TRADE, DIPLOMACY AND WAR ALONG THE WATERS: THE MISSISSIPPI DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

A Thesis by

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.

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Robert M. Owens, Committee Chair

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Robin Henry, Committee Member

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David T. Hughes, Committee Member
DEDICATION

To my Kansas family—Mom you are our heart, Josh our brain, and Dad our courage. Guess that makes me either Dorothy or Toto. In acknowledgement of the chihuahua and miniature dachshund that kept my lap warm as I researched and wrote, I pick Toto.

To Tania, my wife—Without your love and patience I could not have completed this journey. You taught me the value of hard work and persistence. You are my inspiration, my love, my entire life.
Waterways were indeed the key. Through them, nature had decreed that the trans-Appalachian West would be more connected to New Orleans, and even to the Caribbean, than to Philadelphia, New York, or Boston. For it was not from any eastern port, but down the Mississippi, via New Orleans and through the Caribbean, that all commerce from the vast region must eventually pass.

- François Furstenberg

The lands along the Mississippi River have remained an amorphous area "dimly realizing westward" (in Robert Frost's phrase) and waiting to be occupied by Anglo-Americans and their Afro-American slaves. This West, in a word, has been only dimly realized by historians as a place with a history of its own and a people whose tale is worth telling in its own right.

- Daniel H. Usner, Jr.

But what if the frontier were stripped of its providential veneer and refocused through a wide-angle lens. Desacralized, the frontier is "only" the contact point of cultures. In the history of the Great West, the frontier was the ground—actual and metaphorical—where European and Indian worlds met and mixed. It was the intersection where peoples came together—to trade, to fight, to procreate, to preach contrary conceptions of the good life, to restore old worlds, and to make sense of new worlds.

- Stephen Aron

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Finally, words cannot do justice to the extraordinary lengths that Dr. Robert Owens has undergone on my behalf. You showed me that history could be ceaselessly interesting, emotional, and milk-shooting-out-of-your-nose hilarious. A thousand thanks for your guidance. Whenever I give my first lecture I will remember to bring a handkerchief and an enormous bottle of Gatorade, but I am fairly certain that no matter how hard I try, I will never be able to make a decent Seth Sothel joke. Thank you.
ABSTRACT

In early 1779 Father Pierre Gibault, a supporter of the American cause, found himself hiding on an island in the Mississippi River. Both ice and the lack of a formal alliance between Spain and the United States blocked his path to the Spanish west bank, while a British military expedition prevented him from returning to the east bank. As the French-Canadian priest struggled to keep warm he probably pondered the delicacy of his position: surrounded by enemies, unreliable allies, and a host of powerful Native groups he did not understand.

In the years before, during, and after the American Revolution, the Mississippi River served as both a highway and a border between empires. Trade, diplomacy, and war all depended on the waters of the river. Other than the Appalachian Mountains, no other physical feature in North America figured as prominently as the Mississippi River. The waters tumbled settlers, soldiers, adventurers, and merchants together along the banks in a complex mixture of cultures. The geographically dictated blending of cultures, the limited number of European settlers residing on the banks of the Mississippi River, and the overwhelming military and political superiority of Native groups who made the region their home, created a unique European middle ground in the heart of the continent.

Living under the hammer of a Native dominance that never fell, European and American settlers and soldiers in the region picked their steps carefully. Religious and political concerns paled in comparison to the practical matter of survival. Europeans and Americans on the banks of the river shared a unique political malleability born of vulnerability. This malleability made the western frontier of the American Revolution a peculiar landscape into which, mere handfuls of men were able to tip the balance of power toward the Spanish and American cause.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Historiographic Question

Days after arriving in St. Louis as the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana in July of 1779, Fernando de Leyba wrote to Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez asking for advice on a legal problem that was nearly six years old:

Don Pedro Piernas, in a letter of April 24, 1773, informs the predecessor of Your Lordship, that he has in the prison of this village the principal chief of a band of that nation who was convicted of having committed some thefts and murders on the Arkansas river, and he had not determined to pass sentence. As he feared lest the revengeful nature of the Indians would lead them to commit other greater excesses.

The Governor of Louisiana, Luis de Unzaga, disagreed with Piernas' decision and argued that only swift and decisive action could instill in the Indians a proper sense of respect for Spanish authority. At first glance, the situation Piernas found himself in appears as just one of many instances where European authorities sitting comfortably in capitals issued decrees that were impossible to enforce on the peripheries of empires. A closer examination of the account adds levels of complexity and context however, which call for both more questions and answers. Not only did Piernas fear Native reprisals for executing a murderer, he feared executing a prisoner who had been delivered to him by the Missouris and Great Osages themselves. A year earlier Piernas had boasted of capturing and placing in irons a chief of the Missouris and his accomplice who had been engaged in stealing horses from the inhabitants of Ste. Geneviève.

Once again, Piernas was dependent on the help of Indians, this time the "Sotoux [Unknown tribe] and Putatami [Potawatomie] nations, which was pursuing them [the Missouri]," the previous day. In the face of the thefts of 1772 Governor Unzaga decreed that trade with the Little Osages and Missouris be halted, but this embargo resulted in another Native success, after an English trader
sneaked past the Spanish and provided them, "with all requisite arms and ammunition wherewith to defend themselves and continue their raids." In St. Louis, during the early 1770s, Piernas attempted to cow nearby tribes into submission through threats and by withholding trade goods, but accomplished little for all his efforts. In 1779, there was a new governor in New Orleans and a new lieutenant governor at St. Louis, but history repeated itself. Though Gálvez tempered his orders by recommending that Leyba carefully explain his reasons to the Indians, he still advocated punishment, to be followed by withholding gifts for stubborn offenders. In a rebuttal to Gálvez, Leyba recited an argument made six years earlier, and still true:

Various habitants, whom I have consulted are of the same opinion [that executions are necessary]; but they also say that to despise the opinion of Don Pedro Piernas, as this post was, and is situated, is necessarily to touch the limits of temerity.  

In the years prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the Mississippi River served as a political boundary. However, as Piernas, Leyba, and countless other Europeans found, political boundaries drawn out on European maps meant little to the Native and European settlers living near the river. Not only did European politicians display an overreliance on maps, but historians have also in large part either ignored the Mississippi River region or have examined it piecemeal. The western frontier of the American Revolution is still waiting for a history that incorporates the narratives of Native Americans, the Spanish, the British, and the Americans into a cohesive framework. This dearth does not plague some other American frontiers. Alan Taylor has already examined the Northern Borderlands in his book, *The Divided Ground: Indians,*

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4 Throughout this study I have retained the spelling found in the original documents, except in cases where a word in unclear. Leyba to Galvez, St. Louis, July 13, 1779, in, Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri: a collection of papers and documents relating to upper Louisiana principally within the present limits of Missouri during the dominion of Spain... Volume I* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1909), 163-164; Piernas to Unzaga, July 30, 1772, Piernas to Unzaga, April 12, 1773, in, Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Vol. II, Pt. I, The Revolutionary Period* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 206-207, 214-215, 218; The tribe referred to as "Sotoux" cannot be located in other sources. Most likely Piernas was referring to Indians residing near the Sotoux River, though it could refer to the Salteaux tribe.
Settlers, and the Northern Borderlands of the American Revolution. Similarly, books such as Jim Piecuch's, *Three Peoples One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782*, illustrate the complex nature of war and allegiance in the South during the Revolution. Each of these works demonstrated the importance of expanding the historical discourse to include groups such as women, slaves, and Native Americans, who had been marginalized or discounted by prior generations of scholars.⁵

Frontiers are at times ephemeral constructions. They are composed of overlapping edges of often-dubious provenance that owe their existence as much to imagination as to reality. Further complicating the concept of the frontier is the reality that one man or woman's frontier was or is another person's traditional home, devoid of sentimentalism and exaggeration. The complex and sometimes ephemeral nature of frontiers creates a host of difficulties for historians seeking to understand the groups who occupied or acted within a frontier. Into such murky waters one would expect historians to wade carefully, but this has not been the case. Perhaps, due to the vastness of the West or due to the rapidity of American expansion during the 1800s, historians have often made bold claims when attempting to understand the American frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner confined both Americans and Indians with ill-fitting labels, and his determinism stifled more complex debates. Before, during, and after Turner's creation of his frontier thesis, historians of the American West plied their trade by creating histories of "great men." These works assumed the presence of a top-down hierarchy that existed more in the imaginations of historians than in reality. More recently, Richard White's explanation of the interactions between Native and European powers in the Great Lakes region, has been

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appropriated by historians seeking a framework for other regions of North America. But, White's middle ground did not stretch from coast to coast, and it does not provide a suitable framework for the Mississippi River Valley. Unfortunately, it is not only the inchoate nature of frontiers and a sometimes bloated historiographical response that plagues scholarship of the trans-Appalachian West and Mississippi River Valley. Two other significant obstacles, one practical and one ideological, stand in the way of better understanding this region. In practical terms, the number of books and articles dedicated to this frontier, both during the colonial and revolutionary eras, pales in comparison to the attention that has been paid to New England or even to the Southern Colonies. Writing in the 1970s, Lawrence Kinnard demonstrated the problem by quizzing his students:

I asked several ... about Oliver Pollock, the American most involved in all major phases of the conflict in the Mississippi Valley. None had heard of him. A few knew of Haym Salomon who might have had some business connection with New Orleans, but, ironically, that was only because the government had honored him as a "financial hero" of the Revolution by placing his name on a postage stamp.6

Excluding famous Kentuckians, such as George Rogers Clark and Daniel Boone, one would be hard pressed to find many students in a history course who could name any participant, American, British, Spanish, or Native, of the Revolutionary War in the West. For most Americans the Revolutionary War stretches between Massachusetts and Virginia, desperately hugging the Atlantic. Knowledge of conflicts outside this boundary is usually local, and often trivialized into themes like, “The real first shot heard round the world.” For those of us residing outside the original thirteen colonies, we often need roadside plaques to remind us that before the Lewis and Clark expedition, occasionally, a Coronado or De Soto roamed the interior of the

present-day United States. For the historian of the frontier out amongst the public, this lack of knowledge and interest can result in irritation, or it can segue into a mildly interesting conversation. However, while the tepid level of interest in colonial frontiers does not threaten to unravel society, it has unfortunately stunted historiographical discourse. David Weber argued that this neglect seeped into the university, and that, “as historian Light Cummins put it, the Spanish Borderlands has ‘an orphan history because there is no distinct society or geopolitical entity that in our own time views the entire history of all the Spanish Borderlands as its special story.’”

New England and Europe captured the attention of the first generation of German-trained historians in the United States, while the second generation skipped over the Mississippi in their pursuit of gold rushes and Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier. In the early twentieth century, one notable historian, Herbert Eugene Bolton, did pick up the torch of the Spanish Borderlands. Bolton was a prodigious writer who also trained more than one hundred Ph.D. students. But, unlike Turner, Bolton’s prose was tedious and he largely failed to use, modify or refute Turner’s thesis as a means of understanding the Spanish Borderlands. Bolton’s students unearthed and transcribed thousands of documents relating to Spanish rule in North America, but not until the publication of John Francis Bannon’s, *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier 1513-1821*, in 1970, was there much of an attempt at any synthesis of this area as a whole. By the time that the topic of the Spanish Borderlands was revived in the 1980s, a myriad number of enticing new fields and subspecialties opened up for historians. The half-century of stagnation between the creation of the concept of the Spanish Borderlands and the renewed interest meant that the field lagged

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behind that of other regions, groups, and topics, while a number of talented historians veered off into new unrelated specialties or tangentially related topics within the vibrant new Atlantic World.8

For the purposes of this study, a more glaring problem persists. Just as the Mississippi River disappears for most Americans before the travels of Lewis and Clark, Louisiana tends to disappear for historians during the Spanish administration. Adding insult to injury is the fact that most Spanish Borderlands historians focus their attention on the Southwest and Florida. Only in the Illinois Country where American “great men” can be located has there been much attention given to the lands adjacent to the Mississippi River between 1763 and 1802. While the “great men” histories of the nineteenth century can be excused as being products or their age, the continuation of this tradition during the early twentieth century within the Spanish Borderlands resulted in biased research that appeared out of place. David Weber stated the case succinctly:

In a sense, the Boltonians made themselves irrelevant because they failed to connect the borderlands with larger conversations in American history. Eager to win recognition for Spain's enduring contributions to American history, Bolton and his immediate successors placed Spaniards in such a favorable light that their interpretations often lacked authenticity.9

This lack of connection however, should not only be blamed on historians of the Spanish Borderlands. West Florida, the trans-Appalachian West, and the Gulf of Mexico have also been ignored or marginalized in histories of the American Revolution. With the exception of Robert V. Haynes’, The Natchez District and the American Revolution, and a few other works, these regions lie untouched. Fortunately, interest in the region has been increasing, and should soon benefit from the work of Kathleen DuVal, whose book, Independence Lost: The Gulf Coast in

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the American Revolution, is shortly forthcoming. One of the most comprehensive studies of the region comes from slightly afield, in Thomas E. Chávez’s, Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift, published in 2002. Chávez received his Ph.D. in history, and has published numerous books and articles, but has spent more than two decades working in museums. Perhaps, it is due to this background that he argues that he “believe[s] that a traditional history that concerns itself with geopolitical views is still valuable.” Despite these claims of modesty, and Chávez’s forthright admission that one of his goals is to restore to the historical narrative so that people, “of Spanish heritage [can] is some way claim participation,” his Atlantic-wide focus reminds us that from the perspective of the Spanish and the British, the American Revolution stretched from Gibraltar to Central America. Factual errors mar the work, but Chávez’s argument that the United States needed both France and Spain to achieve independence is a gauntlet that should have been thrown down long ago.10

Noted exceptions aside, the history of the region has been written in pieces— the only change being that the focus shifted away from American participation in the war, to the role of Native Americans in the conflict. A brief summary of the body of work up to this point hints at the possibilities and pitfalls that await those who attempt to construct broader histories. In the early decades of the 1900s, a number of historians, including James Alton James, Clarence W. Alvord, Louise Kellogg, and Reuben G. Thwaites, wrote histories primarily concerned with understanding the reasons for American military success in the West during the war. These are serviceable studies, but show their age through referring to Native Americans as "savages." More

10 Thomas E. Chávez, Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), viii, x; James A. Lewis, correctly notes in his review of Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift, by Thomas E. Chávez, The Journal of American History, Vol. 90, No. 1 (Jun., 2003): 209, “Where the author seems to get events garbled is in a curious lack of critical reading of both his primary and his secondary sources. This results in too many questionable assertions. Could there really have been a meeting of twenty-five thousand Southeastern Indians in Mobile in 1777 (p. 94)?”
serious flaws in these narratives stem from various myths of inevitability that crept into them. The problem for these early historians cannot however, be attributed to a lack of detailed study of the source materials. Thumbing through the footnotes of these works reveals that many historians made exhaustive use of archives as far away as Seville and Havana. James Alton James, for example, cast a wide net when writing his biography of George Rogers Clark. However, James tended to trust the assertions made by his American subject even when the bulk of the documentary evidence contradicted Clark. For instance, James wrote of Clark’s Indian policies that, "He knew better than any other man of his time the policy which would prove successful. He opposed terms which were gotten through the bestowal of presents, for this would be interpreted by the tribes as a sign of fear." Further, James wrote that, "He [Clark] advocated complete military control, and if his plan had been put into operation it is probable that the losses in the later Indian wars would have been largely avoided.” The problem lies in the fact that despite Clark's bluster, his military career repeatedly demonstrated the impossibility of subduing Native Americans during the late 1700s. When James and other historians of his generation wrote their studies, European actions and diplomacy were usually placed in proper context, but diplomacy regarding Indians was written as if they were dealing with the age of Jackson rather than the age of Washington. Clark's 1782 and 1786 campaigns against the Indians failed not because of a lack of ruthlessness or an excess of gift giving, but because the military capacity which could be mustered on the frontier by American leaders was simply not sufficient to frighten any populous group into submission. Native Americans could easily see that the ill-provisioned, often shoeless men who marched into their country could be defeated or waited out
without a battle. They also saw the waves of deserters that often reduced American expeditions
to half of their original strength.¹¹

A handful of the works addressing aspects of the American Revolution along the
Mississippi do however stand the test of time. The fact that John Walton Caughey's, *Bernardo de
Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783*, written in 1934, remains the definitive English-language
biography of this crucial figure of the American Revolution, stands as a testament to Caughey's
scholarship and to the continued marginalization of Spanish contributions to the Revolutionary
War. Jack D. L. Holmes argued in the foreword to the book that, "In analyzing Caughey's study,
it is important to realize that he has attempted too much." Holmes can boast of his own
contributions to the understanding of the Spanish administration of Louisiana, but his argument
wildly misses the mark. Though *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783* actually began by
describing the governorship of Antonio Ulloa, a decade before the arrival of Gálvez in New
Orleans, it is important to remember the historical brevity of the Spanish rule of Louisiana and
the commonsense utility that comparison can bring to biographies. It was the mild incompetence
of Ulloa and the occasional heavy handedness of Governor Don Alejandro O'Reilly, that made
Gálvez's career stand out sharply as exceptional. Unfortunately, Caughey drifted away from
Louisiana in order to focus further west on Indian tribes and the gold rushes of California.
Though his biography of Gálvez gave short shrift to Native Americans and largely ignored
slaves, a huge portion of the population of Spanish Louisiana, Caughey's analysis most often hit
the mark, and his decision to abandon the region hindered progress towards creating a broad
cohesive history.¹²

¹² John Walton Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783* (Berkeley: University of California Press,
Perhaps the most valuable early contributions to the study of the western frontier during the Revolutionary War come in packages devoid of interpretation altogether. Though James grossly miscalculated the strength and importance of Native groups, his compilation and transcription of primary source materials in his *George Rogers Clark Papers*, constitutes an invaluable resource for scholars. Likewise, Louis Houck and Lawrence Kinnaird, along with a number of other historians, assembled books of source materials that illuminated the Spanish administrations of Louisiana. Records from the British bank of the Mississippi in the settlements of Cahokia and Kaskaskia were transcribed by Clarence Walworth Alvord, and published by the Illinois State Historical Library, and historical societies from Wisconsin to Missouri published books that provided historians with access to letters, petitions, census data, and other important information concerning the western frontier.13

These early attempts to understand Louisiana and West Florida during the American Revolution suffered at times from a lack of access to pertinent sources, assumptions concerning the inevitability of Native American decline, and from ignoring important groups like women and slaves. Historians during the last few decades of the twentieth century began the process of righting the ship. Carl J. Ekberg and Natalia Belting contributed immeasurably to our understanding of French Louisiana, while Jack D. L. Holmes, Gilbert C. Din, Stuart Banner, and a host of other scholars tackled issues related to the Spanish rule of Louisiana. Though he is primarily concerned with French Louisiana, Carl Ekberg has perhaps done more to further our

understanding of the Illinois Country than any other scholar. His book, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times*, was one of the first works to incorporate previously marginalized groups into an, at least region-wide, history. Ekberg's wide focus becomes clear within the first pages of his book when he makes note of the often understood but rarely uttered fact that, "By the mid-eighteenth century black slaves composed one-third of the population in colonial Illinois." His study sought to incorporate economic, agricultural, and social realities in order to provide a comprehensive view of French society in the Illinois Country. Due to the reluctance of Spanish citizens to immigrate to Louisiana, most of Ekberg's assertions regarding the French Illinois Country are applicable to the Spanish Illinois Country. Indeed, during the more than three decades of Spanish rule, there was never a point in which French settlers did not outnumber Spanish inhabitants.14

The most important recent contributions to the history of the region come from the field of Native American history. Several chapters of Colin G. Calloway's book, *The American Revolution in Indian Country*, deal specifically with tribes residing in or near the western frontier, and in the process Calloway illustrated how diplomacy worked from a non-European perspective. Many earlier works stumbled by assuming that tribes were unified bodies or by assuming that the only option available to Native groups was to pick one side of the conflict. In a similar vein, Greg O’Brien’s book, *Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830*, detailed the evolution of the sources of power in one of the most important tribes residing near the Mississippi. O’Brien utilized a dual-biography format to contrast the political lives of Taboca and Franchimastabé: leaders who relied, respectively, on spiritual and economic resources for

their power. Peppered throughout the brief book are a number of details applicable to Indian
power and diplomacy throughout the region. For instance O’Brien wrote:

Most eighteenth-century and earlier southeastern Native peoples were, in the words of
anthropologist Charles Hudson, “parochial to a degree that few modern people can
imagine.” Most southeastern Indians probably stayed within a few miles of their home
villages for their entire lives, though this does not mean that knowledge of neighboring or
distant lands was lacking.15

Understanding the locality of Native experience helps to contradict biases in the source
materials, which rarely recorded the voices of Indians, and often only the statements of military
and political leaders. Understanding the centrality of the village to the Native experience helps us
understand the difficulties associated with alliance building, as well as the possibilities open to
Native leaders who could use their knowledge of the outside world to further their own personal
agendas. However, the history of Indian military participation and diplomacy, even if limited to
the western frontier, has largely been written as a series of disconnected articles. Even the
handful of books that delve deeper, like Gilbert C. Din and Abraham P. Nasatir’s book, The
Imperial Osages: Spanish-Indian Diplomacy in the Mississippi Valley, tend to concentrate on
single tribes. Calloway took on the daunting task of writing a broad history of the Indian
experience during the American Revolution, realizing the important fact that, ”Most of North
America was still Indian country in 1775.”16

This history-by-fragments extends throughout the region in a vast more-parts-than-sum

15 Greg O’Brien, Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830 (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002): 52; Joshua A. Piker, argues that, “The people who lived in the communities that dotted Creek country were wedded to a system of thought that privileged the town over all other forms of social organization. They could envision, and participate in, other patterns of alliance, other stories about the past, other models of the future. In the end, though, Creek life, like the debate over the Great Old Path, centered on community, not tribe; on town, not region; on the local, not the national.” Though his analysis focuses on one tribe it is safe to say that local loyalties are generally underestimated by historians; see his, ”White & Clean” & Contested: Creek Towns and Trading Paths in the Aftermath of the Seven Years War,” Ethnohistory, Vol. 50, No. 2 (Spring, 2003): 333.

collection. Topics as specific as John A. Jakle’s article on salt availability in the Ohio Valley to Gilbert C. Din’s study of the immigration of Canary Islanders to Spanish Louisiana in the late 1770s contribute to a vast wealth of knowledge. But while scholars have been reluctant to gaze west of the Appalachian Mountains when writing books, the historical facts of the narratives involved are captured in articles and chapters. Unlike histories of trans-Appalachia concerned with life before the French exploration of the Mississippi, reconstructing the world along the river during the American Revolution does not require huge leaps based on archeology and comparative methodology. The lack of secondary materials, which is most likely soon to be remedied, constitutes the first hurdle. Just as daunting an obstacle presents itself in the form of a historiographical debate.

During the American Revolution, the Mississippi River Valley was home to two empires, the fringe of a nascent republic, and numerous Native groups. Figuring out what lens to use in order to best understand this region is no small task. The evolution of the historiography of the region progressed from the Boltonians’ Spanish Borderlands into François Furstenberg’s trans-Appalachian West, as well as a number of historians’ Atlantic World—not an altogether dizzying array of options. Each approach benefits from certain advantages and is simultaneously plagued by certain inadequacies. Evan Haefeli noted one of the more critical problems facing historians of the West in his response to Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron’s controversial article, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” which appeared in *The American Historical Review*, in 1999:

In terms of world history, North America's frontiers were remarkable for their instability and fluidity. Elsewhere, frontiers of powerful societies tended to form along ecological boundaries and last for centuries. Deserts, deep forests, and vast steppe lands halted the expansion of Mesoamerican, Andean, Roman, Middle Eastern, Egyptian, and Chinese
civilizations. Their frontiers had little in common with the steady march of the American frontier across the continent.¹⁷

A number of locations worldwide possessed their own borderlands, but due to the peculiarities of North America, few readily allow comparative analysis. In comparison to the territory that became the United States, few borderlands, if any, experienced large-scale immigration from a powerful nation, sustained natural population growth, and created a largely non-extractive economy. Historians of the Spanish Borderlands began their work without the sorts of analogues available to scholars of European or Colonial American history. Curiously, they also ignored the most dynamic theory of their age, Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis.” The father of the Spanish Borderlands, though he at times aspired to write in the romantic spirit of Francis Parkman, wrote detailed political histories. This nuts-and-bolts approach was both a product of his temperament and a result of the infancy of the field. Bolton contented himself with the novelty of recovering the story of a forgotten European power within the boundaries of the present United States, even though he studied under Turner. David Weber has contended:

Bolton’s published work suggests that he was far more interested in the impact of Spaniards on the frontier than in the influence of the frontier on Spaniards. Heroic figures and the high drama of exploration and international rivalry captivated him, and the establishment of Spanish institutions in the Borderlands interested him intensely.¹⁸

Bolton’s fixation with heroic figures, as well as his opinion of Spanish and French inhabitants precluded him from utilizing Turner’s thesis. While the North American frontier was


exceptional for Turnerians, for the Boltonians, the average Spanish inhabitant was timid and unequal to the task. Subscribing to Turner’s thesis meant destroying it, for how could the inhabitants of the Illinois Country, faced with seemingly endless tracts of “virgin” land, not be molded by the frontier, if the thesis held true. Bolton reasoned that Spanish absolutism stifled self-reliance. Whatever level of insight Bolton possessed in relation to the Spanish Borderlands, geography and tradition limited the usefulness of his framework. Simply put, Louisiana was a place where another European power had existed, while Mexico and the Southwest were not. Economically, Louisiana resided in a sort of economic goldilocks zone, more conducive to revolution than to docility. Louisiana possessed neither the easy wealth of silver found in parts of Mexico, nor the stifling poverty of the Southwest. This middling subsistence level, augmented by fur and lumber exports allowed for some wealth to be accrued without resorting to a hacienda-style system. Further, the meager returns of French mining schemes, as well as those of hemp, indigo and wheat production meant that slaves could be more profitably used in other locales. Spanish officials inclined towards despotism and graft could easily find targets that were more vulnerable and lucrative elsewhere within the Spanish Empire.

