

**A New Guardian: The Values of the American Revolution in Late Eighteenth-Century  
Spanish Louisiana**

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## ABSTRACT

Eric Nicolas Becerra: A New Guardian: The Values of the American Revolution in Late  
Eighteenth-Century Louisiana  
(Under the direction of Kathleen A. Duval)

In the late eighteenth century, Spanish Louisiana was in flux. After the American Revolution, Spain viewed the United States with suspicion. In order to develop Louisiana, and thereby to protect their profitable Mexican colonies from American infringement, the Spanish worked to entice American settlers to switch their loyalty to Spain. To this aim, the Spanish offered the settlers land, security, access to the Mississippi, and notably, even religious toleration. My thesis explores how Spanish attempts to settle Louisiana, under the direction of Louisiana Governor Esteban Miró and the Spanish Minister Don Diego de Gardoqui, tapped into the values of the American Revolution, particularly liberty, order to entice Americans to become Spanish subjects. These attempts attracted Americans all along the Mississippi River, both to existing Spanish settlements such as Natchez and a new settlement created with the specific purpose of appealing to Americans called New Madrid.

To my parents, whose sacrifices made all of this possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

On November 30, 1789, fourteen Americans swore an oath of loyalty to Spain.<sup>1</sup> These men had come to the newly established settlement of New Madrid to take up the Spanish offer of free land and unrestrained trade on the Mississippi River and at the port of New Orleans. Notably, the settlers were not required to learn Spanish or convert to Catholicism; all that the oath mandated was loyalty to His Majesty, “to live under his laws, and promise not to violate directly or indirectly His royal interests, to give immediate advice to our Commandants of whatever comes to our knowledge and which can in any way prejudice the general welfare of Spain and the special welfare of this province, in whose defense we are ready to take up arms on the first requisition of our leaders, especially in favor of this district, whenever forces should come by way of the upper part of the river or overland to invade it.”<sup>2</sup>

The settlers at New Madrid represented a new colonial strategy for the Spanish Empire. Whereas previous Spanish strategies in the Americas hinged upon the acculturation of new subjects, especially their religious conversion, the opportunity to develop territory in the Mississippi River Valley in the years following the American Revolution overruled conventional policies. Whereas for the previous 400 years the Spanish Empire abided by the *Recopilación de las Leyes de los Reynos de Indias*, the Compilation of the laws of the Indies, which allowed only

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<sup>1</sup> “Some Persons who took the Oath of Allegiance at New Madrid from 1789 to 1796,” *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, ed. and trans. Louis Houck (Chicago: Donnelley & Sons, 1909), 334.

<sup>2</sup> “Some Persons who took the Oath of Allegiance at New Madrid from 1789 to 1796,” 334.

Catholic settlers, for the first time the empire allowed Protestants to immigrate.<sup>3</sup> All along the Mississippi River Valley, Spanish officials recruited Americans to settle Louisiana.

Although Spain supported the United States during the American Revolution, its motivations lay in the expansion of its own North American empire and the opportunity to weaken the British. After the war, Spanish officials viewed the new republic with suspicion. Though the United States was weak and in debt from its Revolution, American officials had grand ambitions to thwart Spain's plans of developing and expanding its vast colony of Louisiana. To that end, American diplomats tried to gain access to the Mississippi River, and American settlers ignored established borders by illegally settling western lands. Spain, wary of the new republic possibly infringing upon its lucrative Mexican colony to the southwest of Louisiana, sought to create buffer states populated by Native Americans and Spanish subjects, including immigrants from the United States.<sup>4</sup> Thus, to develop Louisiana, and thereby to protect their profitable North American colonies, the Spanish worked to entice American settlers to switch their loyalty to Spain.

Borderlands historians have argued that these Spanish settlements were destined to fail; but, in fact, Americans flocked to these regions in surprising numbers.<sup>5</sup> Those settlers were

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Arena "Land Settlement Policies and Practices in Spanish Louisiana," in *The Spanish in the Mississippi Valley 1762-1804* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 57.

<sup>4</sup> Spain's Mexican colonies were by far its most profitable possessions. Even as late as 1803, its Valenciana mine alone produced one-fifth of the world's silver. The empire's 20 percent tax on minted silver drove the efforts to turn Louisiana into a buffer state to protect Mexico. John Charles Chasteen, *Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>5</sup> A.P. Whitaker, *The Spanish American Frontier 1783-1795* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962) and Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104, (1999): 826. The most common reason for the "destined to fail" argument was the (valid) assumption that Americans and Indians would come into conflict and that Protestant Americans could not live under a Catholic monarch.

willing to swear allegiance to a new foreign power in exchange for a chance to gain land, access to the Mississippi, and freedom from taxation. This thesis reexamines these settlements in an attempt to understand the real motivations that drew settlers to the Spanish colony. The eventual expansion of the United States should not mask the fact that, during this period, the Spanish strategy of enticing American settlers worked.

Borderlands, to borrow the definition from historians Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman, were “contested spaces” on national borders, both European and Native.<sup>6</sup> Despite the lines drawn on American and European maps, American settlers who entered these spaces found themselves on the peripheries of their nation, largely outside its influence and protection, and often infringing upon the borders of Native nations.<sup>7</sup> The overlapping sovereignty lent itself to a flexibility towards allegiances, making the borderlands spaces where empires could challenge each other for authority over resources and people. In contested borderlands, how people identified depended on who was asking as they shaped their identities to whatever national disguise provided the best opportunities for their self-sufficiency.<sup>8</sup> For settlers heading into the Spanish settlements, their pursuit of self-sufficiency drove their allegiance. When deciding immigration policy, Spanish officials were fully aware of the opportunism of Anglo

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<sup>6</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, most borderland generalizations will refer to the borderlands of the North American Southeast. Borderlands refers to the territory along the peripheries of the Spanish, the American, and the Native nations, as well the contested spaces in between. The term borderland itself is problematic. During the eighteenth century, there were borderlands across the continent, although the term is commonly used to describe places between American and different European territories. For a more thorough discussion of this subject, see: Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman, *Contested Spaces of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Juliana Barr, “Geographies of Power: Mapping Indian Borders in the ‘Borderlands’ of the Early Southwest,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (2011), 1-8; Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia, 2006); Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Barr, “Geographies of Power,” 8.

<sup>8</sup> Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.



settlers and counted on their ability to entice them. They hoped that once the new subjects established their homesteads they would feel a sense of loyalty to their new home, and that the settlers' children would know only loyalty to the Spanish domain.<sup>9</sup>

This thesis uses the history of two towns from 1785 to 1790, Natchez and New Madrid, to explore Spain's new imperial policy. As one of the oldest colonies in the Mississippi River Basin, Natchez was an established settlement that was one of the first to experience Spain's change in immigration policy. As such, the colony provides the best opportunity to understand how Spanish officials designed a policy to make a variety of non-Spaniards into Spanish subjects, and how Americans reacted to this offer. In contrast, an American speculator proposed the settlement of New Madrid and created it with Spanish officials, all specifically to entice American settlers. In this study, one can see conflicting versions of liberty between what speculators imagined settlers prioritized, what Spanish officials believed was enticing to them, and what settlers actually wanted. This thesis not only seeks to answer why and how the Spanish enticed settlers and speculators, but also why Americans might choose to become Spanish subjects. Having just emerged victorious from their revolution against a European power, what motivated some new Americans to join another empire?

This thesis argues that Spanish attempts to settle Louisiana, under the direction of Louisiana Governor Esteban Miró and the Spanish Minister Don Diego de Gardoqui, the first ambassador to the United States, tapped into the values of the American Revolution, particularly

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<sup>9</sup> Esteban Miró and Martin Navarro to the Minister of the Indies, September 25, 1787, "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," trans. and ed. D.C. and Roberta Corbitt, *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 12 (Knoxville: The East Tennessee Historical Society, 1944): 105-7.

the value of liberty.<sup>10</sup> Liberty was not an abstract notion for white Americans in the aftermath of the Revolution. To them, liberty depended on land ownership, access to markets, security, judicial rights, protection of property, religious freedom, and local control over taxation. Yet, in the earliest years of the American republic, the United States was a weak, poor, and unstable confederation, incapable of fulfilling the Revolution's promise to defend its citizens' liberty. Spanish officials recognized American weakness and aimed to take the young republic's place as a new guardian of liberty by offering these enticements to prospective settlers. In the turbulent period following the Revolution, the Spanish co-option of American rhetoric, and the appeal Americans found in Spain's offer, reflected the early republic's shaky authority and challenge the traditional U.S. narrative and its teleology of American expansion across North America. When viewed from Spanish Louisiana, the American Revolution and its aftermath did not signify the birth of an expanding republic; instead they presented opportunities for Spain to revitalize its own empire.

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<sup>10</sup> The American notion of liberty, as Eric Foner notes in the *Story of American Freedom*, is an evolving concept. One of the purposes of this essay is to discover how liberty was understood by borderlands settlers, speculators, and the Spanish officials appealing to them. For more on the subject of early American liberty, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998); Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

## LIBERTY AND IMMIGRATION

When France gave Louisiana to Spain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the colony lacked cash crops and a sizable colonial population. The colony, according to European maps, was immense as it stretched west of the Mississippi from New Orleans to Canada and out to the border of the Spanish colony of New Mexico. However, the vast majority of “Louisiana” was in reality the territory of dozens of sovereign Indian nations. What little population the colony did have was isolated and limited to the Mississippi River Valley – New Orleans, its environs, and a few outposts along the river. Underdeveloped in European eyes, the colony had been a drain on France’s resources and threatened to be the same for the Spanish Empire. Spain initially hoped to populate it with Acadian refugees from Canada, along with Spanish, French, and Irish settlers, but efforts failed to meet expectations and steadily drained Spain’s treasury. While Spain established an immigration budget of 25,000 pesos in 1767, a cost estimated to cover the aid immigrants needed to settle, the budget was revised to 40,000 pesos in 1778.<sup>11</sup> However, a surge in immigration raised the costs to 128,568 pesos.<sup>12</sup> After twenty years, Spanish officials had almost tripled the population of Louisiana from around 11,000 mostly French-speaking residents to 31,433 inhabitants, but at high costs.<sup>13</sup> Spain needed a more cost-effective way to settle

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<sup>11</sup> Gilbert C. Din, *Populating the Barrera: Spanish Immigration Efforts in Colonial Louisiana* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 19, 21.

immigrants.

