

---

# TOPICAL REVIEW

---

## RESEARCH IN THE SPANISH BORDERLANDS: INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD ANYONE BE INTERESTED IN THE SPANISH BORDERLANDS of the southeastern United States during the last years of the Spanish occupation, and what has occurred that makes the area of more than passing interest at the present time? First, this area of Spain's New World colonial empire was unique. And second, the availability of a significant amount of new source material has given rise to a healthy increase in scholarly interest and productivity during the past decade.

The Spanish Borderlands east of Texas were unique. Spain had inherited an area in which the bulk of the non-Indian population was French in Louisiana and Anglo-American in the Floridas. Many of these non-Spaniards remained in the Spanish provinces. The acquisition of Louisiana in 1762 and the Floridas in 1783 also ushered in a drastic change in immigration policy. Previously, the Spanish had for the most part excluded foreigners from their colonies. Spain encouraged French Acadians and Germans to come to Louisiana and Anglo-Americans to the Floridas. During this era, little effort was made to reestablish the mission system with the Indian serving as the colonist because it had proven unsuccessful in the face of serious foreign threats. But colonization of the area represented only one of the problems facing Spain.

This was also Spain's first confrontation with the newly created American republic, the United States. It meant a new series of crises for the Spanish Bourbons: disputes over the boundary between the Floridas and the United States, navigation of the Mississippi River and competition for the loyalty of the Indians in the debatable land. These problems plagued the diplomats of both countries for a dozen years and more.

In the trans-Appalachian frontier sinister schemes were concocted to separate the West from the United States or to wrest Louisiana and the Floridas from Spain. General James Wilkinson emerged as one of the biggest scoundrels in the history of the American West. Aaron Burr, the former vice president, intrigued with Wilkinson, fell victim to his duplicity, and became the central figure in one of the most

celebrated hearings on the American frontier. George Rogers Clark, put aside his bottle long enough to accept a commission from Citizen Edmond Genêt as "Major General of the Independent and Revolutionary Legion of the Mississippi." Dr. James O'Fallon conspired with Clark, married the General's sister, and on one occasion received a beating from his brother-in-law. Thomas Washington, an associate of O'Fallon's in the South Carolina Yazoo Company, was hung for counterfeiting. Alexander McGillivray, the famous Indian leader, equalled any of the American or Spanish conspirators. William Augustus Bowles, soldier, gambler, lover of Indian women, and incidentally, Director General of the Creek Nation, cannot be overlooked. Gregor McGregor, General George Mathews, Panton Leslie and Company, and the Seminoles played important roles in East Florida. The Spanish governors and diplomats in America, Esteban Miró, the Baron Carondelet, Manuel Gayoso, Vicente Zéspedes, Diego de Gardoqui, and Luis de Onís, listened and often encouraged the schemers. Most of these men combined the qualities of heroes and villains. It was an exciting epoch in the history of the Spanish Borderlands.

To meet the challenge and to govern the region Spain established its colonial administration, although modified by the influence of the frontier and the innovations of the "Bourbon Reforms." The intendant, introduced in other Spanish colonial areas, was also created in Louisiana and West Florida; but the office of syndic was peculiar to these provinces. Innovations in the law were made to accommodate Anglo-Americans. Religious tolerance, although not religious freedom, was practiced. Spanish policy in this part of the borderlands revealed a flexibility not normally credited to their administrators in the New World.

Spanish Louisiana and the Floridas shaped and influenced the early Latin American policy of the United States. Before there was a Lone Star Republic in Texas, West Florida rebels had declared their independence and raised their own "lone star" flag. Out of the West Florida controversy emerged the "no-transfer" principal later incorporated in the Monroe Doctrine. Negotiations over the Floridas resulted in the conclusion of one of the most significant treaties in United States history, the Adams-Onís or Transcontinental Treaty. The diplomacy of the period has attracted some outstanding historians, but the final word on these matters has not yet been written.

The following studies cover the major geographic regions which constituted the Spanish provinces of Louisiana, East and West Florida. These three provinces have been divided into five areas for the purpose of this project: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, East and West Florida. The authors have attempted to do three things. First, to discuss within recognized limits what has been written on their particular area of concentration. Second, to indicate what they think still needs to be done. And third, to point out where the material for a further study of the area can be found.

Since the areas, topics and personalities discussed in the reports often tend to complement each other a common bibliography for all five studies was used. We have attempted to provide a comprehensive and an up-to-date listing of references

RESEARCH IN THE SPANISH BORDERLANDS

without claiming by any means that it is definitive. It should provide a good beginning bibliography for the study of most subjects pertinent to the eastern Spanish Borderlands. It is hoped that this joint effort will prove helpful and useful to students and scholars alike.

William S. Coker