Bolton chose not to address Turner’s thesis, at least in Spanish Louisiana. He concentrated on building a foundation for his nascent field. However, Bolton may have profited from utilizing or refuting Turner’s thesis. Instead, Bolton ignored strong evidence that demonstrated the independence and self-reliance of Spanish soldiers and citizens. Bolton wrote:

Not since the days of Cortes had Spain taken so long a forward step in expansion. If, with all his energy and foresight, Carlos [III] failed to accomplish his larger aims, it was because he came too late. Spain’s great opportunity had passed, and no stroke of magic could free her people from the lethargy into which they had fallen.19

For Bolton, the life of a Spaniard was controlled from above. Only an ambitious King, like Carlos III, could awaken the Spanish people and usher in an age of vitality like that which they had experienced during the first generation of conquistadors. Bolton’s prose, equating the extraction of mineral wealth through disease, military conquest, and the imposition of a brutal system of slavery, with vitality, demonstrated not only callousness, but also his very peculiar definition of what constituted success for an empire. Even as Bolton lamented the lethargy of Spain under Carlos III, he failed to understand that it was the fixation with quick wealth, pioneered during the age of conquest, which had composed the lullaby. Bolton placed the onus of failure on the lethargy of the Spanish people, while at the same time extolling the successes of great men. In his opinion, the malignant Spanish bureaucracy of the past could not be overcome by the energetic and skillful administration of Carlos III, because the Spanish people had become docile and lazy. Bolton, Turner, and the Spanish people themselves, all cast events in a different light. Bolton realized that in Louisiana, Spaniards were scarce, and he recorded that only ninety Spanish soldiers accompanied the first Spanish governor to Louisiana. Were these ninety soldiers the most energetic lot conceivable, they hardly stood a chance of subjecting a European population of roughly ten thousand souls stretching along hundreds of miles of river. Bolton acknowledged that French flags flew above French-occupied villages and outposts in Spanish Louisiana long after the region was ceded to Spain, but somehow for him the intrinsic dependence of Spaniards of the age doomed Louisiana. This argument could be examined in the Southwest and Florida, but given the scarcity of Spaniards in Louisiana, it can only be considered with great difficulty.  

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20 Ibid., 238.
Though sources recording the lives and attitudes of Spanish inhabitants of Louisiana are scarce, the limited records we do have, do not show the Spanish to be any more cowed by authority than were the French. Though they lacked the bellicosity of early Kentuckians, the Spanish in Louisiana regularly conducted illegal trade, ignored laws or orders they found odious, while Spanish soldiers often deserted in large numbers. Shortly after his arrival in Louisiana, Governor Ulloa wrote that the people of the colony “clamor seditiously, as has already been experienced on various occasions.” Ulloa found that this spirit of sedition was not simply a French trait, but one that could quickly transfer to his own soldiers and sailors. Two months after Ulloa complained about French residents, he sent his superior a letter as well as a prisoner. Ulloa had ordered a Spanish crew out of New Orleans to move materials and assist in constructing buildings on an island in the Mississippi River because the “French boat that is maintained here at the expense of His Majesty... has refused to do anything that is for his royal service, demanding special payment for anything they do.” On the first day, the Spaniards performed their duties, but, Ulloa continued:

On the second day, in imitation of the French... all of them as one man refused to perform this work. They presented themselves to me in a body and the man I am now sending to Your Lordship, acting as a spokesman for the others, told me emphatically that all those present would not do any work on the island.

Only after Ulloa exiled Gregorio Gor, the ringleader of the group, and threatened the rest with the yardarms was he able to regain control of his own sailors. Unfortunately, for the already stressed Spanish treasury the buildings that Ulloa constructed rotted and eroded away within a matter of two years.  

While Spanish sailors near New Orleans displayed an aversion to working without special pay, the soldiers stationed further upriver were even more bold. Captain Rui, the commandant at the Missouri River, found himself unable even to enter his own fort. Governor Ulloa removed him because, “there was not among the officers nor among the troops, anyone who could agree with his way of acting; in such manner that they and the workmen... are all very angry with him, and have even gone so far as to not permit him to go to the fort, or to take the command.” The governors who followed Ulloa complained on a number of occasions of the disloyalty of inhabitants and troops. Settlers disobeyed O’Reilly’s proclamation prohibiting Indian slavery, and they invited tribes to Spanish posts, forcing the commandants to foot most of the bill for food and presents. Settlers also refused to allow an increase in the amount of tithes they paid to their local priest. The people that Bolton argued were docile were anything but, because they realized that in the absence of a large military force, the Spanish government of Louisiana was all carrot and no stick.22

Further undermining Bolton’s assertions regarding the Spanish are the actions of the Americans during the Revolution. The early settlements in Kentucky, far from demonstrating the uniqueness of Americans, reveal the common experiences of the inhabitants of the trans-Appalachian West. Though the Kentuckians were much more aggressive than the Frenchmen and Spaniards of the Illinois Country, the frequent military losses and blunders they experienced caused many of the "intrepid" and "self-reliant" Americans to either be killed or to flee back east. Even as the population surged in Kentucky, the morass of land speculation and the presence of

22 Ulloa removes Captain Rui as Commandant of the Fort on the Missouri and appoints Don Pedro Piernas as his successor, August 4, 1767, in Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri, Volume I*, 33; O’Reilly to Arriaga, December 29, 1769, Kinnaird ed., *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Vol. II, Pt. I*, 146-148, recorded that while Ríu could not hold on to his position, he was able to line his pockets. “At Ylinueses, when Captain Don Francisco Ríu went there with his detachment, he himself confesses that the present given him by the Indians was worth two thousand pesos fuertes which Ríu said he divided with the French commandant, M. de St. Ange.”
hostile Native groups made the Protestant agrarian anything but self-reliant. A petition of the inhabitants of Boonesborough was one of many letters sent by the Kentuckians pleading for help:

The few among us who have long experienced the intolerable hardships of maintaining our Post against the Barbarous savages, Derive very little consolation from the vast addition of Numbers now scattered through the various Parts of this Country. The almost incredible number of Distressed and defenceless Families settled through our woods for the sake of sustinance instead of adding to our strength are in fact, so many allurements, and must become a daily sacrifice to the savage brutality of our inhuman enemies.23

While this study does not intend to rehash old arguments concerning the frontier thesis, historians of the trans-Appalachian West are encumbered by the debates created by the ideas and terminology left in Turner’s wake. The Anglo-centrism and determinism found in Turner’s work dissolve in the face of the evidence from the Mississippi River Valley. The French, Spanish, British and Americans all inhabited regions in which vast stretches of fertile, “virgin” land lay within grasp, but none of the early settlers to the region became transformed by the frontier. French Canadians brought their unique nuclear villages and longlots with them to Louisiana, while the other groups focused on trade with Native Americans, pursuing agriculture and mining half-heartedly. This was an area comprised of a complicated blend of cultures. Was this a middle ground? Should we label the region a frontier or a borderland? Even a cursory glance at the correspondence between commandants and governors reveals that this was no middle ground. Cultural accommodation moved almost entirely in one direction as Europeans huddled along the banks of the Mississippi or roved individually through Indian country. The bluster of civil and military leaders arriving in the region was always followed by the realization that European military power was inadequate to impose their will upon Native groups. The argument over whether the Mississippi River Valley constituted a borderland or frontier is more contentious. To

23 Petition from Inhabitants of Boonesborough to Clark, March 10, 1780, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 398.
begin the debate we will start with the definitions proposed in Adelman and Aron’s controversial article, “From Borderlands to Borders:”

By frontier, we understand a meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined. Consistent with recent studies of frontiers as borderless lands, we stress how intercultural relations produced mixing and accommodation as opposed to unambiguous triumph. Yet Bolton's original accent on the region as a site of imperial rivalry is no less important. Accordingly, we reserve the designation of borderlands for the contested boundaries between colonial domains.24

Using Adelman and Aron’s definitions, the Mississippi River, at the time of the American Revolution, served as both frontier and borderland depending on whether Native-European or European-European interactions are being explored. They argued that modern historians are too quick to dismiss imperial rivalries, and that, “Absent the interimperial dimension of borderlands, the cross-cultural relations that defined frontiers take on a too simple face: "Europe" blurs into a single element, and "Indians" merge into a common front.” They also hoped to resurrect the redeeming qualities from Turner’s thesis because, “Turner's frontier-warts and all-took into account the underlying transformations. Problematic as efforts to isolate apertures and closures have been, Turner's frontier concept at least insisted on temporal boundaries.” Criticism to Adelman and Aron’s definitions ranged from tepid qualified support to histrionic opposition. Where Adelman and Aron understood borderlands as places where Indians could gain political clout, Evan Haefeli contended in his response that, “Borderlands restrict natives' options at least as much as they increase them... Trying to play one colonial power off of another only ups the ante of potential destruction to local autonomy.” John R. Wunder and Pekka Hämäläinen, in their aptly named response, “Of Lethal Places and Lethal Essays,” stopped just short of name-calling. Criticizing Adelman and Aron’s definitions they wrote:

They evidently believe empires are European and lead to nation-states; empires are never indigenous, nor is there such an entity as an Indian nation. By definition, treaties are fictive or cynical tracts. Frontiers are ambiguous, borderless meeting places that involve cultural mixing. Borderlands are places of European imperial rivalry where Indians slyly seek micro-diplomatic openings.\(^{25}\)

After eviscerating Adelman and Aron for their lack of a specialist’s knowledge concerning the veracity of claim by Ramón A. Gutiérrez, Wunder and Hämäläinen wrote:

Thus the construction of a borderlands and bordered lands paradigm without proper reference to and understanding of recent historiography, the interplay of imperial and indigenous political economies and environments, Indian agency, and basic native history is not very useful. Constructing an essay leaving out the very people whose homelands are invaded is to create a lethal essay.\(^{26}\)

Adelman and Aron, in their response admitted that they should have acknowledged their debt to Turner, and that they “In stressing imperial rivalries as a shaping factor in North American intercultural relations... unfairly limited the scope and space of Indian actions in fashioning the character of frontiers and forestalling the contraction of their countries.” However, they also reminded their readers that, “Our essay did not presume to cover all facets of cross-cultural interaction. We did not mean to suggest that imperial competition was all that mattered, that only borderlands produced accommodationist frontiers.” In essence Wunder and Hämäläinen bludgeoned Adelman and Aron for their depiction of Indians as pawns, never realizing that the authors were playing checkers, not chess. Moreover, the authors of, “Of Lethal Places and Lethal Essays,” clearly misrepresented the facts. For the time period that Adelman and Aron describe, where were the Native empires of North America? Even the most successful coalitions, like that which Pontiac helped to forge, were plagued by internecine disputes and political machinations. What of micro-diplomatic openings? Did Joseph Brant, Pontiac, Taboca,


Cornstalk, or other leaders regularly form stable macro-diplomatic alliances? At times they did, but the scale of diplomatic goals must be considered. Some historians continue to underestimate the political savvy and economic clout of Native groups and leaders, but the cure should not be as misguided as the disease. Empires sent ships full of soldiers and manufactured goods across oceans, negotiated with myriad European and Native powers, and colonized distant locales. That Indians did not pursue the same goals as European empires does not marginalize or trivialize their power and intelligence. Exceptions, such as coalitions built upon political and religious foundations need to be noted and carefully examined, but there can only be losers when historians judge their sources and each other out of proper context. For the purposes of this study, Adelman and Aron’s definitions stand, with the important caveat noted that this author does not intend the Mississippi River Valley to serve as a model for borderlands and frontiers in any general sense. Rather, this study intends to examine the borderlands and frontier along the Mississippi river, fully aware that Native Americans made their own decisions and were integral to the politics and diplomacy of the region, but also that the voices of Native Americans, women, and slaves, can never be fully recovered from the void.²⁷

Focus of the Study

The fault lines of societies are often best seen when they are placed under stress. This study not only attempts to provide a narrative of events taking place within the Mississippi River Valley during the war, but also investigates the societies who made this region their home. The constraints of space dictate that this work represent a first step rather than the final word. The heavy lifting of necessary research has already been completed by historians like David Weber, Carl Ekberg, Gilbert C. Din, and others. What this study intends to accomplish is a weaving together of the political, economic and social narratives that have been created. In addition to providing a brief but cohesive narrative of the river, the question of whether the river can serve as an organizing principle will be asked. It is my contention that the Mississippi River as an organizing principle provides a useful tool for examining the frontiers encountered by early American settlers. Before we consider the merits of a river-based approach, it is necessary to take a brief look at a few other contenders. The Atlantic World would, by its inclusiveness and awareness of the intersections of empires, Native groups, and material cultures, seem a likely candidate. Indeed, were Bernard Bailyn or Edmund S. Morgan to have taken up the torch of the trans-Appalachian west during the Revolution, our understanding would be much elevated. Such inclusive works require a prodigious level of knowledge and supreme talent as a writer, and present numerous and dangerous pitfalls for the historian without the requisite skill. But, the utility of the Atlantic World framework may be overestimated due to the skill of a handful of historians. Critics of the Atlantic World argue that this framework is not comprehensive enough, and suffers due to what they see as arbitrary borders. Peter A. Coclanis has argued:

Simply put, the levels of explanatory power and analytic acuity possible via the Atlantic history stratagem are beguiling but ultimately confining because the stratagem artificially limits the field of vision of its devotees, often blinding them to processes, developments, and conditions of central importance to understanding their figurative little corner of the
world. Or to put it another way, Bobby Darin’s way, we need to move “beyond the sea.”

The arguments for and against the value of the Atlantic world framework often boil down to a question of scale. Europe, Africa and the Americas were connected. Networks of trade and power pulled people and materials across oceans and continents. The beguiling possibilities of the Atlantic world framework suggest possibilities and depths of knowledge heretofore impossible. However, the demands of the Atlantic world simply do not suit the purposes of this study, which is less concerned with the impact of North America upon Europe than it is on the impact of European intervention within the Mississippi River Valley.

**The River as Organizing Principal**

The Mississippi River does not take its course directly. The waters of the river meander east and west as they make the journey south, and as the water moves it carries with it the rich sediment that has made its banks fertile. But, the river changes the landscape as it moves—destroying, creating and shaping the landscape of the North American continent. The fickleness of the currents of the Mississippi mirrored the political malleability of the region, but does the river work as an organizing framework? Historians of the region wrote of Spanish Borderlands, the trans-Appalachian West, and the Atlantic World. The Spanish Borderlands confine too much, especially in the Mississippi River Valley where Spain was not the only European player at the table. The trans-Appalachian West broadens the dialogue necessarily, but the focus of scholars, such as François Furstemberg on the geographical impediment of the Appalachians to westward expansion obscures the motives and importance of the settlers, voyageurs, officials, and Native

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28 For the first attempt at an Atlantic-wide history that addresses Spanish military campaigns on the Mississippi River, see, Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift*, x. Though Chávez admits to writing a “throwback” that, “concerns itself with geopolitical views,” he is among a handful of scholars who are concerned not just with Louisiana or West Florida, by with the wider Atlantic World; Peter A. Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, Volume LXIII, Number 4, (October, 2006): 726.
peoples who made the Mississippi Valley their home long before American frontiersmen and women peered over the mountains. Furstenberg contended:

The Appalachian Mountains may have been the continent’s single most important feature. Separating the eastern seaboard from the Mississippi Valley, the Iroquois in the uplands from the Algonquian peoples along the coasts and valleys, the British from the French colonies, the ocean-facing coast from the western-oriented backcountry, the Appalachian Mountains were responsible for the great problem of North American, and perhaps even Atlantic, history from 1754 to 1815: the fate of the trans-Appalachian West.²⁹

Indeed, conditions within the geographical space of which Furstenberg writes were responsible for the one of the great problems of American history between 1754 and 1815, but the Appalachian Mountains can hardly be considered responsible for creating this problem. Explorers and settlers found passes through the mountains, but it is important to note that they did not necessarily have to do this. Thousands of settlers, including Canary Islanders, Loyalists, Acadians, and adventurers made their way into the trans-Appalachian west by water. The problem for American expansion came not as much from geographic impediments as from human obstacles. Simply put—people already lived there. Furstenberg and others of course understand that the trans-Appalachian west was no virgin ground, but his emphasis on this geographical feature distorts as much as it illuminates.

The scholarship of the peripheries of empires has moved away from the study of European diplomacy. This transformation constituted a necessary change from the Euro-centric dialogues of the past. Furstenberg argued:

Ultimately, the arrows of influence that emerge from this scholarship reverse those of the older diplomatic history: rather than imperial capitals imposing their will on populations of distant peripheries, the actors on those peripheries impose their will on policymakers in the center. The tail in effect wags the dog.³⁰

²⁹ Furstenberg, "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," 648.
³⁰ Ibid., 653.
Furstenberg noted, however, and this study agrees, that the pendulum can swing too far. Constructing a unified narrative of the trans-Appalachian west from 1754 to 1815 would indeed be a significant accomplishment. The perspective of the Atlantic World offers a wide enough lens to incorporate the center and the periphery. The problem comes when historians attempt to cast their nets that wide. Furstenberg stated this problem succinctly:

The newer historiography on the Atlantic world, which aims to transcend the limits imposed by national historiographies, would seem to offer some hope. So far, however, it has tended to remain content sailing aboard ships or landing along coastlines, leaving the more grueling trek into continental interiors to the national historiographies it so haughtily claims to supersede.31

In the end methodologies and frameworks are no more than tools. The intention of this study is to examine the interactions between groups that took place on the western peripheries of the American Revolution in order to understand the people who lived, worked, traded, and carried on war in the region. With a few exceptions such as Detroit and Mobile, the actors of the Revolution in the West lived and moved along the waters of the Mississippi. For Europeans and Americans, the Mississippi River and Native groups determined how they lived. Indians in the region also plied the waters, but their concerns also included sets of actions that would be impossible for European settlers and officials. Native groups had political options that included the creation of a pan-Indian alliance, division between tribes, or division within a tribe or locale. Unfortunately, the actions of Indians in the region are usually only seen in the documents preserved by European settlers and officials. These documents, like the officials who wrote them, often gave short shrift to Native power, and thus the actions of European leaders centuries ago continue to obscure our view of frontier society.

This study, while not global in perspective, does attempt to move “beyond the

31 Ibid., 648.
sea,” as well as beyond the Appalachian Mountains. However, it will rarely stray too far from the waters of the Mississippi. This approach has been taken for several reasons. First, overland travel to and from the settlements along the western frontier was extremely difficult during the era described. The waters of the major river systems in the west necessarily funneled inhabitants, Native Americans, voyageurs, military expeditions, and goods, towards a handful of cities and outposts. The practicality of river travel meant that groups in action were most often moving by water. Secondly, the navigability of the Mississippi meant that in general, cities, villages, and military outposts hugged the banks of rivers. The Mississippi, the largest and longest river of the western frontier, served as the home of the majority of permanent European residents of Louisiana. Thirdly, the economy of the region depended on the fur and deerskin trades, bulky commodities that required cheap and easy transportation. Finally, the river served as a boundary line between European possessions in North America, making the waterway an odd blend of boundary and center. By using the river as an organizing principle, this study intends to understand how the residents of the region perceived this boundary. Was the Mississippi River simply a waterway, a well-defined border, or an irrelevant European abstraction put on paper? Answering these questions helps us understand why the residents of the region acted in the ways that they did.32

In order to answer these questions, this study will first examine the European settlers who occupied this region, French, Spanish, British, and American. An emphasis has been placed on Spanish source materials for several reasons. Spanish sources have long been overlooked by historians of the region. Also, the conditions for settlers of all nationalities living along the Mississippi River were similar. Following an examination of the economic world of European

32 Coclanis, “Atlantic World or Atlantic/World,” 726.
settlers in the region, a brief narrative of the Revolutionary War along the waters will be sketched. Concluding this study will be a discussion of how and why trade, diplomacy, and war shaped the region. This study cannot take a scope comprehensive enough to do justice to all of the groups acting in the region. The Mississippi was chosen to provide a venue in which important groups and people acted. Because the military superiority of Indians in the region remained constant, the locus of the most dynamic changes within the Mississippi Valley was centered within European and American societies. For the most part, Native peoples were confident in their ability to resist European encroachment. They waited out the conflict, benefitting from the massive influxes of gifts and trade items brought on by the war. Old grudges survived, and warriors sometimes responded to European calls to arms, but the desperation bred of real vulnerability that existed in Iroquoia bore little resemblance to the Mississippi River Valley.

**Methodology**

Just as Chávez termed his book a “throwback,” the methodology used in this study trends toward the methods used to write political histories. However, this study does not suppose that the action along the river was the result of a top-down hierarchy. The pendulum has swung away from the praise of “great men,” but perhaps too far. The problem with the "tail-wagging-the-dog" assertion is that it assumes a tangible connection between dog and tail. Though within the Mississippi River Valley, imperial capitals did little “will imposing,” this periphery bounded by water cannot in any way be supposed to have imposed its will on capitals. Within the frontier, European residents dictated their own terms of survival and governance. They depended upon empires for two necessities: gifts for nearby tribes, and a modicum of military support. When
either of these supports was removed, residents protested to their government. If their protests went unheard, residents shopped for a better imperial bargain.

This study incorporates the fragmentary histories of the region, and in doing so it moderates the extremes of “great man” history and the “tail wagging the dog” revision. An unusually large amount of the secondary research compiled and used for this study comes from journal articles. This is due to the fact that book-length works that address the region often devote only a single chapter to Louisiana or West Florida, and they tend to tell the same story of French neglect, Spanish weakness, British obtuseness, and American dreams for expansion. Articles fill in the gaps left behind, and provide the bricks from which the edifice is constructed. The books that will be most often referenced are the compilations of primary source materials created in the early twentieth century. Particularly, Kinnaird’s Spain in the Mississippi Valley, Houck’s The Spanish regime in Missouri, and James’ George Rogers Clark Papers, will be used to reconstruct the world of the western frontier. These familiar sources still contain a great deal of unexamined and under-examined information. I have also undertaken a fair amount of reading against the grain of my sources, paying attention to the many letters and petitions which have either never, or rarely, been referenced, as well as by refusing to entirely trust the authors of primary materials, I have attempted to provide a nuanced interpretation of the evidence. For example, the failure of Governor Ulloa’s administration has often been explained as a result of his personality and his marriage to a Peruvian woman. Though Ulloa’s personality played a part in his alienation of leaders in New Orleans, this study contends that the serious lack of funds available to Ulloa undermined the administration far more seriously than did an unadvantageous choice in brides. On June 22, 1768, Ulloa wrote to his superior:

The need of funds in which this colony finds itself has caused the extreme and serious crisis now being experienced. The reason is that last year there was no allotment, only
60,000 pesos having been remitted for account of this colony, while this year not even the balance of 140,000 has been received, much less the one for this year... I assume that funds expressly intended for this colony have not been received in your city from Mexico since the allotment for the year ’66 was sent.33

Ulloa may have haughtily treated his subjects, but he did so even after withholding payments to important merchants, some for a period of several years. By combining the extensive secondary scholarship that has been published in journals with a fresh look at familiar primary source materials, this study proposes to create the first sketch of the Mississippi River during the American Revolution. Unfortunately, secondary materials are so deficient in some areas that it is impossible to approach every important topic or group. The conditions and contributions of women living in the region have only begun to be examined, and while a handful of thought-provoking works such as Susan C. Boyle’s, “Did She Generally Decide? Women in Ste. Genevieve, 1750-1805,” begin an important conversation; our understanding of the lives of women in the region is still in its infancy. The role that slaves played in the society of the region is better understood, but huge gaps in our knowledge remain.34


CHAPTER 2

“THEY DESIRE LIBERTY IN EVERYTHING;” AGRICULTURE AND TRADE ALONG THE MISSISSIPPI

The spell which had concealed the Mississippi amid hitherto impenetrable forests, and, as it were, an ocean of trees, was broken; and the Indians who claimed its banks as their hereditary domain, were now fated to witness the rapid succession of irresistible intruders.