In 1785, Spain began its new immigration policy to develop its colony of Louisiana. After Spain's conquests of West Florida settlements during the American Revolution, Louisiana had an expanded territory that now included Pensacola, Mobile, and Natchez. Esteban Miró, the new Spanish governor of Louisiana, took the lead to increase the population to guarantee the success of the colony. Miró, a veteran of the Seven Years War, immediately set out to fulfill the colony's promises that his predecessors had failed to do. While Louisiana remained unprofitable, the colony held the potential to help revitalize the Spanish Empire. Not only was the colony, along with Texas and New Mexico, a key buffer state protecting the silver mines of Mexico, but the land was fertile enough to produce cash crops and food crops for the rest of the empire. The Louisiana Intendant Martin Navarro, the officer who oversaw the treasury, tax collection, and economic policy, realized the colony could become profitable by increasing commerce and increasing the population to sustain trade.<sup>14</sup> Yet, the costs of importing Catholic settlers had proved far too expensive and the incorporation of French settlers, who stayed after Spain took over the colony, was not enough.<sup>15</sup> Miró's initial solution was to allow British colonists, who were in danger of removal, to stay after Spain conquered West Florida from

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<sup>14</sup> Navarro, *Political Reflections on the Present Condition of the Province of Louisiana New Orleans, ca. 1785, 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: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1911), 1: 238.

<sup>15</sup> Former Louisiana Governor Bernardo de Gálvez achieved impressive results in gaining the loyalty of French settlers during the 1780s, much of which will be addressed later in this thesis. Kathleen DuVal, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2015), 135-137.

Britain in the American Revolution.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the colony still needed more settlers to continue developing Louisiana.

In 1787, Miró and Navarro wrote to the Minister of the Indies recommending a new policy.<sup>17</sup> As they explained, the best way to entice settlers was by offering free land, freedom from religious coercion, and exempting settlers from import duties in exchange for an oath of allegiance.<sup>18</sup> Spain's new policy, now tolerant of non-Catholic immigrants, saw American settlers as the key to Louisiana's future.

In the traditional American narrative, historians portray the Spanish Empire as notoriously intolerant. When conquering Mexico, the Spanish brutally subjugated the Native population, forcing many of them to convert to Catholicism. This history of Spanish colonization came to be termed *la leyenda negra*, or the Black Legend. As historian David Weber notes, the Black Legend shaped perceptions of the Spanish Empire.<sup>19</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Anglo Americans used the Black Legend to justify westward expansion. Exploiting the Black Legend was a useful tool for legitimizing U.S. dominance; the American narrative portrayed Spanish rulers as unjust while condemning the racially mixed mestizos as “an imbecile, pusillanimous, race of men” unfit to rule themselves.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Din, *Populating the Barrera*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Miró and Navarro to the Minister of the Indies September 25, 1787, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 12: 105-107.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Maude Burson, *The Stewardship of Don Esteban Miró: 1781-1792 a Study of Louisiana Based Largely on the Documents in New Orleans* (New Orleans: American Printing Company, 1940), 129.

<sup>19</sup> David J. Weber, “The Spanish Legacy in North America and the Historical Imagination,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (1992): 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

In modern times, historians have used the Black Legend to, as historian Andrew McMichael explains, “justify the sense of inevitability” of the “Spanish retreat from the New World.”<sup>21</sup>

While in many respects Spanish intolerance merited its reputation during the initial conquests, imperial policy had evolved by the late eighteenth century. When Carlos III (r. 1759-1788) took power, he began the Bourbon reforms, a set of policies inspired by Enlightenment ideals. Throughout his empire, the Crown appointed men of talent and knowledge who embraced pragmatic outlooks in state affairs. On the ground, the Spanish allowed their subjects to privately practice any religion, although Catholicism could be the only one practiced publicly. Miró, one of these new enlightened administrators, went so far as to remove a Spanish priest seeking to begin a Louisiana Inquisition when he thought the zealot would discourage potential non-Catholic immigrants.<sup>22</sup>

Under the Bourbon monarchs, pragmatism took precedence in the borderlands of northern Mexico, Louisiana, and Florida. Historian Eric Hinderaker points out that colonial empires in the New World were not just manifestations of imperial policies but rather “organic systems” molded by the decisions of colonists on the ground.<sup>23</sup> Specifically, David Weber argues that the Spanish metropolis “did not so much dictate policies as negotiate them in ongoing dialogues with their own colonial subjects.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Spanish toleration of other Christian denominations was no secret, as *The Kentucky Gazette* reported: “The court of Spain has come to

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 2-4.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Gayarre, *History of Louisiana* (New York: W.J. Widdleton, 1867), 270.

<sup>23</sup> Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xii.

<sup>24</sup> David Weber, *Barbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 2005.), 9.

a resolution of tolerating to a certain degree every Christian sect, that admits of the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of our blessed Saviour [sic].”<sup>25</sup> Thus, if American settlers could help develop Spanish Louisiana, the Spanish would bend their policy regarding Catholicism and allow Protestants into the colony.

While religious concessions were vital, Spanish Louisiana was economically already a tempting choice for American settlers. George Washington himself voiced concern that if the Atlantic and western states did not maintain an economic connection, “the ties of consanguinity, which are weakening every day, will soon be no bond” and the settlers would seek out “commercial connexions...with the Spaniards.”<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the fragile Continental dollar, the Spanish peso was a stable currency, backed by a powerful government. Indeed, Continental currency was so weak, Americans paid taxes in British pounds, Spanish pesos, and even goods like whiskey. In the era before the United States had a national bank, potential subjects of the Spanish Empire could benefit from a well-established credit system. Moreover, the Spanish Empire provided a market for foodstuffs as many of Spain’s other colonies focused on cash crops and the extraction of precious minerals at the expense of agriculture.

Providing economic opportunities was among the array of liberties through which the Spanish hoped to entice Americans. Carlos III’s Chief Minister, José Moñino y Redondo, conde de Floridablanca, wrote to Spanish Minister Gardoqui: “our idea is to attract to us the inhabitants of the Provinces of Ohio and the Mississippi: either through an alliance by which they place themselves under the King’s protection or through a union with his dominion under pacts which

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<sup>25</sup> November 22, 1788, *The Kentucky Gazette*.

<sup>26</sup> George Washington to Henry Lee, June 18, 1786, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. Worthington C. Ford (New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893), 41.

guarantee their liberty.”<sup>27</sup> Floridablanca further elaborated that providing immigrants liberty meant “furnishing them with an outlet through New Orleans for their produce and an opportunity in that City to provide themselves with what they need from other countries.”<sup>28</sup> To American settlers, this was an especially potent deal.<sup>29</sup>

For Americans, self-sufficiency was key to liberty. As Thomas Jefferson opined, “dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.”<sup>30</sup> In the new republic, true freedom required land and property; self-sufficiency guaranteed that a man was free from dependency and coercion, meaning no one could influence his decisions.<sup>31</sup> Historian Eric Hinderaker explains that for settlers, “freedom from oppression easily merged with the freedom to pursue their desire for western lands without restraint.”<sup>32</sup> If the United States could not protect their liberty, Americans would consider leaving. The fact that the United States had won independence from Britain did not mean that the Revolution was complete.<sup>33</sup> Many white Americans men did not have the liberty the new nation promised to provide them, a liberty composed of secure and equal access

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<sup>27</sup> José Moñino y Redondo, conde de Floridablanca to Diego de Gardoqui, May 24, 1788, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 16: 95.

<sup>28</sup> Floridablanca to Gardoqui, May 24, 1788, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 16: 95-96.

<sup>29</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 186-220.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Query XIX, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson being his Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and other Writings, Official and Private*, ed. Henry Augustine Washington, 3 (Washington D.C.: Taylor & Maury, 1854), 405.

<sup>31</sup> J. W. Cooke, “Jefferson on Liberty,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, (1973): 573.

<sup>32</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 201.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 5.



to property.<sup>34</sup> As such, Spain was prime to offer these enticements and market itself as a protector of liberties.

Prosperity in the trans-Appalachian West depended on the use of the Mississippi River, to which the Spanish, particularly with the port of New Orleans, had sole access. As Virginia politician John Dawson wrote, “altho’ the lands on the Ohio and its branches are very fine and productive, what benefit can be drawn from them, more than a bare substance, without a market for their productions?”<sup>35</sup> Before steamships and railroads, traveling down the Mississippi and around the Gulf of Mexico to reach the Atlantic coast took less time than traveling there by land. Thus, in their struggle to create buffer states, the great leverage the Spanish held was control of the Mississippi. Despite claims to free navigation made by the United States and Britain during the Preliminary Articles of Peace, signed at the end of the American Revolution, Spain controlled access to the river and continued to tax all foreign ships that passed through.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the 1780s and 90s, the Spanish continued to guard trading rights over the great river, reiterating their control in official proclamations and using the Mississippi to entice settlers.<sup>37</sup>

The struggle to attain access to the Mississippi was emblematic of the U.S. failure to safeguard its citizens’ liberty. When negotiating the Jay-Gardoqui Treaty in 1786, John Jay attempted to negotiate a twenty-five-year restriction on access to the Mississippi in exchange for

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<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *Liberty Men*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> John Dawson to Governor Beverly Randolph, January 29, 1789, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January 1, 1785 to July 2, 1789 Preserved in the Capitol at Richmond*, ed. William P. Palmer, 4 (Richmond: R.U. Derr, Superintendent of Public Printing, 1884), 555.

