Intrigue in Cumberland:
New Perspectives on the Spanish Intrigues and U.S. Expansion

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The American Historical Magazine......................AHM

The Journal of East Tennessee History ....JETH

Annual Report of the American Historical Society
for the Year 1945....................................AHA

Introduction

In the late fall of 1785, Anthony Bledsoe looked on curiously as a strange visitor approached his tiny settlement nestled along the banks of the Cumberland River. Situated in the middle of a vast, Indian controlled wilderness with a single road leading to the North Carolina homes most of them had left behind five years prior, Bledsoe and his fellow settlers were unaccustomed to visitors. Figures on the horizon were typically a call for alarm as rogue Indian raiding parties from the Creek and Cherokee nations still besieged their homes on an almost daily basis. The lone figure of Don Luis Chachere, however, appeared relatively harmless. Trust was a luxury rarely afforded on the American frontiers, however, so Bledsoe made a point to interrogate the visitor as to the reasons behind his coming to Cumberland before he would engage him in any serious conversation. Chachere would later recall that Bledsoe "said to me that he had taken this step because the inhabitants feared that I was a spy sent by the Spanish Government."[1] Chachere vehemently denied the accusation. After some additional questioning, Bledsoe reluctantly accepted Chachere's promises. Chachere noted that "he did not seem to be entirely satisfied with my reasoning," even though he "did not openly reject it."[2] Chachere, however, continued to assert that he had no connection to the Spanish.

After touring the Cumberland settlement and talking at length with Bledsoe and his fellow frontiersmen, Chachere bid them goodbye and promptly returned to Louisiana to report the finding of his covert expedition to Francisco Bouligny, the standing governor of Spanish Louisiana. Don Luis Chachere thus completed his mission as a spy for the Spanish Crown.

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[1] Don Luis Chachere to Francisco Bouligny as attachment to Esteban Miro to Bernardo de Galvez, December 10, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 138-141.
[2] Ibid.

Why was the mighty Spanish Empire sending spies into this tiny, remote American settlement along the Cumberland? Why was a visitor to Cumberland greeted first with an interrogation instead of a handshake? The answer lies in a series of diplomatic maneuvers that have dominated the historical narrative of America's southwestern frontier from 1780-1795 and are collectively known as the Spanish Intrigues. While large portions of the Old Southwest, including the areas that comprise East Tennessee and Kentucky today, were actively engaged in the secessionist talks with the Spanish Crown that commonly defined the intrigues, Cumberland stands as a unique anomaly. Unlike the larger, better organized East Tennessee and Kentucky settlements, Cumberland faced almost complete isolation from the seaboard states at the same time that it struggled against protracted Indian resistance.

As the most remote of the early westward white settlements, it was perilously cut off from both its parent state of North Carolina and the U.S. central government. Additionally, it sat squarely in the middle of a vast region of hotly contested Indian hunting grounds that had been acquired a decade before by speculator Richard Henderson via a somewhat questionable treaty with three Cherokee chiefs at Sycamore Shoals. The dangers inherent in simply travelling to the Cumberland region, let alone living there, were enough to deter most settlers. Cumberland's population was therefore quite small throughout the 1780s and early 1790s. It had an agricultural, subsistence economy and could barely defend itself against roaming Indian raiders that continued to plague its outer homesteads.

Again, the question of why Spain would concern itself with spying on such a settlement arises. Until now, the answer has been extremely vague. Many historians have neglected Cumberland due to the diminutive size that makes Spain's interest so perplexing. Its historiography has, therefore, remained generally unsatisfying. As a lifelong Middle Tennessee

resident with great interest in the history of the Early Republic in my home region, I found this sparse historiography to be unacceptable when I happened upon a brief discussion of "Spanish Flirtations" in a general history of Tennessee.[3] By closely examining the Cumberland settlement and its role in the Spanish Intrigues, I hope to examine America's early westward expansion from the perspective of its most isolated and besieged settlers.

* * *

Literature Review

The existing historiography of the Spanish Intrigues can be broken down into four basic categories: diplomatic histories, general histories, close histories, and comparative histories. While each approach succeeds in unveiling particular facets of the overall narrative, they fall short of adequately addressing a very specific yet vital component of the Old Southwest's history: the evolution of Cumberland's role in the intrigues. This paper will draw on all four categories as well as original research in order to analyze the full complexity of Cumberland's diplomatic and political endeavors from 1780 to 1796 within the context of the Spanish Intrigues. To harness the unique strengths of each category, I have focused the primary themes of each category on Cumberland through the lens of detailed primary research.

The first and arguably most important category of literature surrounding the Spanish Intrigues is composed of diplomatic histories. Characterized by their attention to international relations and 'big picture' narratives, these works emerged in the early twentieth century. Samuel Flagg Bemis' *Pinckney's Treaty* (1926), A.P. Whitaker's *The Spanish-American Frontier* (1927), and Thomas Abernethy's *The South in the New Nation* attempted to flesh out the work of previous historians, such as Theodore Roosevelt, who had analyzed the intrigues via

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[3] Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 36.

purely American sources. As Bemis stated in the preface to *Pinckney's Treaty*, "It was apparent that no investigations of the Spanish negotiations had been made outside of purely American archives." *Pinckney's Treaty*, therefore, was "the result of [his] endeavor to fill that gap in diplomatic history."[4] Bemis' decision to utilize more Spanish records than previous scholars marked the first attempt to critically compare American and Spanish reactions to frontier activities during the intrigues. Yet he considered the intrigues only "insofar as was germane to the diplomatic story" and present in "principal sources" of an "American and European" nature. He admitted that "the task of a more intensive study" must be left to some later historian.

The historian that he charged with this task was A.P. Whitaker. "We may await with interest," Bemis stated, "the results of [Whitaker's] laborious and lengthy investigations into the thousands of Spanish colonial documents which I have covered only in a most summary manner."[5] While Bemis' treatment had focused solely on events that could be immediately linked to either the Jay or Pinckney treaties, Whitaker attempted to include "the influence of the frontier underworld on the formal diplomacy between Spain and the United States."[6] Using both Bemis' work and his own extensive experience in the Spanish Archives, Whitaker sought to frame the intrigues within the context of the region instead of a particular treaty.

While Whitaker succeeded in increasing regional focus, he still fell short of escaping the precedent set by Bemis. Cumberland, Franklin, and Kentucky were 'lumped' together as a mostly homogeneous group of frontiersmen despite their vastly different situations. Only in Chapter VIII did Whitaker attempt to address each region as a distinct entity. This chapter,

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[4] Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study Of America's Advantage From Europe's Distress 1783-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1926), iii.
[5] Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty*, x.
[6] Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier 1783-1795: The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927), contained within the unpaginated "Acknowledgement" and "Introduction" sections at the beginning of the work.

however, is only fourteen pages long with Cumberland claiming a whopping two of those fourteen. Claiming a lack of space, Whitaker asserted that it was enough to say that the intrigues began in April of 1788, were driven by a static set of diplomatic forces, such as inducement of Spain to restrain the Indians or coercion of North Carolina to cede its western territories, and lasted for only a very brief period. [7] This opinion, however, represents a gross understatement of both the forces that drove the intrigues and the timeline over which the intrigues took place. Not only did the roots of intrigue begin far before April of 1788 and exist until 1795, but the underlying forces and strategies that fueled the intrigues were highly dynamic and evolutionary. Thomas Abernethy perpetuated Whitaker's simplistic view in his *The South in the New Nation* with the assertion that after Cumberland was integrated as a U.S. territory in 1789, "no more was heard of the Spanish Conspiracy in the country which was soon to become the State of Tennessee."[8] This gaping hole in the historiography is what I hope to fill. While the efforts of diplomatic historians were commendable for the international significance they established, their sparse treatment of local developments leaves much wanting, especially for Cumberland in the post 1789 period.

Yet in the decades after Bemis, Whitaker, and Abernethy, historical thought diverged little from their example and, instead, morphed into the next broad category of intrigue literature, the general histories. Two subcategories, however, did manage to develop. Some historians held closely to the Bemis model and focused on major diplomatic events, such as treaties and conventions, while emphasizing the actions of high profile national and regional leaders. Other historians published material more akin to Whitaker's regional work. In often drab, 'text-book' fashion, they described general

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[7] Whitaker, 112-13

[8] Thomas Abernethy, *A History of the South: The South in the New Nation 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 60.

trends in frontier communities and superficial accounts of frontier interactions with Indian and foreign nations as they fell beneath the wake of an inevitable Anglo-American onslaught. In the words of J. Folmsbee, author of *History of Tennessee* (1960), the era of Spanish intrigue "was but a part of a general tendency toward secession which characterized much of the American West at the time." According to Folmsbee, the fact that the Americans "were willing to initiate such an intrigue in connection with their secessionist activity was not due to any love they had for the Spaniards" but was "based instead on the idea 'if you can't lick 'em, join 'em."[9] Such simplistic reasoning lacks sophistication and falls well short of explaining the reality of America's often haphazard expansion westward. More factors than just 'if you can't lick 'em, join 'em,' went into the often sophisticated if sporadic decisions that shaped America's discordant westward advances.

The general histories, therefore, compose the most problematic category of available literature. Their scope, which chronicles Tennessee history from its geological conception through modern times, leaves little room for extensive coverage of any one period. Even such recent histories as Bergeron, Ash, and Keith's *Tennesseans and Their History* and John Finger's *Tennessee Frontiers* retain a nonchalant tone when considering the impact of the intrigues. The complexity of their analyses is generally limited to a dismissal of the episode as an interesting anomaly in America's relentless march west. Frontiersmen, Indians, and Spaniards are all marginalized as mere actors in a play whose script had already been written.