Charles Gayarré

Dreams of Excess and the Reality of Subsistence: Agriculture Within the Mississippi River Valley

Charles Gayarré, once the foremost expert on the history of Louisiana, saw the expansion of European settlement into the region as if it were a flood whose waters, once loosed, could never be contained again. He speculated that the Native peoples who populated the region might be “at best a variety of our species.” Almost nothing could be further from the truth than Gayarré’s ebullient prose. The “rapid succession of irresistible intruders” took place over the course of more than 150 years, and until the massive influx of American settlers in the early 1800s, appeared far from irresistible. European inhabitants of the region lived either as traders amongst the Indians, or huddled along the coasts of rivers in their isolated nuclear villages.

Governor Ulloa instructed Spanish leaders in the Illinois Country in 1767 that, “Outside the houses must run an encircling pointed fence, which will be constructed by each owner at his own expense, in order to prevent the savages from making any sudden rush at night and surprising them.” These were hardly words spoken by an irresistible power.

37 Ibid., 12; 1767 – Ulloa Sends an Expedition to the (Spanish) Illinois Country to Establish a Fort and Settlement and His Rules for the Government of the same, in Houck, The Spanish Regime in Missouri, Volume I, 16.
Unfortunately, while the misty and romantic imaginings of Gayarré concerning the history of the Native inhabitants have been stripped of their more offensive notions by subsequent generations of scholars, the numbers and nature of pre-contact Native groups remain a mystery to historians. Archeology provides glimpses into the world that made Cahokia, and it at times is possible to “read back” from more modern societies, but at best we know that pre-contact population numbers were much higher than those encountered by the French explorers of the region. David J. Weber, and others, postulated that Hernando de Soto and his men left a virgin soil epidemic in their wake following their ill-fated expedition in the early 1540s. The rapid depopulation of the Southeastern Native peoples, he contends, created “Shortages of skilled persons to make complex societies function [and] probably led to the simplification of political, economic, and social institutions and weakened the control of elites.” The French settlers of Louisiana did not necessarily find the cleared fields and buried corn that the Pilgrims were so lucky to encounter, but they did step into a land decimated by disease. More than a few generations would have been necessary to rebuild the societies crippled by disease, but even the weakened tribes living along the western frontier militarily and politically dominated their European neighbors. The early 1700s saw the first round of what would become a familiar cycle for European leaders within Louisiana. The fertile land and maze of navigable rivers, most importantly the Mississippi, lured dreamers and speculators into grandiose visions. The speculative bubble created by John Law to tap the riches of Louisiana was the first, and perhaps most destructive to French settlement, of the myriad number of schemes proposed in the West.38

By the middle of the eighteenth century, speculation in the lands and mineral wealth of

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Louisiana calmed, and investment and population became relatively static. The region did see a forced influx of vagabonds, criminals and slaves, who were intended to be used to clear the land, but between 1719 and 1721 more than half of the slaves brought to Louisiana died. These early losses, combined with the drastic reduction in capital available for investment in the region, retarded European expansion in the region. The Spanish, British, and American settlers and officials who came to the Mississippi River Valley all repeated one or more mistakes made by the French. They clearly saw the richness of the soil and the ease by which agricultural products and furs could be floated to New Orleans, but they failed to understand why French efforts had failed. The correspondence of Spanish, British, and American officials attributed the sorry state of settlement not to Native threats and depredations, but to the lethargy of the inhabitants of the region. Upon arriving in the region, European officials usually sent back letters to their superiors marveling upon the richness of the land. But, these optimistic tracts were soon followed by complaints of Indian attacks, a scarcity of presents for visiting tribes, the high price of labor, and the rebellious nature of the residents of the region. These officials either learned to profit from the Indian trade or they found a way to transfer back to more civilized areas. There were simply not enough Europeans within the Mississippi River Valley to provide enough labor to accomplish the goals that were created by European and American authorities.39

On top of the difficulties that the French experienced in keeping themselves and their slave laborers alive, their inexperience with the region's climate hampered their ability to produce exportable agricultural goods. In the first decade of the eighteenth century the French imported wheat seed from the Illinois Country and planted it along the Gulf Coast and near Lake

Pontchartrain, but the climate prevented the grain from maturing without succumbing to rust. Ekberg found that "By the early 1730s it had become virtually axiomatic that Lower Louisiana was ill-suited for wheat production and that the mission of the Illinois Country within the province was to produce wheat." The French mission in the Illinois Country to produce surpluses of wheat went largely unheard. Though wheat grew well in the Illinois Country, the trade in skins often proved more lucrative than agriculture and prevented reliable surpluses from being produced. Until the Louisiana Purchase, French, Spanish, and British ships unloaded cargos of wheat in New Orleans in order to make up the shortfalls of grain from the Illinois Country.

Ekberg found in the Archives Nationales Coloniales that in the early 1760s New Orleans found itself in such dire straits that it imported grain from its inveterate foe, the British:

> The last French governor of Louisiana, Charles-Philippe Aubry (who remained in New Orleans until Spanish Governor Alejandro O'Reilly arrived in August 1769), wrote to Versailles in August 1765 that "for three years, the citizens and few troops here have subsisted only on English flour, and should we be deprived of this we would be forced to subsist on bread made of rice and maize." Forced to live on rice and maize—quelle horreur for the poor Frenchmen in New Orleans!40

Ekberg contended that flour production was depressed because, "There was little effective government on either side of the Mississippi," but this explanation does not adequately explain the deficiencies. Ekberg himself suggested an alternate explanation in his article documenting the career of Terrisse de Ternan, a French soldier stationed in the Illinois Country. Ternan wrote to Sieur Rossard in New Orleans, on July 5, 1729, that "If I wanted flour, it would soon be sold, but that would not suit you. If you want us to get into the fur trade the best things for that are: gunpowder, vermillion, Limbourg, cutlery, and large brass kettles." Ternan asserted that pelts and brandy overflowed in the region, but that articles useful for trading with Native

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peoples were in need. Flour was salable, but only to the inhabitants of the Illinois Country, suggesting that Indians were self-sufficient and that if large quantities of flour could be sent to New Orleans in exchange for gunpowder and kettles that this would have been done.\footnote{Ibid., 281; Carl J. Ekberg and Terrisse de Ternan, "Terrisse de Ternan: Epistoler and Soldier," \textit{Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association}, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Autumn, 1982): 405.}

The fortunes of wheat producers rose and fell violently in Louisiana. This volatility may have encouraged planters to diversify into the fur and skins trade. Francisco Vallé provides an example of the pitfalls that threatened even the wealthiest inhabitants of the Illinois Country. At the time of his death, Vallé's estate was valued at 193,063 \textit{livres}, making him one of the wealthiest residents of the region. Vallé moved from Canada to Kaskaskia, and again to Ste. Geneviève once the French ceded the eastern bank of the Mississippi to Britain. In tow with Vallé were, "72 slaves, 30 head of horses, 32 work oxen, [and] 18 cows." For the year 1772, Vallé produced 1000 quintals of flour from a total harvest at St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève of 5,898 quintals. The same year Vallé sent 411.75 packs of furs to New Orleans.\footnote{The table for furs exported in the year 1772 is labeled, rather unclearly, as, "Packs of Furs; Flour and Lead in Quintals." The items listed included only descriptions of varieties of animal skins, "Taken to Los Arcos, \textit{Idem} to the City, and Lead \textit{Idem}.

\begin{itemize}
\item Vallé's exports are listed under \textit{Idem}. In subsequent statistical reports the word flour is dropped from the table and Vallé's \textit{Idem} listing increased while his flour production plummeted, suggesting that the 411.75 packs attributed to Vallé represented furs rather than representing flour exports being recorded twice. According to Lewis Houck a pack of deerskins weighed approximately one hundred pounds, but most were packed by number. A pack of beaver pelts normally contained approximately eighty pelts, but weight could vary considerable depending on the season in which the animal was harvested. Louis Houck, \textit{A History of Missouri from the Earliest Explorations and Settlements Until the Admission of the State into The Union, Volume II} (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1908), 259; Walter B. Stevens, \textit{Centennial History of Missouri (The Center State) One Hundred Years in the Union, 1820-1921 Volume II} (St. Louis and Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), 432.} The next year Vallé produced only 167 quintals of flour, while total production in Spanish Louisiana dropped to 4,304 quintals. However, Vallé sent 532 packs of furs to New Orleans, as well as 10 to Los Arcos, and 4 measures of lead. In 1774 Vallé did not export any furs or lead. These may have been lost or not sent due to the death of Vallé's son at the Mine la Motte at the hands of Indians.
That year Vallé sent 377 quintals of flour to New Orleans. The Vallé family experienced dramatic financial gains just one year after the loss of his son in 1775. Francisco Vallé, Jr. shipped 5,000 packs of furs to New Orleans, while Vallé himself produced 1000 quintals of flour. Between the years 1772 and 1775 Spanish Louisiana experienced no significant political upheavals. Rather, following in the wake of O'Reilly's demonstration of Spanish power in 1769, the political situation in Spanish Louisiana stabilized. Ekberg's claim that political uncertainty stunted agricultural production has a kernel of truth, but it is more likely that bad harvests and deliberate choices to concentrate on the fur trade rather than on agriculture played a larger role in determining flour production. Finally, covert trade with British merchants certainly soaked up some of the market in flour, making it plausible that Vallé's dismal harvest in 1773 reflects contraband trade. Eventually, Vallé's son, Jean Baptiste concentrated the family's energies in the fur trading enterprise of the firm of A. P. Chouteau, Menard and Vallé, based in Kaskaskia.43

Though Louisiana was nominally Spanish, French inhabitants still largely carried out agriculture and trade. The French-born longlot system of farming migrated to St. Louis, a city born in a vacuum of European power, just as France ceded Louisiana to the Spanish, but long before effective Spanish governance was brought to the region. When Spanish officials finally arrived in Louisiana, they repeated the mistakes that early French explorers and administrators made. They did, however, refrain from attempting to promote grain production in the settlements surrounding New Orleans. Following Ulloa's disastrous tenure as governor, O'Reilly pushed for trade barriers to be removed in order that Louisiana's potential as a wood-exporting colony could

be realized. O'Reilly drew out the general outline of his plan for Louisiana's trade in a 1769 letter
to Julian de Arriaga:

From Catalonia vessels would come with red wine. They would load wood and other
things here for Havana, and get sugar there. I think that this arrangement would assure an
outlet for the products of this colony and a supply of what it needs... I found the English
entirely in possession of the commerce of this colony. They had merchants among the
Germans and stores in this city, and I can assure you that they got nine-tenths of the ready
money here.  

O'Reilly lamented that both French and English merchants undercut the Spanish trade of
the colony. The governor quickly realized that cutting off illegal trade was a tricky business, and
he blamed his own subjects as much as the English. Much of the problem had to do with
Mississippi River itself, where vessels could anchor mid-stream in order to avoid inspections and
duties. O'Reilly advocated abandoning posts situated in places that the Spanish could not
effectively police:

The English will never come by land with goods. They lack all means of doing so and
they would immediately be known and the goods confiscated. Our own people are the
ones who can and always want to trade illegally, and that post [Natchez], far from all
control and inspection, would be a secure haven, protecting the greed of everyone
employed there.

O'Reilly's pragmatism contrasted sharply with the naiveté of his predecessor Ulloa, who
suggested that in times of need that the Spanish should trade for supplies with English merchants
across the river. Throughout the 1770s tensions between Spain and Britain remained high, and
though illicit trade abounded, the prospect of officials collaborating to supply one another was
more fancy than reality. In the early 1770s a dispute over the Falkland Islands created tension
and the Mississippi bristled with military preparations. The oft-distressed Leyba at St. Louis

44 O'Reilly to Arriaga, October 17, 1769, in Kinnaird ed., Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Vol. II, Pt. I,
104-105.

I, 146.
tested Ulloa's order in the summer of 1779, even as ships sailing from Spain brought a declaration of war to Havana. Leyba complained to Governor Gálvez that, "It is indispensible that our Indian tribes be provided with their accustomed goods. There are not enough in this post to supply the smallest of them." Leyba sent merchants to the British side of the river in order to obtain some goods, but, "the English traders, from whom nothing is hidden and who see our need, asked such exorbitant prices that only a person who wanted to ruin himself would accept them."

Spanish commandants frequently complained of the reluctance of their subjects to pursue agricultural endeavors. Pedro Piernas wrote of the large numbers of wandering inhabitants of Spanish Illinois:

They do not apply themselves to agriculture, or to any other work, but are forever wandering; and although they have not at times the means for their sustenance and vices, as they find men to back them, who will supply them on account of the future trade, they come out on top and always live in idleness, although it is known that they corrupt the native youth by their example.46

Piernas claimed that these unattached men spent only four to six months per year hunting, but that they quickly lost what gains they made through, "reveling and scandalous chambering as is notorious." Clearly, Piernas' frustration steered him away from the strict truth, for if the gains were lost quickly, hunters would starve—a phenomenon rarely recorded. Daniel H. Usner offered up a more nuanced evaluation of the conditions of the region when he wrote that, "Many habitants of Louisiana preferred direct exchange with Indians for their subsistence, which proved easier than learning how to produce their own food from the soil and wildlife of an unfamiliar land." Instead of the slothfulness that Spanish officials saw, Usner contended that the trade for

agricultural commodities demonstrated the, "vitality of the exchange economy." Unfortunately, few of the small-scale exchanges between European inhabitants and Native peoples were recorded on paper. But, given the volatility of harvests and the inability of the Illinois Country to consistently export grain it stands to reason that Europeans from New Orleans to Vincennes regularly traded with Indians for food.47

Men like Piernas and Vallé, who served for a time as the commandant of Ste. Genevieve, decried the inroads made by English merchants, but they were far from insulated from the illicit trade of the region. An English merchant at Manchac, John Fitzpatrick, trusted Piernas with a draft, and entertained Vallé's youngest son when he travelled to New Orleans. Fitzpatrick's account books record numerous shipments to Spanish possessions, including the city of New Orleans. In May of 1773 Fitzpatrick advised Evan and James Jones and Company at Pensacola that, "Your flour would Meet with Good sale in Orleans at present there Being none in the place to be had for love Or Money." When O'Reilly docked at Balize, Fitzpatrick concentrated on the specie that the Spanish governor brought with him, rather than on the large number of soldiers, even though Fitzpatrick had frequently and openly traded with British merchants. Fitzpatrick wrote to McGillivray and Struthers in August of 1769 that, "they [the Spanish] have brought Dollers 500,000. with part of which it is Expected they will pay of all the Spanish Bills. so as soon as the people have any money among them I shall I Shall [sic] Use my Endeavours to gitt in All the outStanding Debts." The next month O'Reilly expelled Fitzpatrick from Spanish Louisiana, but the English merchant continued shipping goods between English and Spanish posts for the rest of his life. Given the small numbers of Spanish troops in Louisiana and the occasional complicity of Spanish officials residents on both sides of the river most likely met

their food needs through a combination of subsistence agriculture, trade with local Indians, and both legal and contraband trade.48

Spain and Britain faced different obstacles to agricultural expansion. Spanish inhabitants clamored for the importation of slave labor, and the empire exerted itself to supply the demand. In 1778 Spain acquired the African islands of Fernando Po and Annabon from Portugal by treaty. However, two attempts to subjugate the peoples of the islands in 1778 and 1783 failed. In addition to the acquisition of African islands, Spain opened up Louisiana to French slave traders. On November 21, 1777, the king's, "Proclamation Concerning Louisiana Commerce," declared:

His Majesty... granting to the inhabitants the privilege of selling their goods and products for money or bills of exchange to the French vessels which may come from the American islands... whereby he enjoins us to inform the said inhabitants, that for the sake of their greater advancement, and to augment their property by increasing agriculture, he is willing in his royal clemency to permit them to receive Negroes in payment for the said goods.49

Regardless of Spain's attempts to promote the slave trade in Louisiana, many of the new imports probably came from British merchants. In 1776, Fitzpatrick wrote to Captain Cornelius Van Horn at Manchac that, "a french Gentleman of Point Coupie by name Mr. Bohomme, offered to take them, [two male slaves] if you will let them goe, for two hundred and forty Dollars each payable in Indigo next Novr." In addition to illicit trade with the British, Spanish agriculturalists also disregarded the Spanish prohibition on Indian slavery in order to augment their enslaved workforce. O'Reilly's December 1769 proclamation grandfathered in existing

48 To McGillivray and Struthers at Mobile, from New Orleans, August 4, 1769, To Evan and James Jones and Company at Pensacola, from Manchac, May 8, 1773, and, To Monsieur Darchutte at St. Louis, from Spanish Manchac, September 1, 1778 (note 37), in Margaret Fisher Dalrymple, ed., The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 65, 149, 304-305.

Indian slaves, but declared that, "all subjects of His Majesty, and even all transients, are expressly forbidden to acquire, purchase, or take over any Indian slave." An undated letter to Piernas from Governor Unzaga ruled that, "The fourteen Indians bought by the inhabitants of St. Louis, even after the publication of the ordinance, may be kept by their owners as slaves, but not sold pending the decision of His Majesty." In a manner typical of the Spanish rule of Louisiana, the orders emanating from Spain and New Orleans proved difficult to enforce.50

The ambitious Spanish empire of Charles III, concurrent with their efforts to increase the numbers of slaves in Louisiana, also sought to encourage the production of new cash crops in the region. Tobacco exports languished due to trade restrictions and the low quality of the product. By 1778, officials sought to augment the indigo and rice trade by adding flax and hemp production. In a letter to Governor Gálvez, Francisco Cruzat indicated that, "As to the cultivation of flax, they are not much inclined to it." The inhabitants showed interest in hemp cultivation, but Cruzat warned that, “They declared that they would set about planting it this year, but cannot expect a large crop, because of the scarcity of the seed Since this kind of tillage has not hitherto been practised here it will cost them some trouble to get the seed." However, even the Crown's promise to provide slaves on credit to the planters failed to jumpstart the production of either flax or hemp. Spain consistently tried to implement top-down reforms to its trade regulations, but neither the early dreams of mercantilism on the Mississippi, nor proclamations encouraging the production of cash crops in Louisiana, managed to move the colony's economy in a direction that satisfied the Spanish Crown.51


51 The cultivation of hemp and flax to be encouraged by providing settlers with negro slaves, 1778, in Houck, The Spanish Regime in Missouri, Volume I, 158-159.
During the years between France's cession of its North American holdings and the beginning of hostilities with the Spanish, England failed to capitalize on its manufacturing and trade advantages. One question that is rarely asked of the western frontier, is why did colonists fail to take advantage of opportunities to settle or to speculate in land in West Florida? Robin F. A. Fabel asked this question, noting that, "West Florida was the only sizable area west of the Appalachian Mountains where the proclamation of 1763 did not forbid settlement but actually encouraged it." Monforte Brown and Phineas Lyman were among the mere handful of major players to undertake any serious private ventures to speculate in land in West Florida. Appointed Lieutenant Governor of West Florida in 1764, Browne arrived in January 1766, but clashed with Governor George Johnstone who, luckily for Browne, left in January 1767 never to return again. Browne secured a grant of 20,000 acres, but his ambitious paper holdings went largely unimproved and unsettled. England lacked the requisite numbers of troops necessary in 1767 to protect settlers from even small raids by the Choctaws and other tribes. Browne's abrasive personality and his neglect led the inhabitants of West Florida to send complaints back to England against him, and Browne was removed from office in 1769. Any hope for his grandiose scheme died before troop numbers increased to the point that wide scale settlement became practical. Just as Browne's prospects waned, Phineas Lyman, a former Maj. General of Connecticut's First Provincial Regiment successfully petitioned the British government for his own 20,000 acre grant. Lyman represented the surviving members of his regiment, but he failed to obtain lands other than his personal grant. Several other English subjects secured large grants of land adjacent to the Mississippi River, but the early attempts to settle these lands failed. Fabel has argued:

The London government... [refused] to provide military protection... [and] deter[ed] potential immigrants, especially members of the Company of Military Adventurers, at a
most promising time for immigration. That there was a large pool of Loyalists in Connecticut ready to leave their homes is demonstrated by Montfort Browne's ability to persuade many hundreds... to volunteer for the Loyalist regiment that he raised in New York.\footnote{Robin F.A. Fabel, "An Eighteenth Colony: Dreams for the Mississippi on the Eve of the Revolution," \textit{The Journal of Southern History}, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Nov., 1993): 648-649, 655, 666, 671.}

Fabel contended that Britain's failure to rationalize the administration of its wide-flung possessions, and that the confusion bred of political connections trumping ability, combined to discourage the growth of settlements in West Florida. While these factors certainly played into the failure to settle land claims, the population of West Florida managed to rapidly increase during the Revolutionary War. More important than efficient government on the frontier, was the security of life and limb. West Florida, like Kentucky, began to flood with settlers only after the numbers of European settlers reached such a point as to constitute a real threat to Native American military forces. The soil on the British side of the river was as rich and productive as that of Spanish Louisiana. But, without adequate numbers of settlers to work the land, the extensive paper holdings of speculators in West Florida land produced little agricultural produce. Further, English residents of the region found the fur and skins trade just as alluring as their Spanish counterparts.

\textbf{Mining}

To such an extent were Crozat and his partners influenced by this shining bubble that they frequently magnified the most trivial prospects into what they regarded as realities of the greatest value. An instance in which they suffered by their credulity, and which greatly resembles the impositions and deceptions of the present day, occurred at Kaskaskia. Two pieces of silver ore, left at this place by a traveler from Mexico, were exhibited to Cadillac as the produce of mines in Illinois, and so elated was he by this assurance of success that he hurried up the river, only to find it, like all previous prospects, vanish into empty air. But while silver and gold could not be found, large quantities of lead and iron ore were discovered in Missouri; but the great abundance of these metals in the civilized portions of the globe made their presence in the wilds of
Louisiana of little consequence.53 Davidson and Stuvé leave little left to be said of mining enterprises in Louisiana. In the heady early 1700s, speculators marketed Louisiana as a land of untold mineral riches. These hopes soon shattered against the reality on and under the ground of Louisiana. Miners found lead in significant quantities, but due to the weight of the metal as well as its low value, exporting lead outside the colony was an economic folly rarely pursued. Certainly, the presence of lead benefitted hunters and those in the region who traded with Indians. In the 1720s Phillip Renault, one of the largest slaveowners in Louisiana, focused his efforts on a lead mining enterprise, while at the same time trying to establish himself as a French-style seigneur, but his efforts failed. In Renault's wake, scattered small-scale lead mining continued, but until the population along the Mississippi River increased, the demand for lead remained flat.54

More beneficial to the residents of Spanish Louisiana were the presence of salt works. The lack of salt, which often plagued American settlers in Kentucky, does not appear in the correspondence of Spanish or British officials along the river. Though Piernas worried that the owners of the salt works near the Missouri preferred trading with the British, he conceded that the houses, "were sufficient for the supply of the country." The fact that officials and merchants rarely mentioned salt suggests that the supply was plentiful, for residents of the region were rarely shy in clamoring for assistance from the crown.55

54 Ibid., 120; Ekberg, French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times, 43-44, 150.
Furs, Skins, and Liquor

Leyba to Gálvez
November 16, 1778

There is not a foot of soil in this country which is not suitable for all kinds of crops, and there are many square leagues of beautiful meadows on these heights; but the settlers are interested only in trading with the Indians and neglect their farming. All are, or wish to be merchants. This has the following results:

1. There is always a scarcity of food at this post
2. The classes of people are so mixed up that one cannot tell who is a farmer and who is a merchant.
3. The person in command of this post (and even sometimes Your Lordship) is so overwhelmed with requests for permits for the Missouri that, as it is impossible to satisfy them all, it is impossible not to make some enemies.56

The unpredictability of agriculture, as well as the failure of mining ventures to locate precious metals, meant that the trade in furs and skins presented merchants with the greatest opportunity for economic success. However, though officials on both sides of the rivers often commented on the overwhelming interest in trading with Native groups, the diversity of enterprises within Louisiana should not be underestimated. Natalia Belting's extensive search through records concerning Kaskaskia revealed little official correspondence concerning the fur trade. Her list of the professions of inhabitants of Kaskaskia recorded no one labeled as strictly a merchant, while one Antoine Roland's profession is recorded as, "wig-maker."