<sup>36</sup> Gálvez, Navigation of the Mississippi Not Free, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 237.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Atlantic port trade agreements.<sup>38</sup> Although Jay recognized the need for the river, Spain was unwilling to cede that right, and Jay thought the treaty was a reasonable compromise.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, American politicians also worried that the Mississippi would spur the migration of settlers too fast, leaving them open to manipulation by the British.<sup>40</sup> While the treaty was never ratified, as Southern States with land interests in the west voted against it, the negotiations earned the ire of western groups.<sup>41</sup> Americans agreed that trade was an essential element of liberty, yet western settlers were left out. Many immigrants, like Greenberry Dorsey, applied to settle in Louisiana specifically because of the trade opportunities provided by the Mississippi.<sup>42</sup> Dorsey represented those in the United States, overladen by “a considerable number of debts” who hoped to start over in Spanish territory.<sup>43</sup> The chance to recover their personal independence and to gain wealth superseded the allegiance these settlers had to the United States.

Dorsey’s old neighbors back in the United States also supported his move to Louisiana. In a testimonial, a friend claimed Dorsey was a good and honorable man and hoped Dorsey’s immigration could “eventually prove the foundation of a commercial [connection]” between the Spanish and the United States.<sup>44</sup> At least among certain groups in the borderlands, whatever

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<sup>38</sup>David Narrett, *Adventurism and Empire: The Struggle for Mastery in the Louisiana-Florida Borderlands, 1762-1803* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 128.

<sup>39</sup> John Jay to Jefferson, January 9, 1786, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, ed. Henry P. Johnston (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1891), 2: 178-9.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Rutledge to Jay November 12, 1786, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, 2: 216-8.

<sup>41</sup> Narrett, *Adventurism and Empire*, 128.

<sup>42</sup> Greenberry Dorsey to Miró 1788. Folder 1, Greenberry Dorsey Papers, MSS 187, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection. New Orleans, La..

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Character Statement Regarding Greenberry Dorsey, March 17, 1789, Greenberry Dorsey Papers, Folder 6.

position or status that would allow inhabitants to benefit the most was accepted as long as one's neighbors benefitted from "reciprocal advantages" as well.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the stigma in switching allegiances was limited. Economic opportunity trumped loyalties. The feeling was mutual with the Spanish; Governor Miró approved of Dorsey's immigration proposal in August of 1789, citing the Crown's order "to encourage, farmers, tradesmen, and other good men" to settle in Louisiana.<sup>46</sup>

Most important among Spain's assets was land. Prior to independence, settlers' objections to Britain's denial of land past the Appalachian Mountains formed a major part of their support for the Revolution.<sup>47</sup> The Proclamation Line of 1763 was a direct affront to the goals of many British subjects in North America. Although American settlers often ignored the line and crossed the Appalachian Mountains, there was always a fear that their lack of land titles meant elite speculators could purchase their tract and evict them from homesteads they had already worked.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, land speculators, including a good number of the Continental Congress, were barred from speculating and selling western lands.<sup>49</sup> During the Revolution, when Britain began creating new taxes, settlement restrictions grew more threatening to colonists' liberty; colonists felt they were trapped east of the Appalachians and forced to pay

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Passport issued to Greenberry Dorsey by Esteban Miró, September 5, 1789, Greenberry Dorsey Papers, Folder 4.

<sup>47</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 199-200.

<sup>48</sup> Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 30-1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 38.

taxes by an oppressive government.<sup>50</sup> Without the means to establish new freeholds in the west or to gain wealth from speculating, colonists turned to revolution.

To many borderland settlers, the new American government was not defending the liberties for which it had just fought. Key officials in the west felt that Congress actively betrayed the ideals of the Revolution. One Revolutionary general, James Wilkinson, who would later become a Spanish agent, observed the discontent in the borderlands. As Wilkinson noted in 1787, “The last revolution involved the Americans in heavy foreign and domestic debts, and to provide for the payment of these, and to sustain the federative Government,” the new government thereafter imposed taxes on its citizens “who found them so oppressive that a multitude were reduced to the alternative of opposing the laws, or . . . sought refuge in the woods of the west.”<sup>51</sup> These Americans believed that the principles of the American Revolution needed to be protected, yet additional taxes meant impoverishment and an increased difficulty to own land. Indeed, after the Revolutionary War, Americans found themselves facing higher taxes and land prices than they had under British rule.<sup>52</sup> To buy land, a settler would have to pay Congress two-thirds of a dollar per acre.<sup>53</sup> If self-sufficiency was a path to liberty in the eighteenth century, the United States was not capable of providing it.

In Spanish Louisiana, there was plenty of land to provide settlers and speculators. As noted by Spanish Commander Don Josef Antonio Rengel, aside from St. Louis and Ste.

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<sup>50</sup> Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 16.

<sup>51</sup> James Wilkinson, Memorial to Governor Esteban Miró and Intendant Martin Navarro, September 3, 1787, Pontalba Papers, Temple Bodley Collection, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. I thank Kathleen DuVal for sharing her copies and notes from the Pontalba Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*, 37-8.

<sup>53</sup> Max Savelle, *George Morgan: Colony Builder* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 206.

Genevieve, there were no settlements for 500 leagues north of New Orleans.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the land Miró offered the potential immigrants was free and, even after settling, the immigrants would not pay “any tax whatever.”<sup>55</sup> As Miró advertised in a proclamation in 1789, every immigrant family qualified for 240 acres of free land.<sup>56</sup>

Spanish hopes to entice these settlers were reasonable as borderland settlers were among the most disconnected from the nation, often believing that those on the Atlantic coast held little regard for their interests.<sup>57</sup> Congress exacerbated these tensions as it limited expansion and failed to secure access to the Mississippi when negotiating trade relations with Spain. Reflecting the frustrations of borderland settlers over the Jay Treaty, North Carolina Congressman James White wrote: to “cause the separation of our new Settlements in that Country, it could not find better means than the cession [navigation of the Mississippi River] in question.”<sup>58</sup> As tensions rose, settlers became increasingly vocal about their alienation. Contributors to borderland newspapers like the *Kentucky Gazette* noted the failures of the government and warned that “the moment [national leaders] attempt to give up the trade of the Mississippi, the western Country, with all their territorial claims and pretensions, will be lost.” Western settlers, it argued, would make allies with foreign entities who could provide them access to the Mississippi.<sup>59</sup> While

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<sup>54</sup> A Description of Louisiana, December 12, 1785, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, ed. and trans. Lawrence Kinnaid, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1: 160.

<sup>55</sup> Miró and Navarro to the Minister of the Indies, 107

<sup>56</sup> Burson, *The Stewardship of Don Esteban Miró*, 1940), 129.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin T. Barksdale, *The Lost State of Franklin: America's First Secession* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>58</sup> James White to Gardoqui September 26, 1786, (Enclosure) Summary of a Conversation Between James White and Gardoqui, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 16: 84.

<sup>59</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, November 22, 1788.

some feared the British and others the Spanish or the French, the author warned that “ludicrous as this may appear, let it be remembered that stranger things have come to pass. It may be said Congress, by an army, ...may prevent this event. The premises cannot be admitted-they have about 600 men- illy [sic] paid and supplied- It would require an army of 20,000 men- and [expense] that cannot be supported, and the object will not repay the [expense].”<sup>60</sup>

Although historians have often portrayed the eighteenth century as an era of Spanish decline and inevitable American ascendance, in fact Spain posed a major threat to American expansion. In terms of military strength, during the eighteenth century the Spanish maintained a powerful army and the third largest navy in Europe.<sup>61</sup> In the late eighteenth century, Spain typically maintained around 50 ships at a time. France manned about 70 ships while Britain could maintain about 90 ships at a time. In comparison, the United States had disarmed its navy as it far too expensive to maintain, only constructing new ships after the Naval Act of 1794. Moreover, in the Americas, Spain had colonies in Cuba, Pensacola, New Orleans, and Mexico from which it could threaten the new republic.<sup>62</sup> The United States, on the other hand, had no standing army and was still bankrupted and in disarray from its revolution.<sup>63</sup> A set of frontier militias, with little to no coordination with one another or support from the federal government, was in no shape to challenge another world power. But what made the Spanish most dangerous to American expansion was what the empire could offer. The same army that threatened the new republic was a force that could protect a loyal group of potential Spanish subjects from outside

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<sup>60</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, November 22, 1788.

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan R. Dull, “Mahan, Sea Power, and the War for American Independence,” *International History Review* 10, (1988): 59-67.

<sup>62</sup> Whitaker, *Spanish American Frontier*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> DuVal, *Independence Lost*, 333.

threats, such as Native Americans and the British. Settlers who declared loyalty to Spain would benefit from the protection of its military.

While both the United States and Spain used notions of liberty, only one could actually protect it. After the Revolutionary War, land-hungry settlers poured over the Appalachians, staking their claim to Indian country in the name of individual liberty. Unsurprisingly, American settlers came into conflict with the region's original inhabitants, who staunchly defended their land that they dominated on both sides of the Mississippi River. In 1786, a report stated that Indians were "extremely indisposed and irritated against the Americans" to the extent that every day "news [was] coming to us [the Spanish] that wherever they are found they are killed."<sup>64</sup> The Creeks were "carrying a lively war with the Americans."<sup>65</sup> In the following decades, violence between settlers and Indians ravaged the borderlands just west of the American states. Moreover, as settlers claimed their right to the frontier lands, they not only fought Indians, but increasingly defined whiteness as a necessity for Americanness. They came to see all Indians, whether friendly or hostile, as inferior peoples who were in the way of westward expansion, spurring more conflict.<sup>66</sup> As such, while the leadership of the early republic wanted to prevent unnecessary Indian violence, it could not put serious efforts into maintaining peace or conquering Indians.