The third category of literature is composed of '*close histories*.' I have defined close histories as those texts written within 100 years of the intrigues. Their proximity to the intrigues

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[9] Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, *History of Tennessee* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1960), 173-4.

makes them hybrid sources that can provide both secondary analysis and primary data not present in later and more detached histories. Works such as J.G.M. Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee* and John Haywood's *Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* provide detailed accounts of events and individuals involved in the intrigues absent from later texts. The close histories, however, are often bogged down in the literary conventions of the 19th century. This makes their writing styles cumbersome at best. Valuable data is buried within poorly labeled chapters and masses of unrelated data. The contribution of these texts to the overarching narrative of intrigue, therefore, is severely limited. Ties between events are lost or confused as they are strung over tens or hundreds of pages of unrelated or overly detailed material. In addition, the tone of such works are often overly celebratory of American actions and focus on telling stories of triumph more than accurately recording historical events.

The final major category of literature is composed of comparative histories. Emerging from recent trends in historical thinking that emphasize the explanatory power of comparative analysis and specialization, these histories focus on highly specific issues within greater historical questions. For example, in "Remapping Boundaries in the Old Southwest, 1783-1795," Daniel Usner argues that "in order to rescue what actually happened inside contested regions, it is useful to examine boundaries and borders under the new light of comparative and theoretical analysis." By focusing on the boundaries of present-day Mississippi and Alabama, Usner was able to conclude that "local and intercultural relations were intertwined with international negotiations" along three boundaries: "the international boundary between nation-states or empires, boundaries between and around societies situated on the borderlands, and boundaries between ethnic groups within both indigenous and colonial territories."[10] Usner's

[10] Daniel H. Usner, "Remapping Boundaries in the Old Southwest, 1783-1795" from Tamara Harvey and Greg O'Brian, *George Washington's South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 25.

argument that small-scale interactions across local boundaries were intertwined with negotiations happening at the international level has been crucial in guiding my research as it pertains to explaining relations between frontiersmen, Indians, and Spaniards; however, the question of boundary interactions accounts for only one facet of the specific story I hope to tell. While Usner's three boundaries certainly existed in Cumberland, their use to my research rests largely in their power to help me decipher the issues underlying the written dialogues of frontier leaders and their correspondents.

Another example of these comparative histories is Colin Calloway's *White People, Indians, and Highlanders*. Published in 2008, the text analyzes the similarities between Highlander and American Indian cultures as a means of explaining their complex cultural interactions that took place on the early frontiers. Calloway's book traces "the experiences of two groups of peoples on the fringes of the same empire at roughly the same time" and "how they dealt with one another when they met in multiple American contexts."[11] In similar fashion to Usner, Calloway focuses his efforts on explaining a singular facet of the vast array of activity occurring along the American frontier. This also means that, like Usner, I can use his insights to only a limited extent. Instead of building on the research of Calloway and Usner, I must borrow from their work those aspects critical to analyzing the cultural encounters that apply to my own work.

* * *

Primary Sources

In order to step beyond the scope of the existing historiography, I have extensively utilized the few surviving collections of original Cumberland documents. First and foremost

[11] Colin G. Calloway, *White People, Indians, and Highlanders: Tribal Peoples and Colonial Encounters in Scotland and America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii.

among these has been the collection of James Robertson's papers that was preserved in the *American Historical Magazine* from 1896 to 1900. While original copies of Robertson's correspondence are kept at the Tennessee State Library and Archives building, I chose to focus on the transcribed versions in the AHM for both convenience and the frequent context inserted by A.P. Whitaker on some of the more obscure letters. Unfortunately, the majority of the letters that make up the collection are those sent to Robertson, not written by him. While access to those lost letters would certainly be valuable, the replies that were preserved provide sufficient context to make assumptions as to the tone and content of Robertson's letters. As the only surviving collection of Cumberland letters of a significant size, "The Correspondence of General James Robertson," as it is called within the *American Historical Magazine*, has been the most valuable primary source I have found.

To supplement the Cumberland-focused, primarily American correspondents that make up Robertson's papers, I tapped into two additional collections of period letters. These collections were translated from colonial documents stored in the Spanish Archives in Madrid and focused more on the chatter among Spanish officials and their Indian agents. Contained within the *Journal of East Tennessee History* and the *Annual Report of the American Historical Society for the Year 1945,* they provide evidence for the development of Spanish suspicion, the early involvement of Indians and traders in enhancing that suspicion, and the evolution of Spanish policy through the 1780s.

The final group of primary sources that I have harnessed in the production of this thesis is made up of the pivotal political documents that shaped the development of the Cumberland, territorial, and Tennessee State governments. Examples of these documents include the Cumberland Compact and the Tennessee Constitution of 1796. Unlike the often candid or

duplicitous discussion that took place in the correspondence of intriguers, these documents provide a look at how the frontiersmen chose to organize their governments and portray those governments to the world.

* * *

Thesis Structure

This thesis will harness all of these sources in an effort to fill the current gaps in Cumberland's history while exploring the explanatory power of Cumberland's story in defining American westward expansion. Instead of viewing the intrigues in an Atlantic, national, or regional context, I will focus on the specific events that incited, sustained, and ultimately terminated the Spanish Intrigues in the remote settlement through the perspective of the Cumberland settlers. The first chapter will therefore focus on the circumstances that led to Spanish interest in Cumberland as a serious threat to their colonial holdings as it was this threat that opened their minds to the idea of intriguing with the Cumberland settlers in the first place. The second chapter will focus on the events surrounding the emergence of the Constitution and a new federal government in 1789 and what affect it had on Spanish policy and the evolution of intrigue within Cumberland. The third chapter will analyze the aftermath of federal emergence for Cumberland and argue for the continuation of intrigue into the mid-1790s in spite of previous historians' objections to such ideas. The collective knowledge generated by these three chapters can then be used to draw some general conclusions as to the true nature of Manifest Destiny in the Early Republic era.

The Roots of Intrigue

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In his 1927 introduction to Arthur P. Whitaker's classic monograph, *The Spanish-American Frontier*, Samuel Eliot Morison, a Pulitzer Prize winning historian and distinguished naval officer, remarked that Whitaker's analysis of the Spanish Intrigues had "reconstructed a fascinating story of the relations between rough-necked backwoodsmen of the Daniel Boone breed and courtly representatives of the King of Spain." [12] In reality, the behavior of the Spanish can be defined as courtly no more than that of the frontiersmen can be defined by their backwoods home. For each group, decisions were made and unmade based on fluctuating political climates, uncertain loyalties, and pragmatic concerns of survival. It is pertinent, therefore, to evaluate the international events that framed the decades leading up to the 1780s before a discussion of the intrigues can begin. After the international environment is analyzed, the specific events that led to Spain's interest in the seemingly unthreatening Cumberland settlement can be explored.

* * *

The Atlantic World

Prior to the defeat of the British in 1783, the American continent was claimed by European monarchs. For the first two hundred years of European settlement, this meant that the nations of Britain, Spain, and France were in constant conflict over who held title to various sections of the New World. This relationship began to change in 1713, however, when the Treaty of Utrecht brought the idea of balance of power to the forefront of international politics

[12] Samuel Elliot Morison in Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier 1783-1795: The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969).

and formally allied Spain and France. For the first time, the Spanish and French governments recognized each other's colonial rights in the Americas and resolved to stand together against Britain. This alliance, however, would prove troublesome in later decades as it failed to result in a clear definition of the boundaries between French Louisiana and Spanish Florida.[13] Even if the two nations had attempted to agree on a set of boundaries, however, there is a very low probability that they would have been upheld as no European power had the capacity to impose definite boundaries at any point during the early colonial period. The uncertainty that this precedent created for boundary rights in the Southwest territory would serve as one of the primary catalysts for the Spanish Intrigues during the 1780s.

When Britain emerged from its crushing victory in the Seven Years' War in 1763, it found itself in an unprecedented position of power within North America. Through the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Britain stripped France of its North American holdings, leaving only a few Caribbean colonies to remain under the French flag. Spain, however, gained New Orleans and the Louisiana Territory west of the Mississippi. Britain, of course, claimed the rest of eastern North America, including the formerly Spanish Florida territory, for itself. Britain also expanded its economic system, which dictated the need to establish clear boundaries to safeguard British held assets. In the Proclamation of October 7, 1763, Britain sought to define the boundaries between itself and the surrounding Indian Nations. The proclamation defined the northern boundary of West Florida as the 31st parallel. This boundary held until 1774 when King George III shifted the line north to 32° 32'. By moving the boundary, Britain inadvertently added to the

[13] Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 1-5.

confusion that would characterize the Spanish Intrigues by establishing the two sets of latitudinal lines over which the Americans and Spaniards would disagree in 1783.[14]

In the absence of France, Britain and Spain were also left to deal with the problem of ruling both their colonial subjects and the surrounding Indian tribes as best they could. The shifting of imperial power in North America affected the Indian nations just as much as it did the European colonist as they were often intricately intertwined with colonial trade and political systems. For Britain, this meant engaging both northwestern and southwestern tribes in peace talks that often included the issue of Indian right of soil. For several centuries, however, the eastern Indian tribes had been destroyed by war and disease at the hands of white settlers. The amount of mistrust demonstrated by the various tribes west of the Appalachian Mountains toward the growing British population was therefore understandable. There was much concern among the western tribes that if white settlement spread westward, they could face the same fate as their eastern counterparts. In a gesture of good intentions toward the Indians as well as a useful control mechanism for his own colonial subjects, King George III inserted a condition into the Proclamation of 1763 that bound Anglo-American settlement to east coast by forbidding immigration west of the Appalachian Mountains. This rule, however, rapidly broke down as discontent with England grew within the colonies. Rather than restraining the colonists, the Proclamation Line ultimately contributed to the grievances that sparked the American Revolution.