The trade in liquor has often been mentioned only as it related to Indian affairs and trade, but Europeans provided an abundant market for liquor as well. In a letter to his superior, Governor O'Reilly recounted the business potential of vice in New Orleans:

For the revenues of this city [New Orleans] I have established to the general satisfaction of the councilmen and public a tax of twenty pesos per year on each of the six inns permitted, forty pesos on each of the twelve taverns, and the same amount on each

billiard hall, of which there are six. There has been a great rivalry for preference in obtaining these licenses. 57

Even the rugged frontier could at times become glutted with liquor. In 1773 Fitzpatrick advised a trading partner that, "I am Glad you have not sent your Rum this way the New England Man has Supplyd all them that would want rum at 4/ per Gallon hear." The liquor market that Fitzpatrick described in 1773 was, however, an anomaly and liquor was normally a durable and highly sought after trade item that could be safely stockpiled. In 1777 Fitzpatrick wrote to Phillips Comyn, "I have a Large Quantity of Rum myself on hand West India & Jamaica for the present, but should any Occasion offer to purchase more than what I can supply them with be assured shall not fail in acquaing." Wine and rum dominated the liquor trade on both sides of the river. Records from Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Missouri, Kinnaird's documents concerning Spanish Louisiana, and the *Mississippi Provincial Archives 1763-1766*, all lack any reference to the brewing or consumption of beer. Likewise Belting's work does not document the occupation of any resident of Kaskaskia as "brewer," nor does she reference the consumption of beer. Given the costs associated with transporting beer across the ocean, as well as the availability of grain in the Illinois Country, had the palettes of residents living along the Mississippi River desired beer, some inhabitant of the region surely would have established a brewery. Instead, the region imported from Jamaica, Havana, France and Spain, most of the wine and all of the rum required in the region. Cheap taffia rum was extremely popular, but French and English inhabitants and soldiers displayed more discriminating tastes when it came to wine. 58


Governor Ulloa attributed the preference for French wine as one of the contributing factors for the rebellion that ousted him from the colony. He wrote to Grimaldi in October 1768:

I, with considerable severity, had told those who spoke to me about it that they could leave the colony as honored citizens, but that His Majesty did not desire subjects who were not content and could better themselves elsewhere, and that he would never regard as good subjects those who were so only for Bordeaux wine. I mentioned this since they were giving as one of the causes of their displeasure with the new commercial regulation, that they would not have this wine but would have to use that of Catalonia, which did not suit their palates.\(^5^9\)

Though Frenchmen preferred fine wines, high costs at times prevented consumption.

After advising Comyn that he would seek to acquire more rum, Fitzpatrick followed by writing, "that you have that Article for sale, Madeira wine come to high for frenchmen and as all the English Troops have left the Illinois, it will not suit them." Fitzpatrick himself displayed quite a French love for claret. Writing to William Strother in New Orleans in October 1776, he demanded, "for Gods sake send me the wine per the first conveyance as I have not one drop in the House." Terrisse de Ternan, shortly after arriving in the Illinois Country, became so desperate for wine that he produced his own from local grapes, but risked making himself sick by drinking it before it was ready. But, transporting wine in casks was a risky business.

Fitzpatrick often lamented the spillage or spoilage of wine en route to its destination, and twice the merchant advised his associates to salvage spoiled wine by selling it as vinegar. Recent immigrants to the region suffered more severely from a desire for products from home. Fitzpatrick's letter concerning Madeira wine suggests that the tastes of the long-term residents of

the Illinois had changed to the point that they were reluctant to pay exorbitant prices for luxury wines.  

Agricultural produce and spirits kept the residents of the region alive and in good humor, but the fur trade constituted the primary focus of merchants. Unfortunately, many of the documentary records concerning the fur trade have been lost or were never written. The census data and economic statistics compiled by French, Spanish and British authorities focused on inhabitants, men of good standing who owned land. Merchants in Louisiana and West Florida displayed a financial confidence in the fur trade in contrast to their tentative endeavors in the flour trade. This confidence was demonstrated by the fact that merchants advanced money to hunters and wanderers. Piernas' previously noted, October 1769 report describing the Spanish Illinois Country asserted that hunters lived in idleness, but this opinion cannot be accepted wholesale. While life in Louisiana was not often plagued by widespread poverty, few merchants were wealthy enough to incur repeated losses. Piernas' assertions regarding the slothfulness of hunters and the willingness of investors to back expeditions on credit, suggests that the fur and skins trade was a lucrative business. The documents concerning the fur trade that survived to the present day recorded large volumes. When Jacques Bourdon of Kaskaskia died in the summer of 1723, his estate contained not only a great quantity of cloth and fine clothing, but also a staggering number of pelts:

4,443 pounds of beavers, including 13\(\frac{1}{2}\) pounds of cast-offs
84 deerskins
12 deerskins
12 doeskins
6 buffalo hides

\(^{60}\) To William Strother at New Orleans from Manchac, October 2, 1776, and, To Phillips Comyn from Manchac, January 24, 1777, in Dalrymple, ed., \textit{The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790}, 211, 230-231; Fitzpatrick wrote of salvaging wine in letters to McGillivray and Struthers in February 1771, and to Peter Swanson, both in Mobile, in, ibid., 100, 114; Ekberg, "Terrisse de Ternan: Epistoler and Soldier," 404.
Fitzpatrick regularly conducted transactions in which hundreds of deerskins or pelts were exchanged. The importance of skins and pelts can also be seen in the fact that in the more remote reaches of the region that they often served as the de facto currency. Fitzpatrick wrote to Monsieur Darchutte at St. Louis in the fall of 1778, attempting to collect monies owed:

["Y"]ou will please to observe that all these papers are payable in dollars and not in Skins; but as they are not the currency of your part of the Country you will be obliged to take skins in that case you will take them on such Conditions that I will not be a sufferer.62

In February of 1784, Fitzpatrick received, "961 good skins, Weight 2420 lb." by barge, and December 1776 he had on hand, "about 50 Packs 5500 lb. of fine Illinois Scraped Skins, fit for the French Markett." Considering that Fitzpatrick was only one of the many ambitious merchants trading in the region, the numbers of deerskins and pelts floated down the Mississippi River must have been extremely large. Though merchants often flouted trade restrictions, monopolies, powerful organizations and official restrictions, all to some extent prevented skins and pelts from moving as easily as possible. Officials and merchants both understood the potential of the Mississippi River. George Morgan, a perennial opportunist along the western frontier summed up the situation in a 1788 land petition:

Your Memorialists are of Opinion that this [The Mississippi River] is the natural Channel for 9/10ths of the rich Fur Trade which is at present carried to Canada as Returns may be made to these States in twelve Months which require three & often four Years to be made to Montreal, from the difficulties of the Navigation & the Numerous Portages by the lake of the Woods to the most Northern Sources of the Mississippi, from whence the richest Furs are derived.63


62 To Monsieur Darchutte at St. Louis, from Spanish Manchac, September 1, 1778, in Dalrymple, ed., The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790, 305.

63 To David Ross at New Orleans from Manchac, December 29, 1776, and To William Smith at Natchez from Manchac, February 27, 1784, in ibid., 224, 406; George Morgan Petitions for Land, May 1, 1788. To the
Before the breakout of hostilities, British officials shared Morgan's opinion of the importance of the Mississippi for trade. Writing in January of 1764, Major Farmar advocated to the Secretary at War:

In my humble opinion, this that is the most Exteriour, ought to be the most Interiour Post, and the principal Fort at Biloxi, with small Posts extending along the Lakes Pontchartrain, and Maurepas, to where the River Iberville communicates with the Mississippi, otherwise the French will Command the greatest part of the Indian Trade as it is verry near to them and entirely open, to Guard this Coast properly it would require at least two Regiments more.64

Establishing the volume of the trade in skins and pelts with the information available presently is not possible. However, it can be safely asserted that individual merchants regularly conducted transactions in which hundreds of skins passed hands. For the hundreds of hunters and wanderers spread out in Indian country whose ribald ways worried Spanish and British officials to survive, the output of Indian and European hunters must have measured in tens of thousands of skins and pelts produced annually. While merchants recorded transactions concerning flour, wine, and salt, as often as transactions exchanging skins, several facts strongly suggest that the fur trade dominated other enterprises. First, officials like Leyba and Piernas, often stated that the inhabitants of Louisiana cared only for trading with the Indians, and that they were pestered with requests for licenses. Secondly, officials usually used their influence to gain access to the trade in peltry and to ship skins free of charge, instead of using political leverage to acquire land grants. Thirdly, the rum, knives, pots and other goods imported to the region, most often found their ways into the hands of Native peoples, meaning that some of the disparity in the numbers of


instances in which the fur trade was recorded by merchants in contrast to these goods does not mean that these other goods held more importance in the eyes of businessmen. Finally, the mere existence of the cities and outposts situated along the Mississippi River cannot be explained by reference to religious intolerance, forced exile, or land hunger. For generations, the inhabitants of Louisiana and West Florida halfheartedly pursued agricultural production, whereas traders such as Pollock and Fitzpatrick moved vast distances in order to ply their trade. Had the inhabitants of the region been no more than unsuccessful farmers, they would have moved to greener pastures long before the outbreak of the war. Rather, a unique mix of agriculture, specialized trades and fur trading developed along the waters.

The tens of thousands of deerskins and pelts produced near the waters of the Mississippi River almost always found their way to European markets. However, the process of shipping these goods was anything but streamlined. Hunters and traders wandered about in Indian Country while merchants set up shops at far-flung outposts and major cities. Skins from the same locale could travel north, south, or east, depending on local conditions and trade partnerships, because, for all the posturing and proclamations concerning trade regulations emanating from European capitals, business practices within the frontier were personal. Great trading monopolies developed slowly along the Mississippi, not fully emerging until after the American Revolution. Personal connections and the whims of Native groups prevented trade goods and exports from always following direct routes to markets. A letter written by Fitzpatrick in July 1773 illustrates how small and personal the world along the waters could be. Fitzpatrick, born in Ireland in 1737 and deported from Spanish Illinois, wrote to a Frenchman in New Orleans. In his letter to Jean Lafitte, Fitzpatrick referenced that, "Inclosed You have Two Notes of Messrs. Polock & Willing at Sixty Days Sight Amounting to $331.6r which you'l please to git Excepted." In just a few
short years Oliver Pollock would become the financier of the American expeditions in the West, and James Willing would lead an American raiding party down the Mississippi River, forcing Fitzpatrick to seek refuge on the Spanish side of the river. Moreover, before the war James Willing had, like Pollock, represented the interests of the firm, "Willing and Morris." The firm used Pollock's personal connection with O'Reilly to further their business interests in Spanish Louisiana. These merchants moved and traded allegiances, making radical changes in an attempt to prosper. Pollock received land grants in West Florida from Britain in the years preceding the war, but sided with the Americans and the Spanish. Willing, never a savvy businessman joined the Patriot cause, finally successful in his plundering raids. Fitzpatrick moved across the river several times during his life, but found that an influx of new merchants to the region and new Spanish regulations undercut his advantage as a trader, and in his later years he focused his energy on creating a financially profitable plantation based on slave labor. However, just because personal connections made business within the frontier a close-knit, and inefficient affair, the men who engaged in trading operations and schemes should not be labeled provincial. Pollock's career took him from New Orleans to Cuba to Pennsylvania and back to the Mississippi River.65

Transportation

The Mississippi River made shipping trade items possible. Along the Mississippi River, roads between settlements were not well kept, and the residents of the region could not depend upon overland transport. But, shipping heavy items such as pelts, grain and lead consisted of much more than floating a barge downstream. The trip downstream could be made quickly and with much less exertion than a trip upstream, but both required rowers, and many of them.

Natalia Belting made no mention of rowers in her description of the occupations of the residents of Kaskaskia. Ekberg devoted some space to describing river travel in his description of the French Illinois Country, but concentrated on the construction methods and materials of the boats. In general, traders and merchants plied the water in either pirogues or bateaux. Pirogues were vessels constructed by hollowing out a single massive tree trunk, whereas "bateaux" referred to large plank-built vessels, including barges. Rowers underwent incredible hardship while powering these vessels. Not only did physical exertion and lack of proper nutrition take their toll, but mosquitoes also swarmed the men navigating the river. Merchants with access to slave labor often utilized their slaves as rowers, though engagés (hired men) made up the majority of the boatmen within the Mississippi River Valley.66

The censuses for the Spanish regime in the Illinois Country show that a very large number of the residents of the region worked as rowers. Of the roster of the first company of the St. Louis militia in 1780, 42 men out of a total 107 men were listed as having the occupation of rower. Not only did the enlisted men of the militia work as rowers—two officers, a first and second corporal were recorded as rowers. It is likely however, that these men engaged in other economic pursuits during the course of a year. Water levels and ice precluded travel for much of the year, and a voyage from the Illinois Country to New Orleans and back would take almost six months. The downriver trip between the Illinois Country and New Orleans took on average one month, while the return trip could take as long as four months. A myriad numbers of factors including wind, currents, and the health of the rowers made the time of voyage quite erratic. Nancy Surrey found instances in the early 1700s where the downstream voyage took as little as

twelve days. Balize could be reached from New Orleans in several days and Mobile in less than one week.\textsuperscript{67}

The number of rowers on pirogues and bateaux varied widely. Surrey asserted of pirogues that, "The larger-sized vessels, however, were from forty to fifty feet long by three to five feet wide and could carry thirty men. In freight capacity they ranged from one ton to forty-five or fifty tons." The term bateaux encompassed a number of vessels constructed of planks and often described as being shaped like coffins. By the late 1700s these vessels reached massive proportions, carrying more than fifty tons of freight, and were often equipped with sails. However, shortages in manpower frequently reduced the numbers of rowers, making voyages difficult and slow. The difficulties of rowing presented additional hazards for military expeditions in which men were required not only to row but to be ready to resist an assault. From Mobile, Major Farmar lamented the weakness of his men intended to garrison posts in the Illinois Country in 1764. He asked the Secretary of War:

\begin{quote}
What can the most determined resolution, on our part, avail, when the moment, a few tired & fatigued Men quit their Oars, (in order to take to their Arms) They are hurried down a rapid River, at the rate of five miles in an hour, exposed to the fire of an Enemy at every turn, that you can neither see, nor discover [?]\textsuperscript{68}
\end{quote}

Military expeditions also suffered because they frequently needed to be undertaken at times when the elements did not cooperate. During the 1700s ice frequently clogged the Mississippi and other rivers, making travel during the winter months difficult or impossible. In early 1779, George Rogers Clark fled in advance of Hamilton's force and sent public papers and money with a priest who was to cross over to the Spanish side of the river. However, a thick


\textsuperscript{68} Surrey, \textit{The Commerce of Louisiana During the French Régime}, 57; From Major Farmar, to the Secretary at War, November 24, 1764, in Rowland, \textit{Mississippi Provincial Archives 1763-1766: English Dominion, Vol. 1}, 125.
torrent of ice racing down the Mississippi River forced the priest to camp on an island in the river for three days.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ George Rogers Clark to George Mason, November 19, 1779, in, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 134.
Daniel Paterson, Cantonment of His Majesty's forces in N. America according to the disposition now made & to be compleated as soon as practicable taken from the general distribution dated at New York 29th. March 1766, image accessed at, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_item.pl?data=/home/www/data/gmd/gmd3/g3301/g3301r/ar011800.jp2&style=gmd&itemLink=r?ammem/gmd.klpmap.ww2map.:@field%28NUMBER+@band%28g3301r+ar011800%29%29&title=Cantonment%20of%20His%20Majesty%27s%20forces%20in%20N.%20America%20according%20to%20the%20disposition%20now%20made%20%26%20to%20be%20compleated%20as%20soon%20as%20practicable%20taken%20from%20the%20general%20distribution%20dated%20at%20New%20York%2029th.%20March%201766 (accessed 10 March, 2010).
J. Gibson, "The British Governments in Nth. America Laid down agreeable to the Proclamation of Octr. 7. 1763," courtesy of The John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, image accessed at, http://www.lunacommons.org/luna/servlet/detail/JCB~1~1~4243~6640006:The-British-Governments-in-Nth--Ame?trs=254&mi=207&qv=w4s%3A2Fwhere%2FNorth-America%2FCaribbean+Islands%2F3B%3Blc%3AAMICOCO%7E1%7E1%2CBardBar%7E1%7E1%2CCChineseArt-ENG%7E1%7E1%2CCORNELL%7E3%7E1%2CCORNELL%7E9%7E1%2CSTATE%7E2%7E1%2CFBC%7E100%7E1%2CCHOOVER%7E1%7E1%2CCIC%7E1%7E1%2CLTU%7E20%7E20%2CMOAC%7E100%7E1%2CPRATT%7E12%7E12%2CPRATT%7E13%7E13%2CPRATT%7E21%7E21%2CPRATT%7E9%7E9%2CPRUITT%7E8%7E1%2CPRUITT%7E9%7E9%2CStanford%7E6%7E1&cic=AMICO%7E1%7E1(accessed 6 May 2010).
CHAPTER 3

WAR AND MILITARY EXPEDITIONS

The commanding colonel arrived at this town in hunting shirt and breechcloth, naked of foot and limb and with his bed, food, and gun on his shoulder. The troops had no other equipment than breechcloth, powder horn, gun, and knapsack.

Leyba to Gálvez, San Luis, July 11, 1778

As late as the 1760s, maps of North America, depicting areas west of the Appalachian Mountains and south of Georgia, rendered these frontiers as vague expanses. One map created in 1765 of the territories adjacent to the Mississippi River portrayed the western frontier as a place devoid of European settlements, but full of potential, with the phrase, "Country full of Mines," boldly printed in a vacant stretch of land west of the river. Daniel Paterson's map of British military forces in North America left the western frontier as a desolate stretch broken only by the Mississippi and a single military outpost. One of John Gibson's maps of North America following the Proclamation of 1763 emphasized that the lands west of the mountains were, "Reserved for the Indians." This map tightly contained the British colonies along the coast, though another map of the region created by Gibson and Eman Bowen in the same year stretched the British colonies all the way to the Mississippi River, with the words "Conquered Country" prominently displayed. All of these attempts suffered from myopic tendencies and from a simple lack of cartographic information. Paterson and Gibson drew the southern portion of Florida as a series of broken up islands. Both mapmakers were unable to locate and name a single tribe west of the Mississippi River. The lack of knowledge of the West in European capitals should not however be overstated. Officials posted within the frontier regularly corresponded with their

counterparts in Europe, but information regarding trade and military capabilities was regularly inflated or miscalculated, and knowledge of the location and size of tribes often little understood. For instance, in 1782 Spanish Governor Estevan Miró wrote to Joseph Gálvez that the lieutenant governor of Louisiana made peace with "The aforesaid chiefs, to the number of a hundred and thirty tribes [emphasis in original] from among those who live within the territory which is washed on one side by the river Misisipy, and on the other by [the Ohio].” The lieutenant governor likely received 130 chiefs, but it is highly doubtful that each of these chiefs represented a distinct tribe. Officials rarely mentioned such vast numbers of tribes. Most often their correspondence concerned a handful of the most powerful groups, such as the Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Osages.71

In the realm of Indian affairs, confusion reigned supreme, and there were great disparities between the perspectives of local officials and those located in capitals. European officials stationed within the frontier better understood the conditions of their rivals located across the river, but given the vast distances between settlements and the vulnerability of remote outposts, rumors gained an audience easily. In the fall of 1779, the erroneous news that, "Col. Clark has

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71 “Louisiana as formerly claimed by France, now containing part of British America to the east & Spanish America to the west of the Mississippi from the best authorities,” *London Magazine Vol. 34*, 1765; “The British Governments in Nth. America Laid down agreeable to the Proclamation of Octr. 7, 1763”; Daniel Paterson, "Cantonment of His Majesty's forces in N. America according to the disposition now made & to be compleated as soon as practicable taken from the general distribution dated at New York 29th. March 1766"; "An accurate map of North America. Describing and distinguishing the British and Spanish dominions of this great continent; according to the definitive treaty concluded at Paris 10th Febly. 1763. Also all the West India Islands belonging to, and possessed by the several European princes and states. The whole laid down according to the latest and most authentick improvements, by Eman. Bowen, geogr. to His Majesty and John Gibson, engraver,” http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/map_item.pl?data=/home/www/data/gmd/gmd3/g3300/g3300/ar002300.jp2&style=gmd&itemLink=D?gmd:4./temp/~ammem_JILx::@@@mdb=gmd,klpmap,ww2map&title=An%20accurate%20map%20of%20North%20America.%20Describing%20and%20distinguishing%20the%20British%20and%20Spanish%20dominions%20of%20this%20great%20continent%20and%20to%20the%20definitive%20treaty%20concluded%20at%20Paris%2010th%20Febly.%201763.%20Also%20all%20the%20West%20India%20Islands%20belonging%20to%20His%20Majesty%20and%20possessed%20by%20the%20European%20princes%20and%20states.%20The%20whole%20laid%20down%20according%20to%20the%20latest%20and%20most%20authentic%20improvements,%20by%20Eman.%20Bowen,%20geogr.%20to%20His%20Majesty%20and%20John%20Gibson.%20Engraver (accessed 6 May 2010); Letter of Governor Miró to Don Joseph Galvez - 1782, in Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri, Volume I*, 209.
taken fort Detroit,” was published in a Boston newspaper. More often written, however, than such easily refuted misinformation, were aggrandizements of the power or expenditures by foes. British and Spanish officials along the river regularly complained that they were being outspent or outmaneuvered by one another. The one constant fact that both sides agreed upon was the importance of the Mississippi River as a border and as an avenue for the transport of men, materials, and goods.72

Following the defeat of the French in 1763 and their subsequent cession of Louisiana to the Spanish, the Mississippi River figured as one of the most prominent boundaries on the continent. Despite the vulnerability of the French outposts on the western frontier, there was little military action in the West. Because the Seven Years’ War left the region untouched and because of the vulnerability of defensive structures, the cities and outposts situated along the waters were largely civilian enterprises. Prior to the neglect of the region during the Seven Years' War, death, desertion, and the allure of trading with Native peoples, all combined to undermine the efficacy of military forces in Louisiana. In 1735, the Weekly Rehearsal, a Boston newspaper, chronicled the extreme lengths that two French soldiers took to desert from their garrison, “300 Miles farther up the said River [from New Orleans].” The paper claimed that the men travelled 1500 miles during a six-month journey in order to reach an English settlement where they could find transportation back to France. They undertook the journey due to a lack of food and the harsh treatment of the soldiers by their officers. The article advised that, “after frequent Complaints to the Officers for Redress of their Grievances, they were told, that if they would have Provision, they must go and get it in the Woods with the Indians.”73


73 Ibid.; The Weekly Rehearsal, Boston MA, 14 July 1735.
By the time that Spain began sending soldiers and officials into Louisiana it was clear that the settlements along the Mississippi river could not be ruled with strict military discipline. Even the notoriously indifferent Ulloa advised as much in his 1767 decree of rules for governing the Spanish Illinois Country:

[Rule] 15. The command of the district whither the expedition is going cannot be military, according to the custom and rule of Spain. In strict terms what the troops are there to perform is not a matter of military obligation, nor a subject of military command, but if they be asked civilly, courteously, and affably, they will do whatever is needed, especially when it is not asked that they do it free of charge.  

Unfortunately for the governor, Ulloa ignored his own good advice when he dealt with Spanish and formerly French soldiers located near to the capital. Ulloa’s seventeenth rule likewise attempted to undercut the problem of desertion in the far-flung outposts of Louisiana, by banning the use of Spanish munitions by soldiers for private hunting enterprises. Though affronts and small raids by bands of Indians sometimes threatened outposts, full-scale European warfare rarely broke out on the western frontier, and one can imagine that boredom, isolation, hunger, stringent military discipline, and sexual frustration all worked to encourage desertion, whether back to Europe or into Native societies. Between the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War and the end of American Revolution the total duration of assaults led by European forces represented mere weeks of concerted fighting between European forces during a span of two decades. Not surprisingly then, the Revolutionary War in the far West was a largely bloodless affair carried on by volunteers and Indian allies. 

In several senses however, the war along the waters was peculiarly European. First, for reasons that will be elaborated on at a later point in this study, the ability to raise and provision

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74 1767 - Ulloa Sends an Expedition to the (Spanish) Illinois Country to Establish a Fort and Settlement and His Rules for the Government of the same, in Houck, The Spanish Regime in Missouri, Volume I, 5.

75 Ibid., 6.
regular forces in the region decided the fate of the territory within Louisiana and West Florida. Secondly, Native peoples residing near the Mississippi River, largely avoided participating in military expeditions.