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<sup>64</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Miró, July 19, 1786, Folder 132, Louisiana Papers, BANC MSS M-M 508, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, Berkeley, California; For more on Native power, see Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Carlos de Grand Pré to Miró, June 1, 1787, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 211; DuVal, *Independence Lost*, 309-312.

<sup>66</sup> Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 186-230.

One of Spain's greatest assets was the security it could offer its subjects. As John Locke wrote, "the great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting."<sup>67</sup> Security was thus a vital component in the quest for liberty, for it was the very reason for which man enters into a social contract with a government. Without security, one is not truly free to enjoy property as anyone can take it (or one's life) and deprive that person of one's self-sufficiency, and thus one's liberty. When judging the ability of the United States to protect its western settlers, Spanish Minister Gardoqui stated: "I doubt very much whether they can supply it. It seems that a necessity concerned with their security might oblige them to turn to their neighbors," such as the Spaniards.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, James Robertson, one of the founders of Nashville, named a district the District of Miró, after Governor Miró to gain Spain's favor and support. In his eyes, this action was necessary as "The United States afford us no protection. The District of Miró is daily plundered and its inhabitants murdered by the Creeks, and Cherokees."<sup>69</sup>

In the borderlands, the Spanish provided this security by maintaining friendly relations with various Native nations, who were a primary threat for Americans. While Taniel, chief of the Mascouten nation, waged war against the Americans every year, he claimed to love the Spanish; the Spanish officer, Manuel Perez, confirmed that "he shows us much affection, and up to now has never done any harm to our district."<sup>70</sup> Yet, the Spanish were careful not to alienate

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<sup>67</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: Printed for Thomas Tegg; 1823), 159.

<sup>68</sup> Gardoqui to Floridablanca, October 24, 1788, "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," 18: 135.

<sup>69</sup> James Robertson to Miró, September 2, 1789, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 279.

<sup>70</sup> Manuel Perez to Miró, February 27, 1788, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 244.



settlers. As the Spanish official and former Louisiana Governor Bernardo de Gálvez warned Miró in 1786, providing “help to the Indian Nations against Americans...must be reduced to the least which can be given them without compromising ourselves in any manner.”<sup>71</sup> To hide the extent of their aid, the Spanish provided weapons to Natives only when trading other items as well. By hiding their support, Spanish officials abided by Spain’s treaty terms with the United States while allowing their Indian allies to defend the border against any infringing Americans.<sup>72</sup> The secrecy seemed to work. In 1789, James White was in negotiations with Miró for Cumberland settlers, who inhabited the borderlands of North Carolina and Tennessee, to potentially join the Spanish. In return for settler allegiance, he requested Spanish protection against Indian raids. Miró promptly sent a letter to the Creek chief Alexander McGillivray, who stopped the attacks in the district.<sup>73</sup>

While the Spanish generally maintained better relationships with them than Americans, they did not control Native nations. Native peoples in Louisiana were organized into numerous sovereign peoples who used the Spanish as much as the Spanish used them. Especially powerful Native nations, such as the Osages, often made treaties and solicited goods from the Spanish only to break their agreements later when circumstances changed.<sup>74</sup> Miró, while frustrated, wisely chose not to engage in a direct conflict and instead armed the Native “nations most

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<sup>71</sup> Gálvez to Miró, May 20, 1786, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 10: 136-7.

<sup>72</sup> DuVal, *Independence Lost*, 311.

<sup>73</sup> Miró to Smith, April 27, 1780, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 272.

<sup>74</sup> Miró to Cruzat, May 15, 1787, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 201; As Kathleen DuVal argues, the Osages held incredible economic and military power throughout the late eighteenth century, forcing both the French and the Spanish to comply with their own terms. For more on this subject, see Kathleen DuVal, *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 103.

faithful to us.”<sup>75</sup> As he explained, it was important to treat the Osages “like disobedient children and not as enemies, for it is not a good thing for us to acquire the name of a sanguinary or cruel people.”<sup>76</sup> In this way, Miró worked to maintain alliances with neighboring Indian nations, even though they frustrated his ideas of Spanish rule. His efforts paid off, as Spain had far more Native allies in the borderlands than the United States did. As such, potential settlers could reasonably expect security from Indian raids under the Spanish flag.

While patriots during the Revolution vilified tyrants as the ultimate threat to liberty, political overreach was not the main concern for borderland settlers.<sup>77</sup> Taxation without representation probably meant little to someone who did not meet the property qualifications to vote and simply wanted security in a turbulent region. Even during the Revolution, as historian Kathleen DuVal writes, “most people chose sides for reasons besides genuine revolutionary or loyalist fervor.”<sup>78</sup> Instead, many Americans were concerned about their ability to remain self-sufficient in order to protect their personal liberty—and they did not trust the weak and unstable United States to defend these liberties.

The settlers were right to worry as the United States was undeniably fragile. As Spanish Minister Gardoqui noted, “I doubt if there has been an event in any country which promised greater good than the revolution in this one, and which has produced less. The able men

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Bernard Bailyn writes at length about the colonial fear of tyrants and standing armies, specifically their threat towards liberty. See Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017).

<sup>78</sup> DuVal, *Independence Lost*, xv.

recognize this, and although they say nothing, their very silence declares their thoughts.”<sup>79</sup> The *New York Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* warned its readers that in “Kentucky...many of the principal people of that district, are warmly in favor of a separation from the union.”<sup>80</sup> At the time Spain was courting American settlers, settlers in the borderlands were constantly raided by powerful Indian nations, Georgia was torn in fractions and suspended its legislature, Rhode Island businesses were struggling as the continental paper money was worthless, and the nation was still recovering from Shay’s Rebellion.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, while the Spanish could not match every notion of Revolutionary rhetoric, as doing so would require the abolition of their monarchy, it could promise personal liberty and the means to defend it.

The situation provided a unique opportunity for the Spanish Empire to take the young republic’s place as the guardian of liberty. Governor Miró capitalized on this opening. To convince American settlers to switch their loyalty to Spain, new Spanish settlements needed to embody the ideals of the American Revolution by providing liberty in the form of land, security, and markets, without impeding that liberty with religious obligations or taxation. The experiment began in the Lower Mississippi Basin.

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<sup>79</sup> Gardoqui to Floridablanca September 18, 1786, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest VIII,” 8: 82.

<sup>80</sup> *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* February 17, 1789, enclosed in Gardoqui to Floridablanca, March 4, 1780 “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 19: 92.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. Gardoqui makes note of these events as he writes to the Spanish Chief Minister.

## NATCHEZ

Natchez offered English-speaking settlers a chance to attain their version of liberty. Due to the region's rich natural resources, different powers struggled to control the district throughout its long history. However, Governor Miró and his officials aimed to subvert rebellion and strengthen Spain's hold on the district by enticing loyalty. On this experimental ground, Spain altered its immigration policy to continue developing the district, first by recruiting French colonists and former British loyalists, and then finally approving American immigrants. In return, immigrants in Natchez gained opportunities for financial success and personal liberty, for which they seemed truly grateful.

Natchez and its surrounding area were originally inhabited by the eponymous Natchez Indians. The French first made contact with the Natchez in 1700 and founded Fort Rosalie nearby in 1716.<sup>82</sup> Built on rich soil that, due to its high ground, protected it from flooding, the settlement rapidly increased. Yet, as the French settled the area, tensions rose between these newcomers and the Natchez as the Europeans usurped Native land. In 1729, the Natchez went to war against the French. Although the Natchez won a major early victory, the French and their Choctaw and Quapaw allies eventually regained the upper hand. As historian Ira Berlin argues,

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<sup>82</sup> James F. Barnett, *The Natchez Indians: A History to 1735* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 73.

despite the French victory, the fear of another rebellion impeded the development of a plantation economy, which in turn left much of the European-occupied area undeveloped until the late eighteenth century.<sup>83</sup>

In the latter half of the century, Natchez became the possession of different empires. After the Seven Years War, Great Britain acquired the district from France, along with Manchac and Mobile. In the following years, Anglo immigrants arrived and heavily populated the town.<sup>84</sup> However, within two decades, the Spanish would conquer these settlements after they declared war on Britain while supporting American efforts during the American Revolution. While British loyalists rebelled in 1781 and briefly retook Natchez to aid Britain during conflict, Spanish forces held it at the war's end.<sup>85</sup> As such, Natchez and its surrounding areas held a diverse set of French, Anglo, and Spanish colonists by 1785.

Louisiana's French settlers fit relatively well into the Spanish empire. After dealing with a French uprising in 1768, the Spanish had managed to gain French Louisianans' loyalty when emphasizing their shared economic interests, Catholicism, and hatred of the British, an especially potent motivation as many of the French settlers were Acadians who had been exiled from Canada when the British won the Seven Years War.<sup>86</sup> During Spain's Gulf Coast campaign in the American Revolution, Spanish Governor Bernardo de Gálvez gained the French settlers' support by arguing that Spain offered the best opportunities for their political and economic independence, especially when the specter of a British expansion threatened them. The French

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<sup>83</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 88.

<sup>84</sup> Din, *Populating the Barrera*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> DuVal *Independence Lost*, 110.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 139.

settlers agreed and answered Gálvez's call to arms, serving the Spanish faithfully throughout the war.<sup>87</sup>

In contrast to the French, the Spanish viewed Anglo settlers with both caution and optimism. Although Miró was wary of the Protestant settlers, he chose not to expel them as that would create a hostile party that would simply settle across the river. Instead, Miró chose to incorporate the settlers into the colony.<sup>88</sup> As he reasoned, Anglo residents who chose to stay (especially British loyalists) would feel a connection to the settlement. Indeed, by 1785, Spanish officials, aiming to check U.S. expansion, were anxious to recruit Anglo settlers and proceeded to allow non-Catholic Christians to stay and to immigrate. Still, Miró had no plans to create a religiously diverse society. Miró aimed to gradually convert Louisiana's Anglo settlers and sponsored Catholic parishes to proselytize to them, assigning two parishes to Natchez.<sup>89</sup> Thus, former British settlers were allowed to make their home in Spanish Louisiana, setting the precedent for other Anglo settlers as well.