Spain also had to face the challenges of frontier colonization. The only barrier between Spain and its British rivals was the expansive and mostly Indian inhabited territory between the Ohio River and the 31st parallel. Maintenance of relations with the major Indian tribes that controlled this territory was therefore a top priority of Spanish officials. Toward that end, some

[14] Bemis, 5-7; Whitaker 3.

Indian leaders were made paid agents of the Spanish crown. Extensive merchant networks were also constructed to harness the valuable native trade system and help tighten the bonds between the Indians and their Spanish suppliers. Fears remained, however, as to the security of Spanish Louisiana. British incursions and Indian attacks were constantly on the minds of Spanish governors. There were even concerns about the ability of Spain to control her own colonial subjects. Antonio de Ulloa, the fist governor of Spanish Louisiana, wrote in 1767 to Antonio Maria Bucareli y Ursua, the Captain-General of Cuba, to warn of his uneasiness over the state of Louisiana. Ulloa wrote that Spain had to "bear in mind that there is no recourse here from which to obtain funds and that these people [mostly French subjects living in Louisiana], even without cause, clamor seditiously, as has already been experienced on various occasions."[15]

The coming decades would only heighten Spanish concerns, however, as clouds of war began to gather over the American colonies once more. As the stable and identifiable hand of British power in North America fractured under the weight of colonial discontent, Spain watched with a mixture of jubilation and fear. The monarchal Spaniards were weary of the liberal democratic ideals taking hold north of their colonies and grew increasingly determined to hold them at bay even as they sent monetary aid to the struggling American offensive. The rise of the United States of America in the wake of the 1783 Treaty of Paris marked the beginning of a new diplomatic age for the Americas. While fragile, the liberal minded United States had managed to oust Britain's restraining hand. The question on the minds of Spaniards and Indians alike was what would replace it.

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[15] Ulloa to Bucareli, January 23, 1767, in AHA, vol. 2, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, ed. Lawrence Kinnaird (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 19.

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Revolution and Remapping

By challenging and then removing England's firm hold on the eastern seaboard, the American Revolution signaled the beginning of a new era in frontier diplomacy. The emergence of an independent North American republic not only added a new player to the balance of power politics that characterized North American diplomacy but also introduced a whole new set of problems for Spain and the Indians. The highly structured, monarchist, and Catholic Spanish government found much to be uneasy about in their new neighbor. The Americans were liberal, primarily Protestant, and, worst of all, expansionistic. In theory, the American people controlled their government, and the people wanted land. As early as 1780, adventurers and speculators began pushing west by either gaining land concessions via new treaties with the uneasy Indian nations who had lost Britain as their primary ally or blatantly ignoring Indian land rights by squatting in unsettled territories. Within this environment, the Proclamation Line of 1763 rapidly disintegrated, and ambitious men began leading bands of settlers deep into the backwoods of the western frontier.

It was during this period that Cumberland began. Meeting at Big Salt Lick (Nashville) on April 24, 1780, John Donelson and James Robertson completed a journey that had lead Robertson through the Kentucky wilderness and Donelson along the Indian controlled Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. Their arrival marked the beginning of Cumberland, the western-most Anglo-American settlement in the U.S. at that time. For Donelson, the trip had lasted four months and cost the lives of several of his party members at the hands of hostile Indians. While he admitted in his journal on the day of his arrival that "our prospects at present

are dreary," both he and Robertson were determined to establish Cumberland "happen what will."[16]

Within days, Richard Henderson, the speculator on whose land Cumberland was developing, drew up a rough compact to which Robertson, Donelson, and 248 other signatories agreed to abide. Within the Cumberland Compact, one can see the basic values of a post-Revolutionary frontiersman. Foremost among these was land ownership. The first paragraph of the Compact was devoted to establishing a land office, land regulations, and judgeships specifically designed to ensure the rights of land owners. The Compact then opened the settlement's doors to government intervention as their "remote situation" was "utterly destitute of the benefit of the Laws of [their] County." This left them "exposed to the depredations of the Indians" without any "effectual means" of defending themselves from the "almost daily massacre of some of [their] Inhabitants." They "prayed" for "the immediate aid and Protection of Government by erecting a county to include [their] settlements."[17]

This plea for help, however, would be frustrated by the central government's policy of "watchful waiting." Indeed, many U.S. leaders saw the southern frontier as a place of manifest expansion whose frontiersmen only needed time to reach the Mississippi River.[18] Instead of risking a direct conflict with Spain and their southern Indian allies by sending what little military it had to the aid of the Southwest frontier, the government decided to simply wait for the natural expansion of frontier populations to overtake the area and stabilize the otherwise stormy political situation. Thus, much to the consternation of the frontiersmen, both the Confederation and North

[16] "Donelson Journal," *Tennessee State Library and Archives* (2008). http://tsla-teva.state.tn.us/landmarkdocs/files/41.php.
[17] Cumberland Compact in "Landmark Documents," *Tennessee State Library and Archives* (2008). http://tsla-teva.state.tn.us/landmarkdocs/files/188.php.
[18] Whitaker, 16.

Carolina governments refused to recognize Cumberland and its frontier neighbors as official political entities.

The growing discontent among frontiersmen was exacerbated further when John Jay's commercial negotiations with Spain ended in 1783 without settling either boundary disputes or navigation rights to the Mississippi River. In the wake of this failure and the end of the Revolution, Britain added to the confusion when it also failed to address these issues in the treaties it signed with the U.S., France, and Spain. The omission of navigation rights was the most onerous to the frontiersmen as they had already grown accustomed to using the Mississippi under British rule. In his later writings on Tennessee government, frontier leader Daniel Smith recalled that even by this early stage, frontiersmen saw navigation of the Mississippi as "the light of the sun, a birth-right that cannot be alienated."[19] This conception of the Mississippi as a birth-right appears again and again in frontier writings and even made an appearance in the first Tennessee Constitution of 1796. While the majority of the constitution mirrored that of North Carolina and Virginia, Tennessee's had the unique clause in Article 11, Section 29 that claimed, "an equal participation of the free navigation of the Mississippi is one of the inherent rights of the Citizens of this State; it cannot therefore, be conceded to any prince, Potentate, Power, person or Persons whatever."[20] This provides one of the most striking examples of how important the Mississippi was to the frontiersmen even into the era of statehood.

The close of the Revolution also marked the beginning of a new path in Spanish diplomacy. Spain's new Foreign Minister, Don Jose de Monino y Redondo, Count of

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[19] Daniel Smith, *A Short Description of the Tennassee Government, or the Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio* (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1793), 16, http://infoweb.newsbank.com/
[20] Tennessee Constitution of 1796 in "Landmark Documents," *Tennessee State Library and Archives* (2008). http://tsla-teva.state.tn.us/landmarkdocs/files/90.php.

Floridablanca, was determined to set Spanish policy against free navigation of the river.[21] Floridablanca, a man who would control Spanish policy for 15 years, wanted to close the Mississippi to the democratic minded frontiersmen of the new American state. Arthur Whitaker asserts that "it was the turbulence, the lawlessness, the violence of the American frontiersmen and land speculators, and not the feeble threats of the federal government that alarmed Spain."[22] Yet this assertion is misguided. Evidence from the letters of Spanish officials reveal that Spain was not inherently frightened of the frontiersmen, especially those as weak and far north as Cumberland. Instead, Spanish suspicion was slowly intensified via the efforts of some Indian and commercial agents with stakes in keeping frontier expansion at bay. Spanish policies concerning the frontiers during the 1780-1789 period, therefore, were the result of both 'top-down' policy-setting by Floridablanca and local, 'bottom-up' pragmatism over Indian relations and trade.

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Catalysts to Intrigue: Spain

The trans-Atlantic reach of European empires, cultural migration, and the difficulties of survival on the frontier all contributed to the rise of intrigue in the Cumberland area. Unfortunately, most historic literature on Cumberland's role in the intrigues stops at this level of detail. Instead of digging deeper into the letters, dispatches, and declarations coming out of or concerning Cumberland during the 1780s, most monographs either shift focus to the Kentucky and East Tennessee settlements or simply conclude that Cumberland's involvement in the intrigues was too short lived and static to merit further exploration. Additionally, due to the heightened visibility of such blatant conspirators as Kentucky's James Wilkinson and Franklin's

[21] Bemis, 11.
[22] Whitaker, 19.

Jon Sevier, historians have argued that these areas were more important to the intriguers than the Cumberland settlements. Surviving documents, however, suggest that this assessment is misguided.

In actuality, Cumberland was a favorite subject for inter-Spanish correspondence and a constant source of discomfort for Spanish leaders. The evolution of Cumberland's relationship with Spain is actually one of the most dynamic in the Old Southwest. Their extreme isolation gave them the greatest sense of urgency to find a military protector and economic partner, and, therefore, Cumberland's leaders were highly responsive to changes in local conditions, Spanish overtures, and the power of the United State's central government. On the Spanish side, suspicions and fears were often exacerbated by the effective rhetoric of a handful of local Indian leaders, such as Alexander McGillivray, and regional traders, such as Panton, Leslie, and Company, who were usually more concerned with Georgia and its western land claims than with Cumberland. Unfortunately for Cumberland the rhetoric employed by such agitators often lumped the various settlements of the Old Southwest together in an effort to exaggerate the threat they presented to Spain. In this way, the mutual and often unfounded fears that Cumberland frontiersmen and Spanish officials projected toward one another helped to fuel the willingness of each to engage the other in intrigue. While the Indian attacks and Mississippi navigation questions driving Cumberland settlers to engage Spain were fairly straightforward, the manner in which Spain was drawn into the intrigues was far more complex. The remainder of this chapter, therefore, will focus on the unexplored catalysts that led Spain out of its apathy toward the settlers in the first part of the 1780s.

