

A Provisional Partnership - Spanish Diplomacy in the Gulf Coast Region During the American War for Independence

Justin T. Dellinger
The University of Texas at Arlington

Whether peace has come about between Britain and Spain you must know better than we. If it has happened, we are a few steps nearer the general peace. In a short time Spain has, as usual, paid dearly enough for the dance

From a German Officer in New York, Sept. 11, 1780¹

In a diplomatic sense Spain was not a benevolent influence for the success of the American cause. Spain preferred to win her own stakes without corresponding American successes.

Samuel Flagg Bemis²

In the United States, the widely taught perspective of the American Revolution has been that of patriotic colonial rebellion against an oppressive mother country, where tropes of heroism, tenacity, and destiny ensured the inevitability of independence. While these tropes reverberate in the collective mentality of nationalistic American citizens, their use also downplays the impact of varied American beliefs during the period and the role of foreign nations in the conflict. American reaction to the Declaration of Independence was not as simple as a patriot-loyalist line in the sand and no uniform patriot response dominated the American psyche and strategy. American leaders, instead, instituted a wide variety of military tactics and diplomatic stances.

Across the Atlantic Ocean, European powers in competition with Great Britain perceived the American Revolution as an opportunity to both harm their rival and to further their own interests. European political responses to the Declaration of Independence proved to be as diverse as those of the Americans, however, as evidenced by the hesi-

¹ Ray W. Pettengill, ed., *Letters from America: 1776-1779*, Port Washington, Kennikat Press, Inc, reprinted 1964, 228.

² Samuel F. Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1957, 111.

tation of empires to quickly ally themselves with the nascent republic. Many Europeans did not believe that the Americans could win their independence against the British. Even if the Americans achieved sovereignty, they would not be able to endure as a nation. After France entered into an official alliance with the Americans in 1778, Spain remained neutral until 1779. Although the French and Spanish shared common enmity toward Britain, Spain preferred silent auspices and a reticent partnership with the United States while attempting to negotiate a separate peace. After negotiations with the British ended in failure, Spain still did not enter into an official agreement with the fledgling United States; rather, they only allied with France. Spain's entrance into the war did not mean, however, that Spanish-United States policies and interests coincided. The Spanish Crown's policies and interests became increasingly more clear and rigid as they sought to keep the United States out of the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi River basin, reacquire territorial losses from the Seven Years' War, and obtain Gibraltar and Minorca through diplomatic or military means. While Spain's entrance into the war would no doubt aid the immediate American cause, the Spanish court's ambivalence helped shape diplomatic relations with the young United States in the years following the conflict.

Even though Spain never entered into an alliance with the United States, their common enemy in the British set the stage for a provisional partnership. After dramatic territorial gains by winning the Seven Years' War, the British became a significant imperial presence in the western Atlantic. At the start of the war for independence, the close proximity of the British to Spanish Louisiana proved to be too close for comfort, as early Spanish and American goals centered on this region.³ British West Florida, particularly the port of Pensacola, even became a secure place for loyalists who fled the American colonies in 1775-1776.⁴ Of all of the regions that the United States desired, examination of the Gulf Coast region reveals a perfect coalescence of Spanish and American aims. Spanish-American diplomatic correspondence, particularly pertaining to West Florida and the Mississippi River, reflects the barriers that the Spanish wished to be erected and that the Ameri-

³ María Pilar Ruigómez de Hernández, *El gobierno español del despotismo ilustrado ante la independencia de los Estados Unidos de América: Una nueva estructura de la política internacional, 1773-1783*, Madrid, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1978 is an introductory source on the power dynamics and setting before the American War for Independence.

⁴ Albert W. Haarman, «The Spanish Conquest of British West Florida», *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 39 (October 1960), p. 107. This source used John W. Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana: 1776-1783*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1934 as a guide. Additional information on loyalists in East Florida includes Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785*, Boston, Gregg Press, 1972.

cans wished to be torn down for access points of future trade. Spanish fear of possible American incursion into both the Gulf of Mexico and Louisiana exemplifies their mindset of both assistance and containment. This prudent distrust, coupled with a desire to reacquire lost territory stemming from the 1763 Treaty of Paris, furthered tensions between the two and illuminated the Spanish diplomatic ambivalence, conflicts of interest, and a general cultural misunderstanding of what can be considered diametrically opposed populations coexisting in the Atlantic Basin.

Framework, Historiography, and Sources

Utilizing an Atlantic history framework is essential to understanding the broader contexts of the American War for Independence. This construct elucidates widespread transformations, broad systemic impacts, and linkages of new and old societies of the Atlantic world. Significant work on the interconnectivity of the Atlantic has taken place over the past twenty years and serves to disrupt traditional teleological and national histories that are still quite prevalent.⁵ This does not eliminate the role of the nation or empires; rather, it more appropriately contextualizes events and allows for new, bigger research questions. Whereas a traditional imperial/colonial history approach focuses on single-directional movement of people, commodities, and ideas, Atlantic history provides a framework of multidirectional interconnectivity. In this way, the New World also shaped continental powers. While the historiography of the American Revolutionary War has developed, teaching broader contexts still lags behind in secondary and higher education settings.

A quick review of some popular United States collegiate textbooks over the past twenty-five years reveals only slight improvement in the inclusion of the Spanish Empire in the American Revolution. *America: Past and Present* (1991) has one paragraph mentioning, «The French had formed a military alliance with Spain, and French officials announced they could not consider the details of an American settlement until after the Spanish had recaptured Gibraltar from the British. The prospects for a Spanish victory were not good, and in any case, it was well known that Spain coveted the lands lying between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River». There is no mention of any material assistance or North American battles.⁶ *The American Journey* (1998) merely remarks that «France persuaded Spain to declare war on

⁵ Philip D. Morgan and Jack P. Greene, «Introduction: The Present State of Atlantic History», in P.D. Morgan and J.P. Greene (eds.), *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 3-24.

⁶ Robert A. Devine et al., *America: Past and Present*, 3rd ed., New York, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1991, p. 155.

Britain...», «the Spanish fleet augmented the naval power of the countries arrayed against Great Britain», and «the Spanish entered the war and seized British outposts on the Mississippi and Mobile Rivers». None of the «important battles» mentioned in a table include Spain.⁷

Created Equal (2014) mentions «A year later, Spain –unwilling to ally itself directly with the upstart republic but eager to protect its vast American assets from Great Britain– entered the war on the side of France» and that Spain's ships joined the war at sea in 1779. It also included two paragraphs on Bernardo de Gálvez's early, careful neutrality and later military action on the Gulf Coast which prevented the British from gaining ground and cut supply lines to the interior of the continent. This culminated with the loss of Creek and Cherokee allies, which was «support that the British could ill afford to lose».⁸ Written in the same year, the open educational resource *U.S. History* (2014) simply mentions that the patriot leaders sent the Declaration of Independence to Spain in hopes of winning support and that «following, France's lead, Spain joined the war against Great Britain in 1779, though it did not recognize American independence until 1783»⁹

Despite the lack of support from textbook writers, educational agencies have made efforts to connect Spain and the United States during this period. The National Portrait Gallery, Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior de España, Smithsonian Latino Center, and the Fundación Consejo España-Estados Unidos organized an exhibition and symposium in 2007 called *Legacy: Spain and the United States in the Age of Independence, 1763-1848*. The advertising for this event noted that «although it is widely known that France was a key partner in the fight for American independence from Britain, few are aware that independence was only possible with the financial and military support of Spain». The symposium also noted that «the Spanish contribution to the American Revolution has been ignored and underestimated, with the belief that Spain was playing only second fiddle to France in this international conflict».¹⁰

Although not as well researched as the French involvement in the American Revolution, Spain's contribution to American independence is indeed no less important.¹¹ Thomas E. Chávez has even gone as far

⁷ David Goldfield et al., *The American Journey: A History of the United States*, Volume 1, Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall, 1998, pp. 107-110.

⁸ Jacqueline Jones et al., *Created Equal: A History of the United States*, 4th ed., Boston, Pearson, 2014, pp. 172, 176, 178-179.

⁹ P. Scott Corbett, U.S. History, Openstax College, 2014, <https://openstaxcollege.org/textbooks/us-history>.

¹⁰ Bethany Bentley, «Legacy: Spain and the United States in the Age of Independence, 1763-1848 - Opens at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery Sept. 27» *Smithsonian Latino Center*, 2007, http://latino.si.edu/SpainLegacy/Archive/english/Legacy_release_07_287A.pdf.