After the Revolution, Natchez and the surrounding Spanish domain was an increasingly enticing option for landless Americans. After the passage of the Northwest Ordinance, when Congress began selling western lands, Americans without capital could not afford to buy the land. As Kaskaskia resident Joseph Parker wrote to the then President of Congress, Arthur St. Clair, "if the price of the lands is not reduced, it is the determination of the people to go on the other side of the Mississippi, or down to the Natchez, to settle."<sup>90</sup> Although the truth was more

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 135-7.

<sup>88</sup> Din, *Populating the Barrera*, 41.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Joseph Parker to President St. Clair, October 2, 1787 *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord (Springfield, Illinois: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1909), 410.

modest, Parker reported that “a thousand acres of rich land is given to every person- I have known six thousand acres given to one man- in order to encourage the culture of tobacco. The King of Spain allows ten silver dollars...for tobacco, which is received at the King’s Treasury at New Orleans.”<sup>91</sup> As word spread about the fertile land and economic potential, Americans grew more envious of Natchez’s resources.

The land disputes were heightened as European and American diplomats failed to create a clear border. Mobile and Natchez were among Spain’s conquests in the American Revolution, yet during the negotiations after the war, the British signed different agreements with the United States and its European rivals.<sup>92</sup> The Treaty of Paris, signed with the Americans, had a secret provision that extended American territory to the 31<sup>st</sup> parallel, depending on if Spain also retained West Florida after their own negotiations. Meanwhile, the treaty signed with Spain had no clear northern border. Thus, after the war, both Spain and the United States felt the right to claim the lands between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains and north of the 31<sup>st</sup> parallel.

Undeterred, a group of Americans tested their claim for the Natchez district in 1785. During the spring of that year, a small party of Georgians arrived in Natchez and demanded that the Spanish surrender the settlement, according to the terms of the Treaty of Paris. The Spanish were appalled and Governor Miró ordered their leader, Thomas Green, sent to New Orleans.<sup>93</sup> Before the Spanish commander Francisco Bouligny could arrest Green, he escaped back to Georgia. A second party of Georgians arrived a few months later, only to encounter a worse

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> DuVal, *Independence Lost*, 234.

<sup>93</sup> Narrett, *Adventurism and Empire*, 121-2.

fate. These Americans were expelled by the Spanish and attempted to hide among the Choctaws and the Chickasaws, whose support they attempted to gain.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately for the Georgians, the Creek Alexander McGillivray ordered one of them killed, and the rest eventually returned to the United States.<sup>95</sup>

While the episode caused the Spanish commanders initially to fear an invasion, the result helped consolidate Spain's control over the district.<sup>96</sup> Not only had Spain demonstrated its ability to defend against American aggressions, but Americans received a clear message that they could not count on Anglo settlers to support any American takeover. As Green attempted to take the district, a group of Anglo settlers in Natchez signed a petition stating Georgian control would only bring Natchez's "ruin and destruction."<sup>97</sup> As Natchez resident John Gordon wrote to a friend, "I shall prefer the Spanish government to the American, for the taxes give me the headache."<sup>98</sup> In an ironic turn of events just after the Revolution, it was former British colonists who rejected American rule for fear of taxes.

Spanish officials were already winning the loyalty of former British and French subjects. A key proponent of this idea was the Spanish Commander Francisco Boulogny. The son of a Frenchman who immigrated to Spain to take advantage of trade opportunities at the Spanish port city of Alicante, Boulogny personally understood how Spanish enticements attracted new

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<sup>94</sup> Alexander McGillivray to Vincente Manuel de Zéspedes, October 6, 1787 *McGillivray of the Creeks*, ed. John Walton Caughey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1938), 162.

<sup>95</sup> McGillivray to O'Neill, July 25, 1787, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 159.

<sup>96</sup> Miró to Perez, February 15, 1788, Folder 98 Louisiana Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>97</sup> Ellis, Gaillard, and Banks to the Citizens of Natchez, June 1785 "Papers relating to Bourbon County, Georgia, 1785-1786," *American Historical Review Volume XV October 1909 to July 1910* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 77.

<sup>98</sup> John Gordon to George Profit, June 25, 1785, "Papers relating to Bourbon County, Georgia, 1785-1786," 96.



subjects.<sup>99</sup> Bouligny was living proof that immigrants could successfully assimilate and even dedicate their lives to their adopted empire. As such, when considering how to develop the area surrounding Natchez and how to “maintain the tranquility” of the population, Bouligny recommended creating a militia composed of recent American settlers who would elect their own commanders.<sup>100</sup>

Despite the risks of arming the former Americans, Bouligny was “inclined to think that they are not Capable of forming a rebellion” against their new government.<sup>101</sup> As he explained, “many of those who are Americans by birth... I am aware, are full of gratitude for the benefits they have received from the [Spanish] Government.”<sup>102</sup> Bouligny was not just theorizing about inhabitants he had never met; the inhabitants he described were people with whom he regularly interacted as the local commander. As the Spanish Commander in Natchez, Bouligny was in charge of public safety and patrols, which brought him into frequent contact with the settlers as he listened to their comments and concerns. As a result of these interactions, Bouligny clearly saw that Americans prioritized opportunities for land and trade, and that their allegiance depended on their individual wellbeing.

Notably, liberty for some came at the cost of liberty for others. As Bouligny noted in 1785, an outer region of Natchez had a population of 1,100 white inhabitants and 900 black slaves.<sup>103</sup> After Spain began allowing Anglo-Americans to immigrate into Louisiana, the slave

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<sup>99</sup> Gilbert Din, *Francisco Bouligny: A Bourbon Soldier in Spanish Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>100</sup> Bouligny to Miró, August 22, 1785, Folder 107, Louisiana Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

population dramatically increased; an estimated 500 slaves in 1784 grew to over 2,000 by 1796.<sup>104</sup> Bouligny's concern with the "tranquility" of the area may have been influenced by the need to restrain the slaves.<sup>105</sup> A year prior, in 1784, the area was traumatized by the "knight of the ax."<sup>106</sup> The knight of the ax, appropriately named because he used an axe to chop open the heads of white men, led an insurrection of about 50 slaves. Eventually, the knight was put down by a battalion of soldiers and militia led by Bouligny himself.<sup>107</sup> From this experience, Bouligny surely realized that the security and liberty of all the colonists depended on the restriction of their slaves. Notably, unlike what happened during the Natchez War, the revolt did not hinder the development of the slave economy as the economic component of liberty depended on plantations.

Although most of the Anglo settlers in Natchez were former British subjects, who had never been Americans, the settlement proved a relatively successful testing ground for allowing Protestant colonists. As the Anglo settlers were industrious and loyal, more Americans continued to receive permission to settle. From 1787 to 1789, not counting the English-speakers already in Natchez, 293 Americans settled in the district.<sup>108</sup>

Ironically, while the United States was reputed to be the nation of tolerance and liberty, Catholics in America sought out Louisiana as a haven because of persecution within the republic. While the United States officially separated church and state, non-Protestants were often

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<sup>104</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 341.

<sup>105</sup> Bouligny to Miró, August 22, 1785, Folder 107, Louisiana Papers, Bancroft Library.

<sup>106</sup> Burson, *The Stewardship of Don Esteban Miró*, 114.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>108</sup> Census, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*. The math is corroborated by Gilbert Din in *Populating the Barrera*, 76.

disenfranchised. In the eighteenth century, five states excluded Catholics from voting; Virginia only lifted the bar in 1785.<sup>109</sup> In 1787, prospective settler Bryan Bruin wrote to Esteban Miró for a land grant in Louisiana. Bruin, a Catholic, claimed that he was persecuted back in Maryland and sought refuge under the protection of His Catholic Majesty.<sup>110</sup> To Miró, Bruin was a perfect candidate, a man with considerable resources and a Catholic, and quickly approved his immigration. While Brian Bruin moved to New Orleans, his son Peter Bryan Bruin and a party of eighty moved to Natchez from Virginia.<sup>111</sup>

English-speaking Protestants found significant success in Natchez. Similar to the aforementioned Greenberry Dorsey, Anglo settlers in Natchez maintained trade with their American counterparts and used their livelihood to pay off old debts. In 1788, one Benjamin Drake petitioned Miró for a passport to return to the Cumberland to “settle his affairs in that place” before he would “return immediately with the rest of his goods.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, trade boomed in the district. In 1789, Natchez planters, most of whom were Anglo inhabitants, produced 1,402,725 pounds of tobacco.<sup>113</sup>

Natchez served as an example of how Spain could entice former subjects of other empires and even citizens of the United States. Natchez experienced a steady stream of immigrants.

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<sup>109</sup> Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 5; Jack R. Pole, “Representation and Authority in Virginia from Revolution to Reform,” *Journal of Southern History* 24 (February 1958): 18.

<sup>110</sup> William S. Coker, “The Bruins and Spanish Immigration Policy,” 1787-88,” in *Spanish in the Mississippi Valley 1762-1804* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 64.

<sup>111</sup> Coker, “The Bruins and Spanish Immigration Policy,” 67.

<sup>112</sup> Benjamin Drake to Miró, July 15, 1788, “Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest,” 15: 95.

<sup>113</sup> Grand Pré, March 2, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 305-311.

From April to June of 1790, at least 106 Americans settled in Natchez and took at least 45 slaves with them.<sup>114</sup> Though the immigration of Americans into Natchez was a positive step in developing Louisiana, it was still insufficient for Spain's ultimate goals. While American immigrants buttressed existing settlements, to create a successful colony, Spain would need to create new settlements altogether.