In his contribution to Tamara Harvey and Greg O'Brien's monograph, *George Washington's South*, historian Daniel H. Usner asserts that "if we are going to understand

disputed and contested territories in a specific historical context, the narratives produced in the process of American territorial expansion must be recognized as a vital part of the process."[23] It was not always the reality of unbroken westward migration that drove the political developments along the uncertain boundaries of frontier country. Instead, the rhetoric of leading officials and government agents often fueled the evolution of policy in ways that reality never could have. Since such rhetoric was paramount in driving the intrigues, it is vitally important that we first attempt to unravel the complex web of correspondence that characterized the beginning of Spain's interest in the Cumberland region.

In order to utilize the rhetoric emerging from colonial Spanish leaders in the 1780s, one must first note the lack thereof during the first three years of the decade. As previously noted, the end of the American Revolution gave rise to two British treaties in 1783. In one treaty, Britain promised the Americans free navigation of the Mississippi River and all English lands extending southward to the 31st parallel. In a second treaty signed with Spain on the same day, however, the British made no mention of such navigation rights and Spain was simply stipulated to 'retain' West Florida. By a 1764 British order in council, however, this 'retention' implied that Spanish lands would extend as far north as Natchez and the Yazoo River, which would, therefore, place the boundary line around 32° 26'. Thus the southwestern lands of the new United States were set on uncertain ground from the nation's beginning. A.P. Whitaker notes that the Spanish looked upon this discrepancy with a "studied silence" as they believed England was "pretending to do something [with the Americans] which in its nature could not be done;"

[23] Daniel H. Usner, "Remapping Boundaries in the Old Southwest, 1783-1795" in *George Washington's South*, ed. Tamara Harvey and Greg O'Brien (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 24.

that is, "granting territory and a right that had already been lost by the Spanish conquest of West Florida."[24]

Spanish policy retained this course of denial until unsettling reports of frontier unrest began to filter onto Spanish desks from local Indian chiefs and merchants. Prominent among these informers were two former British loyalists, Alexander McGillivray and William Panton. McGillivray was the son of Scottish trader, Lachlan McGillivray, and a Creek woman named Sehoy. Growing up, he had enjoyed both full membership in the Creek nation and a European education in business while living first in Charleston, South Carolina and then in Savannah, Georgia. This bicultural background gave McGillivray a unique perspective when he returned to his Creek mother's homeland after the Revolution already angry at the Americans for confiscating his Tory father's estate. His extensive education, however, had made him fluent in both America's language and its political system. He would use this fluency to engage the Spanish, frontiersmen, and the federal government in an improvised and often delicate diplomatic dance throughout the 1780s and early 1790s. McGillivray would also play a key role in bringing the British Panton, Leslie, and Company into the pre-intrigue fold as he actively campaigned for them to become the major trading agency through which the Creeks could gain access to Spanish goods.[25] In doing so, McGillivray, Panton, and their allies hoped to stop American economic and territorial encroachment by rousing the Spanish into engaging them in ever closer and more lucrative relations in order to keep American settlement at arms length from Spanish territories. While Spanish expeditions ultimately exposed the immediate threat of Anglo military action to be less pressing than it was often portrayed, the early influence of

[24] Whitaker, 12
[25] Whitaker, 39.

McGillivray, Panton, and others like them in planting the seeds of suspicion into Spanish minds was significant.

The first evidence of their influence appears in a December 15, 1783 letter to Arturo O'Neill, the governor of Spanish controlled Pensacola, from Charles McLatchy, a partner in the Panton, Leslie, and Company. He warned that if Spain failed to allow his company to continue operations under Spanish oversight, the southern Indian nations would "depend entirely on Georgia for their supplies," thus shattering both an important economic and political outlet for the Spanish colonial territories and transferring power to the rival Georgians.[26] McLatchy and Panton knew that the idea of losing sway with the Indians to the Americans would be unacceptable to Spanish leadership. By constantly reminding the Spanish of the tenuousness of their hold on Indian commerce, Panton's Company and his Creek allies hoped to gain increasing Spanish support for both their trade networks and ongoing raids on frontier towns, respectively. McGillivray and his followers would benefit from the increased firepower provided by Spanish munitions while Panton would reap the financial rewards of selling such wares.

Within surviving Spanish papers, one can also find possible roots for the Spanish belief that it was possible to win the loyalty of American frontiersmen through a particular set of concessions. In a letter to O'Neill dated February 5, 1784, McGillivray praised the virtues of the industrious and "well skilled" British loyalists who had expressed a desire to become Spanish subjects. "Reduced to very little on account of their Loyalty to their King," McGillivray wrote, "if Liberty of conscience would be allowed to them they would be contented and happy under the King of Spain's Government."[27] In addition to bolstering the position of McGillivray's fellow Tories and further securing his place as a trustworthy informant, this letter may have also

[26] Charles McLatchy to Arturo O'Neill, Dec 15, 1783, in JETH no. 9 (1937), 112.
[27] Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, February 5, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 113-14.

played an instrumental role in forming the Spanish policy of wooing settlers away from the American frontiers by appealing to their embittered position within the American state. A full fledged version of this policy, however, would not come into play until the appearance of James Wilkinson and his similar assertions in later years.

Like the Tories of the Revolution, the southwestern frontiersmen often felt marginalized, if not totally ignored, by their central government, and this led to much resentment. In 1789, James Robertson wrote that his followers "cannot long remain in our present state, and if the British or any commercial nation who may be in possession of the mouth of the Mississippi would furnish us with trade, and receive our produce, there cannot be a doubt but the people on the west side of the Apalachian mountain will open their eyes to their real interest."[28] Such sentiments closely mirrored those expressed by the disenfranchised Tories. It seems that both frontiersmen and Tories felt betrayed and vulnerable under the new American state. The similarities were abundant enough that they could have easily sparked the Spanish belief that the frontiersmen shared the Tories' desire to submit to Spanish rule.

Spain was also under the impression that the United States could shatter into multiple factions at any moment. McGillivray asserted in a February 5, 1784 letter that "the back inhabitants of Georgia and Carolina are in arms to oppose the Tax collectors; the whole continent is in confusion; before long I expect to hear that the three kings must settle the matter by dividing America between them."[29] The situation McGillivray was referring to was the uprising of many Georgian and Carolinian farmers in response to pressures from the Articles of Confederation government for states to raise taxes in order to pay off war debts. Such expectations gave additional credibility to arguments that Spain could forge relationships with Southwestern

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[28] James Robertson to Alexander McGillivray, in AHM 1, no.1 (1896): 81.
[29] Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, Feb. 5, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 113.

peoples. These relationships were justified as (1) short term security measures that could create friendly buffer zones between the U.S. and the Spanish Gulf of Mexico and (2) long term integration efforts that could establish legitimate Spain claims to ownership of the Southwest region should the United States break up.

In the first half of the 1780s, however, such policies were still years away. In the meantime, Spain retained its watchful position and strove to distance itself from any overtly dangerous connections with frontier rebellion. The embers of suspicion toward American encroachment were still faint and required further fanning if they were ever to blaze into open action. For Panton, the problem was how to convince the Spanish government to further his monopoly of the Indian trade in Spanish territories east of the Mississippi.[30] In a 1785 letter to Governor O'Neill, he warned that if the Spanish crown failed to supply him with more money and passports with which to obtain goods to trade with Indians who would "soon be down again for their Winter supplies," the Indians would leave Panton's trading posts "miserably disappointed" and open their doors to other sources of trade. Panton went on:

> It is out of line of my duty, and indeed unnecessary for me to urge to you the evil tendency such a disappointment would have on the minds of those people because your own knowledge...will suggest to you the ill consequences upon such an occasion after the promises which hath been made to them, and more especially at this critical period when the Americans are using every artifice to gain the Indians over to their interest.[31]

The last section of this statement is especially important as it represents the quintessential argument used by Panton and McGillivray to strike fear into the Spanish bureaucracy and garner

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[30] D.C. and Roberta Corbitt ed., "Papers from the Spanish Archives," JETH no.9 (1937): 111.
[31] William Panton to Arturo O'Neill, July 30, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 123-24.

greater financial benefits. Unlike Georgia and the Carolinas and in spite of the few Cumberland merchants genuinely interested in trade, however, many of the Cumberland frontiersmen of this early phase of settlement were more interested in quelling the Indians' almost daily assaults than establishing a strong trade network with them. Security and navigation rights to the Mississippi River, not Indian trade, were the prominent themes in Cumberland.