¹¹ One of the first real inquiries into the Spanish attitude during the American Revolution

as to state that «United States independence... probably would not have happened without Spain».¹² Spanish aid in the form of supplies and money helped stabilize the early American struggle, but more importantly Chávez notes that Spanish strategy actually won the war and ironically set in motion a chain of events that allowed the United States to become a transcontinental superpower.¹³ For Chávez, the Spanish did not involve themselves out of self-interest, rather through the generosity and caring of Charles III of Spain. Bernardo de Gálvez noted that Charles III, who before the war had familiar relations with colonial leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, desired to assist the Americans during their time of need.¹⁴

was by Charles H. McCarthy in 1916. His article serves as a seminal work that relatively few American historians have expanded upon (Charles H. McCarthy, «The Attitude of Spain during the American Revolution», *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2 (April 1916), pp. 47-65. McCarthy does note the inconsistent policy during the American conflict and stresses the Spanish Crown's desire to «impose peace upon [the British]» (p. 50) because of fear of providing an example of successful revolution in her own colonies. For McCarthy, the attitude of the Spanish changes from maintaining unrest of the Americans to «discouraging American advances» to exacting revenge for previous territorial losses and using the Americans to achieve retribution.

¹² Thomas E. Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States: An Intrinsic Gift*, Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 2002, p. 17. This point contradicts the assumptions of Samuel Flagg Bemis, a noted diplomatic historian, as well as other authors. In *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, Bemis suggests that «it is reasonable to assume that the Spanish participation was not a decisive military factor in the achievement of American independence» (p. 111). Newer historical contributions, particularly Chávez, have proved this to not be the case and show Spain to be active in the process of American independence. The section called «España y Los Estados Unidos: Las Primeras Relaciones» in Eduardo Garrigues López-Chicheri, *Norteamérica a Finales del Siglo XVIII: España y los Estados Unidos*, Madrid, Marcial Pons, 2008 contains a number of contributions that illustrate Spain's presence. Most notable of these are Vicente Ribes-Iborra, «La Era Miralles: El Momento de los Agentes Secretos», pp. 143-169, José A. Armillas Vicente, «Ayuda Secreta y Deuda Oculta. España y la Independencia de Los Estados Unidos», pp. 171-196, and Reyes Calderón Cuadrado, «Alianzas Comerciales Hispano-Norteamericanas en la Financiación del Proceso de Independencia de los Estados Unidos de América: La Casa de Gardoqui e Hijos», pp. 197-218. Light Townsend Cummins also makes the case that Spain hoped that the American revolutionaries would succeed, as it would diminish the size of the British Empire (Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1991). Cummins notes that while imperial Spain never supported the idea of revolution against a monarchy, its hatred for the British fueled its support of the United States. Even after Spanish agents warned Madrid of the future rise of United States' prestige and power, they sought to harm the British as much as they could. The presence of Spanish observers like Juan de Miralles allowed Spain to form relationships and gather information to «wait until conditions appeared propitious for Spain to take a more active role in the conflict». Like Chávez, he casts Spain again as a positive role player, eager to actively assist in the Revolution.

¹³ Thomas E. Chávez, *Spain and the Independence of the United States*, op. cit., pp.213-221.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 16. Chávez also notes Charles III's youngest son and his correspondence with Franklin that took place before Franklin's arrival in Paris.

Jonathan R. Dull's *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, provides a different perspective than Chávez's later work.¹⁵ While his position that the Americans could not have won without the aid of the Spanish is similar to that of Chávez, Dull largely disregards their contributions to the Revolution prior to their official alliance with the French in 1779.¹⁶ Dull even goes as far as to say that «Spain had no interest in American independence» during that time period.¹⁷ While this is a complete oversight, Dull does complement important aspects of the Revolution's historiography, particularly the primary goals and self-interest of Spain, and the self-righteous attitude of the United States and its disdain for other nations.¹⁸ This furthers the discrepancies between the traditional historiography, which utilizes the legacy of the Black Legend, and the more contemporary reactions to this legend.

Historiography aside, examination of Spanish primary source material illuminates much of the ambivalent diplomacy presented in this paper. Much of Spanish and American diplomatic correspondence still survives, as well as the domestic communication amongst officials. Yela Utrilla's seminal *España ante la Independencia de los Estados Unidos* is a principal source of Spanish correspondence, particularly between Spain's policy makers. He compiled the extensive Spanish diplomatic correspondence into a large work which provides access to text in the original language. This is valuable to students and historians who do not have easy access to Spanish archival material.¹⁹ Utili-

¹⁵ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1985, pp.161-162. Chavez's claim that Spain gained the most from the American Revolution, besides the now-independent colonies, is one major difference. Dull argues that Britain, despite its loss of the American colonies, actually gained the most in the long run because the French and Spanish policies during the revolution led to their eventual decline resulting in the French Revolution and the Spanish loss of empire

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 109-110. It is hard to speculate, though, what success the Franco-American relationship would have had without Spanish assistance, especially with increasing pressure from the League of Armed Neutrality (124, 126, 129-130) and Chávez, *Spain and the Independence...*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

¹⁷ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 149. This reference is particularly centered on John Jay's diplomacy with the British in negotiating peace with Great Britain. Dull notes here that a vindictive Jay was willing to push for the British recapture of Pensacola from the Spanish. The events surrounding Jay's mistreatment will be examined later in this paper.

¹⁹ At the time of the writing of this paper, no personal travel to archives has been possible. As I continue to move through my doctoral studies, I plan to make more use of specific AHN/AGI/AGS primary source material and expand my knowledge of Spanish secondary sources, such as that of M. Gómez del Castillo. Some useful sources include James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence Concerning the American Revolution», which provides both transcribed and translated Spanish correspondence, as well as Mario Rodríguez's *The 1776 American Revolution and the Spanish World: Essays and Documents*. Buchanan P. Thomson's *Spain: Forgotten Ally of the American Revolution* also offers translated copies of specific letters, as well as historical perspectives into

zation of older sources like these can help contextualize newer trends of interconnectivity and disruption of traditional national histories.

Relations between Spain and the United States during the American Revolution cannot simply be stated as iniquitous or righteous, but a thorough investigation of these relations reflects a Spanish attitude of ambivalence in diplomatic correspondence with the United States and its policies toward the nascent country. This ambivalence pervades the myriad of diplomatic misunderstandings, conflicts of interest, contradictions between the Crown's desired policies, the practical measures taken, and unrealistic expectations of King Charles III's chief minister, José Moñino y Redondo, Conde de Floridablanca. Careful examination of Spanish diplomatic correspondence of both countries' policies pertaining to East and West Florida and New Orleans, offers insight into the fluctuation of strategies employed there, and provides a case study of the ambivalent nature of the Spanish during the American Revolution.

Early Revolutionary Correspondence Pertaining to West Florida

Examination of early Revolutionary correspondence from 1776-1778 illuminates not only American interest in attacking British West Florida, but also the conquest of West Florida by the United States to facilitate negotiations with the Spanish in Louisiana and to help return Pensacola to Spain in order to gain commercial access to the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Understanding that the Spanish would be displeased with the simple replacement of the British by the Americans, United States leaders sought to achieve recognition from Spain and legitimacy as a nation. Given the fact that Americans revolted against their mother country, the United States genuinely feared a French and Spanish alliance with Britain to subdue the colonies. The report of a large number of French troops heading to the islands of Martinique, Santo Domingo, and Guadeloupe in 1776 exacerbated this apprehension.²⁰ Therefore, American diplomats desperately sought to enlist the aid of both the French and the Spanish.

the importance of the Spanish assistance during the war for independence. While Thomson's title is deceiving as Spain never allied with the Americans, his work nonetheless contributes to Spanish-United States historiography nine years prior to Dull's publication. Yela Utrilla's title in Spanish is *España ante la Independencia de los Estados Unidos*, while Rodríguez's is *La Revolución Americana de 1776 y El Mundo Hispánico: Ensayos y Documentos*. Thomson's *Spain: Forgotten Ally of the American Revolution*, Francis Wharton's *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States, Volumes 1-6*, and the Library of Congress', «A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation», online database all provide valuable correspondence in English from both Americans and Spaniards.