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<sup>114</sup> Grand Pré to Miró, April 22, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 326-328; Grand Pré to Miró, April 24, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 333-4; Grand Pré to Miró, April 30, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 334; Grand Pré to Miró, May 4, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 334-5; Grand Pré to Miró, May 5, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 335-6; Grand Pré to Miró, May 8, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 337; Grand Pré to Miró, May 16, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 342-3; Grand Pré to Miró, May 16, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 343-4; Grand Pré to Miró, May 25, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 345-8; Grand Pré to Miró, June 10, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 349-350; Grand Pré to Miró, June 22, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 251-4; Grand Pré to Miró, June 28, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 355-6.

## NEW MADRID

Spanish and American speculators co-sponsored new settlements based on what they believed liberty meant to American settlers. One of these settlements, New Madrid, was the brainchild of Minister Gardoqui and a veteran of the American Revolution, Colonel George Morgan. Morgan, like Spanish officials, realized that for a settlement to be successful, liberties must be given “as a Right and not as an Indulgence.”<sup>115</sup> Yet, while the Spanish emphasized liberty in terms of owning land and being financially independent, Morgan later stressed that for Americans, “Our love of Liberty Civil and religious is our ruling Passion.”<sup>116</sup> These differing interpretations of liberty ultimately led to conflict and impeded New Madrid’s growth as both sides felt uncompromising towards their respective versions. Still, New Madrid was created to embody the notion of liberty, whatever it might mean.

Born the youngest child of a prominent merchant family in Philadelphia, George Morgan was always anxious to acquire wealth and prestige.<sup>117</sup> During the American Revolution, Morgan was commissioned as a Colonel and served as an agent for Indian affairs and a commander at Fort Pitt. At the height of his influence, Morgan corresponded with a number of American leaders, even sending Benjamin Franklin a sample of his homegrown honey.<sup>118</sup> Like many other

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<sup>115</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, February 24, 1791, quoted in Savelle, *George Morgan*, 200.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 8.

<sup>118</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 193.

Revolutionary officers, Morgan hoped to benefit from the nation's independence and the subsequent opening of western lands after the removal of the Proclamation Line of 1763. After submitting proposals for "two Million Acres of Land" in the Northwest Territory, Morgan believed in the new American government and its ability to provide economic opportunity to himself and to its citizens.<sup>119</sup>

However, by 1788, Morgan had not received his lands. After the Revolutionary War, Virginia ceded its claims to the Northwest Territory to Congress, which thereafter sold the lands to pay for its war debts. As a result, Morgan was left emptyhanded. Deprived of his venture, Morgan formed the New Jersey Land Society and began negotiating with Congress for the purchase of western land. But in the meantime, Morgan received a more promising offer from Spanish Minister Don Diego de Gardoqui.<sup>120</sup>

Gardoqui was the head of a wealthy merchant family in Bilbao who previously served in various local positions, including as mayor for four years and the Second Trustee Procurator General of Bilbao from 1778 to 1779.<sup>121</sup> During the American Revolution, the Gardoqui family supplied the United States with both money and supplies, which won him the gratitude of notable Americans such as John Adams.<sup>122</sup> After the war, Gardoqui was appointed as the "Encargado de Negocios," or the charge d'affaires to the United States.<sup>123</sup> While Gardoqui was instrumental

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>120</sup> George Morgan Petitions for Land, May 1, 1788 *Kaskaskia Records*, 469; Proposals of George Morgan and Associates, May 15, 1788, *Kaskaskia Records*, 471.

<sup>121</sup> Angel Chaparro Sainz, "Diego María de Gardoqui y los Estados Unidos: Actuaciones, influencias y relaciones de un vasco en el nacimiento de una nación," Univ. Del País Vasco (UPV/EHU) Dpto. Filología Inglesa. (2013).

<sup>122</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 202.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. A charge d'affaires is a temporary ambassador to a small nation. As such, Gardoqui served as an ambassador (or minister) to the young republic.

in supporting the United States during its Revolution, he recognized its danger to the empire as a neighboring nation. As such, Gardoqui had two main goals: to guard Spain's possession of the Mississippi and to create a division between borderland settlements and the United States.<sup>124</sup>

While Gardoqui could not recruit Americans directly because doing so would be an act of hostility, he found a way to spread the information about the planned colonies through Thomas Hutchins, a mutual friend of Morgan. Through Hutchins, Morgan learned that the Spanish Minister planned to develop colonies along the Mississippi River in order to expand the empire and to create buffer states using dissatisfied Americans.<sup>125</sup>

Gardoqui saw an opportunity to use encroaching settlers to Spain's advantage. The Spanish Minister hoped to entice Americans into the colony of Louisiana by providing them land in exchange for an oath of fealty to Spain, thereby solidifying Spain's hold on the Mississippi River while simultaneously limiting the expansion of the United States.

In response, Morgan promptly dropped out of the New Jersey Land Society and wrote numerous detailed proposals to Gardoqui.<sup>126</sup> Morgan assured Gardoqui that under his supervision, the settlement would develop into one with one hundred thousand souls within ten years.<sup>127</sup> In return for his efforts in developing a settlement, Morgan requested command of the town, a salary, and a land grant of a thousand acres for himself, his wife, and his children.<sup>128</sup> Over the next year, Morgan and Gardoqui planned the settlement that would, by 1789, become

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Max Savelle, "The Founding of New Madrid," *The Mississippi Historical Review* 19, (1932), 33.

<sup>126</sup> John W. Repts, "New Madrid on the Mississippi," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 18, (1959), 21.

<sup>127</sup> Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 299.

<sup>128</sup> Repts, "New Madrid on the Mississippi," 21.

New Madrid. Both Morgan and Gardoqui realized that American settlers differed substantially from the typical Spanish and French colonists still living in Louisiana. However, while many Americans held reservations about the Spanish Empire and distrusted Catholics, Natchez had proved that Protestants could successfully settle within Spanish Louisiana. Still, in an attempt to mitigate these concerns, Morgan prioritized land, trade, and religious freedom in his proposals to Gardoqui.<sup>129</sup>

When Morgan reached out to Gardoqui, the Spanish minister embraced the opportunity. Gardoqui immediately recognized Morgan's value, writing to the Spanish Chief Minister that Morgan's project "seems to me to be of prime importance, and the talents of that person encourage me to reiterate my recommendation of him."<sup>130</sup> The partnership between Morgan and Gardoqui capitalized on the divisions between frontier settlers and the coastal elites. Citing reports from "confidential communications," Gardoqui wrote that the inhabitants of Kentucky grew "much exasperated by the first reports that Congress [was] discussing surrender of the navigation of the River for 25 years, and they [had] openly asserted that if this [was] done they will seek aid from another Power as an Independent State."<sup>131</sup>

Gardoqui, impressed by the efforts and "talents of" Morgan, quickly approved Morgan's proposals and wrote him a passport to find suitable lands for the settlement.<sup>132</sup> Without waiting

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<sup>129</sup> George Morgan to Diego de Gardoqui, "General Directions for Survey, Settlement and Government of His Colony," April 1789, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 299.

<sup>130</sup> Gardoqui to Floridablanca, October 24, 1788, "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," 18: 135.

<sup>131</sup> Gardoqui to Floridablanca October 28, 1786, "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," 16: 87.

<sup>132</sup> Gardoqui to Floridablanca, October 24, 1788, "Papers from the Spanish Archives Relating to Tennessee and the Old Southwest," 18: 133-7.



for the Spanish Crown's final approval, Morgan took the initiative to advertise the settlement, taking care to emphasize how the Spanish could provide liberty to settlers. Access to land was the central element of Morgan's advertisements. In a handbill, he promised his recruits "320 Acres of land, at one eighth of a Dollar per Acre."<sup>133</sup> In comparison, settlers had to pay two-thirds of a dollar per acre through Congress. He emphasized that the land was "in the richest and most healthy part of the country."<sup>134</sup> New Madrid's initial settlers, recruited personally by Morgan, wrote letters to be printed in eastern newspapers that also promoted the fertility of the land.<sup>135</sup> They claimed that "there is not an acre of it uncultivable, or even indifferent land, within a thousand square miles."<sup>136</sup> While in reality a significant portion of the settlement was marshy, potential settlers reading Morgan's ad saw an opportunity to gain land.<sup>137</sup>

Morgan knew that freedom from taxation would also be essential in attracting a population that had just fought a war against taxation without representation. When planning New Madrid, Morgan knew he could not promise his settlers a republican form of government through representation, but he could offer the other part of the equation in the form of no taxation. Although Morgan required new settlers to pay an initial land payment, they were to pay no taxes thereafter.<sup>138</sup> For potential tradesmen and merchants, Morgan guaranteed in the

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<sup>133</sup> George Morgan, Morgan's handbill, quoted in Max Savelle, *George Morgan*, 207.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>136</sup> Letter to Messrs. Bedford and Turnbull from settlers at New Madrid, April 14, 1788, quoted in Reps, "New Madrid on the Mississippi," 22.

<sup>137</sup> Reps, "New Madrid on the Mississippi," 22. A town plan of New Madrid drawn by visitor Victor Collot indicates swamps and marshes, a product of the Mississippi River's periodic flooding.

<sup>138</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, August 20, 1789, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 295.

name of Spain “free Navigation of the Mississippi” as well as permission to trade with New Orleans and other Spanish colonies such as Havana or Mexico.<sup>139</sup>

While promising to maintain the notion of no taxation without representation, Morgan took further liberties to assure his potential settlers that Spain would safeguard the most important values of the Revolution, claims he made without the official consent of the Spanish Crown. While Morgan was to command New Madrid under the authority of His Majesty, he stressed that “to make the emigration toward the new establishment a lasting and desirable object to Americans per continuation at all time, the trial by jury & liberty of regulating their own interior police, must stand also foremost as a charter right inherent to this new Province.”<sup>140</sup> By promising settlers control over the judicial process, Morgan called upon a long-held element of English liberty: trial by jury. British colonists had a long history of protecting the trial by jury and upheld the right since the Magna Carta. For Americans, trial by jury held special importance. Among the most hated features of the Stamp and Townshend Acts, which precipitated the Revolution, was the denial of a trial by jury. The Administration of Justice Act of 1774 further insulted this principle by allowing British officials to avoid colonial juries by relocating their trials to other British colonies or Great Britain.