**Early Years**

Nearly three years passed between the shots fired at Lexington and Concord and the arrival of American forces along the Mississippi River. From 1775 to 1778 the British and Spanish militaries transported little more than rumors to their military outposts in the west. The most important development along the river was the open secret of the cooperation between the Spanish Crown and the upstart American rebels. Even before Clark and his men marched west, rumors of American successes against British forts travelled along the Mississippi River. In July of 1776 Fitzpatrick wrote to John Stephenson that, “By a Bautaux from the Illinois the other Day; We hear that Fort Dutroit, is taken by the amicans.” Fear and uncertainty was not restricted to far-away locales. In the same letter Fitzpatrick recorded that, “a number of Negroes in the Settllmen of Banton Rough; had Laid a Skime to put there masters to Death.” In contrast to the fabricated American success in the north and the, likely fictional, uprising in Baton Rouge, valuable aid did flow to the American cause from the south as the Spanish funneled war materials to the Americans through schemes involving supposedly-neutral third parties. In February of 1777, the Spanish provided, “6 cases of quinine, 8 cases of other medicines, 108 bolts of woolen cloth and serge, 100 hundredweights of powder in 100 barrels, and 300 muskets with bayonets in 30 boxes,” to their American allies. The Spanish in New Orleans dealt primarily with representatives from the state of Virginia. In a September 1776 letter from Governor Unzaga transmitted to Navarro, “the attached order and two receipts from Mr. Gibson, agent for the colony of Virginia, to whom there were delivered by my order one hundred quintals of
powder from the royal stores of this place as it was to the advantage of the service of His Majesty.”

As military assistance flowed to the Americans from Spanish warehouses, the Spanish government began to crack down on British merchants and smugglers who had long used the Mississippi with impunity as a base for illicit trade. Martin de Navarro wrote in his memoir, of British traders that, “Already had their audacity come to such an extreme, that forgetting, or despising, perhaps, the sacred immunity of the territory, they built a dock on the land in order to facilitate the passage of the floating warehouses of their vessels.” The outbreak of war gave Spain an opportunity to act against the interests of England, while at the same time giving preference to French and Spanish traders. The English believed that Spanish seizures of their boats along the Mississippi stemmed from a secret alliance with the Americans. For Governor Gálvez, the situation allowed the Spanish to support their ally, distress their foe, and promote Spanish commercial interests. The rapid about face came as a brutal shock to English merchants who had grown accustomed to Unzaga’s blind eye regarding contraband trade. Fitzpatrick and other English businessmen assumed that Gálvez intended to uphold the status quo. In February 1777, Fitzpatrick wrote to Michael Hoopock at Concord Mississippi that, “the New Govener... allows the English Liberty to trad or hunt up any of the Rivers on the Spanish Sid they Please.” By April however, Fitzpatrick was writing to John Stephenson that the Spanish had seized all the British vessels near New Orleans. He admitted that, “what the reason in for so doing can’t say without we have a War with Spain.”


77 To Michael Hoopcock at Concord, Mississippi from Manchac, February 14, 1777, and To John Stephenson at Pensacola from Manchac, April 23, 1777, in Dalrymple, ed., The Merchant of Manchac: The Letterbooks of John
Though Spanish officials exempted American merchants from these kinds of seizures and supplied military leaders from Virginia with materials, they possessed little confidence in the military abilities or political reliability of their ally. In the summer of 1776, Governor Unzaga as well as other Spanish officials believed that the Tories and Patriots might at any time resolve their differences and unite to overthrow Spanish rule in the Americas. He asserted:

I do not discount the possibility that the two sides [Americans and English] may unite and surprise the dominions of some of the other powers of Europe in order to indemnify their costs and damages or for the attainment of other designs which I shall try to ascertain by all means possible.  

Despite the mistrust between the Spanish, British, Americans, and French inhabitants living along the length of the Mississippi River, between 1775 and the winter of 1777, little changed in the region. Residents grew their crops, traded for furs and skins, and pleaded for gifts and trading licenses. British and Spanish authorities occasionally stopped vessels travelling the river that were suspected to be conducting illicit trade or supporting the rebels. During the first days of 1778 the governors of Spanish Louisiana and British West Florida exchanged runaway slaves and pleasantries. Governor Peter Chester of West Florida wrote to Gálvez that, "The two fugitive Negroes which you were pleased to send round to me, have been delivered... [and] By the Vessel which carries this Letter, Your Excellency will receive a Fugitive Slave." American depredations carried out on the river soon changed the tenor of British and Spanish correspondence. Tensions and conflict escalated, primarily due to American incursions into the

Fitzpatrick, 1768-1790, 236, 244; Political reflections on the present condition of the province of Louisiana. By Intendant Martin de Navarro. [New Orleans, ca. 1785]... Translated from the original in Archivo de Indias, Seville, in, James Alexander Robinson and Paul Alliot, Louisiana under the rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807 : social, economic, and political conditions of the territory represented in the Louisiana Purchase, (Cleveland, Ohio : A.H. Clark Co., 1911), 246.

British Illinois Country and West Florida and were finally brought into the open shortly after Spain formally allied itself with France in on April 12, 1779 though the Treaty of Aranjuez.79

From Alliance to Victory

Though the outcomes of military expeditions along the Mississippi Rivers figured significantly in the aftermath of the American Revolution, actual conflict was both rare and largely bloodless. Significant conflicts included the expeditions of James Willing, George Rogers Clark, Bernardo de Gálvez, James Colbert, Henry Hamilton, as well as the Loyalist uprising against Spanish rule at Natchez.

James Willing's campaign against British planters in his river vessel the Rattletrap, was seen by many of his contemporaries as a vicious, barely partisan, plundering expedition. All of the sources agree that Willing made a better plunderer than businessman, but historians have begun to reevaluate the nature of Willing's campaign. Unfortunately, the accounts of Willing's raid were written by Willing himself and his critics, and we lack any third party account of the action. The accounts appearing in newspapers of the raid came from loyalists. A letter appearing in the Royal Gazette recounted that, "He committed the most wanton cruelties with his own hand, he set fire to the dwelling house of Mr. Walker... and even cut down the fruit trees in his garden."80 Willing and his crew began their expedition from Fort Pitt in early January 1778 and reached Natchez by February. At Natchez Willing and his men seized the property of only two men, both of whom were clearly Loyalists as they were British officials. As the Rattletrap moved downriver, opportunistic men augmented Willing's original force. The new additions to the raiding party proved difficult to control. Tales of the brutality of Willing's raiders outpaced


80 "Copy of a Letter from Mr. Robert Foss, of Pensacola, Relating to the Conduct of Mr. James Willing, Addressed to Thomas Symonds," Royal Gazette, New York, 5 May 1779.
the *Rattletrap* as wealthy Loyalist planters fled with possessions and slaves in tow from plantations in and around Manchac to New Orleans. These British subjects sought protection in Spanish Louisiana, and as Spain had not formally declared war against England, Gálvez found himself forced into a difficult situation. Examining the records concerning the Willing raid, Henry O. Robertson contended that, "Willing's men raided fifteen plantations, perhaps more, on the Mississippi River in present-day Louisiana. Of these fifteen, eleven were loyalists." Though Willing's raid concentrated on loyalist possessions, by the summer of 1778, both Oliver Pollock and Governor Gálvez began to worry about the repercussions of harboring Willing and his spoils. Pollock wrote of Gálvez's situation that, "As there is no account here of War being declared or even that the Court of Spain have acknowledged our Independancey, he may therefore be liable to Censure from his own Court for acting as publicly in our favor."81

Willing himself took a decidedly humble posture towards the Spanish governor. In three letters to Gálvez defending or explaining his actions towards his captives he began by writing, "I am exceedingly sorry... I am inexpressibly sorry... [and] I am extremely sorry." The correspondence between Willing and his ostensible American ally Oliver Pollock lacked the diplomatic tenor of that which passed between Willing and Gálvez. Perhaps the notorious dissolute living and drunkenness that Willing participated in, previous to his military campaign and while a serving as a representative in the business of both his brother and Pollock, soured the relationship even before Willing reached New Orleans in the *Rattletrap*. Certainly, Willing displayed an obtuse indifference to the difficult straits that financing the western campaigns had

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placed upon Pollock. Willing wrote to Pollock in May 1778 that, "My Men and Officers are discontented, myself displeased and the Governor himself highly dissatisfied [sic] with Your Conduct and what is of the most serious consequence My Men are deserting and the American Bank [emphasis in original] as it is termed is become proverbially Ridiculous." Pollock responded by stating that Willing was clearly aware that Pollock had "cheerfully run myself in debt," for the American cause. He also argued that Willing's claims were "unsupportable."

Willing's men, fearing reprisal, finally left New Orleans in late summer. In the end, Willing separated from his men and attempted to reach Philadelphia by boat but was captured by the British and made a prisoner for the duration of the war. Despite the drafts written against him by Willing and his men, Pollock expressed relief that he was rid of the nuisance of their presence in New Orleans. Evaluations of the impact of Willing's raid range from the negative views held by George Rogers Clark, John Walton Caughey, and the majority of scholars up to the second half of the twentieth century, to more positive opinions which have begun to appear in the last few decades. Henry O. Robertson makes a compelling claim that loyalist sentiment in West Florida has been overestimated and that Willing's raid destabilized the English government rather than incited Tory action. Curiously, Willing's detractors have failed to note the lack of militia participation against American and Spanish expeditionary forces and the political upheavals that followed in the wake of the Willing raid. On the eastern seaboard and in official correspondence Willing may have been vilified, but on the ground adjacent to the Mississippi River planters cared only for what government could bring them security. Willing's raid worked effectively against the British because it diverted resources away from the defense of the Illinois Country and made British residents both resentful of, and distrustful towards their government.82

82 Willing to Gálvez, March 24, 1778, Willing to Gálvez, April 1, 1778, Willing to Gálvez, April 5, 1778, Willing to Pollock, May 30, 1778, and Pollock to Willing, May 31, 1778, in Kinnaird ed., Spain in the Mississippi Valley,
The campaigns that George Rogers Clark embarked upon in the Illinois Country left a more significant impact upon the region. Accounts of Clark’s childhood and early adulthood, record him as robust in both spirit and body, over six feet tall with striking red hair. As a young man Clark learned the art of surveying from his grandfather. Clark combined his trade with a natural wanderlust, and in so doing he set a course that gave him valuable experience and skills in frontier living. Clark’s first western surveying trip was in June of 1772 when he and a handful of other men set out down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh. The party found that the soil was fertile, but that the terrain and isolation presented serious difficulties to settlement.83

By 1773 Clark was occupied in surveying, settling, and defending lands in what would become the state of Kentucky. Kentucky was in a precarious situation during its first few years. Settlers were scarce, skirmishes with Indians were common, and land claims were disorganized and rife with fraud. Former North Carolina judge Richard Henderson established the Transylvania Company with eight other investors, and purchased 20,000,000 acres between the Kentucky and Cumberland rivers from the Cherokees on March 17, 1775. Clark quickly realized that Henderson’s claim lacked the necessary legitimacy required to attract enough settlers to ensure security. In his memoir Clark wrote:

I immediately fixed on my plans that of assembling the people [of Kentucky] get them to Elect deputies and send them to the assembly of Virginia and treat with them Respecting the Cuntrey if Valuable Conditions was procured to declare our selves Citizens of the State otherways Establish an Independent Government.84

Clark’s fellow settlers and adventurers however elected him only as a delegate, along with John Gabriel Jones, and sent the two to petition the Virginia Assembly for supplies. In

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83 James, The Life of George Rogers Clark, 4.

84 Ibid., 21; Clark to John Brown, 1791 [?], in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 209.
Virginia, Clark faced a problem that would become common for him in later years—financing. The Continental Congress and the Virginia government could only be described as dismally inefficient at financing war and defense. The Assembly initially agreed only to loan the Kentuckians 500 pounds of gunpowder, with the caveat that Clark himself was to be responsible for its full value. Clark argued against this by asserting that, “If a Cuntrey was not worth protecting it was not worth Claiming,” and by contending:

> It was out of [his] power to pay the Expence of Cariage and Guards necessary for those supplies that the British Officers on our Frontiers ware making use of every Effort to ingage the Indians in the war that the People might be destroyed for the want of the small supply.\(^{85}\)

Largely through the efforts of Clark, Kentucky was formally connected with Virginia as one of its counties, despite the protestations of Henderson and his affiliates. This connection proved vital in the coming years. 1777 was a particularly dangerous year for the Kentucky settlers. Indian warriors attacked the small communities of Harrodsburg, Boonesborough, and Logan’s Station. Logan’s Station was besieged more than three months, and it was only due to the arrival of reinforcements from Virginia, led by Colonel John Bowman, that those inside the fort were saved from starvation. Had it not been for connections to Virginia many Kentuckians would not have lived through the summer of 1777. As it was, the Kentuckians found that even after the warriors retreated that their crops had been burned and that many or all of their horses had been stolen. Men such as Clark understood that even the most fertile land was worthless if settlers could not be secure against Indian attacks. Clark summed up the situation:

> No people could be in a more allarming situation detached at least two Hundred miles from the nearest settlement of the States surrounded by numerous Nations of Indians each

\(^{85}\) Clark to John Brown, 1791 [?], in Clark, *George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781*, 213.
one far superior in number to ourselves and under the Influence fo [of] the British
government and pointedly directed to distroy us.86

Clark believed that Kentucky and the Illinois country could serve a strategic purpose in
the war against England. In the summer or fall of 1777 Clark wrote to Virginia Governor Patrick
Henry, describing his reasons and plans for capturing Kaskaskia, a small town downstream of the
convergence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Clark sensibly argued:

If it was in our possession it would distress the garrison at Detroit for provisions, it would
flying the command of the two great rivers into our hands, which would enable us to get
supplies of goods from the Spainards, and to carry on a trade with the Indians [line
obliterated] them might perhaps with such small presents keep them our friends.87

Historians who do not accept that Clark was seeking to prevent Indian attacks against
Kentucky have questioned the motives for Clark’s campaign in the Illinois. George C. Chalou,
an Archivist at the National Archives, argued that, “The Illinois tribes in southern and central
Illinois were only a remnant of a once powerful force. It was tribes two hundred to four hundred
miles to the east that plagued the Kentuckians.” This position is true in detail but ignores Clark’s
openly-espoused strategy, and the reality that Clark had been fighting Indian warriors for four
years, not just to protect his own land claims, but often for mere survival. It seems unlikely that
he was unaware of which Indian nations he was fighting. Chalou and other historians posit the
contention that, “It is also possible that Clark was in collusion with a small group of Kaskaskia
merchants who eyed the growing Kentucky populace as a source of trading revenues.” The
evidence suggests a more moderate conclusion, that Clark’s motives were threefold: to ensure
safe access to the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, to capture British forts in the west, and then by
doing so to influence the Indians who had been attacking settlements in Kentucky and

86 James, The Life of George Rogers Clark, 57; Clark to John Brown, 1791 [?], in Clark, George Rogers Clark
Papers 1771-1781, 216.

87 Clark to [Patrick Henry?], 1777, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 32.
Pennsylvania. The personal privations that Clark tolerated while waging his campaign, cast doubt on the view that Clark operated purely for personal profit. The most likely ulterior motives, given Clark’s ego, would be personal glory combined with land claims.88

By January 1778, Clark secured the approval of Governor Patrick Henry and several prominent Virginians for his assault against Kaskaskia. Due to the secrecy necessary to undertake a surprise attack in the Illinois country, Clark’s public orders were considerably different, and quite vague. These orders stated:

You are to proceed without Loss of Time to inlist Seven Companies of Men officered in the usual Manner to act as Militia under your Orders. They are to proceed to Kentucky & there to obey such orders & Directions as you shall give them for three Months after their arrival at that place.

Clark’s secret orders authorized him to take men who had volunteered to defend Kentucky, and to instead lead them on an assault of a fort several hundred miles west of Boonesborough. Both the public and private orders presented problems for Clark’s recruiting efforts. Western settlers in Pennsylvania and Virginia were suffering Indian attacks themselves, and could see little use in defending several hundred frontier speculators in Kentucky. Clark also found that most Kentuckians were in such dire straits that they could ill afford to abandon farm and family in order to guard a western fort. Adding to Clark’s troubles were the disagreements between Virginia and Pennsylvania regarding state boundaries. In Pennsylvania, leaders as well as potential recruits eyed the efforts of the Virginian distrustfully. In Clark’s memoir written to George Mason he recounted his recruitment difficulties:

I could have executed it with the greatest ease if it had not been [for the] following Conduct of many leading Men in the fronteers, that had liked to have put an end to the enterprise, not knowing my Distination, and through a spirit of obstinacy they combined

and did every thing in their power to stop the Men that had Enlisted, and set the whole Fronteers in an uproar.\textsuperscript{89}

On May 12, 1778, Clark set out from Redstone in western Pennsylvania with 150 men—less than half the number that had been approved. It was not until Clark’s men travelled more than five hundred miles, while camped on Corn Island in the Falls of the Ohio River that Clark revealed to his men the true destination of the expedition. Clark convinced most of the men to voluntarily join him, while he coerced the rest, and the group set out from Corn Island on June 26\textsuperscript{th}.

Clark and his men left the Falls of the Ohio (near modern Louisville, KY) during a solar eclipse, and Clark, in a characteristically optimistic way, took this as an auspicious omen. Just before leaving the Falls Clark recorded that, “Fort[u]nately I had Just Received a Letr from Col Campbell Dated Pittsburgh informing me of the contents of the Treaty between france and America.” This information proved critical to Clark’s success as it served to reassure the French inhabitants of the Illinois that their acceptance or assistance of the American cause was not politically foolish. Within several hours of departing the Falls of the Ohio, Clark’s men intercepted a small hunting party who had recently left Kaskaskia. These men not only provided intelligence that pleased Clark, but they offered to join the American party as guides. This offer however, almost proved fatal to one of the guides and illustrated Clark’s tendency towards rashness. After losing their path for several hours Clark recounted:

I never in my life felt such a flow of Rage to be wandering in a Country where every Nation of Indians could raise three, or four times our Number… I could not bear the thoughts of returning; in short every idea of the fort put me in that passion that I did not master for some time; but in a short time after our circumstance had a better appearance,

\textsuperscript{89} Public Instructions to Clark, January 2, 1778, and, George Rogers Clark to George Mason, November 19, 1779, in Clark, \textit{George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781}, 36, 117.
for I was in a moment determined to put the guide to Death if he did not find his way that Evening.90

Clark’s party reached the mouth of the Tennessee River within several days of leaving the Falls, and in order to preserve the element of surprise, the men set out by foot towards the town, so that the odds of discovery by either Indians or French militia would be reduced. The march through heavily wooded areas proved difficult but not slow. The men ran out of provisions after four days of marching, but by July 4, Clark had crossed the aptly named Big Muddy River, and was within sight of Kaskaskia. Under the cover of darkness, Clark and his ragged band of men captured the town without bloodshed. From the beginning Clark had determined to use a combination of intimidation and diplomacy to gain the allegiance of the French and their Indian allies in the area. Clark wrote:

A little reflection convinced me that it was in my Interest to Attach them to me, according to my first Plan; for the Town of Cohos and St. Vincents, and the numerous Tribes of the Indians attached to the French was yet to influence, for I was too weak to treat them any other way.91

One of the principal ways in which Clark attached the French to his cause was through his positive treatment of the Catholic Church, and in this respect Clark behaved brilliantly. Clark biographer James Alton James asserted that Clark’s generous treatment of the church had a “magical” effect. This magical effect was to be fully felt when Father Pierre Gibault of Kaskaskia traveled to Vincennes to gain the support of the French there for the American cause. Similarly, Captain Joseph Bowman with a small group of soldiers was sent to secure the towns


91 Clark, The First American Frontier, 31-32.
of Prairie du Rocher and Cahokia. By early August, Clark had secured every key town and fort in the British Illinois Country without bloodshed.\textsuperscript{92}

Once the allegiance of the French had been secured, Clark set about trying to negotiate peace with surrounding Indian tribes. In August of 1778 Clark held a conference with chiefs and warriors of the Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sauk, Miami, and other tribes. After Clark’s men foiled a plan to kidnap Clark while he slept, the negotiations went well enough to at least ensure a relative neutrality that lasted for much of the war. Clark affected a dramatic and grandiose style when treating with the Indians, but he was pragmatic at his core. He stated his philosophy:

\begin{quote}
I always thought we took the wrong method of treating with Indians, and strove as soon as possible to make myself acquainted with the French and Spanish mode which must be preferable to ours, otherwise they could not possibly have such great influence among them.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}

The British response to Clark’s success began in October of 1778 when Lieutenant-Governor Hamilton left from Detroit with 175 white troops, most of them French, along with a small group of Indian allies, and headed towards Vincennes. Hamilton reached the city by the middle of December, and after capturing a small reconnaissance party sent out by Captain Helm, the British took the city, which was at the time guarded by only two men. The French citizens of Vincennes quickly switched their allegiance back to the British. Hamilton sent a large part of his French militia force back home to Detroit, with the understanding that he would be reinforced in the spring. With characteristic luck, Clark received intelligence of Hamilton’s attack from

\textsuperscript{92} James, \textit{The Life of George Rogers Clark}, 121.

\textsuperscript{93} Clark, \textit{The First American Frontier}, 38.
Francis Vigo, who had been released by the British. This information allowed Clark to narrowly escape capture when Hamilton advanced on Prairie du Rocher.

Because Clark could expect no reinforcements in the spring, he had two options, he could retreat back to the east, or he could make a risky winter assault against the British at Vincennes. Unwilling to sacrifice his gains, Clark opted to carry out the dangerous winter assault against Hamilton’s reduced forces. In preparation Clark purchased a large Mississippi bateau and rigged it with guns, and named the vessel the *Willing* (likely after Captain James Willing). On February 4, 1779 the *Willing* sailed to the Wabash River, to wait for Hamilton should he retreat downstream. On February 5, 1779, Clark with about 150 men, some of them French volunteers, began to march towards Vincennes.

By February 13, 1779 Clark and his men had come to the bank of the Little Wabash, but found their path flooded by water, several feet deep, for more than two miles. Clark’s men had been marching through swampy ground since they left Kaskaskia, but they had benefited from a stroke of luck in that the weather proved to be much warmer than normal. The conditions for the men proved extremely difficult, but they could easily have proven impossible had the weather turned colder. On February 20, 1779, Clark’s party neared Vincennes when his men intercepted five Frenchmen in a boat who advised him that Hamilton was unaware of Clark’s presence and that people in Vincennes supported the Americans. Using an odd logic that undermined the element of surprise, Clark wrote a letter to the inhabitants of Vincennes warning them of his approach:

> Being now within two Miles of Your Village with my Army determin’d to take your Fort this Night and not being willing to surprize you I take this step to request of such of you as are true citizens and willing to enjoy the liberty I bring you to remain still in your houses... for every person I find in arms on my Arrival I shall treat him as an Enemy.  

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The fighting began on February 23, 1779, after Clark had marched his men with extra banners in order to make the number of his troops appear larger. The next day Clark’s men captured a party of Indians returning to the city who did not realize that it was under siege. Clark ordered his prisoners executed, sparing only one who was found to be the son of one of Clark’s Indian allies. This crude combination of warning and threatening the inhabitants achieved Clark's aims as the inhabitants of Vincennes refused to take up arms to assist the British. Hamilton, in his official report, contended that Clark himself tomahawked at least one of the prisoners:

Colonel Clarke yet reeking with the blood of these unhappy Victims came to the Esplanade before the Fort Gate, where I had agreed to meet him and treat of the surrender of the Garrison—He spoke with rapture of his late achievement, while he washed off the blood from his hands stained in this inhuman sacrifice.95

Richard White noted in The Middle Ground how Clark diminished this execution into one brief line, and how both Hamilton and Clark painted the other as "savage" in their accounts of the siege. Clark repeatedly referred to Hamilton as the "hair buyer," while Hamilton, always liberal with excuses, blamed everyone except himself for the British loss. For White, Hamilton's pomposity and Clark's Indian hating were subsumed within the middle ground, and both were forced to accommodate where they had wished to order. True enough, but at Vincennes, Clark and Hamilton did not move into the old French middle ground of the Great Lakes. Rather, they stood at the border between a middle and a Native ground. Clark may have espoused a preference for the French and Spanish method of dealing with the Indians, but he also utilized an aggressive military posture during his negotiations. Clark may have been an Indian hater, but he was also a man with a flair for the dramatic, and he vacillated wildly in his diplomatic maneuverings with Native leaders. In the face of American presents and threats Indians

95 Report by Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton on his Proceedings from November, 1776 to June, 1781, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 190.
continued their course without much change, collecting gifts and occasionally plundering their French neighbors.96

The morning after the execution of several Indians outside Vincennes, Clark’s unlikely success was completed when Hamilton and his men formally surrendered the city and its fort. Clark was overburdened with nearly as many prisoners as soldiers, and sent Hamilton and the British troops to Williamsburg, while he pardoned and released Hamilton’s French volunteers. Clark’s letters and memoirs indicated that he believed that the taking of Detroit would shortly follow success at Vincennes. James Alton James phrased Clark’s belief succinctly:

He knew that with Detroit in his possession the whole Northwest would be under his control. He was informed that the British garrison at that post, numbering only one hundred men, without adequate supplies... might be overcome with ease.97

Unfortunately, for the Americans, inadequate funding and support doomed Clark’s plans. Less than two hundred men were sent to reinforce Clark following the battle for Vincennes, and strategically, the best that Clark could hope to accomplish was the pacification of as many Indian tribes as possible. Clark accomplished this end through posturing and diplomacy rather than through warfare, as can be seen in a letter Clark sent to several tribes near Detroit:

I now send two Belts to all the Nations, one for Peace and the other for War. The one that is for War has your great English fathers Scalp tied to it, and made red with his Blood; all You that call yourselves his Children, make your Hatchets sharp & come out and Revenge his Blood on the Big Knives, fight like Men that the Big Knives may not be ashamed when they fight you; that the old Women may not tell us that we only fought Squaws.98

Following the success at Vincennes, Clark spent most of the duration of the war at the Falls of the Ohio, occasionally leading assaults against the Shawnees. Virginia governor Thomas

96 White, *The Middle Ground*, 376.
97 James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 147.
Jefferson encouraged Clark in 1780 to wage a campaign against Detroit, but funding and men proved too scarce even for the grossly optimistic Clark. Instead, Clark followed a limited defensive strategy, which can be seen in a letter from John Todd Jr. to Thomas Jefferson in June 1780:

On Consulting with Col Clark we found it impracticable to maintain so many petty posts in the Illinois with so few men & concluded it better to draw them all to one post. The Land at the Junction of the Ohio & Mississippi was judged best Situated for the purpose as it would command the Trade of an extensive Country on both sides of each River.99

Geography, inadequate financing, and disputes between states limited Clark's ability to attract men to the frontier. Virginia sent Clark, hoping that the settlers of Kentucky or Pennsylvania would volunteer, but Kentuckians were too busy trying not to be killed by Indians to travel west. Men in Pennsylvania had their own problems with British troops and Native attacks, but were also little inclined to travel vast distances for little pay to protect land claimed by Virginia.