²⁰ James H. Hutson, «The Partition Treaty and the Declaration of Independence», *The Journal of American History* 58 (March 1972), p. 888. Americans were afraid of partition

The Gibson Mission in September 1776 further outlined the United States' intentions in West Florida. An officer named Colonel George Gibson delivered General Charles Lee's correspondence to Louisiana Governor Luis Unzaga y Amezaga to procure both supplies and a diplomatic relationship with the Spanish, explicitly listing West Florida as an objective.²¹ Unzaga y Amezaga forwarded this information to José de Gálvez, Minister of the Indies, focusing mainly on American trade aspirations without mentioning other American goals.²² In his letter to Gálvez, Unzaga y Amezaga delved into the particular military campaigns that the Americans wished to execute along the Mississippi River and into British West Florida. This action would bring American military forces extremely close to New Orleans in order to eliminate the British threat to the city, as they sought to capture their Gulf Coast ports.²³

Unzaga y Amezaga then noted his fear of the Americans' access to the Mississippi River and the threat that they posed to the security of the river, New Orleans, and the Gulf of Mexico. While the American military presence focused particularly on British West Florida, the close proximity to New Orleans and the relative ease in which Americans could move into this region illuminates not only his hesitancy to work with the Americans, but also an anticipation of future attacks. He prepared for this by placing all twenty of Spanish Louisiana's eighteen-pound canons at this location.²⁴

by Spanish, French and British Empires and were also flabbergasted at the partition of Poland. The Spanish were not interested in Poland, but did have interest in the United States in 1781. The main option for the American Partition Plot was to give Georgia and possibly SC to the British in exchange for peace, something that was staunchly opposed in the former colonies. This is found in Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence*, New York, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965, p. 178.

²¹ Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, «Spanish Projects for the Reoccupation of the Floridas during the American Revolution», *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 9 (August 1929), p. 266.

²² Unzaga y Amezaga to José de Gálvez, September 7, 1776, in James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence Concerning the American Revolution», *Hispanic American Historical Review* 1 (August 1918), p. 300. The Spanish text is provided as is without correction and this edition contains no accent marks. «Señor: Por la adjunta carta y papel que la autoriza comprendera V. Yltma la pretension del General Don Carlos Lee maior General, y segundo en el mando militar al servicio de los Estados Unidos Americanos, y comandante en Jefe del distrito del Sud, por los motivos que expresa y ventajas a los intereses de S. M. con el comercio sistemático que intentan aquellos Americanos, juzgandose ya independientes, establecer en nuestros puertos, a la que he respondido en los terminos que contiene la copia que acompaño».

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 301-302. «Que se proponen igualmente vajar la proxima primavera con un grueso destacamento, para desalojar y tomar posesion del terreno que ocupan varios Yngleses de el Manchak 35 leguas distante de esta villa en la margen derecha de este Rio, hasta el nombrado Ohio, y pasar por los Lagos Mourepas y Pontchartren que estan a dos leguas de nuestra espalda a tomar la Movila y Pansacola, con intento de inutilizar su puerto para precaverlo de su atacado por mar».

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 302. «La facilidad que tienen de introducirse en este Rio y desender a ponerse

Prior to sending this correspondence to José de Gálvez, Unzaga y Amezaga replied to Charles Lee's requests, rejecting some stipulations and approving others. Unzaga y Amezaga quickly rejected the notion of American trade in the Gulf of Mexico, while at the same time offering friendly relations with respect to harming the British in the region.²⁵ His quick response reveals both a central Spanish policy of containment in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as protection of territory and commerce in Spanish Louisiana itself.²⁶

In a new letter, the final correspondence regarding the Gibson mission again passed from Unzaga y Amezaga to José de Gálvez. This letter, dated three months after Unzaga y Amezaga's first memorandum, announced Charles III's approval of an American attack in West Florida and for the United States to acquire munitions and supplies from Spanish ports. This also included discussion of the transfer of Pensacola to Spain after the United States obtained independence. To avoid incrimination in the eyes of the British, however, Spain's involvement remained silent. This persisted as Spain's primary diplomatic stance throughout their period of neutrality up until their declaration of war June 21, 1779 as they tried to negotiate an amicable exchange of territory for a nonaligned status in the conflict. The word-

en seis dias delante de esta plaza, sin poderlo saver ni precaver Siempre lo he rezelado, pues al mismo tiempo que ellos llegara el aviso de nuestros puestos que es imposible lo execute antes por tierra por lo inaccesible del pais según tengo participado, y ahora lo ejecuto de estar construyendo baterias sobre dicho Rio para colocar los unicos veinte cañones de a 18 que tiene S.M. en esta Provincia, para con mas seguridad de la tropa que las sirva, defenderla de qualquier insulto a que puedan resistir sus fuerzas y para el mismo intento me parece combeniente, si es de la aprobacion del Rey se destine a esta rada la fragata el Bolante o Chambequin que por lo poco que calan podra entrar por las pasas de este Rio la que se destinase al mando del capitan de Fragata Don Joseph Melchor de Acosta que como practico de el podra ser mas util al servicio, en caso que intente alguna enbarcacion de guerra de uno u otro partido Yngles oponerse a las operaciones que según los accidente [s] que ocurran me sea indispensable executar».

²⁵ Unzaga y Amezaga to Charles Lee, September 4, 1776, in James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence...», *op. cit.*, pp. 305-306. «Mui Señor mio: La apreciable de V E he recibido, e instruido de su contesto despues de darles gracias por lo quo se interesa en el bien de la Nacion Española y por la solitudine de su amistad a la que deseamos corresponder con la maior sinceridad y buena fe, dire que me es imposible asentir al comercio Sistematico que proponen las provincias americanas establecer con nosotros, no obstante las ventajas que nos resultaran de su separacion de la Gran Bretaña, sin consultarlo COII mi Soberano el Rey de España a fin de que se digne hacerme saber sus Reales intenciones sobre un asunto que es en el dia el objeto de toda la Europa sin que en el interin deje de ofrecer a V E mis facultades para que las emplee en lo que fuere de su agrado y obsequio como en Ser-vicio y bien de las Provincias seguro de mi buen deseo en complacerla como podra testificar el embajador de ellas a quien he prestado mis auxilios y franqueandoles los arbitrios que pueden facilitarle sus intentos de socorrerlos».

²⁶ The use of colonials in the siege of Havana during the Seven Years' War also contributed to a desired exclusion of Americans.

ing of the original Spanish in particular offers a perspective of Spanish hesitancy and fear, while trying to show their strength. Though the ministers write that the capture of Pensacola would bring pleasure to the monarchy, inclusion of the insistence present in the American war goal reveals an almost begrudging attitude in cordial diplomatic correspondence.²⁷

The Willing Expedition in January and February 1778 also elucidates the ambivalent Spanish response and the problems inherent in their policy versus practice. Captain James Willing raided on his way from Fort Pitt to New Orleans, seizing prisoners, supplies, and ships from the British. Bernardo de Gálvez, the new Louisiana governor, allowed the captured ship *Rebecca* to be refitted by the Spanish in New Orleans and also gave the Americans permission to sell their war booty.²⁸ The British, well aware of the protection offered to the Americans, as well as the sale of the plunder, came to see the Spanish in Louisiana as nefarious. The harboring of Willing, coupled with other tension-building events such as ship seizures, caused Bernardo de Gálvez to an attack on New Orleans from forces in British West Florida.²⁹ Gálvez, encouraged by Willing and Oliver Pollock, a United States agent and merchant in New Orleans, even went as far as writing the Continental Congress asking for an American offensive in the region. Spanish diplomatic policy in 1778-1779 focused on American attacks in East Florida, especially under Spanish observers, but this division over a theater of operations proved to be moot as Gálvez's plea met with the following response:

²⁷ Unzaga y Amezaga to José de Gálvez, December 23, 1776, in James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence...», *op. cit.*, pp. 304-305. «Enterado el Rey de todo aprueba su re[s]puesta al General Lee y manda prevenir a este Gov.o que insistiendo los Americanos en su propuesta de tomar a Panzacola y los demas establecimientos Yngleses en la orilla derecha de aquel Rio, se le[s] manifieste con la mayor cautela y secreto que el Rey celebrara que lo consigan y que asegurado su independencia se tratara de la entrega que prometen a favor de la España. Que para facilitar ambos objetos se advierta tambien al Gov.r de Luisiana, que ira recibiendo por la Havana y quantos medios sean posibles los socorros de Armas, municiones, ropas y Quina que piden los colonos Yngleses y se le prefiriran los modos mas sagazes y secretos para que ocultamente los haga suministrar con apariencias de venderse los comerciantes particulares, a cuyo fines se enviara la correspondiente Ynstruccion reservada y alguna persona de comercio que sirva de testa de fierro».

²⁸ Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, *Spanish Projects...*, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

²⁹ Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, *Spanish Projects...*, *op. cit.*, p. 272 and John W. Caughey, *Bernardo de Gálvez in Louisiana: 1776-1783*, Gretna, Pelican Publishing Company, 1972, pp. 102 and 136. On January 10, 1779, José de Gálvez also learned from the Cuban Governor Navarro that fifteen-hundred troops were en route to Pensacola to attack New Orleans, should a Spanish declaration of war happen. José gave this information to Bernardo soon afterward. This information is in Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-105.