Notably, Morgan promised that the Spanish “will meet with Encouragement” any Christian “of every Denomination.”<sup>141</sup> Religious toleration was a key principal of the Revolution and one that Morgan emphasized when designing New Madrid. With this policy, Morgan tapped into another key aspect of liberty: the freedom to practice one’s own religion. While Spain

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<sup>139</sup> Morgan, Morgan’s handbill, quoted in Savelle, *George Morgan*, 207.

<sup>140</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, April 1789, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 306.

<sup>141</sup> George Morgan, Morgan’s handbill, quoted in Max Savelle, 207.

already promised private toleration of Protestants, as seen in Natchez, Morgan took the unapproved additional step of promising public toleration for all types of Christians.

Morgan, with Gardoqui's approval, created a set of instructions for the construction of New Madrid that highlighted the new level of tolerance in Spanish policy. Taking into consideration his American audience, George Morgan prioritized religious toleration, access to land, free trade, and peaceful coexistence.<sup>142</sup> Morgan's framework emphasized the common interests of the settlers with Spain and sought to mitigate tensions by ensuring individual rights. In his instructions, he provided a plan designed to accommodate a diverse group of people while providing them the tools and the security for economic success.

The instructions had the double purpose of laying the foundation of New Madrid and answering the Spanish Crown's questions and concerns. He began by stating how the colonists were going to gain access to land and how the city was going to be designed and settled. His statement that the first 600 settlers would receive land "gratis," or free, after only paying a dollar for a patent highlights the urgency to settle the town quickly.<sup>143</sup>

To continue flattering the Spanish, Morgan stressed that the urban planning of New Madrid would reflect its status as a Spanish settlement. The town name itself, New Madrid, was a sign of deference to the Spanish. As such, the town was designed to remind the population of Spanish rule. Similar to how streets in New Orleans are named after monarchical names and symbols, the main street of New Madrid was named King Street while the lots adjacent to King

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<sup>142</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, Directions, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 302-5.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

Street were designated for a Roman Catholic school and church.<sup>144</sup> Their centrality made the Catholic Church both the most prominently displayed and geographically the most convenient one for the settlers to attend. Notably, the emphasis on royalty and Catholicism contrasted sharply with the Anglo Protestants immigrating from a republic with no established religion, and demonstrates Morgan's catering to the Spanish. In addition, trade policy was created to benefit the Spanish Empire. Trade, Morgan wrote, needed policing to stop contrabands and to protect the interests of Spanish subjects.<sup>145</sup>

Morgan's plan attempted to balance Spanish authority and settlers' desire for individual liberty. By designing New Madrid with different church districts, he embedded Christian tolerance into the town. He also ensured that settlers would have access to land and the Mississippi River, the most important source of trade in the interior of the continent.<sup>146</sup> If these rights were guaranteed, then Spain would have earned its right to rule over them.

In an effort to safeguard settler liberty, Morgan's instructions demonstrate a carefully constructed infrastructure and forethought for long-term success. Morgan promised to provide the settlers' children with education, as well as farming supplies for the settlers themselves.<sup>147</sup> Morgan realized that land alone was not enough to guarantee self-sufficiency; in many ways, the land was useless without the tools to cultivate it. By supplying the ability to farm the land and offering an education, Morgan sought to ensure that settlers were both financially and intellectually independent.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 304-5.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>147</sup> George Morgan, Morgan's handbill, quoted in Max Savelle, 207.

Morgan also took considerable efforts to demonstrate how settlers would avoid clashing with local Native Americans, stating that white men would not be allowed to hunt unless they planned to consume the entire animal.<sup>148</sup> By outlawing commercial hunting, Morgan intended to keep Indians and settlers from competing for resources. The slight limitation to commercial liberty was a necessary tradeoff. After all, security was an essential feature of liberty.

In a 1789 speech to a collection of Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees at New Madrid, Morgan worked for a mutually beneficial relationship with Natives. In his speech, he referenced his experience as an Indian agent and stated that his previous Indian associates “will tell you all the good business they came here for.”<sup>149</sup> He assured the assembled that “you shall have all the liberty to hunt and kill all the Game in the Country” and that although Morgan and the settlers would hunt in the surrounding area, he “will not allow any white men to hunt herefor the sake of skins of furs.”<sup>150</sup> In return, Morgan requested that the Indians respect white men’s property. He stressed that they “must charge [their] young men to be civil to all my people and not on any account to steal a horse from them nor take any of their property.” To Morgan, upholding this agreement would allow settlers to maintain their property, the core element of their liberty.

Not only did the Spanish maintain peace with the Indians, they drew much of their economic and military strength in the area from their alliances with Native Americans.<sup>151</sup> The

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<sup>148</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, Directions, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 304-305.

<sup>149</sup> The Speech of Colonel Morgan to the Delaware, Shawnese and Cherokee at his First Meeting them at New Madrid, April 1789, Papers of the Morgan Family, 1768-1938, MSS #367, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> A. P. Whitaker, “Spanish Intrigue in the Old Southwest: An Episode, 1788-89,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 12, (1925), 162.

Shawnees, Delaware, and Cherokees all traded with New Madrid.<sup>152</sup> The Spanish highly valued this trade and assigned additional trading agents to live with the Chickasaws, the Choctaws, and the Creeks. By 1793, an estimated two thousand Indians “received their Supplies at New Madrid.”<sup>153</sup>

Native Americans also prioritized cementing the trade relationship. After the Revolutionary War, when the British lost the Southeast, many Native American groups that had allied with the British, such as the Creeks, made new alliances with the Spanish. Although the Spanish fought on the side of the Americans during the Revolution, Native American groups recognized the necessity for a European ally. Indians were part of the creation of New Madrid from the beginning. When Morgan was determining a site for New Madrid, eleven Indians from the nations of “the upper bella rivera [beautiful river]” accompanied him, two of them later traveling to St. Louis to update the Spanish commander, Manuel Perez.<sup>154</sup> After reporting, the Indians stated they would go and spread the word about the Spanish.<sup>155</sup> In the Spanish, Native American groups saw an ally against American expansion and an opportunity to establish a new trading network. Gaining access to European goods, especially guns and ammunition, and an ally against American expansion was paramount.

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas Mitchell to Alexander Hamilton, August 27, 1793, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jabe E. Cooke, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1996), 15: 292. Mitchell notes that after raiding the Cumberland (presumably Nashville), Natives traded horses to New Madrid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Perez to Miró, March 2, 1789, Louisiana Documents from the National Archive of Cuba, MF 6, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA. The ‘bella rivera’ most likely refers to the Ohio River.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

Gardoqui agreed with Morgan's proposal, and their plan successfully attracted a diverse set of people. Among the first 70 settlers Morgan accepted were German families.<sup>156</sup> Morgan himself recruited about "39 households," who each received "at least 160 English acres."<sup>157</sup> While some received grants that were exceptionally large, including grant of over 4,000 acres, most received about 160 or 320 acres.<sup>158</sup> By 1788, the first immigrants arrived and began clearing land.<sup>159</sup>

With a large number of settlers arriving at New Madrid, especially those with enough capital to buy thousands of acres of land, the settlement seemed promising for the Spanish and troubling for United States officials. As James Madison wrote to George Washington in 1789, Americans were worried that settlers "will be enticed from Kentucky, as rapidly, as the allurements of the latter place, have obtained them from the Atlantic States."<sup>160</sup> Just as the opportunities had pulled settlers west, the enticements of Louisiana land threatened to pull them farther west still. James Madison's friend and fellow Virginia politician, John Dawson, demonstrated more concern about the loss of settlers. In a letter to the governor of Virginia, Beverly Randolph, Dawson wrote that because of New Madrid, "a door will be open'd through which the United States will [lose] many thousands of her best citizens."<sup>161</sup> Morgan's plan, he

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<sup>156</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 206.

<sup>157</sup> "List of the persons who have subscribed to Colonel George Morgan their acceptance of the plots of land, which he has promised to allot them in his projected settlement of New Madrid," Pontalba Papers.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 214.

<sup>160</sup> James Madison to George Washington, March 8, 1789, *James Madison Papers at the Library of Congress*, Retrieved from the Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/item/mjm023460>.

<sup>161</sup> John Dawson to Beverly Randolph, January 29, 1789, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts*, 10, 554-5.

claimed, was “far superior to that of Congress” and “added to these circumstances, the most sacred assurances of freedom in religious matters, a free navigation of the Mississippi to New Orleans, clear of all duties and taxes, besides being entitled to all of the King of Spain’s rich dominions are inducements sufficient to draw the attention of the industrious and enterprising.”<sup>162</sup> The settlement of New Madrid was off to a healthy start.

Unfortunately for Morgan, his actions that were implemented without the consent of the Spanish King disturbed Governor Miró. Specifically, Miró viewed Morgan’s efforts as an attempt to establish “a Republic within its own domains” and therefore “highly detrimental to the welfare and service of Spain.”<sup>163</sup> Even Morgan’s naming of the settlement as “New Madrid” was too presumptuous. Although Miró allowed Morgan to continue to use the name, the governor believed Madrid was a name only the Spanish could use. As such, Miró sought to rein in Gardoqui’s and Morgan’s vision. Instead, Miró listened to the American General James Wilkinson, who also approached the Spanish with a plan to create new settlements along the Mississippi.<sup>164</sup> According to Wilkinson’s proposal, the Spanish needed to close off the Mississippi from Americans as the great river was its greatest bargaining asset.<sup>165</sup> Closing off the Mississippi would encourage western settlers to break off from the United States and negotiate separate agreements with the Spanish. Miró would then offer free land to Americans in order to entice them to become Spanish subjects. However, Miró, skeptical of non-Catholics,

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<sup>162</sup> Dawson to Randolph, January 29, 1789, *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscript*, 554-5.