Years later, Clark’s final impact was his recommendation to President Jefferson that his brother William would be a suitable leader in the exploration of Louisiana and beyond. Captain William Clark and Captain Meriwether Lewis eventually passed through Clarksville in October 1803, on their famous expedition. George Rogers Clark suffered from ill luck and from political maneuvering that lay outside of his control, but his contributions to the Revolutionary War were substantial and long lasting, and his military acumen was impressive. Unfortunately, despite Clark’s military capabilities and his political connections to such important figures as Jefferson and George Mason, he was politically simpleminded, and his reputation declined quickly after the conclusion of the war. Further undermining Clark's political and military viability was his love of drink, a flaw that either contributed to his descent, or cemented his failures.

99 John Todd, Jr. to Thomas Jefferson, June 2, 1780, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 422.
The quick success found by Willing and Clark evaporated soon after the initial euphoria of victory. Clark expected supplies to flow in from New Orleans and Virginia, but Spanish support waned and Virginia unrealistically hoped that settlers in Kentucky would be able to augment and support Clark's forces. Within less than a year after Clark's stunning defeat of Hamilton, James Shelby wrote to Clark of the dismal conditions at Vincennes:

Have Recd No Late auty from Kiskasky nor no Sepplys [sic] of Provisions Sence your departure which Renders Much Confution having no Salt have Rendored at leest Two thirds of the men incapable of duty, the Gentlemen of this Village have Continued furnishing Beef but now Say it is out of their Power to furnishe aney more. We are in an Exceeding Bad Condition at Present & am afeard that Nesessity will oblig avacuation of this Post with out sum Speedy Releif.100

Even when adequate salt could be obtained, it did not guarantee the safe storing of meat. John Floyd wrote to Clark in April 1781 to inform him that "There was one hundred and fifty thousand weight of Beef laid up in this Country last Winter for the use of your Army, out of which quantity I believe not more than sixteen thousand is saved the rest being entirely rotten where it lay in Salt."101

The American soldiers stationed in the Illinois Country and at the Falls of the Ohio River ran out of provisions, and resorted to appropriating the produce and livestock of the French inhabitants of the region (a predicament in which Clark also found himself). As a result of the grim situation the residents of Vincennes wrote a petition to the Governor of Virginia and to the French minister to the United States, Chevalier de Luzerne:

Gratitude has always been a virtue. Your Excellency will see how the Virginians honor it... They bought all our goods, our horses, our provisions with the pretended money; and when we could not furnish them with any more, they had the audacity to go armed into the public mills and into the granaries of different houses to take away by force flour or

100 James Shelby to Clark, October 10, 1779, Post St. Vinston, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 370.

101 John Floyd to Clark, April 26, 1781, Jefferson, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 543.
grain destined for our food...They went and shot our cattle in the fields and our pigs in the streets and in the yards; and what is worse, they menaced and struck on the cheek those inhabitants, who wished to stop these strange extractions.\textsuperscript{102}

The residents of Cahokia made similar complaints in September 1780, insinuating that Captain Joseph Bowman lacked any credentials whatsoever for assuming control of the town. The residents of Kaskaskia also sent out pleas for help to De la Balme and Luzerne. American soldiers deserted back to their homes or to the Spanish side of the river in droves. In such a precarious situation, only the de facto alliance between the United States and Spain, and the inability of the British to stage an assault against the American Illinois Country kept these cities and outposts from slipping out of the hands of the United States.\textsuperscript{103}

The Spanish, led by Bernardo de Gálvez, saw Pensacola as their ultimate military objective. However, because they overestimated the forces needed to reduce the British fort at Pensacola, and because hurricanes and weather wreaked havoc on naval expeditions, they also turned their attention to British possessions on the Mississippi River. By the summer of 1779 news of Spain's declaration of war against England had reached New Orleans but not yet British-held Manchac and Baton Rouge. Despite Gálvez's best attempts to feign good intentions in his correspondence with British officials, tensions escalated along the river. A Spanish expedition of more than 600 men, including a small number of free blacks, mulattoes and Americans, including Oliver Pollock, set out in late August. As they travelled, Gálvez gathered another 600 volunteers, mostly Acadians and German settlers, but fewer than 200 Indian allies. The Spanish

\textsuperscript{102} Memorial addressed to his Excellency M. the Chevalier de la Luzerne, Minister Plenipotentiary of His Most Christian Majesty to the United States of America by the inhabitants of the Post Vincennes, August 22, 1780, in Clark, \textit{George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781}, 444.

reached Manchac in early September, but the English commander had already withdrawn his forces to Baton Rouge. Gálvez easily captured Manchac, and reached Baton Rouge in mid September. Though the British were well stocked with cannon and boasted 400 regular troops, the fort at Baton Rouge had been hastily erected and did not survive the Spanish artillery assault. On September 21, 1779, Gálvez received the surrender of not only Baton Rouge but of Fort Panmure at Natchez, even though the Spanish had not yet reached this location. Natchez however, may have been taken too easily, for the British commander at Pensacola succeeded in inciting several prominent citizens of Natchez to rebel against the Spanish in early 1780. The rebellion cost the Spanish possession of Natchez from April to June of 1780, but news of the English defeat at Pensacola made any attempt by the leaders of the rebellion to hold onto Natchez futile. Ultimately, the leaders of the rebellion were dealt with much more leniently than the French residents of New Orleans had been when O'Reilly landed.104

Just as the Spanish secured Baton Rouge and Natchez, several British vessels were sunk or captured on Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi by the American privateer William Pickles and by Spanish subjects. Following these actions, a short-lived calm, at least as far as European warfare was considered, settled upon Louisiana and West Florida. The British suffered disastrous and preventable losses in the region in 1779, but their last concerted attempt to reassert authority in the west in 1780 presented the Spanish and the Americans with the greatest threat to their authority during the war. In late May 1780, a British-led force of approximately one thousand Native allies, accompanied by a meager component of British and Canadian militiamen, numbering between 100 to 300, arrived to begin their assault on the Spanish fort at St. Louis. Though the accounts of the size and composition of the British army vary widely, all

104 Caughey, Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783, 149-158, 217, 222.
of the sources agree that the army was composed mainly of British Indian allies and Canadian volunteers gathered near Michilimackinac. Had this been a more cohesive and disciplined force, Lieutenant Gov. Leyba and his handful of regulars augmented by several hundred volunteers would have stood little chance of outlasting a British siege. However, the Canadian volunteers showed little inclination to participate in an extended siege, and Haldimand's Indian allies contented themselves with a brief plunder of neighboring farms before returning north. The British may have fared better if they had not recklessly rushed into the heart of the Spanish fortifications and suffered significant casualties during their first assault. In the end, the massive British-led force dissolved away in streams of warriors and a trickle of Canadians, leaving the Spanish possession of the west bank of the Mississippi River secure.105

James Colbert, and his band of Chickasaw Indians proved themselves a more reliable ally of the British. Colbert was a Scot who had spent part of his childhood and all of his adult life living with the Chickasaws. Colbert wed three Chickasaw women and he and his six métis sons were an influential and powerful group in Chickasaw society. Both the Spanish and the British considered the Chickasaws to be the British Crown's most loyal Indian allies in the South, and Colbert's military actions against American and Spanish vessels navigating the Mississippi River lent credence to that view. Colbert's seizures along the river escalated to a point threatening Spain's ability to rule the region only in 1782. However, the British belief that the Chickasaws and Choctaws would serve as the key to southern operations proved more wish than reality.

When John Stuart called a conference in Mobile in 1777, fewer than fifty Chickasaws responded to his invitation, while total Native attendance numbered almost three thousand. The Chickasaw representatives said what the British hoped to hear at the conference, and Colbert's band and allied partners began patrolling the Mississippi, Ohio and Tennessee rivers. The river guard harassed merchants' vessels, but let Willing and the *Rattletrap* slip past them on the Mississippi. Not until 1782 did Colbert's men strike a significant blow to Spanish interests. In late spring Colbert's men managed to capture Madame Cruzat, who was the wife of Francisco Cruzat, the Spanish commander at St. Louis. Colbert's band also confiscated 4500 *pesos* belonging to the Spanish government. Madame Cruzat and the party travelling with her remained prisoners of Colbert for nineteen days until he released them on no other condition than their word.106

The diplomatic maneuverings of the Chickasaws baffled both the British and the Spanish during the American Revolution. Madame Cruzat's account of her captivity provides one of the most illuminating glimpses into exactly how Colbert's band functioned politically. Questioned if the enemy had an occupation, Madame Cruzat responded:

> No, that each one walked about and rested as they pleased, delivered himself to drunkenness, and went hunting, nevertheless it seemed to her that they did not go far away from the encampment, and that they undoubtedly had spies on the river, as she discovered on the 3d of May when an alarm disturbed the camp.107

The group of men led by Colbert little resembled a regular military force. More curious than the informality of the military administration of Colbert's men was its composition.

Contemporaries and historians described Colbert as a Scot who became a Chickasaw leader. Madame Cruzat asserted that, "there came rushing out from the bushes and woods about forty


Englishmen and one Mestizo, and four of them surrounding the proprietor, the rest of them took possession of the boat." The boat had a crew of ten men who were also taken prisoner, though Madame Cruzat noted that one American member of the crew joined with Colbert's party after the boat had been seized. When Spanish officials asked Madame Cruzat a question concerning the size of the rebel group she replied that, "According to what she had heard various times the enemy must have numbered about three hundred whites and they were divided into two encampments." The questioners twice asked Madame Cruzat the number of Indians present in Colbert's band, and both times she responded by stating that only two Chickasaw Indians stayed with Colbert, though, "eight or nine days after the capture of the boat there appeared two hundred Chicachas more or less." Madame Cruzat asserted that one of the chiefs of the Chickasaws was the son of James Colbert.  

Colbert and his sons may have been influential leaders among the Chickasaws, but whites, at least in 1782, made up the bulk of Colbert's military force. These men operated in ways that resembled Native methods of governance wherein men had to be convinced rather than ordered to act. Madame Cruzat, when questioned about how Colbert led his men replied:

> They held frequent meeting meetings on board the boat, or in the hut of the captain, from which meetings there resulted many orders, and injudicious and opposing decisions, which most of the time were not executed, by the unheard-of insubordination of the individuals who made up the party, and that said Colbert was often disgusted at this.  

Colbert claimed validly that he operated against the Americans and the Spanish with a British military commission, but the manner of his raids, his difficulty managing his own force, and the convenience of a Spanish denial of Colbert's commission made it easy to regard Colbert as little more than a plunderer. The Spanish refused to honor the terms of Colbert's proposed

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108 Ibid., 222-223, 226.
109 Ibid., 228.
prisoner exchange, labeling him a rebel. Colbert responded in a letter to Estevan Miró in October 1782, writing, "Now Sir you Ought to be the Last Person that Should Even mention Anything Of that Nature to me When you Upheld Mr. Willing in Robing & plundering the Inabitents On the Mississipp before the war was Ever declared." However brazen the diplomacy of labeling a commissioned officer a rebel may have been, by 1782 Spanish authorities knew better than to follow their bluster against Native power with actual military force. In a letter to Governor Gálvez, Miró reasoned that to fail in an attack against Colbert's men would be a discredit to Spain, and further that the French had sent two thousand soldiers against the Chickasaws with little to show for their effort. Just as practical a deterrent to Spanish military action was the nature of warfare practiced by bands like Colbert's. Miró argued that, "This is a band of people without domicile, and as they are more than three hundred leagues distant from this capital, it is almost impossible to attack them, to capture or slay them, as they do not wait for our attack."\(^{110}\)

In the waning days of the American Revolution one French and one Indian led expedition travelled north to make war and to plunder British outposts and British-allied Indians. The first expedition, led by Monsieur De la Balme from the American side of the Illinois Country in 1780, met with swift disaster at the hands of, "six hundred men of the Shawnee, Loup, and Mis nations who killed thirty one of his men," and De la Balme himself. De la Balme's expedition failed from the first steps taken. At St. Louis, Cruzat marveled that, "The aforesaid Monsieur De la Balme arrived in this country without letters from the Congress or from Fort Pitt." Further, though De la Balme put on a good face when dealing with Native groups in the presence of Spanish officials, Cruzat warned Governor Gálvez that, "I have no assurance that his intentions are altogether as favorable as he would wish to have appear on the surface... and shall always keep an alert eye on

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 214; Caughey, Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783, 236.
all [his] movements." The rag-tag group of Frenchmen succeeded in taking a "well-stocked warehouse," of the English, but they probably had little intention of carrying on any concerted action with Spanish, American, or Native forces. De la Balme's actions, undertaken without much attempt to obtain proper authorization, smacks of the desire for plunder.111

The Spanish at the behest of influential Milwaukee allies, El Heturno and Naquiguen, embarked upon a more successful expedition against the British post of St. Joseph, located on Lake Michigan, in 1781. Initially historians regarded this venture as little more than a ploy by the Spanish to quell American expansion by securing the east bank of the Mississippi River when the war ended. One reinterpretation of the events recast the expedition as motivated by revenge, while another understood the Spanish military endeavor as an attempt to prevent the British and their allies from launching another attack on St. Louis. All of the sources agreed that the force sent by the Spanish was minimal. Lawrence Kinnaird uncovered a key document that detailed the sequence of events that led up to the attack on St. Joseph. Cruzat's January 10, 1781, letter to Gálvez makes clear that the campaign against St. Joseph came only after prolonged interactions between Cruzat and the two chiefs. In November of 1780, Naquihuen [sic] assured Cruzat that, "A great number of Indians of different nations and even of the same nations who came to attack us last spring, are now getting ready to come next spring with the idea of soliciting our clemency and alliance." Before this council materialized the chiefs pressed upon Cruzat the idea of reducing St. Joseph, and in the face of Native demands Cruzat acquiesced. His most potent reason for going along with the wishes of his allies was that, "For me not to have consented to the petition of El Heturno and Naquiguen would have been to demonstrate to them our weakness and to make evident to them our inadequate forces." Further, Cruzat believed that by attacking

St. Joseph, Heturno and Naquiguen would foment conflict between the Indians that would distract and deplete Native groups so that they would be unable or unwilling to make assaults against the Spanish.\textsuperscript{112}

In a stroke of luck that was probably more engineered than fortuitous, Cruzat received information that the French had abandoned Michilimackinac, leaving behind only a garrison of sixty men, making the assault on St. Joseph appear less risky. On February 12, 1781, the force of Spaniards and Native warriors surprised the defenders of St. Joseph bloodlessly and proclaimed themselves in possession of the valleys of St. Joseph and the Illinois Rivers. In their formal declaration of possession the Spanish made no mention of their native allies or foes, but rather planted a flag, divided spoils and made a hasty retreat. Likely, the Indian allies of the Spanish arranged with the local Potawatomies that this English-allied group remain neutral in return for a portion of the captured goods. Little came of this capture of a remote, sparsely populated outpost. Though the Spanish effort was not born out of a desire to hem in the United States, the Crown attempted to utilize the capture of St. Joseph to bolster their claims to land east of the Mississippi River. For their part, the Americans ignored the Spanish and dealt with England when negotiating boundaries within the Illinois Country.\textsuperscript{113}

The Mississippi River as Military Obstacle

The geography of the region figured significantly in the military expeditions within the region. The Mississippi River provided a conduit for the transportation of men and war materials,


but it also limited the options available for the defenders of outposts and forts. Governor O'Reilly made frequent mention of the difficulties imposed by the soil deposited by the river and the water's effect on wooden structures. For a fort to be of use in the region, it needed to hug the edge of the water. Soldiers residing in forts placed too far back from the Mississippi River could not mobilize quickly enough to stop enemies floating down or rowing up the river. Also, given the primitive state of the roads in the region, transporting artillery, food, and other bulky items overland presented military commanders with a logistical nightmare. The waters that made the transportation of these items so easy also threatened to destroy them when the Mississippi wandered outside of its banks. Spain learned this lesson quickly. When Spain took possession of Louisiana they intended to establish a fort at the mouth of the Missouri River where it met the Mississippi. In October 1767 a military council was held at St. Louis to determine the placement of the fort. The council advised Governor Ulloa "Of the difficulty which presents itself of the inability to establish a large fort at the mouth of the Misuri... because the said part is very low, and consequently, under water, when the river rises." In order to fulfill their orders to establish a fort at the mouth of the Missouri River the council voted to build "A small blockhouse... which will be abandoned or removed in the spring, the time when the waters cover that land to the depth of eight or nine feet"— hardly a formidable obstacle. Floodwaters also threatened the navigation of the river— a fact that British Governor Johnstone quickly realized. During the summer of 1765 flood waters forced Johnstone to draw emergency money against the treasury in order to prevent the Iberville River from remaining obstructed by fallen trees. Upon his arrival in Louisiana Governor O’Reilly saw firsthand the difficulties created by the river. He argued that even the capital, New Orleans, could not be defended against a siege. He wrote in December 1769:
Even if new [the moat and palisade of New Orleans built in 1760], this fortification would be of little use in stopping any enemy. Four cannon shots would level the stockade, and the moat, which can never be deepened because the water is everywhere near the surface of the ground, would not hinder the passage of troops; and so I repeat that the defense of this province must consist solely of its defenders and in keeping the enemy occupied elsewhere.

Further upstream, O’Reilly contended that the fortifications between Balize and the Spanish Illinois Country were likewise vulnerable because, “it is impossible to construct anything but a moat and a palisade. The upkeep of these is costly, the wood soon rots, the moat fills up with mud brought down by the winter floods, and the very banks of the river cave down as they cannot be covered with stone.” During the American Revolution the Mississippi River had no Gibraltar, no Vicksburg. The men and women who made the region their home erected fences and constructed moats, but their defense rested on their military capabilities rather than the work of engineers.114

Military activity in the West during the American Revolution followed a bell curve of sorts. Between 1775 and 1777 little more than rumor travelled the waters of the Mississippi River. Bold, though often bloodless or relatively minor actions, as measured by casualties, redrew the map from the Illinois Country to Manchac between 1778 and 1780, bringing vast swaths of land under the nominal leadership of an infant nation and an empire long past its prime. Not surprisingly the enthusiasm for waging wars of conquests in such a sparsely settled region died out quickly. By 1781 the ambitious expeditions overseen by Clark, Gálvez and Hamilton were ended, and replaced by Native-designed expeditions. The European residents of the region experienced little change other than the shortage of foodstuffs that followed in the

wake of the influx of the ragged soldiers who passed through or encamped among them. The Native peoples who lived and traded along the waters jockeyed for position without ever placing significant numbers of warrior in harm’s war. They repeatedly played all sides of the diplomatic field, not because of their vulnerability but because of their military superiority.

**Aftermath of the War**

For the inhabitants living on both sides of the Mississippi River at the end of the American Revolution, the conflict of the war did not end. Rather, the conflict over land and resources simply changed its direction. The alliance between Spain and the United States quickly unraveled as American settlers flooded west and Spain denied Americans navigation along the Mississippi. While the creation of the United States constituted a radical break from existing European norms of governance, Spain viewed its acquisition of British territories in traditional terms. Before the war, Louisiana served as a buffer to English encroachment towards Mexico. After the war, Louisiana and its new and retaken possessions became an inflated buffer to American encroachment from the east and British encroachment from the north. The administration of Carlos III attempted to resurrect Spanish dominance in the New World through a series of reforms that were intended to modernize the empire. But, Spain was a player who came to the game too late. The paper changes to trade regulations, the Atlantic slave trade, and colonization failed to bear real fruit and the Spanish continued to lag behind the British and French. New institutions and systems created by the Spanish crown had little time to become established before Spain ceded Louisiana back to France and its other colonial possessions began to break away from the empire. Historians have demonstrated a sense of unease when dealing with the twilight of the Spanish empire, especially in Louisiana and Florida. Because the Spanish never adequately populated their territories with loyal subjects, historians have tended to ignore
or trivialize Spanish contributions or innovations. Certainly the disparity between the occasional high-sounding decree issued from Spain and the rough reality on the ground in Louisiana suggests that Spanish rule within the limits of the present day United States was ephemeral. But, after delving into the correspondence of officials residing within Louisiana and Florida, the Spanish administration of the region takes on a different light. The correspondence written by Spanish officials after the war reveals an active, innovative, and often cunning group. The machinations of Spanish officials and some frontier American leaders lay outside the purview of this study. Wilkinson and Clark's actions on behalf of Spain and France are well known, but Spain attached a number of less well-known leaders to their cause. An example of the schemes undertaken by Spanish agents can be seen in the correspondence of James White, who during his political career represented North Carolina and Tennessee in Congress:

To his Excellency Don Estevan Miro Governor of the Province of Louisiana,

Sir, As you have been pleased to direct, I present your Excellency, in writing, the substance of what Mr. Gardoqui has engage me in. That gentleman, in the character of Minister of Spain authorised me to insinuate to the western americans in general, that Spain would upon favorable terms grant her protection to them, to form a connection with the King's government separate from any other. Insinuations have been made accordingly, & the people have manifested a strong bias[?] [text unclear] towards what has been proposed.¹¹⁵

The American story of expansion in the wake of the Revolutionary War is too well known to devote significant space to chronicling it once again. However, it needs to be pointed out that the rapid American expansion to the Mississippi was anything but guaranteed. Intrigues, plots and machinations by such players as James Wilkinson, George Rogers Clark, Genet and Spanish diplomats all threatened to mire the region in such uncertainty as to stall the frenzy of

¹¹⁵ James White to Don Estevan Miro, April 18, 1789, leg. 2370, in, Copies of Records from the Papeles de Cuba (Archivo General de Indias, Seville) Spanish Records, Papeles de Cuba, 1777 - 1787, box 26, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh NC.
land speculation that pushed settlers west. While Wilkinson's schemes and such ephemeral creations as the State of Franklin were destined to fail they could easily have stalled American expansion for a longer period of time than they did. The most potent obstacle to American settlement in the West came in the form of Native dominance of the region. The difficulties that the Spanish and British encountered when trying to direct the energies of single tribes during the American Revolution suggests that the Spanish would have been unable to establish a Native-Spanish bulwark against American expansion. However, the successes of pan-Indian alliances in the Northwest, in the decades after the war, reveal the one political entity that could have derailed the United States.116

For the Native peoples who made the lands adjacent to the Mississippi River their home or workplace, the conclusion of the American Revolution meant little. The changes on European and American maps did not significantly change the numbers of white settlers or traders in their midst. The end of the war meant an end to the generous gifts that had been supplied by European powers, but it also meant that trade would not be disrupted from without. Some tribes like the Chickasaws had to come to terms with dealing with the Frenchmen who now flew Spanish flags, but could still trade with a number of formerly British merchants who now called themselves Americans. Certainly there was little to arouse alarm along the waters of the Mississippi, and little to suggest that a pan-Indian alliance was immediately necessary to protect the land of Native peoples.