«...It is impracticable for these States now to undertake an enterpri[s]e of the magnitude necessary to take possession of and secure as well the country on the Mississippi, in the hands of the subjects of the King of Great Britain, as the other parts of the Floridas, which it will be necessary for the security of these states to hold, when circumstances will permit, recommended by Governor Galvez. That Governor Bernardo de Galvez be informed of the above resolution and be assured that from the favorable aspect of our affairs it is probable Congress will speedily be enabled to turn their attention to and operate effectually in that quarter».³⁰

Gálvez, through earlier communications, misunderstood the role that the Americans could play in West Florida and informed the Minister of the Indies that four to six-thousand Americans would descend on Pensacola during the summer of 1777.³¹ Gálvez wrote to his uncle José about a particular mission proposed by Colonel George Morgan to take West Florida by surprise, but that he must first have permission and support, as well as free access to trade. Bernardo responded to Morgan that he would like to aid in the conflict and allow freer trade, but that he could not make that decision.³² Gálvez noted that he did not believe that Spain would disapprove of an American attack on West Florida, rather «it is quite the thing for Spain to desire it».³³ Over the next two years, Gálvez never got his desired support from the United States, even though many American leaders, such as Robert Morris, still desired access to the Gulf of Mexico.³⁴

³⁰ Journals of the Continental Congress (JCC), October 31, 1778, in The Library of Congress, «A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation», <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/>. Juan de Miralles, a particular Spanish observer instituted a strong East Florida policy, but was not clearly backed by the Spanish court at that time.

³¹ Bernardo de Gálvez to José de Gálvez, June 9, 1777 in Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, *Spanish Projects...*, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

³² Bernardo de Gálvez to José de Gálvez, August 9, 1777 in James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence...», *op. cit.*, pp. 307-308. «Barcos para hirla a sorprender, pero que para ello será preciso sea con mi acuerdo, permiso y concurrencia y que en caso que no lo pudiese lograr Suplica la libertad de tratar y comerciar con esta jurisdicción. A lo que le respondí en los términos que explica la otra copia que también dirijo a V^o Ytilla para que S M quede instruido dle todo y me prevenga lo que fuere de su Real agrado».

³³ James A. Robertson, «Spanish Correspondence...», *op. cit.*, pp. 313.

³⁴ Letters of Oliver Pollock to the Continental Congress, March 6, 1778 and May 7, 1778, from the Library of Congress, in James A. James, «Spanish Influence in the West During the American Revolution», in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4 (September 1917), p. 331. It has been noted that Pollock in fact wanted the United States to gain control of the region at large, but may not have been feasible at that time. Pollock called for the creation of posts along the Mississippi River and the capture of Natchez, Manchac, and Pensacola, all of which would be returned to Spain in an effort to win trading rights in the region. Pollock also stressed that by seizing these locations: «The inhabitants of Kentucky and Illinois country would have a free navigation to come down the River with their produce to this place (New Orleans), where there is a good market or at our

John Jay, however, did not believe that United States had a right to conquer, nor should it invest in such a large venture.³⁵ If the Americans conquered the Floridas, Jay most certainly would have traded them for access to the Gulf of Mexico.³⁶ Although most did not follow Jay's perspective, any chance of the American conquest of the Floridas proved to be tenuous at best in 1779. The French also helped discourage American military incursions in the Gulf Coast region. Gérard de Rayneval's correspondence with Gouverneur Morris reveals his belief that Spain should retain all rights to the Mississippi and of the Floridas. Afterwards, Morris bought into this notion and prepared to concede the Mississippi River to the Spanish.³⁷ In their meeting with the French, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane also failed to achieve a definition of what territory the United States could conquer in North America.³⁸ Ultimately, overly ambitious American rhetoric from 1777-1779 paved the way for future disputes with both the French and the Spanish and an inconsistent Spanish policy for allowing United States military presence in the Floridas furthered tensions between both countries.

On September 17, 1779, Congress agreed to guarantee the Floridas to Spain, with the stipulation that Spain enter into an alliance with France and the United States and that Americans would have access to the Mississippi River. Jay voted against these terms, but this did not stop his appointment to the position of Minister Plenipotentiary, a position just under that of ambassador.³⁹ Jay's appointment set the stage for future animosity, most notably in his relations with Floridablanca. As Jay tried to secure relations with Spain, Floridablanca and the Spanish court refused to recognize him diplomatically and also excluded him from the societal functions of the court. This infuriated him and shaped his foreign future policy. After his months of frustration in Spain in 1780-1781, Jay subsequently began negotiations with the British. A vindictive Jay later pushed for the British recapture of

own establishments Manchac and Pensacola which will soon be preferable to this, as we can import our supplies of Goods immediately from Europe and dispatch them up to the back settlements quicker than from here. This being done the Country would get completely settled and flourishing commerce immediately take place after the war." This is from Pollock to the Continental Congress, July 17, 1779, in James A. James, «Oliver Pollock and the Free Navigation of the Mississippi River», *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 19 (December 1932), p. 333.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 331.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 335.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 335.

³⁸ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

³⁹ JCC, September 17, 1779, in Helen M. McCadden, «Juan de Miralles and the American Revolution», *Americas* 29 (January 1973), p. 367.

Pensacola in 1782, which illuminates increased tensions between the Spanish and the United States.⁴⁰

Jay, however, was not alone in remaining prudent with regards to the Spanish. Spanish negotiations with Richard Cumberland and reluctance to be war allies or to give substantial monetary aid caused further distrust of the Spanish.⁴¹ After the French quickly came to the aid of the Americans through substantial monetary means, the Spanish Crown failed to follow suit. This is not to say that the Spanish did not provide large sums of money and war materiel to the Americans, but not at the level of the French. Spain, in essence, attempted to buy out the British, offering to exit from the war and promising the return of New York to the British in return for the return of Gibraltar. By publishing these events in newspapers, the Spanish tried to pressure the French into accepting Spain's terms of war, but in the end made them look diplomatically imprudent in the eyes of the French and the Americans.⁴² By the end of 1780, a direct correlation exists between the increase of Spanish diplomatic ambivalence and the rise of American distrust of Spain. As American distrust increased, American resolve to negotiate with the British independently at the end of armed conflict also swelled.

The Different Policies of the Crown, Ministers, and Leaders in America

Originally, the Spanish Crown positively received the United States' proposal of the conquering and occupation of the Floridas and Gulf Coast region, but American interest in the Gulf of Mexico quickly led to an increase in Spanish imperial protectionism under the Bourbon reforms and the aspirations of Spain's ministers for a separate peace. Evaluation of the differing policies of ministers Grimaldi and Floridablanca, and that of Aranda, minister to France, is vital to clarifying Spanish objectives and contrasting them with American aims.⁴³ These leaders' policies best exemplified Spanish ambivalence towards the United States as perspectives changed from assistance to exclusion.

After the United States declared its independence from Great Britain, Spaniards initially felt empathy for the American cause. Just one

⁴⁰ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 149. A short-sighted Jay, infuriated after being treated poorly during his visit with Floridablanca, did not stop to think that a British Florida would have caused more problems for the Americans than a Spanish Florida. Since the Spanish retained Florida, it set the stage for future territorial disputes that ended with the United States acquiring Spanish lands.

⁴¹ Samuel F. Bemis, *Diplomacy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104. Cumberland had been sent by the British on a secret mission to secure a peace agreement with the Spanish Crown in 1780-1781.

⁴² Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History*, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

⁴³ This particularly pertains to early involvement of the Spanish in the Revolution, as well as Spain's desired gains by way of recompense.

decade before, the Spanish lost important pieces of their empire to the British in the Seven-Years' War. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the loss of Gibraltar and Minorca in the War of Spanish Succession, Spain's brief foray into the Seven-Year's war proved to be another setback on the global imperial stage. Spaniards, eager to seek retribution and return to the status quo before the Seven Years' War, initially supported the Revolution, as evidenced in the important newspapers, *Gaceta de Madrid* and *El Mercurio*.⁴⁴

The loss of the Spanish Floridas during the Seven Years' War did not prove to be devastating to the Spanish Empire, but did present strategic and economic problems in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.⁴⁵ British smuggling, logging practices, and close proximity to other Spanish imperial possessions moved Spain into a cautious and methodical mindset. Although the Spanish built up a large navy to prepare for future war with the British, conflict did not happen until 1779 as the sixteen-year period proved to be a time of political posturing, as well as an opportunity for Spain to focus on Portugal, an ally of the British. During the period of Spanish neutrality towards Britain, their policies revealed distinct dichotomies. The first part illustrates diplomatic policies versus diplomatic realities, while the second addresses the old historiographical terms of Old World versus New World. Both are intertwined as Spaniards on the Western half of the Atlantic recognized the realities present in North America, while the Crown itself remained more traditional than practical.