<sup>163</sup> Miró to Morgan, May 23, 1789, Pontalba Papers.

<sup>164</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 215.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.



planned to convert Anglo settlers through the use of English speaking Irish priests.<sup>166</sup> As such, this new plan redefined the liberty the Spanish were willing to offer.

To Miró, Morgan emphasized the wrong type of liberty. As Morgan soon discovered, the number of civic freedoms that helped define his and the Americans' version of liberty did not fit into the array of liberties that the Spanish could offer. As such, when Morgan arrived in New Orleans to discuss New Madrid, Miró quickly checked his ambitions. Although Miró had no plans of persecuting Protestants, he asserted that "Catholicism [would] be the only public religion."<sup>167</sup> Religious liberty only extended to private tolerance, not acceptance, of other forms of Christianity. In contrast to Morgan and Gardoqui's proposal, only Catholic churches could exist in the Louisiana Territory. Furthermore, Miró rejected Morgan's proposed system of government. The governor assumed that religious toleration would not be the main priority for incoming settlers. Rather, he believed that providing free land to settlers would earn their loyalty and their contribution to the development of New Madrid.<sup>168</sup> In his view, Morgan was unnecessary. Indeed, Miró was suspicious of Morgan's desire to sell land and assumed this profiteering would lead to personal enrichment while leaving most of the land "uncultivated forever."<sup>169</sup> Although bothered that Morgan had taken such liberties in designing New Madrid, Miró nevertheless honored Morgan's previous promises to the settlers and allowed them to keep their land grants.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Miró to Morgan, May 23, 1789, Pontalba Papers.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Miró to Don Antonio Valdes May 20, 1789, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 277.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

While Miró rejected many of Morgan's conditions, Spanish flexibility was nevertheless demonstrated in the pledge of loyalty taken by new settlers. In fact, the oath of allegiance was something Miró and Morgan previously discussed and Miró kept.<sup>171</sup> The wording of the pledge required new settlers to declare allegiance to "His Catholic Majesty" and to serve in the military if foreign adversaries attacked the Spanish controlled Louisiana Territory.<sup>172</sup> However, the wording of the pledge does not erase the identity of the new immigrants. While the immigrants declared loyalty to a Catholic monarch, they were not required to renounce loyalty any other nation or convert to Catholicism. Indeed, the primary goal of the oath was for the settler to work for the benefit of the Spanish King and to take up arms for the Spanish Empire if ever called upon. Thus, the pledge allowed a compromise in which immigrants could become Spanish subjects without giving up their old identity, thereby easing them into their new role.

Yet, Miró's intervention had denied Morgan's his idealistic, and profitable, community. Rebuked, Morgan left Louisiana. While the Colonel kept in contact with Gardoqui for some time, once Morgan inherited his brother's sizable fortune, he returned to Pennsylvania.<sup>173</sup> When Morgan inherited property, he became self-sufficient and no longer needed the Spanish to obtain his own personal liberty or fortune. By the end of 1789, Morgan had completely abandoned New Madrid.<sup>174</sup>

Morgan's departure ultimately compromised Spain's ability to promise liberty to Americans. As Morgan left, Governor Miró assigned Pedro Foucher as the commander of New

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<sup>171</sup> Miró to Morgan May 23, 1789, Pontalba Papers.

<sup>172</sup> "Some Oaths of Allegiance Taken at New Madrid from 1793 to 1795," *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 334.

<sup>173</sup> Savelle, *George Morgan*, 227.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

Madrid. The appointment of Foucher spoke volumes to the shift in policy, for, as Morgan previously noted in disapproval, Foucher did not speak English.<sup>175</sup> Foucher was a French officer serving the Spanish.<sup>176</sup> His appointment demonstrates how the Spanish prioritized French settlers as fellow Catholics as opposed to the Anglo settlers Morgan tried to recruit.

American settlers became disillusioned with New Madrid as Miró altered the conditions of the settlement by limiting civic liberties, affecting the settlement's growth. As Foucher reported to Miró, no new families arrived by April 1790.<sup>177</sup> Instead, Foucher writes, the only new immigrants were a few deserters from Virginia, in contrast to the wealthy American planters, like Peter Bruin, who brought substantial resources to and even led groups of settlers to Natchez.<sup>178</sup> No longer guaranteed their version of liberty and facing the struggles of a new settlement without their trusted leader, most of those whom Morgan brought to New Madrid left the settlement and returned back to the United States by May of 1790.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Morgan to Gardoqui, August 20, 1789, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 296, 299.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>177</sup> Foucher to Miró, April 10, 1790, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley*, 3, 305.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Savelle, "Founding of New Madrid," 55.

## CONCLUSION

The new Spanish immigration policy used at Natchez and New Madrid ultimately had mixed results. The steady stream of immigration boosted the population of the Natchez District from 1,600 in 1784 to 5,381 in 1796.<sup>180</sup> In contrast, it is difficult to determine how many non-Catholic settlers took up the Spanish offer in New Madrid. While the Spanish register of 1791 counts 220 settlers at New Madrid, as one immigrant Thomas Mitchell implied, there were also numerous deserters from the continental army who joined the settlement who do not appear on the Spanish records.<sup>181</sup> When American military deserters arrived, they were commanded to stack their guns, leaving “about 400 arms, belonging to the United States.”<sup>182</sup> Interestingly, many of those who swore oaths to Spain in 1789 did not appear in the register taken in 1791.<sup>183</sup> Although New Madrid increased in population, it failed to grow into the spectacular success Spanish officials had imagined only a few years prior.

The greatest reason for this disappointment was that, despite the rhetoric, New Madrid did not succeed in offering the liberty settlers wanted. When Spanish officials used liberty to attract immigrants to Natchez, they appealed to a wide variety of settlers and limited their version of liberty to encompass security, financial independence (in the form of land, free trade, and freedom from taxation), and private religious toleration. These incentives had already attracted French and British settlers, who in

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<sup>180</sup> Din, *Populating the Barrera*, 76.

<sup>181</sup> New Settlers of New Madrid, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 327. Thomas Mitchell to Alexander Hamilton, August 27, 1793, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 15, 292.

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Mitchell to Alexander Hamilton, August 1793, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 15, 292.

<sup>183</sup> Foucher to Miró, April 30, 1791, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 328-9.

turn helped develop Natchez into a lucrative settlement capable of enticing Americans. In contrast, when Morgan helped plan New Madrid, he primarily targeted Americans and promised his settlers too much in terms of civil liberties and public religious toleration, promises that were subsequently repealed by Miró.

Even Morgan's economic promises remained unfulfilled. While Natchez had successfully attracted settlers due to its rich resources, as later observers such as surveyor Andrew Ellicott noted, New Madrid and its surrounding areas suffered from poor quality soil.<sup>184</sup> Ironically, while the main attraction of the settlement was land, the land was marshy and prone to flooding. Although many Mississippi settlements dealt with flooding, other towns avoided this pitfall; Natchez, for example, was established on higher land while New Orleans used a system of levees. A settlement with limited farmable land made its promises of financial independence ring hollow. Another reason for New Madrid's failure was that since the settlement could not live up to its promised potential, its settlers left for other parts of Louisiana that were perceived as far more profitable. For instance, one New Madrid resident named Elisha Winsor moved to New Orleans where he established a ropewalk and fell under the favor Miró's successor Francisco Luis Hector de Carondelet, who eventually granted him a million acres in Arkansas (although this grant was never confirmed).<sup>185</sup>

Still, the immigrants who settled permanently would remain Spanish subjects until Spain eventually deprioritized Louisiana. As Napoleon took power in the late eighteenth century, the Spanish shifted their attention to Europe. To focus their resources towards the French threat, Spain signed away Natchez and sole access to the Mississippi to the United States in the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795. In

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<sup>184</sup> Andrew Ellicott, entry for February 3, 1797, *Surveying the Early Republic: The Journal of Andrew Ellicott U.S. Boundary Commissioner in the Old Southwest 1796-1800* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2016), 48.

<sup>185</sup> Some Persons who took the Oath of Allegiance at New Madrid from 1789 to 1796, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 320-1; Foucher to Miró, April 30, 1791, *Spanish Regime in Missouri*, 328-9.

1797, when surveyor Andrew Ellicott encountered a number of Anglo inhabitants of Natchez protesting the Spanish governor, he was not witnessing a rebellion. Indeed, Spain already surrendered the district. But what's telling is the lack of loyalty Anglo settlers had to their former Spanish rulers. When Spain agreed to the terms of the Treaty of San Lorenzo, the empire forfeited its role as an alternative guardian of liberty. If the empire no longer provided the land, security, and trade the inhabitants required, the settlers saw no need to align with the Spanish. Ultimately, settlers in the borderlands were not particularly loyal to the United States or the Spanish. They were loyal to liberty itself, prioritizing landed liberty over national identity. By the time the United States reabsorbed the settlers who left, it had grown into a nation that could fulfill its promises of providing new lands and trade opportunities. Thus, the settlers happily joined the government that could once again provide them liberty.

Although the United States eventually took over the settlements, the fact that Spain, in the eyes of many borderland Americans, had once challenged the United States as a provider of liberty gives pause to the traditional historiography. At the end of the eighteenth century, the young United States was weak and its future uncertain. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, the developing nation was particularly vulnerable and not necessarily destined for expansion. In contrast, Spain's position in the New World offered the opportunities and security that could protect American settlers' ideas of liberty. Control of the Mississippi River, as seen in the following decades, was critical to the success of the trans-Appalachian west. Spanish attempts to encourage frontier establishments to secede and join Spain serve as evidence that Europeans were ready to subjugate the United States, either by dividing the nation among themselves or transforming it into a dependent state. Spain's potential of success as a new guardian of liberty and the viability of Spanish settlements like New Madrid spoke to the vulnerability of the American confederation and shows how unstable the United States was in the years following the Revolution.

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