CHAPTER 4

THE CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Fragile and Neglected: the European Middle Ground of North America

In 1770, the Arkansas Post received its first Spanish commandant, Fernando de Leyba, an officer who had arrived in Louisiana a year earlier amidst the threatening pomp of the more than two thousand Spanish soldiers sent to quell an insurrection led by the formerly French citizens of New Orleans. On the frontier of Spanish Louisiana, the situation that Leyba found was much less glorious. After two years of frustrating work trying to intimidate or pacify nearby tribes, Leyba was so vulnerable that he was forced to give a Quapaw chief a barrel of brandy rather than risk losing his own scalp. Leyba found himself caught between governors who pushed to control expenses, tribes who expected to receive what they considered adequate goods, and a motley bunch of voyageurs and soldiers who showed very little loyalty to the Crown. The baffled commandant blamed French interpreters, "for turning the Quapaws against Spain." The reality was that the Spanish had provided their allies with inferior weapons, medals, and trade goods. Leyba, who would be promoted to Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana at St. Louis, survived the threats of his Indian neighbors, but his health deteriorated under the strain of a European war. Fatigued by the debt he accrued after helping the American forces under George Rogers Clark, and by the death of his wife, Leyba died shortly after defending St. Louis from an attack by British and Indian forces. A secretary, fluent only in French, transcribed his last communication to Governor Bernardo de Gálvez.117

Given the fragility of the government of Louisiana just prior to the American Revolution, one question that must be asked is, why were the Spanish able to keep control of the residents of Louisiana, repel the attacks of both British and British-allied Indian forces, and even launch successful campaigns against Pensacola and other British outposts? The experience of Leyba demonstrated that Louisiana was constructed differently than other regions of North America. Along the length of the Mississippi River, residents both European and Indian felt little loyalty to European authorities. Settlers and government officials did not operate in a middle ground that could be controlled by diplomacy and gift giving. Rather, they worked and lived under the shadow of overwhelming Native American power. In this European middle ground, nominally French, British, Spanish and American citizens, along with a large number of slaves, worked as traders, soldiers, farmers and miners. The precarious setting in which Europeans found themselves along the Mississippi prevented the internecine violence that plagued the American colonies during the war and allowed American and Spanish forces to campaign in a relatively neutral environment. Because of this environment, diplomacy in the region took on a peculiar aspect. The east coast, Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America remained one step removed from the dictates of European governments. Louisiana and West Florida, due to administrative structures and neglect, were removed an additional step from European capitals. In addition to this gap between Europe and the Mississippi River Valley, the European and American participants in the war stood oddly removed from one another. Spain chose to ally itself with France rather than to formally join with its American partners in war, and the United States' minister plenipotentiary to Spain, John Jay, experienced more frustration and humiliation than success. In the summer of 1780 Jay went so far as to wonder if Britain would recognize the independence of the United States before Spain. Carlos III, as well as other Spanish officials also
worried that France might abandon the conflict prematurely as they did during the Seven Years War, leaving Spain vulnerable to British reprisals. The haphazard diplomacy of Europe trickled very slowly into Louisiana and West Florida, leaving officials enough leeway to make significant progress or to make career-ending decisions. Not surprisingly, tensions ran high and many local officials refused to make diplomatic decisions, such as whether or not to return deserters and refugees back to their countries of origin.\footnote{Caughey, \textit{Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783}, 14-15; For examples of the violence rampant in the South during the Revolutionary War see, Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782}; Document, 1780 June 04, \textit{The Papers of John Jay}, Columbia Universities Library, http://wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/ldpd/jay/item?mode=item&key=columbia.jay.07439 (accessed 1 April 2010).}

This study does not concern itself with the macro-level diplomacy carried on in the palaces and parlor rooms of Europe. Within the Mississippi River Valley, diplomacy was an intensely personal affair in which the actors often knew their allies and adversaries by face. The diplomacy most directly affecting the majority of the European population of the region involved not decrees from Paris or London, but the decrees of Native leaders. The formality of treaties and declarations of war melted away on the frontier, leaving a messy, dangerous, and personal chessboard.

\textbf{Economic Obstacles and the Problem of Population}

Louisiana, with its fertile lands, lead mines, and a valuable conduit of trade, the Mississippi, appears in retrospect to be a valuable addition to the Spanish empire. However, the Spanish found Louisiana to be an economic drain rather than an economic asset. New Orleans was only able to rely on grain shipments from settlements in the Illinois Country for a handful of years in the middle of the century. Carl J. Ekberg argued that, "there is no doubt that during the last years of the French regime in Louisiana, the Illinois Country was unable to sustain itself and supply flour required for the staff of life in New Orleans." Land grants intended to stimulate
mining enterprises, and relaxed duties and regulations on trade never translated into the successful mining or fur trading operations of which the French and Spanish had hoped. Fur trading was integral to the economy of Louisiana, but suffered due to competition with Canada, which could offer beaver pelts with denser winter coats and possessed its own waterway to the sea. Historians have contested the importance of lead mining, but it is clear that lead mining contributed less to the economy than either agriculture or fur trading. The British encountered the same averseness to agricultural labor on the east bank of the Mississippi as well. Philip Pittman lamented the situation in his description of the inhabitants of the Illinois Country:

The price of labour in general is very high, as most of the young men rather chuse to hunt and trade amongst the Indians, than apply to agriculture or become handicrafts. At the Illinois a man may be boarded and lodged the year round on condition of his working two months, one month in ploughing the land and sowing the corn, and one month in the harvest.119

Of the total population residing between New Orleans and Kaskaskia, Pittman praised only the industriousness of the residents of Prairie du Rocher, an insignificant settlement across the river from Ste. Geneviève. But what Pittman and the British viewed as slothfulness, the residents of the region regarded as making simple economic sense.

Though the settlers in the Illinois Country found themselves precariously situated among powerful Native groups, they did benefit from residing on the fertile lands adjacent to the Mississippi River. However, the glowing reports of visitors to the region, and the subsequent agricultural success found by American settlers, masked the deficiencies of agricultural production under the French, Spanish, and British administrations. Pedro Piernas, who served as a lieutenant in the Illinois Country, described the region in 1769 as, "In general, healthy and

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fertile, its climate delightful, and suitable for all sorts of plants, fruits, and grains." Piernas understood however, that the fur trade greatly detracted from agricultural enthusiasm, and went so far as to assert that, "The sole and universal trade consists in furs." Fernando de Leyba, writing from St. Louis in 1778, repeated almost verbatim this description of the country, adding that, "the settlers are interested only in trading with the Indians and neglect their farming. All are, or wish to be merchants." The fur trade and perceived slothfulness were repeatedly blamed for the region's inability to consistently export agricultural products. European and American officials overlooked several factors that limited agricultural output. In the Illinois Country, residents lived in small nuclear villages and farmed long narrow strips of land, which were enclosed by a communally maintained fence. Their practice of fencing off fields to protect crops from livestock meant that any rapid expansion of grain production would not only necessitate clearing land without large numbers of slaves, but also building fences. Further, mills and milling technology were quite limited in the region. The residents of Ste. Geneviève who complained to Leyba of the theft of their horses feared they would be unable to mill wheat because they lacked sufficient horsepower. Despite the availability of water and wind power in the region, milling facilities were deficient. In 1768 Governor Ulloa requested that millstones be sent from Spain along with a model of a horse mill, because the two operational mills, "Are so imperfect that they require the strength of two mules to turn the stone and these animals have to be relieved by others, while all that they grind from daybreak until night is only four bushels."

During the American Revolution, the population of the city of New Orleans exceeded 3000, while the population of Spanish Illinois gradually increased from a starting point of around 1100. In 1774, the harvests from St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève totaled 5,018 quintals of flour, of which 3,723 were used in these villages, while only 1,078 quintals were delivered to New Orleans.
Further, the production and export of grain, meat, and lead, though seemingly not reliant on Native groups, could at any time be cut off. Francisco Cruzat complained in 1775:

Since the Cheraquis [sic] Indians compelled the miners at the Mine de Mota, located fifteen leagues from Santa Genoveva, to abandon it, only a small amount of lead has been taken from other small mines, although not enough for the consumption of these settlements.120

Not only did Native power undermine the economies of Louisiana and West Florida, but the traditional enmity between the Catholic Spanish and the Protestant British, facing off across an easily crossed fluid boundary, stunted economic growth. A particularly surprising example of this, especially given previous Spanish successes in the New World, was Spain's reluctance to allow experts from Coahuila to come to Louisiana to assess the ore of a potential silver mine in the summer of 1773. After initial approval of the project, Governor Unzaga was informed that King Carlos III, "Far from agreeing, was of the opinion that under no consideration should this operation be put into effect on account of the difficulties which would result therefrom." Unzaga was ordered to observe "caution and prudence" so as to "prevent the neighboring English from entering to work it in violation of the frontier." The problem for both sides was that exporting goods required safe and secure navigation of the river. During the war even small bands, like the one led by Chickasaw leader James Colbert, could capture or stall the shipment of men or supplies. Though Detroit was not located on the Mississippi, the British possession of this post allowed regulars, militia and Indian allies to move rapidly with the currents to the south.

However, the British advantage was largely negated by the Spanish possession of New Orleans, because this densely populated bulwark prevented the British from easily exporting trade goods and agricultural products via the Mississippi.121

The impact of the Seven Years' War and of Pontiac's War drastically changed the balance of power on the North American continent, but these wars left Louisiana relatively untouched. Pontiac and the war often named for him ended in Louisiana and in the Illinois Country with a whimper, not a bang. That is not to say that these wars did not affect the outcome of the Revolutionary War in the west, but that, following France's defeat in North America, the shift from French to Spanish and British rule was a lateral move for most Indians and inhabitants of the region. Stuart Banner has argued that Upper Louisiana enjoyed "much autonomy" due to a combination of distance, a lack of significance in the empire, and because the Spanish intended the region to serve as a buffer between British settlements and their valuable possessions in Central and South America. The lack of military action along the Mississippi during the Seven Years' War and the limited nature of military conflicts along the river during Pontiac's War, both tend to support the argument that Louisiana was not seen as an economically valuable territory by European powers.122

By the time of the Revolution, Louisiana above New Orleans consisted of a handful of small cities and outposts that were largely stagnant in population and prosperity. This stagnation


condemned Louisiana to backwater status within the empire, but it also worked to ensure the safety of the European inhabitants of the region. The French and Spanish inhabitants of Louisiana displayed little of the land hunger, which made frontier settlers in Pennsylvania and Virginia notorious among Native populations. Though Native American leaders in Louisiana were surely aware of the conflicts between Indians and frontier settlers in these areas, both the distance of these conflicts and the relatively small number of European inhabitants in the region seem to have dulled the apprehension of Indians living near Spanish settlements.123

In order to understand the societies that inhabited the lands adjacent to the river, it is necessary to take a brief look at census data from the region. The censuses taken by the British and Spanish were sporadic, and historians have often been forced to rely on correspondence and other anecdotal sources. It is however possible to create a rough estimate of the total population in Louisiana and West Florida by combining census data with reasonable anecdotal evidence.

123 Ekberg, “The Flour Trade in French Colonial Louisiana,” 282; See, Davidson and Stuvé, A complete History of Illinois From 1673 to 1873, 113. They argued that “While silver and gold could not be found, large quantities of lead and iron ore were discovered in Missouri; but the great abundance of these metals in the civilized portions of the globe made their presence in the wilds of Louisiana of little consequence.” This assessment contrasts sharply with Winstanley Briggs,’ “Le Pays des Illinois,” The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Jan., 1990): 54. Regarding the lead mines of Illinois, he contended, "Since the operation ran quite smoothly, it has left few traces in the problem-oriented official documents. Although this Illinois mining activity can no longer be measured by the modern yardstick of numbers, its importance should not be underestimated. The elaborate and rather sophisticated organizational structure used from the beginning is indication enough of its economic role."
### TABLE 1

**POPULATION ESTIMATES FOR LOUISIANA AND WEST FLORIDA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illinois Country</th>
<th>Inhabitants</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
<th>Negro Slaves</th>
<th>Indian Slaves</th>
<th>Families*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census, 1767</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaskaskia</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>303</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincennes</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahokia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prairie du Rocher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Philippe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Chartres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Illinois Country Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>832</strong></td>
<td><strong>168</strong></td>
<td><strong>313</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>546</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,876</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census of St. Louis and Ste. Genevieve, 1772</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ste. Genevieve</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td><strong>803</strong></td>
<td><strong>485</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,288</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The estimate of family size is of six is based on a letter written by George Rogers Clark in 1777, which describes Kaskaskia as "contain[ing] about one hundred families of French and English." Though the population of Kaskaskia underwent significant change following the Seven Years' War, the 1767 census data remains the most accurate source available. See, Clark, *George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781*, 30.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population of Louisiana and West Florida during the mid 1770s</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
<th>Free blacks, mulattos, and Indian and mulatto slaves</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British settlements from Manchac to Natchez</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder of West Florida</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>6,540</td>
<td>4,168</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>11,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>10,040</td>
<td>5,368</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>16,044</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vulnerability of European settlers, like their traditional autonomy, also made allegiances fluid. Settlements along the Mississippi, with the exception of New Orleans, were sparsely populated and widely dispersed. Regular troops were in short supply in the region as well. Even after Spain openly allied itself with France during the war and a large force of British and British-allied Indians moved south, Fernando de Leyba, the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana at St. Louis, warned Governor Bernardo de Gálvez that, "Sixteen men including the drummer are all the troops I have with me and I hardly have forty of the militiamen capable of bearing arms since at this season they are all trading on the Misury [or] hunting." In 1778, with a population of more than eight hundred free men of all ages, the militia rolls from New Orleans included 302 men. Had British and Spanish outposts in the Illinois Country boasted a similar percentage of men enrolled in the militia they could have mustered 281 and 184 men.

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respectively. In total, along the length of the river, roughly 1,280 Spanish and 850 British men could have enrolled in the militia. However, at no point during the conflict were anywhere near these numbers mustered into service. Only during the campaigns led by Governor Gálvez against Baton Rouge, Mobile and Pensacola, were significant numbers of militiamen present.  

The Spanish government attempted to remedy the population problem of Louisiana by encouraging the immigration of a people who were strategically placed and had already proven their hardiness and loyalty. Canary Islanders, or Isleños, began immigrating to the New World soon after its discovery. The combination of high birth rates, endemic poverty, limited land, and the location of the islands meant that the Canary Islands were an ideal place for Spain to look to when in need of loyal subjects to export to the Americas. In 1777, as war between Spain and Britain loomed, Gálvez was well aware of the shortage of Spanish troops in Louisiana. Spain eventually sent more than two thousand Isleños west to Louisiana. However, many of the factors that led Isleños to accept the call to emigrate also prevented them from serving in the military. The majority of the men of military age were both poor and married, meaning that the meager salaries provided to soldiers in Louisiana would not suffice to provide for their wives and children. Gálvez decided to use the immigrants as buffers to protect New Orleans. As a result, the locations of the settlements were determined by military necessity. Several of the settlements were located in flood plains and in areas surrounded by swamps. The worst suffering occurred in Gálveztown, where disease, hurricanes, floods and tornados struck repeatedly during the war. Smallpox, and a host of other afflictions claimed 146 lives, or more than a third of its total population in 1779, Gálveztown's first year of existence. Despite the appalling mortality and the

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127 See appendix for militia calculations.
continued poverty of the Isleños, the immigrants did contribute militarily to the Spanish cause. Even as disease ravaged the infant community, the men of Gálveztown "seized seven enemy vessels of different sizes, captured 125 soldiers and sailors, and took Fort Graham (really a warehouse) on the Amite above Gálveztown." The fiscal drain of enticing Isleños to Louisiana through land and goods contributed little to the long-term success of Spanish Louisiana. However, the influx (even of indigent families) did serve the short-term goals of war. England never managed to field significant numbers of regular troops or loyal militia forces in the region. This meant that the addition of as little as 400 loyal men capable of bearing arms into the region tipped the balance of power towards the Spanish, especially considering that in mid-1776 the Louisiana Battalion, the professional army in Louisiana, consisted of only 462 men.  

In this region, the bonds of family, religion and commerce tied together nominally British and Spanish subjects and significantly reduced participation in both raids and defensive operations. West Florida, particularly in and around Natchez, did experience an influx of immigrants from New England and from the backcountry of South Carolina and Georgia. Unfortunately for the British, political infighting and instability in England stymied the efforts of loyalists to establish a thriving plantation economy on the east bank of the Mississippi. The British had hoped to drive the French off the continent for more than one hundred years by the time of their success in the Seven Years' War, but British optimism concerning the possibility of weakening the formerly French settlements around New Orleans quickly flared and then died. Lieutenant Maclellan, writing to Governor Johnstone from New Orleans believed that the British

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Crown could easily lure many residents of New Orleans and all of the German settlers on the Mississippi River. He contended that the British only needed to clear several obstacles:

The first, is, the Sterility of the Land towards Pensacola and Mobile, so that I am conscious not a Man or Woman will leave the fertile Banks of the Mississippi to settle there, but they often talk, if we could give them Protection, of settling on the opposite Side, which is the richest Land in the World.129

Maclellan and the British did not mange to persuade many of the residents of Spanish to move as the Spaniards also desired religious freedom, and worried about the expense of moving their estates. In the end it was the ravages of war that at times tossed British subjects west and Spanish subjects east.

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Phineas Lyman, along with other veterans of Connecticut's First Provincial Regiment led the settlement drive that would have benefitted the British Crown most had it been endorsed. The group lobbied from 1763 to 1773 for land grants near Natchez. Lyman acquired some 20,000 acres, but was never able to secure grants for the other members of the Company of Military Adventurers. Despite the failure of the Company to acquire land, approximately 100 Adventurers brought their families and slaves to West Florida. Many of these Adventurers squatted on the land or lived on Lyman's 20,000-acre tract. With the revolving door of British administrations in London, attempts to stimulate settlement in West Florida, like those of Montfort Browne, experienced similar difficulties. Though West Florida's population rapidly increased before and during the first two years of the Revolutionary War, most of the newcomers to the area remained neutral during the conflict. Historians have often contended that because of the influx of loyalist refugees, and the aftereffects of the Willing raid, that most West Floridians wholeheartedly supported the loyalist cause. The inference is logical, but incorrect. Henry O. Robertson has succinctly argued:

Like other colonies, West Florida was undoubtedly home to loyalists, but the idea that the colony was a hotbed of loyalist activity simply cannot withstand close scrutiny. The West Florida planters cared more about stability, protection, and open markets than loyalty. The issues that ignited the revolution on the eastern seaboard did not exist in the colony.

Robinson contended that Willing's raid was more strategically focused on attacking active loyalist leaders than previously thought, and that the colony was insulated from concerns regarding foreign trade because it was surrounded by powerful Native groups. Most of the residents on the east bank of the Mississippi, like those living in Spanish Louisiana were simply too isolated and too concerned with survival to risk their lives in the name of the Crown. British subjects in West Florida found themselves cut off, even from news of the revolution brewing on the east coast, and their correspondence generally did not mention the war until 1778 when
American raiders swept into the region. After the conclusion of the war, West Floridians displayed the same sort of apolitical pragmatism as did their Spanish counterparts. After being rebuffed by both England and the United States in response to their petitions for compensation for losses during the war, many packed up their belongings and moved west to the Spanish side of the river. Though Andrew McMichael has argued that this move was predicated on a loyalist preference for a governing structure similar to the British Crown, Spain's offers of land grants certainly did much to encourage these settlers to relocate.

**Native Dominance of the Mississippi River Valley**

The inhabitants of Louisiana occupied a cultural landscape that was constructed differently than that of the Middle Ground of the Great Lakes region as described by Richard White. French-Indian intermarriage and métissage in New France and in the Illinois Country was relatively common, but intermarriage became increasingly rare in both French and Spanish Louisiana during the 1700s. After a thorough search through records of marriages and births, historian Kathleen DuVal cited the fact that there was only one documented case of intermarriage between a French man and a Quapaw woman at the Arkansas post, "in the 130 years from the arrival of the French in 1673 through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803." The Illinois Country was the only region along the Mississippi in which intermarriage was common, and even there the numbers were not significant. Natalia Belting found that in Kaskaskia, following an edict in 1735 forbidding intermarriage without the consent of the authorities, that marriages to Indian women became rare, and that by 1763, "there were few Indian wives in Kaskaskia." Several factors discouraged intermarriage in Louisiana. Many of the tribes from the

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Illinois Country to New Orleans were patrilineal, meaning that French men in these regions stood little chance of acquiring land by marrying Native women. Also, even if the bonds of marriage had resulted in strong ties between French men and their Indian wives' tribes, a large number of intermarriages in Louisiana were to women who were slaves or captives, meaning that the ties would have generally been to tribes located at some distance from European settlements.131

The lack of powerful French-Indian or Spanish-Indian métis leaders in Louisiana could have worked to Britain's advantage. The most active ally that the British possessed in the region was James Colbert. Colbert and his followers spent much of the war harassing Spanish and American shipping along the Mississippi, however, the Chickasaws were not united, and only a small faction supported Colbert. The historical enmity between the Chickasaws and their neighbors also worked to limit the usefulness of Chickasaw allies for the British, though diplomatic conditions had improved measurably during the early 1770s. Even when the British managed to gather large numbers of Indian warriors, their inability to supply adequate gifts and their tendency to treat allies as paid mercenaries quickly undermined their efforts. In 1778, a British plan to gather a force of more than two thousand Choctaws, Chickasaws and Cherokees, fell apart, seemingly due to the success of the Americans led by George Rogers Clark, though the subsequent actions of these tribes suggests that they had little enthusiasm for participating in the war. Meager gifts and the attitudes of military leaders certainly played a part in dampening Indian enthusiasm for war, but self-interest was the most potent factor. Native Americans living on both sides of the Mississippi simply had little to gain from a wholehearted support of one

131 White, The Middle Ground; Kathleen DuVal, "Indian Intermarriage and Métissage in Colonial Louisiana," The William and Mary Quarterly, Vol. 65, Issue 2 (April 2008): 268, 271. DuVal argued that, "In colonial Louisiana marriage was not a common method of establishing trade or diplomacy, and métis communities were few and short lived. Most French-Indian marriages involved slave women, and their descendants gradually merged into the French colonial population." Belting, Kaskaskia Under the French Regime, 75.
side. The most sensible route was to gather what gifts they could from the contending sides for as long as possible without suffering significant casualties.

The scarcity of the white population and regular military forces along the Mississippi had profound impacts on the structure of power in the region, but it was the overwhelming military superiority of Native groups that defined the region. Though certain tribes, such as the Illinois, experienced dramatic reductions in their population during the 1700s, neither Louisiana nor West Florida was like the pays d'en haut, "a world made of fragments." This was not a home for the "shattered peoples" like those that White described in The Middle Ground. The settlements along the Mississippi were instead situated in a native ground, much like that of the Arkansas River Valley, of which Kathleen DuVal has written. Though population estimates for the tribes living near the Mississippi are difficult to establish, it is clear that the Native American population dwarfed the white population. The Choctaws and Osages alone numbered more than 20,000 souls, which was more than the combined white and slave population of Louisiana and West Florida. When the numerous other tribes residing near the river are considered, European power can only be understood as tenuous. The correspondence of governors and commandants of outposts in Louisiana and West Florida reveals that Europeans were so overawed by Native power that they often exaggerated the real numerical superiority of Indians. Even the normally sensible Don Alejandro O'Reilly worried that the British would ally with, "7000 Indian combatants of the Choctaw nation, together with other friendly nations whom they have there always ready to march in the hope of loot."132

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132 White, The Middle Ground, 1; DuVal, The Native Ground, 112, 120; O'Brien, Choctaws in a Revolutionary Age, 1750-1830, xvi, uses the estimates of Daniel Usner and Peter Wood to argue that, "The Choctaw population remained at well over ten thousand persons throughout the eighteenth century and has grown ever since." O'Reilly to Grimaldi, September 30, 1770, in Kinnaird ed., Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794, Vol. II, Pt. I, 184.
Rather than the "mutual invention" of the middle ground, the evidence suggests that Native Americans dictated the terms of European survival along the Mississippi. In March of 1779 the residents of Ste. Geneviève wrote to Leyba at nearby St. Louis of the thefts committed by the Petits Os and Missouris:

For the last seven or eight years these tribes have come each year to the outlying areas of the post and have stolen the horses of the inhabitants, who have borne these losses as well as it has been possible for them... But the said undersigned persons now find themselves totally deprived of horses because of the repeated thefts of the said nations which have again lately taken from them about twenty horses.133

A year later in St. Louis, Francisco Cruzat wrote that La Balafre, a chief of the Little Osages, was so brazen as to come to the city "under the pretext that [they] desired to be forgiven for the thefts of horses," while "at that very instant some of the inhabitants' horses were being stolen, and the aforesaid La Balafre himself had on that very day stolen from different inhabitants in their own homes some silver service and other things." Though individual tribes or factions could at times be cowed by European arms, the overall balance of power was such that settlers were forced to ignore, or resolve through diplomacy, most affronts. The French, the Spanish and the British had all advocated bullying the Indians in Louisiana into submission at some point. During the Revolutionary War, as the conflict expanded from the coasts of the thirteen colonies to Central America, European forces west of the Appalachians found themselves utterly dependent on the cooperation or neutrality of Native Americans. Forcing the Indians of Louisiana into submission had never been a realistic hope. Following the outbreak of

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the American Revolution, European powers had even fewer resources with which to cow Native Americans.\(^{134}\)

Native Americans living near the Mississippi were able to stall Spanish and British calls for allegiance for much of the war. The tactic was both shrewd and necessary. For example, the Chickasaws, whose numbers had been depleted in the past century, understood that a military alliance, even with the victor, could mean decimation at the hands of neighbors after the end of the war. Though Indians vastly outnumbered whites in Louisiana, they could of course never outnumber themselves, and powerful tribes such as the Osages stood ready to dispossess neighboring tribes of their lands and trading connections if these tribes weakened themselves by losing large numbers of warriors. Unable to count on the support of Indians living south of the Great Lakes, the British commander, Henry Hamilton, was compelled to import muscle to the region. The two most threatening attacks against Spanish and American forces, the retaking of Vincennes in December 1778, and the failed attack on St. Louis in May of 1780, relied heavily on warriors of the "Sioux... Menominee, Puant, Sauk, Fox, and Ottawa" tribes brought down the rivers from Detroit and Ft. Michilimackinac. Some historians have found Hamilton's dismissal of his Indian allies baffling. However, the release of most of Hamilton's force was most likely unavoidable. The influx of hundreds of men to the sparsely inhabited region put pressure on food supplies. Further, Indian allies could not be ordered to remain for long periods of time away from their homes, and they were much more likely to campaign for months rather than years.