In April 1778, Governor Navarro, Captain General of Cuba, wrote to José de Gálvez discussing his aims. Havana, an important Caribbean port, had extensive trade connections and was one of the last ports for commercial traffic on its way to Spain. Navarro wrote a letter to Gálvez that he met with a tribunal council and outlined a plan to capture Florida. The council received extensive knowledge of Florida's terrain, its defenses, and the tribes that inhabited the Gulf Coast from an *indígena*, or a native Indian of Florida. Even more importantly, Navarro expressed his desire to secure the Bahama Canal to secure and control commercial traffic in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Frederick F. Harling and Martin Kaufman, eds., *The Ethnic Contribution to The American Revolution*, Westfield, Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts, 1976, p. 113.

⁴⁵ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 28. The entirety of Spanish Florida was not identical to British West and East Florida post-Seven Years' War. West Florida included French as well as other former Spanish territory.

⁴⁶ Governor Navarro to José de Gálvez, April 10, 1778 in Boyd, Mark F. and José Navarro Latorre, «Spanish Interest in British Florida and in the Progress of the American Revolution: Relations with the Spanish Faction of the Creek Indians», *Florida Historical Quarterly* 32 (October 1953), pp. 92-130.

At the same time, the Conde de Aranda, Foreign Minister to France, wrote a letter to el Conde de Floridablanca, Chief Minister of the Spanish Crown. Aranda, well-versed in ideas of the French Enlightenment, did not subscribe to traditional beliefs of the Crown. Instead, Aranda saw the birth of the United States as an unavoidable new epoch in history, and called for immediate diplomatic recognition and military assistance. Aranda was not particularly pro-American, however; Aranda believed in the inevitability of the collapse of empire and the realization of the United States as an even more dangerous threat to the Spanish.⁴⁷

The Spanish Crown, under the tutelage of Floridablanca, simply wished to return to the status quo of the pre-Seven Years' War era, with the exception of any commercial dependency on the British.⁴⁸ Like his predecessor Grimaldi, Floridablanca preferred a policy of patience, much to the chagrin of French Minister Vergennes and the United States.⁴⁹ France, while also hesitant at first, proved to be much more eager than their Bourbon neighbors.⁵⁰ Once the French officially joined in armed conflict with the Americans, it proved difficult to convince the Spanish to join the war. Floridablanca preferred peace negotiations to entice the British into a separate agreement rather than risk further losses through open warfare. By avoiding war with Spain, the British would not have to divert as many resources and the Spanish hoped to receive Gibraltar as part of the compromise. The British, however, felt that they had the military strength to fight the Spanish as well, ultimately dooming Floridablanca's original plan.⁵¹ Then, and only then, did the Spanish ally with the French. As Spain refused to recognize the United States, the only stipulation connecting them to the Americans was that the Spanish would fight alongside the French until the Americans achieved independence.⁵²

⁴⁷ Aranda went as far as to recommend the creation of three sub-monarchies in the Americas where princes ruled under the direction of the Emperor-King of Spain. This plan never materialized, but illustrates the freer thinking that Aranda exercised when compared to Floridablanca, particularly by 1783.

⁴⁸ Joaquín Oltra and María A.P. Samper, *El Conde de Aranda y los Estados Unidos*, Barcelona, PPU, 1987, p. 84. The Harling text also brings up the difference between France and Spain by stating that there was «No class of *philosophes* and no movement like the eighteenth century French enlightenment» (p. 113).

⁴⁹ José Martínez Ortiz, «Un Valenciano en la Independencia de los Estados Unidos», in *Revista de Historia de América* 50 (December 1960), p. 490. Ortiz notes that «El titubeo diplomático del Ministro español Grimaldi empañó, en cierto modo, la brillantez de aquella ayuda, que no por ello dejó de ser práctica y real, pues desde el primer envío de socorro a los americanos, en el año de 1776...»

⁵⁰ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁵² *Ibidem*, pp. 108-109. This price was not cheap for the French, as France had to agree to a joint attack on England herself, as well as remaining in the war until Gibraltar was

The April letter from Aranda to Floridablanca exemplifies the ambivalence of imperial policy towards the American Revolutionary movement as a whole. Aranda asked Floridablanca many questions, but imbedded in these questions are feelings of fear, uncertainty, and confusion. Aranda sees both the British and the United States as powerful, yet he did question whether the former colonies would return to British authority and how Spain should regain their former possessions from Britain. He noted that diplomatic recognition and support of the United States could prove beneficial if the Franco-American alliance won, especially in the removal of the British from former Spanish possessions, and possibly out of the Americas completely.⁵³ Aranda saw the advantages to helping the French and the Americans, but also proved to be hesitant in his relations with Floridablanca.

In 1778, Floridablanca's policy of patience did seem to be an attempt to benefit the Americans due to his use of mediation. A relaxed Floridablanca even proposed a plan that would grant America independence and diplomatic recognition.⁵⁴ Though his plan failed, a more positive Floridablanca provides a stark contrast with that of the early 1780s. When John Jay and Floridablanca finally met in May 1780, a full month after his arrival in Madrid, Jay presented the wishes of the United States. Floridablanca told Jay that Spain desired to give America what it could, but they would no longer assist them with loans. For Jay, it became increasingly evident that Spain's ambitions were diametrically opposed to those of the United States. An upset Benjamin Franklin wrote, «As yet they know us too little and are jealous of us too much».⁵⁵ For the Spanish, the issue of the Mississippi River proved to be their hang up. Floridablanca said that the Americans had no right to the river and that the King would never allow access to it. Later that year, Floridablanca strongly stated «that unless Spain could exclude all nations from the Gulf of Mexico they might as well admit all», and again that the King would never relinquish its access to the river, shutting out any of Aranda's ideas.⁵⁶

reacquired by the Spanish.

⁵³ «Despacho de Aranda a Floridablanca, 4 April, 1778» in Yela Utrilla, *España ante la independencia de los Estados Unidos*, Volume II, Lérida, Gráficas Academia Mariana, 1925, pp. 250-253.

⁵⁴ Charles H. McCarthy, «The Spanish Attitude...», *op. cit.*, p. 5. This plan included the following stipulations regarding the Gulf Coast region: 1. That England acknowledge the absolute independence of the colonies. 2. That she retain Canada and Acadia. 3. That she cede to the colonies all the Floridas except what was necessary for the protection of Spanish commerce in the Gulf of Mexico.

⁵⁵ James A. James, «Oliver Pollock...», *op. cit.*, p. 337.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 337. In Utrilla, Floridablanca even went as far as to call Jay «el mendigo,” or “the beggar.”

Floridablanca, who earlier provided assistance to the Americans' cause, became almost obsessed with the Spanish war aims of taking Gibraltar and complete exclusion of foreign commercial and political presence from the Gulf of Mexico. By the latter stages of the war, Floridablanca felt that the only purpose that the Americans served was to divert British attention from these areas. The inability of Aranda to effectively lobby his policies to the court removed any influence that he may have had with regard to the Americans. Ministers and governors in the lands surrounding the Gulf of Mexico felt more positively towards the Americans than the Crown did, they but still wanted to impose economic supremacy over them by controlling trade. Inconsistent policies, mixed feelings, and fear ultimately shaped the collective Spanish attitude of ambivalence towards the Americans and the role that Spain played during the United States' war for independence.

Spanish Observers

As Spain's objectives became more focused, Spanish observers played a role in shaping diplomatic relations regarding the Floridas, particularly the Eastern portion. Juan de Miralles and his successor, Francisco Rendón, pressed their personal agendas as well as those of the Crown while working alongside American leaders.⁵⁷ Originally a wealthy merchant in Havana, Miralles had personal relationships with merchants in various American ports.⁵⁸ Due to his experience with Americans, the Spanish Crown appointed Miralles as an observer and he traveled to the United States in 1778 to provide information to the Crown. While Spanish observers did not have diplomatic status and were not meant to be spies, they gathered strategic information and pushed both imperial and personal plans.⁵⁹ Observers used trading lanes to effectively export diplomatic communication and import supplies for the American cause, leading to a «tilted neutrality» with both the Americans and the British.⁶⁰ As Spain assisted the Americans through bullion

⁵⁷ Helen M. McCadden, «Juan de Miralles and the American Revolution», *Americas* 29 (January 1973), p. 372. According to McCadden, Rendón did not have the same enthusiasm that Miralles had, making him more a blip on the radar screen of history.