Yet reports continued to arrive on Spanish desks that seemed to point to America's immediate and subversive intentions. McGillivray played to Spanish vanity when he wrote to O'Neill in November of 1784 that "the Americans are very uneasy that this nation [the Creeks] has entered into an alliance with the Spanish Nation…because such measures have made the Indians independent and not beholden to the Americans for trade so that they can't have the sway of the Indians but have lost it….these are the reasons that make the Americans pretend to be so moderate to us; tis out of their jealousy to Spain and I do not thank them for it."[32]
By fanning the growing flames of Spain's suspicion in this way, McGillivray was attempting to play off the thinly veiled threat he had issued to Esteban Miro, the acting governor of Spanish Louisiana, seven months earlier when he declared:

> the protection of a great Monarch is to be preferred to that of a distracted Republic. If I am disappointed [in my expectations from you] I must as the last necessity embrace *[illegible]* offers however disagreeable it may be to my political opinions. I still hope that at our meeting every matter will be agreeably settled [referring to the planned General Congress between Spanish officials and the Indian nations planned for May of the next year].[33]

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[32] Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, November 20, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 120-21.
[33] Alexander McGillivray to Esteban Miro, March 28, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 117.

McGillivray was insinuating that if the Spanish did not respond to his pleas for trade and military aid he would be forced to take actions "disagreeable" to his preference for Spanish rule, i.e. cooperation with the Americans. Even though he claimed a distinct personal dislike for the U.S., he seemed willing to engage the Americans in a trade alliance should the needs of his tribe dictate the necessity of it. McGillivray knew the extent to which Spain coveted Indian trade as a vital means of both bolstering its economy and providing a buffer to the lower United States. He was counting on Spain's willingness to defend those advantages from American encroachment. According to Whitaker, he "found in the American advance at the Indians' expense a powerful means of frightening the Spanish government for his own purposes."[34] Through such threats, McGillivray was also able to promote the well-being of the Creeks, thus increasing his credibility with his Indian followers. He accomplished this via his offer to set his personal dislike for Americans aside if the political situation necessitated cooperation with the U.S. Yet even in this concession, McGillivray could benefit as his personal prosperity depended on the continued and successful existence of the Creek Nation, not in the particular white nation with which it traded. He could, therefore, focus on gaining the best possible trading and land terms for the Creeks by playing off of the white nations' desire for Indian trade and loyalty. He could better the lives of his people *and* line his own pockets by simply picking the best offer. In such tactics, the true complexity of McGillivray's political awareness is revealed. He was both a representative of his people and a self interested capitalist. As a man who Whitaker described as "far better educated than such American frontiersmen as John Sevier and James Robertson," McGillivray was able to spend his time living the life of "a prosperous Southern planter, with numerous slaves, horses and cattle, and broad acres of farm land" while simultaneously serving

[34] Whitaker, 34.

as the primary voice for the Creek nation to both the Americans and the Spaniards.[35] His correspondence conveys how he could be a shrewd diplomat, a capable businessman, and a loyal tribal chief all at the same time. McGillivray heavily tailored his rhetoric to the audience with which he was corresponding. The next chapter will reveal in detail how he was also playing off the fears and needs of the frontiersmen and U.S. government in order to reach the best possible economic and political position for himself and his nation. The frontiersmen, of course, were playing their own diplomatic game. For the moment, however, our attention must remain on the development of Spanish apprehension in the beginning of the decade.

As early as 1784, letters between Spanish officials indicate that the American threat was beginning to grab their attention. On March 12 of that year, Governor Miro wrote to Bernardo de Galvez, the captain-general of Louisiana and the Floridas, asking his advice on a matter for which he had no precedent. The incident in question concerned a Rhode Islander named Christopher Whipple. Miro recounted how Mr. Whipple appeared in New Orleans with a passport and the intention of sailing up the Mississippi River:

> By virtue of this he says he comes to this River because it is free to the navigation of his Nation [the United States] according to the definitive treaty between his nation and Great Britain, which fixes its boundaries at 31 degrees...As I have received no instruction upon this matter nor is there anything mentioned in our definitive treaty with Great Britain...I have decided not to deny him entrance, warning him that if he sells to the Plantations of the River Bank his boat will be confiscated, and I have sent the circular to the Planters so that they will abstain from buying.[36]

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[35] Whitaker, 38.

[36] Esteban Miro to Bernardo de Galvez, March 12, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 115-16.

Clearly caught off guard by Whipple's demands, Miro also sent a detachment of soldiers to follow his boat and keep an eye on him. Additionally, he described to Galvez the specifications "according to some opinions" of the 31st parallel boundary Whipple was claiming as legitimate. He warned that such a boundary would mean the loss of Natchez and a large portion of Mobile to the Americans. To conclude his letter, Miro wrote, "I hope that these reflections will please Your Excellency, that they will be worthy of being sent to His Majesty, and that in consequence of them I shall be advised what I ought to do in case the Americans undertake to make a settlement in some of the said territory."[37]

The importance of this particular letter is that it signaled the moment when the Spanish leadership realized that they had to confront the concessions given to the Americans by the British or face losing control of their territories and trade systems. Whipple demonstrated to the Spanish that while they had been ignoring the British concessions as illegitimate, some Americans had been busy utilizing and integrating both their navigation privileges and southern boundaries as inherent rights. The divide that had formed between Floridablanca's 'top-down' policies and Miro's 'bottom-up' realities became apparent. This incident also lent credibility to McGillivray and Panton's claims that the Americans would soon attempt to take over Spain's North American holdings. From the March 12th letter forward, therefore, the southwestern American settlements, and especially Cumberland, became prominent in Spanish correspondence and policy making.

By July of 1785, Spanish suspicions about the intent of American frontier settlements had grown substantially. While standing in for Esteban Miro as acting governor of Louisiana, Francisco Bouligny wrote to Miro on the 24th to report recent developments in the territory.

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[37] Ibid

Commenting on various reports from French traders and Indian agents that the Americans were gathering artillery, boats, and soldiers along the Cherokee [Tennessee] river, Bouligny wrote,

> I cannot doubt the reality and effectiveness with which they are preparing to come down and support their claims with arms, believing that they have a right to all the territory on this River North of the 31st Degree, and to the Navigation of the [Mississippi] River…The difficulties that this journey offers do not give reasons to doubt here that organized troops may come by that route to attack us, since they are able to prepare their Expedition of the Cherokee River and coming down with the current arrive here in 15 to 20 days after starting without suffering the least fatigue or discomfort.[38]

Speculation thus turned into reality for the Spanish. It is significant to note that Bouligny is not warning of a vague and distant threat but rather drawing imminent war scenarios. The degree to which McGillivray, Panton, and the various frontier agents of Spain had succeeded in reinforcing this fear is evidenced in Spain's willingness to believe seditious reports even when some local Indian tribes "did not at all believe" the threat was as severe as others made it out to be. Instead, the Spanish clung to the belief that "the vagabond Americans and Europeans in that nation were positively assured of it [an invasion]."[39] A week later, on August 4, Bouligny again wrote to Miro that "'the Americans were working hard to construct Chalanes [barges], and Bateaux [small flat bottomed boats], on the banks of the Cumberland and Cherokee Rivers" and "that in all the American towns on the Ohio there were rumors of War."[40]

Miro immediately responded to Bouligny on August 5th, writing that "you must not permit any Americans to arrive at that Post [Natchez] without reporting within 24 hours,

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[38] Ibid
[39] Ibid
[40] Francisco Bouligny to Esteban Miro, August 4, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 128-29.

and…you will announce that any planter to whose country house anyone arrives, letting 24 hours pass without reporting his arrival, will be subject to a fine and punishment."[41] In addition to this new restriction on American movement within Spanish territory, Miro also entertained the previously proposed option of sending a Spanish spy into the Cumberland region in order to find out what sort of activities the frontiersmen of such a remote outpost were engaging in. On this point he wrote, "As to sending an officer with soldiers to the Cumberland River, I consider it very risky, but if after the return of the Loyalist sent by Don Felipe Trevino it seems opportune and necessary that another go, it will be useful...to do everything that might lead to the discovery of the plans of the Americans."[42] Here one can see the breaking down of the old precedent of 'studied silence' in favor of more proactive efforts to head off the now imminent American threat. Even the skeptical Governor O'Neill, who once called the fears of Miro and his informants "imaginary,"[43] began to join in on the conversation as he wrote to Captain-General Galvez in September of that year that "in Carolina and Georgia a small number of recruits were being gathered; who according to rumors heard were to go to the American settlement on the Cumberland and to the territories of Natchez."[44]

While he continued to believe that Natchez was not in danger of the attack "because of the two Companies of Grenadiers who [had] gone there from New Orleans," O'Neill did acknowledge that the potential threat was serious enough to warrant precautionary measures. He wrote to Galvez that he was beginning to agree "with what Mr. Alexander McGillivray proposed" about encouraging the Creek Indians in their attacks on the frontiersmen. O'Neil took note of the extent to which the Creeks were "determined not to permit any Americans to go

[41] Esteban Miro to Francisco Bouligny, August 5, 1785, in JETH no. 9 (1937): 129-30.
[42] Ibid
[43] Arturo O'Neill to Bernardo de Galvez, July 21, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 123.
[44] Arturo O'Neill to Bernardo de Galvez, September 4, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 130.

through their Lands, nor to go to the settlements on the Cumberland, nor to any other place near the Mississippi River." He continued that the Indians would be willing to do so even without an official treaty giving "the consent of Our Monarch."[45] The conviction that McGillivray and his followers could be made useful without direct consent from the Spanish Crown represents yet another step away from inaction by the Spanish court in favor of state involvement in frontier matters. McGillivray and his allies where succeeding in their plans to stir up the Spanish. The question was just how far they would be able to sway the Spaniards toward a more active role on the American frontier.