Hamilton's refusal to capitalize on his gains by taking Kaskaskia and other outposts has often been seen as the failure that doomed British rule in the west. However, the evidence suggests that

the British foundered when they decided to attack Vincennes rather than American forces and settlers in western Pennsylvania and Virginia. Hamilton wrote:

On the 9th day of November I arrived at Detroit, and almost immediately applications were made by the Indians for my assent to their making inroads upon Frontiers of Pennsylvania and Virginia, this I declined giving not having received positive orders on the subject.135

The British ignored their allies' pleas, and in doing so they redirected their most potent forces away from a target that they had great enthusiasm for attacking. Hamilton also pushed ahead in a season not suited for long journeys. Following his brief success, Hamilton was left ill provisioned and with few resources to keep his allies in the area. Just as significant a blunder was Hamilton's misunderstanding of the cultural landscape along the Mississippi. Knowing that his Indian allies were unlikely to remain with him for an extended period of time, Hamilton failed to consider where the loyalty of the residents of the region lay. The inhabitants of Louisiana were little accustomed to stringent military rule. The allegiance of settlers and traders at Vincennes had passed from France to Britain to the Americans within a period of less than two decades. These hardy folk cared more about survival and trade than which flag flew above them. Hamilton's tedious account of his failure provides example after example of supposed treachery and deceit. He wrote that after Clark's siege began, "La Mothe's Volunteers now began to murmur, saying it was very hard to be obliged to fight against their countrymen and relations, who they now perceived had joined the Americans." The residents of Vincennes were able to profess allegiance to Britain, but they were not ready to take up arms against friends, family members, and fellow Catholics. Their use of the word "countrymen" suggests that these

135 Chávez, in his thoughtfully written work found Hamilton's dismissal of his allies "inexplicable." Chávez, Spain and the Independence of the United States, 117; James, The Life of George Rogers Clark, 133, 205; Report by Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton on his Proceedings from November, 1776 to June, 1781, in Clark, George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781, 175; Caughey, Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana 1776-1783, 164.
inhabitants still saw themselves as Frenchmen at a time when France and Spain were closely allied. A more circumspect leader would have taken these factors into consideration.\textsuperscript{136}

The failed attack on St. Louis in May of 1780 suffered from some of the same mistakes as that led by Hamilton. From Ft. Michilimackinac, Patrick Sinclair assembled a massive force, estimated by Fernando de Leyba as comprised of nine hundred Indians and three hundred British and Canadian troops, but he still faced the prospect of waging a war with unreliable allies in a region where the inhabitants would at best be neutral. Also, given the distance that the British had to travel and the size of their force, surprising the inhabitants of St. Louis was an unreasonable hope. Sinclair's military intelligence failed him, and he sent his soldiers in a direct attack against an entrenched force of more than two hundred men and five cannon. The British suffered heavy casualties and their Indian allies plundered nearby farms and returned north rather than remaining to wage an extended siege. As at Vincennes, the British could only hope to overwhelm the American and Spanish forces. Without the cooperation of local Indians they stood little chance of holding captured territory if the Spanish and the Americans managed to mount comparable regular forces.\textsuperscript{137}

In addition to the ineptness of British officials when dealing with Native allies in the West and in the Southeast, several factors beyond their control worked to undermine their attempts to forge a strong military alliance. The death of John Stuart in the early months of 1779 left a vacuum within the British Indian Department at a critical point during the war. The British were also plagued with a wider problem of the public perception concerning their use of Native allies against colonists. In 1777 the story of the murder of Jane McCrea in New York at the

\textsuperscript{136} Report by Lieutenant-Governor Henry Hamilton on his Proceedings from November, 1776 to June, 1781, in Clark, \textit{George Rogers Clark Papers 1771-1781}, 187.

hands of British-allied Indians swept throughout North America, galvanizing resistance to the Crown. Members of Parliament opposed to the use of Native allies, such as Edmund Burke, who railed against the use of Indian warriors in his 1778 speech on the use of Indians, further undermined the ability of British military leaders to utilize Native allies. Both sides used allies militarily, but the British faced the problem of how to win a war without alienating the losers. In the early years of the war, when the odds favored the British, it became clear that crushing the rebels by the use of Indian allies would throw large numbers of neutral and Loyalist parties towards the Patriot cause.138

**Slavery Along the Waters**

The considerable slave population of Louisiana and West Florida also contributed to the vulnerability of settlements along the Mississippi. The 1729 alliance between Natchez Indians and a small number of slaves that resulted in the deaths of the majority of the French population at Natchez, as well as the depredations committed by members of the San Malo band near New Orleans, shortly after the end of the Revolutionary War, both demonstrated the real threat to European rule that the institution of slavery presented. Conspicuously absent from both Clark and Hamilton's descriptions of their campaigns in Louisiana is any mention of the possibility of a slave rebellion. The outbreak of hostilities should have stirred up fears in the white population. A number of practical considerations quelled the threat of a general uprising in Louisiana; the vast distances in some locations required to reach the sea, local customs relating to slavery, and finally the diplomatic problems posed by emancipation. That is not to say that conditions were stable throughout Louisiana. White residents of New Orleans found themselves in a panic over the violent exploits of runaway slaves of the San Malo band shortly after the end of the war.

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Slaves made up a significant portion of the total population in Louisiana, but their numbers never dwarfed the white population as it did in places such as Haiti. The rebellion in Natchez in 1729 killed more than two hundred whites and destroyed the town. However, the conflict of 1729 dragged on for several years in a series of small conflicts, often between the Natchez and Native allies of the French, and resulted in the decimation of the Natchez. The French eventually succeeded militarily, and it became clear to Native groups that returning slaves for a reward was more profitable than allying militarily with slaves. Further, the Natchez attacked the French in response to the proposed appropriation of the lands that made up their Great Village. Such obtuse mistakes were not made by the time of the Spanish administration of Louisiana. During the American Revolution, no tribes wished to ally with slaves in order to wipe out the towns and forts along the Mississippi. Without the assistance of Indians or the British, runaway or rebellious slaves stood little chance of survival. Local conditions may also have discouraged rebellion. Spanish laws concerning slavery were very similar to those of the French, but the Spanish did relax laws pertaining to manumission. Thomas N. Ingersoll has found that, "Throughout the Spanish period, 1,330 blacks [in New Orleans] gained freedom by self-purchase." Ingersoll also hypothesized that when the French and Spanish were unable to import slaves to the region, a frequent condition during the 1700s, that slave owners found it in their best interest to treat slaves more humanely. Villages and outposts north of New Orleans rarely saw the introduction of new slaves in the years preceding the war, and the loss of slaves constituted a significant financial set back. Chance also robbed the British of the opportunity to use slaves as military allies. Hamilton and the British found their only success in Vincennes, a town with a scant slave population. A census taken in 1767 found only ten black slaves of all sexes and ages in Vincennes, compared with 142 adult male slaves in Kaskaskia. Had the British
intended to use slaves as allies, as Dunmore attempted in Virginia, they could not have fomented much of a rebellion without some success in regions with a higher concentration of slaves.139

Fickle Currents and a Fickle Populace

The Spanish Governor of Louisiana, Don Alejandro O'Reilly wrote of the Mississippi River in 1769 that whenever it "changes the direction of its currents (as happens every day), it washes away one place and builds up in another." O'Reilly referenced the fickleness of the currents to explain the state of disrepair found on the Isla Real de Católica de San Carlos, home of the governor's house. Just two years earlier, O'Reilly's predecessor, Antonio de Ulloa constructed the governor's house, barracks, a hospital, workshops, and a wharf on the site, but the river and weather eroded several hundred square meters of land from the island, ruining or destabilizing every structure. During the American Revolution, political alliances along the Mississippi River mimicked the fleeting nature of physical structures. Nowhere in North America was political allegiance as complex and fluid during the war as along the Mississippi. Settlers in the backcountries of Georgia and the Carolinas may have been goaded or forced into vacillating between supporting the Loyalist and Whig causes, but in places like Vincennes and Natchez, inhabitants found that they could be French, Spanish, British, and American within the space of two decades. Hostilities along the western frontier stretched from St. Joseph in the north to the waters surrounding New Orleans in the south. While the conditions in New Orleans were different than those in the Illinois Country, all of the settlements along the Mississippi shared a

political malleability and military vulnerability, which tied them together. Understanding the factors that created this peculiar fluidity of allegiance is an important step towards creating a unified history of the European inhabitants of the region.\textsuperscript{140}

Spanish Louisiana has often been portrayed as an institution fated to end. However, the fact that St. Louis was established only in 1764 despite being located advantageously near the confluence of the Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri Rivers, suggests that rule was tenuous for the French as well. Spanish officials and settlers openly admitted that the British possessed a trading advantage due to the quality and low prices of their goods. It was also widely agreed upon that the inhabitants of the Illinois Country, both British and Spanish, preferred the fur trade to agriculture. A long tradition of strong local institutions and lax oversight from distant administrations created a resistance to interference in matters of trade or local governance all along the Mississippi, and cities like New Orleans and Vincennes bore more of a resemblance to Boston than to Havana in their political atmosphere. Governor Ulloa found French citizens so accustomed to self rule, that despite his orders not to alter existing practices except when necessary, his authority was hotly contested by a group of leading citizens in New Orleans who ousted him from the colony in October of 1768. The Spanish finally asserted some control over Louisiana after the arrival of Governor Don Alejandro O'Reilly and two thousand Spanish troops in August 1769, but in practical terms Louisiana remained as French as it was Spanish until the Louisiana Purchase.\textsuperscript{141}

The Mississippi River, when drawn on a map, divided Catholic Louisiana from Protestant

\textsuperscript{140} O'Reilly to Arriaga, December 29, 1769, in, Lawrence Kinnaird ed., \textit{Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794}, Vol. II, Pt. I, 149; For examples of how violence was used for political ends in the South during the Revolutionary War see, Piecuch, \textit{Three Peoples One King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South, 1775-1782}.

British West Florida and Illinois. Just as the European maps denoting vast possessions in the interior of the continent bore little resemblance to reality on the ground, the line between Catholic and Protestant territories was starker on paper than it was in practice. Of course, Frenchmen and Spaniards in general favored Catholicism and distrusted Protestants. When all other factors were even, Frenchmen and Spaniards chose not to live in British territory.

However, the distance of Louisiana from Europe and the autonomy that flourished within the edges of the empire, transformed religious practices. Because the assumption has long been that religion figured prominently in the lives of Catholics living in New Orleans and on the west bank of the Mississippi River, it is not necessary to document the fact that the residents of the this region retained their Catholic faith while living within the frontier. The residents, and oftentimes slaves as well, were baptized, married, and buried under the supervision of priests. However, soldiers at the most remote outposts often lacked access to a priest—sometimes for periods of months or years. For instance, within the Arkansas River Valley during the 1720s to 1740s, priests came and went, some dying of disease, others at the hands of Indians. But, after the Jesuit Priest Louis Carette left his mission in despair in 1758, unable to reign in the actions of the soldiers or convert Native peoples, the region would remain without a priest for forty years.¹⁴²

When the Spanish took control of Louisiana they compiled a report on religious conditions in their new territory. Governor Unzaga ruled that although the French had shown a surprising laxity that most of the established practices should be kept. Father Dagobert, the superior of the Capuchins in New Orleans, repeatedly drew attention for his relaxed administrative style, but his good rapport with the community and the lack of priests made the Spanish think twice before attempting to remove him. The only instance in which Unzaga

proposed action concerned the Capuchins allowing black female slaves and "mulatresses" to live under the same roof as the clergy. Issues of money, however, raised the ire of the residents of Spanish Louisiana more easily than any illicit behavior by priests. The inhabitants of Ste. Geneviève took particular offence to Father Hilaire's attempts to increase tithes in the summer of 1774. More than thirty leading residents wrote to the governor that, "We were strangely surprised on hearing him announce to us last Sunday that we were to pay him the tenth of all the produce of our lands, although he is not at all ignorant that hitherto we have paid no more that the twenty-sixth part." The inhabitants further added that, "We are surprised at seeing this attempt made by a religious, who, since he has been among us, has given no instruction to the children or preached a sermon, or given an exhortation to his parishioners." For his part, Father Hilaire responded by claiming that, "unless he has the aid of some slave to act as servant, it is impossible for him to maintain or exercise the duties of his ministry with the propriety demanded by the dignity of his person." The crown responded by giving Father Hilaire money to hire a servant and by asserting "The King has absolute control of the tithes in these kingdoms." Even during religious debates in the region, frontier arguments tended to center on practical fiscal concerns rather than philosophical or theological issues.143

Another factor that limited the military usefulness of the French inhabitants of Louisiana was their nonviolent nature. Carl J. Ekberg, in his, *French Roots in the Illinois Country*, contrasted French Creole society with that of the Americans. Ekberg cited John Reynolds, who lived as a child in the Illinois Country during the first decade of the 1800s. Reynolds wrote that, "In common broils and personal combats the French rarely engaged. They detested a

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quarrelsome fighting man." The American territorial secretary in Upper Louisiana, Frederick Bates, described the French Creoles of Illinois as "blameless and inoffensive for the most part, but they know nothing of the duties of a soldier, and could never be dragged [emphasis in original] into action either with Spaniard or Indians." The introduction of Americans to the region following the war resulted in a sharp spike in violent crimes in the Illinois Territory. By the 1820s, visitors to the region recorded not only the frequent brawls, but also the brutal nature of the fighting. British visitor James Flint noted that gouging out eyes and biting off ears was "a part of the modus operandi." From Vincennes to Ste. Geneviève, the French Creole practices of open-field agriculture, communal fencing, pasturing cattle in commons, as well as the tradition of holding local assemblies to address issues affecting the community, all worked to forge strong communal ties. Further, French Creoles in the Illinois Country, farmed and traded under the watchful eyes of powerful Native groups. Settlers in Louisiana and in West Florida kept a low profile because their survival and prosperity depended on trade and the goodwill of their neighbors.144

Conclusion

The reluctance of local Indians to participate in large-scale military operations created a power void in Louisiana. Spain took advantage of this void through a mix of diplomatic showmanship and military aggressiveness. In particular, Governor Gálvez understood the cultural landscape of Louisiana. He treaded lightly on the French inhabitants while simultaneously seeking to augment the population by recruiting loyal Spaniards. Gálvez was also well schooled in the difficulties of subduing Indians. In 1770, while serving in Chihuahua, he suffered arrow and lance wounds after recklessly pursuing a group of at least five Apaches alone.

He publicly blustered on the subject of attacking Indians, but also significantly ratcheted up spending on Indian diplomacy. During 1777, Gálvez's first year as governor, 109,453 silver reales were spent on immigration and Indian affairs in Louisiana. This expense skyrocketed in the next few years, peaking in 1782, when more than 2,000,000 reales were spent. Both of these numbers dwarf the expenditure of less than 25,000 reales in 1770, the first year in which Spain actually controlled Louisiana. Immigration and Indian affairs were two sides of the same coin. The object of both was to ensure security, particularly the security of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{145}

Kathleen DuVal has written:

After the Seven Years' War split Louisiana between Britain and Spain, the Mississippi River made a stark dividing line on European maps, a line that meant much less on the ground. Indians and Europeans continued to trade, hunt, forge alliances, and fight wars on both sides of the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{146}

This reality continued following the outbreak of hostilities in Louisiana during the Revolutionary War. Spanish Louisiana, along with British outposts on the east bank of the Mississippi River, constituted a European middle ground, where national loyalties were overshadowed by local concerns.

In 1779, Fernando de Leyba wrote to Governor Gálvez from St. Louis:

My Very Dear and Most Esteemed Sir: There have arrived at this post from your city five boats, all loaded with rum, sugar, and coffee, which for these people are the world, the flesh, and the devil. But even if such goods were not articles of vice, Sir, they would be worse than useless at this time, because there is no merchandise to furnish the Indian tribes.

Leyba’s career in Louisiana provides a convenient analogue for the region as a whole. Leyba arrived triumphantly in New Orleans as part of the large military force accompanying Governor O’Reilly. However, the honeymoon proved brief. Both at the Arkansas Post, and as


\textsuperscript{146} DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 134.
Lieutenant Governor at St. Louis, Leyba often sent frantic letters to New Orleans requesting goods in order to provide gifts for visiting Indian leaders, and voiced suspicion that his French translators were working against him. Despite Leyba’s opinion that his French subjects were disloyal to the point of insubordination, he was forced to deal gently with the residents of the region, and was denied the power to place those found guilty of theft in the pillory. The final duty that Leyba undertook was the defense of St. Louis in the face of a vastly superior force of British-allied Indians and Canadian volunteers. In a fashion typical of the region, Leyba’s frantic defensive measures convinced the British Indian allies to forgo an extended siege, and instead to plunder a handful of neighboring farms before returning north. Leyba’s world, stretching along the length of the Mississippi, can be found in the correspondence of almost every European or American leader who lived in the region. In the summer of 1772, Leyba's predecessor Pedro Piernas recorded an account of some horse thefts at Ste. Geneviève. By the time his brief letter concluded, the incident involved three European nationalities and four tribes. The region was a confusing, dangerous and expensive place where survival and comfort, rather than a Protestant work ethic or even land speculation, ruled. Where Leyba understood rum, sugar and coffee as “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” the residents of St. Louis understood them as simply the world and the flesh. They relied on the government primarily for the annual gifts given to neighboring tribes. That most French inhabitants preferred to live under the auspices of a Catholic government can be seen in the moderate numbers of emigrants who moved from the east bank of the river to St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève, and from the relief of the citizens of Vincennes when George Rogers Clark incorporated rather than excluded their local priest into his administration. However, in general terms, the European residents little cared what flag flew above them, and the most powerful groups in the region, Native Americans, were content to
largely sit out the conflict along the western frontier in exchange for receiving gifts from both sides.\textsuperscript{147}

There were a number of factors that created this peculiar landscape. The economic insignificance of the region during French, Spanish, and British rule lowered the stakes, especially for the British, and prevented the introduction of large numbers of troops. With the exception of the city of New Orleans, the populations of Louisiana and West Florida were small and thinly spread, making the provisioning of European or Native armies difficult. Powerful Indian tribes residing in and near the region declined to participate in large numbers during the war, and they were the only group with the military resources to decimate an opponent. While Britain began the war with close ties to several important tribes, the Spanish were able to supply enough gifts to convince most British allies to remain neutral. Further reducing Native participation was the lack of \textit{métis} leaders with strong ties to either Spain or Britain. The culture of the French residents residing in Louisiana and in the Illinois Country also played a part in neutralizing allegiances to Britain and Spain. The peaceful French Creoles of the region stood in stark contrast to the waves of brash and violent American settlers that would soon pour west. Though they fought when they were compelled to do so, the violence between residents on the east and west sides of the river was remarkably subdued when it is compared to that which took place in the American colonies. Finally, the Spanish, for practical reasons, tempered their treatment of slaves, accepted refugees from West Florida, and vigorously encouraged the immigration of loyal Spaniards, while at turns reducing or ignoring barriers to trade. The actions

of settlers in Louisiana and West Florida suggest that local concerns were of paramount
importance in the region and that loyalties were malleable. Britain swept into Louisiana on
several occasions, but they could not hold on to their own outposts or to conquered territory
without keeping regular forces in the area.

The situation for Europeans and Americans living near the river was both dynamic and
stagnant. Politically, the war brought on a rapid series of changes in authority and possession.
Practically, the majority of residents saw little real change in their conditions. The realities of
trade, Indian diplomacy, agriculture, and military vulnerability, trumped the concerns of the
empire. Where Furstenberg contended that the "tail wags the dog," I contend that the tail wagged
of its own accord. European residents succeeded in obtaining increased goods for the Indian
trade in return for limited military participation. They also succeeded in pressuring distant
capitals into relaxing trade restrictions. However, these concessions were a far cry from the
periphery controlling the center. The amount of money and resources dedicated to securing or
conquering frontier areas paled in comparison with that dedicated to other theaters of war. The
numbers of Europeans and Americans serving as soldiers on expeditions within the Mississippi
River Valley numbered in the dozens and the hundreds. In contrast, the struggle for Gibraltar
involved thousands of troops and dozens of large warships. Louisiana was always a pawn for the
Spanish and never a priority for the British. The Spanish and French extended war to the edges
of empires as much to draw thin British forces as to obtain valuable lands. The Americans
likewise gave lip service to extending the war west, but the grandiose schemes of marching
thousands of troops against Detroit never materialized. The promises made to staunch frontier
supporters like George Rogers Clark and Oliver Pollock went unfulfilled after the war. The
players at the edges bent the ears of leaders on the coast, but they could not untie their purse
strings. Had European and American military leaders in the frontier succeeded in marshalling significant resources the outcome of the war might have changed in unexpected ways. The influx of men would likely have triggered a significant Native response, and perhaps a pan-Indian alliance like that which emerged several decades later.

The vulnerability of European settlements and the inability of the United States or of empires to engage in full-scale warfare made the Mississippi River Valley a blank slate for European political powers. The end of the war did not signal an immediate end to Native dominance. The destruction of the native ground along the Mississippi River came not with a bang or whimper. Rather, the region became a theater of prolonged violence and diplomatic maneuvering. American expansion to the Mississippi River came in fits and spasms of defeat and success, but as was the case before and during the American Revolution, control of the region was as much about numbers as about military prowess.
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APPENDIX

Calculating the possible sizes of militia in the Mississippi River Valley

Census data for the region during this period was sporadic and of course not standardized. Calculations are to be considered only rough estimates based on data from dates that are as close together as possible. The results of the 1772 census of St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève are used to approximate the relative numbers of men in comparison with women. Estimated maximum possible militia participation has been calculated by using the militia rolls from a 1778 census of New Orleans in which thirty six percent of the total male population enrolled.

1767 British Census of Kaskaskia and Vincennes

Free inhabitants (both sexes, all ages) Total - 832
Total white male population - 530
Number of families in other towns and settlements in the British holdings within the Illinois Country - 91 (For the sake of simplicity it is assumed that each of the 91 families living outside of Kaskaskia and Vincennes could contribute one militiaman.)

First Spanish Detailed Statistical Report of St. Louis and Ste. Genevieve - Dated 1772
White Males - 512
Total - 803

Census of Louisiana, September 2, 1771
Total white male population in Louisiana, excluding New Orleans, St. Louis and Ste. Geneviève - 2217

Census of New Orleans, June 1778
White males of all ages - 829
Militiamen in 1777 - 136
Militiamen in 1778 - 302 (36% of total male population)

Estimate of West Florida population living between Bayou Manchac and Natchez, 1775
Total white population - 2500

Holding participation at a constant of 36% as in New Orleans, the estimated available force is as follows:
Spanish Illinois Country - 184
New Orleans - 302
Remainder of Louisiana - 798
British Illinois Country - 281 (190 + 91 heads of families)
West Florida - 573

Total forces available
Spanish Louisiana - 1,284
British West Florida - 854