⁵⁸ Another useful article on the role of Miralles in the first relations between Cuba and North America is Nikolaus Böttcher, «Juan de Miralles: Un comerciante cubano en la guerra de independencia norteamericana», *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 57 (2000), pp. 171-194. Vincent Ribes Iborra, «Nuevos datos biográficos sobre Juan de Miralles», *Revista de Historia Moderna*, 16 (1997), pp. 363-374 also provides updated biographical information on Miralles and his role in the slave trade and diplomatic relations between the United States and Spain.

⁵⁹ Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers...*, *op. cit.*, p. XI. Utilizing Henry Laurens's term for Miralles, Light Townsend Cummins reintroduced the notion of the Spanish observer into American Revolutionary historiography as the best possible translation for the Spanish term *encargado*. This word does not effectively translate into English.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

and war materiel, they hurt the British while officially remaining neutral. Regardless of purpose, they sought to minimize United States influence and interference in the Gulf Coast region and maximize Spanish understanding of American capabilities and intentions.

Well-respected among American leaders, Miralles formed close relationships with leaders such as George Washington. Upon Miralles' sudden death in 1780, Washington wrote his condolences to Spanish leaders such as Governor Navarro of Cuba, speaking very fondly of Miralles.⁶¹ Although Miralles associated with these leaders and spoke the English language, he still promoted an agenda that represented the desires of the Spanish Crown, particularly to communicate American interests in former Spanish possessions and protection against a new, possibly formidable, power in North America: the United States.⁶²

Even before he received the diplomatic power to help influence Spanish policies, Miralles wished to keep the Americans out of the Gulf and off of the Mississippi River. Not only were Miralles's intentions ambivalent, but the case can be made that ambivalence shrouded the position of observer itself. Cummins notes how the «ill-defined and vague nature of his position reflected the division at the Spanish court regarding fundamental policy questions concerning the revolution».⁶³ In this quote, Cummins refers to two conflicting views in Spain: Aranda's full-scale recognition with alliance versus Floridablanca's refusal of recognition and alliance, while maintaining a greater distance by not granting diplomatic recognition. This inconsistency allowed for Miralles to push his own agenda, particularly the acquisition of East Florida.

As an observer, Miralles, on December 30, 1778, wrote Minister of the Indies José de Gálvez about his meeting with Congressional President John Jay and Conrad Alexandre Gérard, French Minister

⁶¹ Mario Rodríguez, «The Impact of the American Revolution on the Spanish- and Portuguese-Speaking World», in the Library of Congress Symposia on the American Revolution *The Impact of the American Revolution Abroad*, Washington, Library of Congress, 1976, p. 105. Miralles' funeral is further detailed in William S. Baker, «Itinerary of General Washington from June 15, 1775 to December 23, 1783», *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 15 (1891), pp. 65-66. Washington explicitly wrote about the secrecy that was preserved for the protection of Miralles and the Crown, in a way stating that the Americans had kept up their end of the bargain.

⁶² José Martínez Ortiz, «Un Valenciano...», *op. cit.*, p. 492 and Helen M. McCadden, «Juan de Miralles...», *op. cit.*, p. 360. Miralles was even accused of being disloyal to the Crown due to immersion in British-American society. He proved to be efficient, yet jealous of recognized authority, but it was his enthusiasm that set him apart from the other Spanish observers in North America (Ortiz, «Un Valenciano...», *op. cit.*, 495). Miralles has also been credited with shaping Spanish policy in the Gulf Coast region and spreading image of George Washington throughout the hemisphere, increasing his prestige, namesake, and reputation in the West Indies and Europe (Mario Rodríguez, «The Impact...» *op. cit.*, p. 105 and James A. James, «Oliver Pollock...», *op. cit.*, p. 334).

⁶³ Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

to the United States. In this letter Miralles conveyed an exaggerated report about the settlement of twenty-thousand people into the Illinois territory in a quick manner, with up to five thousand armed and prepared for defense. As British lands fell under the jurisdiction of the United States, additional people would move into the area with the goal of exporting goods by use of the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. Miralles also expressed the American intention to conquer British Florida to create additional states.⁶⁴ This alarmed the Spanish as they did not want the Americans in such close proximity to their settlements and trade markets. Two years later, Miralles again wrote to Gálvez about his role in facilitating Spanish policies. Miralles did not receive instructions about his role, but did hear from Gérard that he needed to address American interest in the use of the Mississippi River, American presence in the Floridas, and the fixed border of the Mississippi region.⁶⁵ Fearful that the United States would supplant Great Britain as Spain's chief territorial rival, Miralles again warned his superiors, but this time they largely ignored the issue.⁶⁶

Originally, Miralles tried to convince the Spanish Crown of the worthiness of Americans as allies and of the importance of capturing the Gulf Coast region, both for economic and territorial reasons.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ James A. James, «Oliver Pollock...», *op. cit.*, p. 334.

⁶⁵ José Martínez Ortiz, «Un Valenciano...», *op. cit.*, p. 494. «Señor: El Ministro Plenipotenciario de Francia me ha comunicado hoy que Monsieur de Vergennes le previene en carta de 8 de Julio último (que ha recibido hace ocho días por vía de Virginia) que me considera autorizado para tratar los asuntos de Nuestra Corte con el Congreso; que los puntos más principales eran Tres, que son sobre la navegación libre del Missipy a los americanos, la conquista por ellos de San Agustín de Florida, cederlo a la España, y arreglar las posesiones sobre el Missipy; pero que todo fuese con mi acuerdo: Le he dicho que yo me hallaba sin orden alguna ni instrucciones: que sin oponerme a que diese los pasos que su prudencia le dictase, le hacía presente que el punto de la Navegación del Missipy se había tratado precedentemente en el Congreso por Monsieur Gérard, quien a influencia más había resistido dicha Navegación como contraria a las intenciones e intereses de S. M., de que había resultado se dejase a su Real voluntad concederlo o no, y que las instrucciones dadas por el Congreso».

⁶⁶ Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 5. Prior to his appointment as observer, Miralles had married into a merchant family and grown wealthy by means of legitimate trade with Spain and illegal trade with foreign nations, most notably in North America but stretching as far as Africa. British-controlled St. Augustine was one of Miralles frequented ports, setting the stage for future interest in the liberation of this port for the Spanish. The Cuban merchants located in Havana, along with Miralles, desired both a protected market in East Florida, but also a new trading partner in the United States. By conquering the Mississippi territory and the Floridas, Spanish merchants could dominate the Atlantic and Gulf ports, and thereby reduce future competition with the Americans (361).

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 363-364. Miralles also built up the trade between the Eastern seaboard and Havana. Cuba imported many American goods while the United States imported luxury goods, war materiel, and loan money (368) and example: Morris to Franklin, September 27, 1782 in The Library of Congress, «A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation».

When Miralles later took on a larger role as a diplomat he pushed his East Florida policy harder, only to be met with the changing mindset of the Crown. The Crown quickly dispelled Miralles' hope for a joint attack on St. Augustine and stated it would never be attempted, even as a diversionary tactic. Bernardo de Gálvez's lobbying and the fall of Charleston effectively kept the Americans in the Atlantic and off of the Mississippi and Gulf of Mexico.⁶⁸ Miralles' hope for a Spanish-United States alliance also fell apart, as did American motives in West Florida.⁶⁹ While many of Miralles' diplomatic proposals to the Continental Congress never materialized, Miralles' contributions to trade networks and the importation of war materiel proved to be a very important part of the war for independence. Miralles, bound by conflicting diplomatic courses of action, still managed to successfully fulfill his undefined role as an observer and contribute to the larger sphere of ambivalent Spanish economic and political policies.⁷⁰

Spanish Offensives in Florida

After Spain declared war, Bernardo de Galvez's attacks on British West Florida excluded any joint operations with American military units. This further illustrates a growing ambivalence towards Americans and the Spanish fear of United States claims to the Gulf of Mexico, particularly of the Florida Straits. This led to an aggressive approach under the command of Gálvez to secure what J. Leitch Wright, Jr. called «Britain's fourteenth and fifteenth colonies».⁷¹ Though originally open to the idea of American conquest of West Florida and its transfer to Spain, the Spanish wartime strategy under Bernardo de Gálvez focused on the capture of West Florida before American forces could enter or the British could improve their defenses. Spain hoped that

⁶⁸ Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 154. The Continental Congress desired East and West Florida, but the Americans quickly lost the support of Foreign Minister Vergennes when they attempted to pursue the idea.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 155. Vergennes also wished for a Hispano-American alliance, but this proved to be impossible due to the ambivalent diplomatic policy of Spain towards the United States.