The answer to this question was swift. In reaction to the increasing northern threats, Spanish officials went ahead with their plans to send thinly veiled spies into the American controlled territories to route out any evolving conspiracies. At the same time, trusted traders such as the Frenchman named Fournier began arriving in Natchez with assurances that there was "nothing unusual occurring on the Ohio River" and that "he [had] not seen any Cannon, that the population [was] small, that at the Falls and in Kentucky from where he [had] come and where there [were] the most People not a single Chalan [was] being built."[46] Bouligny confided to Miro that such reports "reassure me for the present, but not to the point of losing sight of my greatest defense in this Fort, for the question that is on the table being of so much importance to America and Spain." Pivotal among the reasons for this residual suspicion was the fact that Fournier and others admitted that they knew "nothing about what is going on in Cumberland, Cherokee, Vincennes post, nor on the Wabash."[47] Thus the next objective became finding out what was going on in the distant settlements along the Cumberland River.

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[45] Ibid
[46] Francisco Bouligny to Esteban Miro, September 1, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 132.
[47] Ibid

In the meantime, however, the Spanish also began questioning the loyalty of some of their agents, especially McGillivray. O'Neill wrote to Galvez that "I believe that the said McGillivray…would preferably follow whatever the rest of his Indian compatriots decide to be advantageous, notwithstanding that at present he prefers our friendship and asks for its continuation."[48] The realization that even McGillivray's friendship was subject to change if another nation were to make a more favorable economic offer caused the Spanish to further increase their efforts to find out how tenaciously the frontiersmen of Cumberland and other settlements were pursing Indian trade advantages. To counteract these new doubts about his loyalties, McGillivray wrote to O'Neill on November 4 to reassure him that he had "the strongest desire to see the Americans kept within due bounds." He then asked the Commandant of Mobile "not to give his consent to any person from [America] to settle on any pretense whatever."[49]

Yet the Spanish soon found out for themselves that the threat posed by Cumberland had been greatly exaggerated. In a pivotal letter to Galvez in December of 1785, Miro reported the findings of Don Luis Chachere. Chachere was the man who had been chosen by Bouligny and Miro to 'determine whether or not Chalanes were being constructed on the Cumberland, or on the Ohio, or other preparations for war were being made, as some Indians had reported."[50] Instead of a land ready for battle, Chachere reported that the Cumberland settlers "have not thought of hostility" and "Green [a frontier leader] is not supported by troops, nor a promise that any will be sent him, as he insinuated in his tumultuous passes at Natchez." Instead, "the most important news that Chachere gives is that six or seven inhabitants of Cumberland have gone to survey lands on the Bluffs of Margot [Chickasaw Bluffs]…where it seems they have the idea of making a settlement." At the end of the letter, Miro again asks for help on what to do with this

[48] Arturo O'Neill to Bernardo de Galvez, September 4, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 133.
[49] Alexander McGillivray to Arturo O'Neill, November 8, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 133.
[50] Esteban Miro to Bernardo de Galvez, December 10, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 138.

new but less direct threat as he asks: "if Your Excellency wants to instruct me about this matter, what I should tell them if any are found established there, time remains for it."

In Chachere's letter, which was transmitted to Galvez along with Miro's commentary, one can also find some of the most significant insights into the diplomacy, economy, and day-to-day activities taking place in Cumberland at this time. His report began with the above mentioned news that "Mr. [James] Robertson…left with six or seven inhabitants to pick out and survey lands on the Bluffs of Margot." It then moves to the interesting account of Chachere's encounter with Anthony Bledsoe that began this thesis. As a representative of Cumberland to the North Carolina legislature along with James Robertson, Bledsoe had made many impassioned pleas to the North Carolina government to save the Cumberland settlements from the "very great spoil" done by the Indians "by murdering numbers of our peaceful inhabitants, stealing our horses."[51] The stature that this loyalty to the settlement garnered him among his fellow settlers made him an obvious choice to greet Chachere upon his arrival.

As previously mentioned, before speaking with Chachere, Bledsoe insisted on interrogating him as to his reasons for coming. Chachere reported that "He said to me that he had taken this step because the inhabitants feared that I was a spy sent by the Spanish Government" and though "he did not seem to be entirely satisfied with my reasoning, [he] did not openly reject it." Bledsoe went on to maintain that "among other reasons" for his distrust, the area from which Chachere came "was under dispute, that the Mississippi River was not open, etc." Chachere "refuted his reasons and he pretended to be satisfied, promising me his assistance," even though Bledsoe obviously still had his doubts about he odd visitor.[52]

[51] Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 35.
[52] Don Luis Chachere to Francisco Bouligny as attachment to Esteban Miro to Bernardo de Galvez, December 10, 1785, in JETH no.9 (1937): 138-141.

This incident is particularly important in that it demonstrates that the frontiersmen were just as suspicious and fearful of the Spanish as the Spanish were of them. They were taking measures to ensure that Spanish spies weren't infiltrating their ranks, and the Spanish were obviously conscious that they were also playing a political game. Yet the next section of Chachere's report proved to both ease the Spaniards' immediate fears and to give an unprecedented look into the nature of a Cumberland settlement:

> There are about 40 souls, 20 able to bear arms which are rifle, used by them with great skill, being for the great part hunters, and Peltry the greater part of their commerce. Thus obliged...to establish themselves by force of arms on these lands that have scarcely been abandoned by the Indians, their life is quite laborious and hard. They are large, well built and robust, as are people who come from the North: the climate is a little colder than in Natchez: the only cultivation that they care for is Tobacco, and Corn....This kind of commerce is not considerable, but as the land is suitable to the cultivation of this plant, there would be a great quantity if means could be found for sending it out, making them greatly desire the free navigation of the [Mississippi] River, which they believe cannot be denied them, being assured that in a short time they will be in possession of Natchez. They expect 100 to 150 families this spring.[53]

With this report, Spanish ideas on the nature of American frontiersmen began to take shape. While the immediate threat put forth by Panton and McGillivray was largely disproved, at least for Cumberland, Chachere's report set up the need for future involvement with the area if the Spanish hoped to quell the frontiersmen's confidence that Natchez and the Mississippi River would eventually fall into their hands. The best way to do so was to engage the Indians,

[53] Ibid

frontiersmen, and U.S. government simultaneously in a series of complex diplomatic maneuvers. Spain's evolving frontier policies and the reaction of Cumberland frontiersmen to those policies are the subject of the next chapter.

Evolution

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Despite Chachere's report, Spanish suspicion toward the intentions of American frontiersmen persisted. Under the strict diplomacy of Floridablanca, Spain began to take measures to restrict American usage of the Mississippi. Predictably, the frontier reacted to these developments with alarm. As discussed previously, the Mississippi represented to many of them their only hope for economic sustainability. They had grown to view free navigation of its waters as an inherent right. Yet thanks in part to the influence of McGillivray, Panton, and others friendly to the Spanish Crown, Spain saw little distinction between the vastly different frontier regions and was, therefore, disinclined to make concessions to any one part.

Cumberland would come to occupy a particularly undeserved spot on the Spanish radar. Sandwiched between overtly expansionist Georgians and vocally secessionist Kentuckians, the people of Cumberland were forced to deal with a blunt Spanish policy responding more to the activity of frontiersmen to their north and south. On one hand, Indian and trader reports from the southern frontier in the first part of the 1780s had convinced Spain that the entire frontier was interested in an all-out invasion of Spanish territory. On the other hand, new ideas on the openness of the frontier to intrigue were forming as a result of communications between some Kentuckians and New Orleans. These communications, instigated primarily by James Wilkinson, opened Spanish eyes to the possibility of using diplomacy to lure frontiersmen into joining the Spanish Empire as either full subjects or, at the very least, independent trading partners. The manner in which Robertson and his followers dealt with the complex and evolving Spanish policy as well as the dramatic and game-changing emergence of the federal government in 1789 are the primary focus of this chapter. While historians like Thomas Abernethy have

argued that this period represented the end of intrigue in Cumberland, this chapter will suggest that the intrigues simply evolved in the face of changing political environments and, ultimately, persisted far beyond Abernethy's 1789 extinction date. First, however, a brief account of the early influence of Kentucky's most prominent intriguer, James Wilkinson, on Spanish policy in the last quarter of the 1780s is needed.

* * *

Wilkinson's Failure….Sort of

Wilkinson, a silver-tongued Yankee who had fought alongside Benedict Arnold and Aaron Burr in the revolution, moved to the Kentucky frontier in 1784. Despite the fact that he had earned a brevet brigadier generalship, most of his contemporaries considered him to be a self-important and generally untrustworthy man. He made a name for himself in Kentucky by decrying Spain's closure of the Mississippi just a few months after his arrival. Like Cumberland, Kentuckians of the time faced economic ruin should their ability to transport goods down the river be cut off. The threat of Indian attack was also a shared and unyielding concern. For these reasons, the Kentuckians began holding conferences "with typical western impatience at distant agencies of authority."[54] Enraged at Virginia's lack of support and Spain's unrelenting hold over the Mississippi, the Kentucky frontiersmen discussed petitioning for separate statehood. Wilkinson, however, had plans of his own. His tremendous ambition had ingrained in him the idea that he could separate Kentucky as an independent western republic of which he would be the head. From his imagined position as "Washington of the West," he could then lead Kentucky to secure navigation rights via its own negotiations with Spain.[55]

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[54] Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (New Haven: Yale University, 1960), 110-11

[55] Bemis, 114; Whitaker, 96.