⁷⁰ Aileen M. Topping, «Alexander Gillon in Havana, 'This Very Friendly Port,» *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 83 (January 1982), pp. 34-49. This article provides fascinating diplomatic correspondence between Miralles, Navarro, and Commodore Alexander Gillon of South Carolina, but cannot fit in this paper due to page count restrictions. In short, the primary sources included tell of Spain's assistance to Gillon in 1782 to refit his ship at Havana and go to France under the protection of the Spanish to purchase three additional vessels, while meeting with general failure except for the retrofitting of his ship which was allowed by decree. After Miralles' death, Gillon and General Cagigal attempt to collect restitution in order to compensate his estate in Havana. Gillon and Cagigal later use this relationship to effectively capture the Bahamas.

⁷¹ J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Florida in the American Revolution*, Gainesville, The University Presses of Florida, 1975, p. IX.

a quick attack would eliminate the economic threat that the United States and the British posed to the Gulf Coast region, particularly New Orleans.⁷²

Bernardo de Gálvez pushed for an attack on West Florida and received the required support at the expense of earlier Spanish desires for East Florida.⁷³ While the Continental Congress failed to pass the measure, Gálvez's lobbying effectively shifted the planned military theater to West Florida. After the British captured Charleston, the notion of the ability of American forces to mount a substantial campaign in the South for the duration of the war proved fruitless.⁷⁴

After the declaration of war reached New Orleans in July, 1779, Gálvez called together a council of war to determine the best course of action. The council decided that their efforts would focus on defending New Orleans, but Gálvez felt that the Spanish should attack the posts and ports of British West Florida before they could adequately prepare their defenses.⁷⁵ The speed and effectiveness with which Gálvez attacked forts and towns in West Florida gained him much prestige in the eyes of the Crown. A handful of United States soldiers and an American privateer took part in assaults in the Eastern Mississippi region, but neither the Crown nor the Continental Congress sanctioned their actions. The quick capture of Pensacola, even after delays with the Spanish navy, effectively kept the United States out of the Gulf of Mexico. This policy change marked a turning point in Spanish-United States diplomacy from a slightly more positive relationship to a more

⁷² Merchants from the Eastern seaboard continued to trade with Oliver Pollock by way of the Atlantic Ocean. The more preferable route, however, was via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. War materiel was shipped to Fort Pitt and spread throughout the northern colonies. The people of New Orleans «cheerfully participated because of their sympathy for the Americans». As the early attitude of Spain promoted assistance, friendships between Spanish and Americans grew. One such friendship, between Bernardo de Gálvez and Colonel George Morgan fleshed out a joint attack plan against the British forts in Florida. Galvez changed his mind and like Unzaga y Amezaga before him, rejected the idea of an American army so close to New Orleans. The Continental Congress, in the end, rejected Morgan's proposal as well, ending any chance of military incursion by the United States. Charles H. McCarthy, «The Spanish Attitude...», *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁷³ The hopes of diplomats and the observer Miralles proved fruitless as an American attack on St. Augustine never materialized, mainly due to the inability of United States military units to leave Charleston. An attack on East Florida based out of Charleston would have cost too much money and stretched the army far too thin, even though Congressional President Samuel Huntington desired a joint attack on St. Augustine. From Light T. Cummins, *Spanish Observers, op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 158. Also, a great bibliography/historiography source for this is Jack D.L. Holmes, «The Historiography of the American Revolution in Louisiana Historiography», *Louisiana History*, 19 (Summer 1978), pp. 309-326.

⁷⁵ L.N. McAlister, «Pensacola during the Second Spanish Period», *Florida Historical Quarterly* 37 (January-April 1959), pp. 281-282.

negative one. The goals of the United States and Spain drastically diverged from this point on, as each government worked less in the interest of their partnership and more for self-serving interests.⁷⁶

The Surrender of Pensacola and Treaty Terms

The terms of the surrender of Pensacola and the Spanish-British treaty that ended armed conflict explicate the determination evident in Spanish policy of reacquiring Gibraltar and the territories lost through their 1763 treaty with Britain. The priority placed on negotiating their return, even to the detriment of their American partners, superseded the establishment of positive diplomatic relations. This policy ultimately led to the failure of Floridablanca's policy by way of future agreements, such as Pinckney's Treaty (Treaty of San Lorenzo), the Louisiana Purchase, and the Adams-Onís Treaty.⁷⁷ While these agreements fall out of the scope of this paper, they serve as important reminders of the long-term consequences of the American Revolution in the Spanish Empire.

After the Spanish entrance into the war, their negotiations with the British at times were more positive than those with Spain's own allies. The terms of surrender of Pensacola illustrate the lack of a strong stance against the British. Astonished Americans viewed the surrender provisions, with their utter laxity and generosity towards the British, in a negative light. Americans along the Atlantic seaboard were not

⁷⁶ S.F. Bemis notes in his book *Diplomacy of the American Revolution* that «the Spanish conquest of Florida was a positive advantage for the United States, simply because it replaced the British by a potentially weaker power on that frontier of future expansion». Fear of American incursion and influence in the Gulf Coast region ultimately weakened the position of the Spanish in the long run (p. 111).

⁷⁷ Pinckney's Treaty in 1795 opened up the Mississippi River to American shipping and ceded territory in present-day Mississippi and Alabama. This allowed American goods from the Northwest Territory, Kentucky, and what would become Tennessee in 1796 to travel into the Gulf of Mexico, just slightly over a decade from end of the war. United States presence in the Gulf of Mexico increased in 1803 as the Louisiana Purchase gave the Americans one of the most important coastal cities in New Orleans. It also removed the buffer between the United States and the Viceroyalty of New Spain, increasing border tensions and fear of American expansion. In the Adams-Onís Treaty, Spain finally ceded Florida to the United States which allowed for American coastal influence from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River as American shipping began to replace that of Spain in the Gulf of Mexico, particularly due to the loss of empire. For some additional information on the Mississippi River prior to Pinckney's Treaty, see José A. Armillas Vicente, *El Mississippi, frontera de España: España y los Estados Unidos ante el tratado de San Lorenzo*, Zaragoza, Institución «Fernando El Católico», 1977; Abraham P. Nasatir, *Spanish War Vessels on the Mississippi, 1792-1796*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968; Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier: 1783-1795*, Gloucester, Peter Smith, 1962; and Arthur Preston Whitaker, «New Light on the Treaty of San Lorenzo: An Essay in Historical Criticism», *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 15 (March 1929), pp. 435-454.

that upset that the British surrendered all of West Florida, but rather that the Spanish gave the British permission to remain in the city long after it fell and that the Spanish gave the British General permission to select his point of transfer to New York.⁷⁸ Spain gave British civilians an opportunity to settle their affairs, with some staying as long as eighteen months to sell their property and make proper arrangements abroad.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Americans still could not trade in West Florida and the Crown rewarded Bernardo de Gálvez for his expediency in securing the old Spanish territory by way of a promotion.⁸⁰

The repatriation of British soldiers captured in the fall of Fort George, at Pensacola disturbed the Americans even more. To the Americans' dismay, once a prisoner exchange between the British and the Spanish took place, the aforementioned soldiers could fight again.⁸¹ Americans viewed this as an act as being against their best interest, even though this time period permitted customary prisoner exchange. The Spanish sent many of these soldiers, at the request of British General John Campbell, to New York, via Havana, aboard Spanish ships at Spain's expense. This led to a great deal of resentment by American leaders. Although American desires for West Florida changed over the course of the war for independence, the seeming Spanish disregard for the United States furthered an apparent ambivalent policy.⁸²

In preliminary negotiations with Britain after the Battle of Yorktown, the United States sought the removal of British forces from the United States, diplomatic recognition as an independent country, and the acquisition of lands west of the Appalachian Mountains and east of the Mississippi River. These negotiations began in April 1782, one month prior to the joint assault on Nassau and five months prior to the last Spanish assault on Gibraltar.⁸³ The Americans completed the pro-

⁷⁸ L.N. McAlister, «Pensacola...», *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁷⁹ Frederick Cubberly, «Fort George (St. Michael), Pensacola», *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 6 (Abril 1928), p. 230. One civilian, William Panton, was allowed to stay and continue trade relations with local natives, having only to swear an oath of allegiance to Charles III of Spain.

⁸⁰ L.N. McAlister, «Pensacola...», *op. cit.*, p. 287.

⁸¹ Albert W. Haarman, «The Spanish Conquest...», *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁸² It was the American frontiersmen, west of the Appalachian Mountains, who were angered the most by the cession of British West Florida. The frontiersmen, numbering seventy-five thousand by 1785, posed the biggest threat the Spanish interests in their desire to reach the Gulf of Mexico. When fervor had almost reached its peak, Josiah Quincy said, «We want West Florida. Our western brethren will have West Florida. By God we will take West Florida». L.N. McAlister, «Pensacola...», *op. cit.*, pp. 292-293.

⁸³ Further ambivalence is evident in the events that transpired after the conclusion of Spanish attacks on the Bahamas and Gibraltar at the end of the war. Spain created a plan to attack Jamaica, but the operation never materialized as the British crushed Admiral de Grasse's fleet near Guadeloupe. In the attack on the Bahamas, Americans and Spanish worked hand-in-hand to achieve complete victory for the first time in the war. General

visional articles of peace and approved them on November 30, 1782 in Paris, France.⁸⁴ The quickness in which the Americans attained peace caught both the Spanish and the French off guard, hurting their respective positions at the bargaining table.⁸⁵ The diplomatic recklessness of the United States hurt Vergennes' original plan to achieve the allied Franco-Spanish terms. British diplomats did not feel that their population would support the loss of the American colonies and Gibraltar/Minorca, and with the Americans now out of the conflict, the British could turn their attention solely on the Spanish. The Spanish transmission of Minorca, Santo Domingo, and West Florida in exchange for Gibraltar fell through, as did George III's plan to trade Gibraltar to gain Minorca, West Florida, and Puerto Rico.⁸⁶

Even though the Spanish previously negotiated with the British both secretly and publicly and did not have a formal alliance with the Americans, the Spaniards took great insult to their actions as well as the terms of the preliminary negotiations.⁸⁷ Spain's inability to capture Gibraltar cost them time to meet with the Americans, and Spanish diplomats were furious that the Americans settled with Britain without Spain's participation. An incensed Floridablanca even stated that the independence of the United States was a great misfortune.⁸⁸ This

Juan Manuel de Cagigal persuaded Commodore Alexander Gillon to a joint attack on Nassau, justifying the assault to Bernardo de Gálvez saying that the acquisition of the important observation point could aid in the protection of a now-defenseless Havana. Securing the Bahamas would also provide defense against the disruption of trade and the flow of contraband in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Gillon was essential to the plan as he had intimate knowledge of the waters that would be navigated in the surprise attack, as well as the use of his superior flagship *South Carolina*. Bernardo de Gálvez noted this reliance on the Americans when writing to his uncle, José in Madrid. Later, Spanish officials relieved Cagigal of command and then arrested him and shipped him back to Spain as a prisoner of state. There he stood court-martial for the Bahama expedition, securing contraband, and failure to arrest and send a particular smuggler to Spain, and was sentenced to four years in prison. While the other charges played a role in his imprisonment, it was ultimately the joint-attack with the Americans that doomed his cause. Instead of using Spanish ships, Cagigal's preference for Gillon illuminates not only the offense taken by the Spanish navy through their omission from the conflict, but a negative feeling towards American partnership in the late stages of the war, even though they achieved their objective without a single loss of life or ship. From Eric Beerman, «The Last Battle of the American Revolution: Yorktown. No, the Bahamas! (The Spanish-American Expedition to Nassau in 1782)», *Americas* 45 (July 1988), pp. 86-94, including Bernardo de Gálvez to José de Gálvez, June 7, 1783.

⁸⁴ JCC, August 6, 1783, in The Library of Congress, «A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation».

⁸⁵ Richard B. Morris, *Peacekeepers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 309. Floridablanca tried to get Vergennes to hold up peace negotiations until Gibraltar could be secured by military means, but the Americans proceeded on without them.

⁸⁶ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

⁸⁷ Richard B. Morris, *Peacekeepers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 423.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 423.

further sheds light on the ambivalent nature of a government that appeared cordial and supportive in private, and seemingly hard-lined and uncaring in public.

While negotiating with the British, the American diplomats also parleyed with the Spanish. Since the Americans and the Spanish did not have a formal agreement, these negotiations took the connotation of establishing boundaries more than divvying up the spoils of war. Three main issues divided the Spanish and the Americans: diplomatic recognition of the United States, free navigation of the Mississippi River, and American territorial claims to the west of the Appalachian Mountains. The 1782 negotiations between Franklin, Jay and the Conde de Aranda in France failed as a whole. The Spanish did not recognize the United States for some time, nor did they allow access to the Mississippi River. The Spanish also tried to limit the territory of the United States to the east side of the Appalachian Mountains as outlined in King George III's Proclamation of 1763, which provided a substantial buffer between the Americans and Indian territories.⁸⁹ Floridablanca convinced Vergennes that the Americans should not be allowed into Western territories, but could not convince him that France should not recognize the United States until Spain captured Gibraltar.⁹⁰ Spanish discourse during their direct negotiations with the Americans reveals continued ambivalence, as they sought to keep the Americans in the conflict until the completion of the conquest of Gibraltar, while also excluding them from the political, economic, and territorial stages of Western society.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 306.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 308-309.

⁹¹ Aranda conducted negotiations with the British in 1782. His instructions were simple, but the failure to achieve them threatened the devastation of his position and legacy. In his meeting with British negotiators, the Crown entrusted Aranda with the task of removing English logwood cutters from the Gulf Coast region, securing the exclusion of all foreigners from the Gulf of Mexico, and obtaining Gibraltar and Minorca. Spain had already captured Minorca, but the supreme war objective of conquering Gibraltar failed. Nowhere in these instructions was any mention of achieving recognition of the United States or the acquisition of British East Florida; in fact, they called for the exclusion of Americans from trade in the Gulf of Mexico and the reacquisition of lands far from North America, particularly Gibraltar and Minorca. From Charles III to Aranda, August 26, 1782, in Richard B. Morris, *Peacekeepers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 388. In their 1783 negotiations, the Spanish and the British found common ground in the exclusion of United States shipping rights in the Gulf Coast region (Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History...*, *op. cit.*, p. 159). American exclusion from both the Gulf Coast and the Caribbean trade markets benefitted the British as it set the precedent for years of dominance over American trade. Americans relied heavily on the British in the years following the Revolution, though they did increase their illicit trade with the Spanish, particularly in New Orleans (C. Richard Arena, «Philadelphia-Spanish New Orleans Trade in the 1790's», *Louisiana History* 2, (Autumn 1961), p. 431). Exclusive commercial control proved to be untenable for Spain, as special trade privileges complemented the smuggling

Conclusion

The Spanish Bourbon King Juan Carlos I, accepting an award given to the nation of Spain in 1993 celebrating the two-hundred fiftieth anniversary of the American Philosophical Society, spoke about the Spanish role in the American Revolution. Juan Carlos noted that Spain contributed to the United States' struggle for independence with subsidies, loans, arms, and military involvement and friendly relations between Spain and the United States continued after the peace. He spoke of a story about a time when Thomas Jefferson visited Paris. Floridablanca mediated with the sultan of Morocco for American prisoners, prompting Jefferson to write to James Monroe, «We hear nothing from Spain but that they do us friendly turns with other nations».⁹² On the other end of the spectrum, Mario Rodríguez, participating in the American bicentennial celebration, wrote that «[The] awareness of the American Revolution's meaning for the Spanish colonies helps to explain the almost pathetic policy of non-recognition and the containment of the American cause by Spain». He does go on, though, to address the important reforms initiated throughout the Spanish Empire as a result of the Declaration of Independence.⁹³ Spain's diplomatic relationships and policies with the United States during the American Revolution cannot simply be seen as cordial and strong or hostile and overly protective. It is the grey area, or the nuanced middle ground, that the Spanish-American relationship really fell into.

The aspirations of American foreign policy towards Spain were relatively simple, necessitated by the inferior situation caused by the United States' nascent national position in the western political and economic arena. American diplomatic inexperience and recklessness, coupled with self-interest of attaining independence, impacted France and Spain from the start of the war until the negotiating table. Securing both access to the Gulf of Mexico and a significant war ally, however, served as the primary foundation of the United States-Spanish relations. Ultimately, the Spanish Crown's strong desire to recover Gibraltar and control the trade conduits of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, while at the same time excluding the Americans from the

of contraband. The ineffectiveness of the Spanish in keeping the Americans out of their ports exemplifies the realization of their fears from the 1770s and helped pave the way for future Spanish-United States treaties. With regard to the exchange of territories, Spain simply traded the Bahamas, which they captured with the aid of the Americans, for East Florida, a place where troops had never fought.

⁹² Juan Carlos I, «Spain and the American Philosophical Society», *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 137 (December 1993), p. 477.

⁹³ Mario Rodríguez, «The Impact of the American Revolution on the Spanish and Portuguese-Speaking World», in *The Library of Congress Symposia on the American Revolution. The Impact of the American Revolution Abroad*, Washington, Library of Congress, 1976, pp. 103-105.

Gulf and protecting its imperial interests from the increasingly powerful British Empire, shaped Spain's complex, evolving, and most importantly, ambivalent, foreign policy towards the United States during and after the American War for Independence.