As the most prominent and vocal of all the pro-Spanish frontiersmen, Wilkinson left behind enough incriminating evidence to secure his place in history as a treacherous conspirator and self-promoter of the first degree. This proliferation of evidence also makes him the most obvious target for historical analysis, and, therefore, he has occupied a staring position in most accounts of the Spanish Intrigues. Yet his use in this analysis is limited to the fact that he was an integral part of pushing for a reformed Spanish immigration policy. According to Wilkinson, there were only two options left for Spain in 1787 if they wished to quell the growing outrage of frontiersmen toward both Spain and the Confederation: (1) start a party of dissent within Kentucky that would eventually push Kentuckians to rebel against the United States and form an independent alliance with Spain, or (2) open Spanish borders with offers of land grants, religious toleration, and exclusive trade privileges generous enough to pull the frontiersmen down to Louisiana as full fledged Spanish subjects.[56] Despite Floridablanca's refusal to follow any such recommendations in '87 and Kentucky's ultimate admittance into the Union in 1792, remnants of Wilkinson's influence on Spanish policy would soon find their way to the desk of James Robertson.

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The Opening of Spanish Gates

By December of 1788, Floridablanca's outlook on Spain's strict immigration policies was beginning to alter. He was consistently receiving reports of frontier unrest and the subsequent need for action from as varied places as Havana, New York, St. Augustine, New Orleans, and, of course, the Indian nations. Whitaker notes how the bulk of intelligence crossing Floridablanca's desk pointed toward three seeming truths: (1) the hard-nosed diplomacy he had first put in place

[56] Whitaker, 98

was ineffective in the face of an impotent United States government incapable of effectively restraining its citizens, (2) the frontier invasion they had feared earlier was quickly becoming more likely, and (3) Americans were eager to take advantage of the opportunity to become subjects of Spain.[57] Thus, the Spaniards began to suspect that the frontiersmen shared McGillivray's 1784 assertion that "the protection of a great Monarch is to be preferred to that of a distracted Republic".[58]

Other conditions also pointed to the advantages of a change in Spanish policy. First among these was the extreme outrage of frontiersmen toward the U.S. government since their willingness to sacrifice navigation of the Mississippi in return for a treaty with Spain became known in 1786. John Jay, the statesman empowered by Congress to relinquish the Mississippi in return for Spain's concession of the 31st parallel boundary, had been optimistic that such a concession could gain the United States the treaty it sought, but it was not to be. Floridablanca stood square in the way of any such agreement, and in 1788 Congress was forced to put off further negotiations on the matter until the new, more powerful federal government was firmly in place. The resolve of the frontiersman to gain their watery prize, however, grew along with their anger.

This magnification of frontier sentiment was both negative and positive for Spain. First, it heightened the possibility of an invasion of Spanish territory in the minds of some of the more radical frontiersmen (though the risks of such a mission were so overwhelming that the actual chances remained extremely small). Second, it opened the possibility of intrigue within the more level-headed frontier leadership. It is likely that this was one of the leading catalysts to Robertson's aforementioned letter to McGillivray, which stated that "if the British *or any*

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[57] Whitaker, 100

[58] Alexander McGillivray to Esteban Miro, March 28, 1784, in JETH no.9 (1937): 117.

commercial nation who may be in possession of the mouth of the Mississippi" would furnish the people of Cumberland with trade, they would undoubtedly "open their eyes to their real interest."[59]

As noted, only Spain was in control of the Mississippi at this time, and McGillivray was a known agent of the Spanish Crown. Britain was also Spain's greatest imperial threat, so Robertson's comment was perfectly constructed to confidentially reach Spanish ears and stir both fear and greed within their minds. Robertson's need to utilize intermediaries like McGillivray in communicating with Spain can be explained through the fact that open intrigue would have been extraordinarily dangerous for both the frontiersmen and Spaniards. In this period, letters had to be carried by couriers and could easily be intercepted, stolen, lost, or read before reaching the intended recipient. For this reason, many of the letters between frontiersmen and Spanish officials were coded in ambiguous language and delivered indirectly. Anyone reading Robertson's message would have easily been able to deduce who he meant in his description of a 'commercial nation', but such phrasing made it just a little less seditious if brought against him as evidence later on. After all, he could argue that the 'commercial nation' he was referring to was the U.S. in the case that it conquered and/or gained access to the Mississippi through treaties. In addition, this was one of the first intrigue letters to appear in Robertson's correspondence, so he undoubtedly took every precaution to keep its contents confidential and likely perceived sending a letter to the king of the Creeks, a man with whom both Cumberland and the U.S. were constantly engaged, as much less suspicious than sending one directly to the governor's office in New Orleans. Combined with Robertson's existing suspicions of McGillivray's close ties to the Spanish Crown and his possible plans to "take

[59] James Robertson to Alexander McGillivray, in AHM 1, no.1 (1896): 81.

protection under the Court of Spain," Robertson could feel reasonably safe in assuming that the chief would quickly relay his sentiments to the Spanish.[60]

His offer would have certainly seemed advantageous at first glance. An alliance with Cumberland would have provided Spain with a sweet territorial victory over the U.S. and Britain as well as a boost to Spain's chances at a maintaining a permanent and profitable hold in North America. After all, the frontiersmen seemed to be following the same type of rebellious path that their co-patriots had treaded just a decade before in the American Revolution. All that was left was for Spain to step in as financier, just as France had done in the Revolution, and wait for an independent 'United States of Southwest America' to appear and embrace them as an economic and political ally. Yet, Floridablanca was still hesitant in yielding to participation in a full-on conspiracy. Such a move could have easily prompted the United States to declare war and provided an opportunity for Britain to step into the fray and remove Spain from both North America and the Gulf of Mexico.

In search of an acceptable resolution, Floridablanca turned the problem over to the Junta de Estado. The Junta de Estado was a body of ministers brought together on a regular basis to effectively serve as a Spanish Cabinet. This junta ("committee") was first convened in 1787 when Floridablanca and the Spanish Crown decided to include all ministers in the existing junta deliberations. By that year, the junta was already in charge of dealing with peninsular as well as colonial affairs, so their sway over the frontier issues of 1788 was quite powerful.[61] On November 20, the Junta concluded that it was indeed too risky for Spain to form an open connection with the frontiersmen. Spanish officials, including Miro, were banned from spending

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[60] see Robertson to McGillivray, exact date unknown, but likely in March of 1788, five months before this letter and soon after the death of his son, Peyton Henderson Robertson, at the hands of a rouge Indian group. The letter is contained in AHM 1, no. 1 (1896): 82.

[61] Jacques A. Barbier, "The Culmination of the Bourbon Reforms, 1787-1792," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 57, no. 1 (February 1977), 56. Available Online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2513542?seq=6>

any government funds to finance a frontier revolution. The Indians, however, still provided a way around this ban. McGillivray and others were still open to Spanish influence via trade networks. Maintaining their loyalty and sustaining their ongoing attacks on the frontiersmen through regular trading of weapons and other supplies continued to hold the possibility of driving the frontiersmen into the arms of the Spanish Empire should the United States government remain unable to protect them. Through the same economic sway, the Spanish could then attempt to restrain the Indians and cement frontier loyalty by presenting themselves as the saviors of the frontier people. While none of this activity was ever made into official policy, its presence on frontier relations was well felt.

The official policy Floridablanca and the Junta eventually proposed, however, was, in part, a modified version of Wilkinson's earlier immigration reform proposals. The key difference was that Wilkinson and Kentucky were not the sole focus of the policy. Instead, Spain embarked on a route that would attempt to embrace the whole of frontier America.[62]

On December 1, 1788, the resulting royal order was issued. It stated that the Mississippi was to be opened as far as New Orleans to all American frontiersmen. The cost for this use would be a fifteen percent tax duty on goods coming through New Orleans. Interestingly, even this policy was soft in nature. It allowed Miro the discretionary power to lower the rate as far as six percent should a particular frontiersman find the fifteen percent tax to be overly onerous. In addition, Spain extended the promise of land grants, commercial privileges equal to those of other Spanish subjects, and religious toleration to all those immigrants who agreed to move to Spanish territory and take an oath of allegiance to the Crown.[63]

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[62] Whitaker, 100-01
[63] Whitaker, 102

It was hoped that this new policy would take advantage of the frontiersmen's embattled and outraged condition. It essentially provided the frontiersmen with all they had asked for and addressed their residual fears concerning equality. The Mississippi would be theirs (for a price), and they would fall under the protection of an empire far older and grander than the faltering United States. In addition, they would be given lands and commercial advantages they then lacked. Even their Protestant Christianity would be tolerated by this more benevolent incarnation of 'His Most Catholic Majesty'. Hopes were certainly high as the royal order of December 1, 1788 was dispatched to Governor Miro.

It wasn't until March of 1789 that Miro actually received the order, but he wasted no time in acting once it was in his possession. On April 20, 1789, one month after the order's arrival, a letter from Governor Miro appeared on the desk of General James Robertson. Robertson had recently requested a passport for his son-in-law to travel into Spanish territory and possibly settle there. Miro's reply is telling in its conformity with the conditions laid out in the royal order:

> I will give you the passport you asked for your son-in-law, & I will be highly please with his coming down to settle in this Province, *& much more if you and your family should come along with him, since I can assure you that you will find here your welfare, without being either molested on religious matters or paying any duty, & with the circumstance of finding always market for your crops*, which makes every one of the planters settled at Natchez, or elsewhere to improve every day, much more so than if they were to purchase the Lands, *as they are granted gratis.*[64]

Miro was apparently willing to waive Robertson's obligation to the navigation tax in order to sweeten the pot of religious toleration, land grants, and open markets Spain was already offering

[64] Esteban Miro to James Robertson, April 20, 1789, in AHM 1, no.1 (1896), 87.

other frontiersmen. This was undoubtedly meant to take advantage of Robertson's elevated status among his frontier followers. Miro knew that Robertson was so revered that a relocation of his family to Spanish lands would greatly increase the likelihood that other frontier families would follow suite.

Unfortunately for both Miro and his Spanish superiors, events that would fatally weaken their arguments for the advantages of Spanish rule were already in motion. On September 17, 1787, the Constitutional Convention of Philadelphia had accepted the Constitution and began the process of ratification. This new incarnation of the American political system was stronger, more centrally based, and, therefore, more capable of dealing with both foreign and Indian nations. If North Carolina indeed ratified the document, Cumberland would no longer have to depend on the state for protection. Instead, they could appeal for the protection of George Washington's new federal government.

* * *

A Less Distracted Republic

By the time that Robertson sent his reply to Miro's offer in September of 1789, eleven of the thirteen colonies had ratified the Constitution. Only North Carolina and Rhode Island were still debating the issue. Despite the hesitation of their parent state, however, the people of Cumberland were greatly encouraged by the appearance of the new federal government. In its stability, they saw renewed hope for protection from the Indians as well as a strong voice for their navigation contention with Spain. These hopes seemed to be confirmed by a letter from I.H. Williamson, a North Carolina official, announcing the actions President Washington was taking toward both Indian and foreign relations. Williamson wrote:

> Commissioners are just appointed by the President of the United States to treat with the Southern Indians; they are to sail in a few days for Georgia with a guard of Continental Soldiers…It is conceived that Genl. Lincoln….having a general Character of a soldier and Statesman will *impress the Southern Indians with an idea that trifling is at an end*, and that they must seriously treat and faithfully abide by what they promise. It is possible that the troops will be left as a *barrier on the frontier* to see that neither parties break the treaty. *This I believe is the beginning of general Peace and security against the Indians.*[65]

These words must have seemed a God-send to the embittered frontiersmen. This new government had been in existence for only two years, yet, it was already promising support from a central military force and a new, strong-arm Indian policy. Williamson also tried to answer any frontier fears concerning the sincerity of such promises in the face of North Carolina's refusal to ratify by writing

> North Carolina Not being in the Union, the Commissioners will be most hampered in any negotiations with the Cherokees. I have however handed them a long Memorial representing the interest of our State and *praying that in all negotiation they would have an eye on the safety of our Citizens and not encourage the Indians to expect the removal of any settlers off the lands they hold.* I hope the representations I have made will be of use to our *Western Friends*, and I may safely venture to say that no man living is more anxious to secure the inhabitants of Davidson and the adjoining Counties than myself.[66]

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[65] I.H. Williamson to James Robertson, August 31, 1789, AHM 1, no.1 (1896): 89.
[66] Ibid

Could this be real? Was the central government finally conscious of the plight of its western settlements? Williamson was certainly taking every measure to ensure that Robertson, the most influential man in Cumberland, thought so. Not only were troops finally on their way, but the new government was going to ensure that the settlers got to keep whatever lands they held despite the Indians' claims? Robertson and his officers were likely filled with equal shares of relief, excitement, and skepticism. For almost a decade, they had existed in virtual isolation on an Indian controlled frontier in the shadow of feckless state and central governments.

Williamson, however, would have been aware of the suspicions the forsaken frontiersmen would retain toward his assurances. He therefore saved his most pertinent piece of news until the end of his dispatch. In his final paragraph, Williamson added:

> If you have seen any News Papers you may have observed that Congress Have established a Post on the Ohio, not with much hope as you must be assured, of collecting many Duties on Goods brought up the Mississippi, *but to part fair and let Spain see that the new Government is resolved to maintain its Claim to the Navigation of that River.* This you see augurs well. Since the resolve I had the good fortune to obtain in Congress on the last Summer in favor of the Mississippi Claim, *no Doubts have ever been hinted on that subject.*[67]

With this statement the government sought to mend the wounds it had inflicted by considering the cession of navigation rights in years past. Yet the true importance of this letter lies not in any individual aspect; instead, its status as the first official communication of federal strength to the frontier is what garners its place in history. It is also important to note that Robertson is receiving this letter only four months after Miro's communication of Spain's willingness to offer the frontiersmen similar advantages if they would forsake the U.S. and become Spanish subjects.

[67] Ibid

This placed the frontiersmen in a unique diplomatic situation. Instead of the ignored, red-headed step children of North America, they found themselves in 1789 at the heart of a battle between two strong nation-states for their loyalty. Their "remote situation" no longer seemed to leave them "utterly destitute of the benefit of the Laws of [their] County" as they had claimed in their original compact.[68]

This moment marked the beginning of a new era for the Cumberland settlers. For a decade, their letters, declarations, and compacts used language that called out for help from anyone who would give it. Faith in the Articles of Confederation government was scant and goodwill toward the Spanish Crown had fared even worse. Nonetheless, the frontiersmen had sent pleas for assistance out of sheer necessity. As of late 1789, however, they found themselves in a position of choice. *Any* protection was no longer the primary goal. Instead, a search for the *best* protection took center stage in the lands south of the Ohio.

* * *

Theory of Evolution

Robertson soon set out to send his duplicitous responses to Miro and Williamson's letters. On the 2nd of September, he wrote to Miro that "the United States afford us no protection. The District of Miro is daily plundered and its inhabitants murdered by the Creeks, and Cherokees, unprovoked. Your removing the latter Savages would bind us, ever to remain a grateful people." He continued that, "for [his] own part," he "conceive[d] highly of the advantages of [Miro's] immediate Government." He went on to claim, however, that "my estate, here, is Such that I could not flatter myself to equal it by removing to any part [of Spanish

[68] "Cumberland Compact," *Tennessee State Library and Archives* (2008). http://tsla-teva.state.tn.us/landmarkdocs/files/188.php.

territory]."[69] It is not difficult to hear the 'you can do better than that' sentiment contained in this letter. The frontiersmen were infused with an intense particularlism that bound them tightly to their lands.[70] The Spanish, or any other power, would have to be much more absolute in their offerings to win their support.

Drawing from this refusal and the rapid succession of events that followed to secure Cumberland's place within the Southwest Territory (1790)*, most historians have abandoned Cumberland as a participant in the intrigues in favor of Wilkinson and Sevier in Kentucky and Franklin, respectively. Arthur Whitaker devotes only two pages to specifically discussing "Intrigue and Indian Ravages" in the Cumberland area. In defense of this brevity, Whitaker claims that "the intrigue never got beyond the preliminary stages." He continues that "the intrigue was Cumberland's last resort in securing the relief from Indian attacks" after efforts by Robertson to ally with McGillivray failed. Due to a "lack of space," Whitaker drops the subject there, as do most other historians of the Old Southwest. [71]

Even prominent Old Southwest historian Thomas Abernethy abandoned Cumberland in the wake of territorialization. In his landmark monograph *The South and the New Nation*, Abernethy declared that "all along those men [Cumberland settlers] had desired the support of their fellow citizens east of the mountains." Once the federal government appointed Blount territorial governor and recognized Cumberland as part of an official territory, Abernethy argued that "no more was heard of the Spanish Conspiracy in the country which was soon to become the State of Tennessee."[72]

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[69] James Robertson to Esteban Miro, September 2, 1789, in *AHA, vol. 3, Spain in the Mississippi Valley 1765-1794*, ed. Lawrence Kinnaird (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 279-280
[70] Whitaker, 91.
[71] Whitaker, 111-13.
[72] Thomas P. Abernethy, *A History of the South: The South in the New Nation 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 60.

I find these conclusions highly unsatisfying. There is ample evidence to suggest that the intrigues never left the minds of Robertson and other Cumberland settlers after the creation of the federal government and the Southwest Territory. Instead, it appears that the diplomacy employed by the frontiersmen evolved into a more sophisticated and subtle form. With the emergence of a powerful U.S. government, hope was renewed for officially joining the union as a full-fledged state, just as Kentucky did in 1792. The eventual success of the United States in integrating the territory, however, should not mask evidence that suggests there was still much dissatisfaction and suspicion of the U.S. all the way up to the creation of the state of Tennessee in 1796. It was this dissatisfaction that allowed the possibility of intrigue to remain alive. As long as the U.S. failed to fulfill the needs of the settlers, the door remained open for Spain to do so first.

Evidence of this duplicity is found in such letters as Robertson's dispatch to Governor William Blount on August 25, 1792. Likely responding to a January letter from John Sevier that reported "the news of this place [Philadelphia] is not very material…many things are before Congress, but not much finished," Robertson wrote that "I am well assured that our not having received adequate protection is owing to our silence, and remote situation, a full proof of which we have in our neighbors, the Kentuckians, who are most amply protected. It is my belief that the Indians entertain an opinion, that the United States are not warmly interested for our welfare, the fixing a few garrisons by the Authority of the United States would convince, and most incredibly deter them."[73] In this letter, Robertson contradicts his earlier insinuation to Miro that the U.S. never afforded and never could afford Cumberland any protection. Instead, he seems quite confident in the idea that the new government *will* be capable of protecting his people. Their failure thus far was merely "owing to [Cumberland's] silence." This statement is

[73] James Robertson to William Blount, August 25, 1791, AHM 1, no.2 (1896): 191.

remarkable because Robertson comes very close to placing blame on himself and his settlers instead of the government. This is a far cry from the language used the decade before in which frontiersmen declared themselves destitute because the government was completely ignoring them by no fault of their own.

Robertson's papers also reveal that federal leaders were constantly trying to maintain any new expectations of aid from the U.S. Blount repeatedly refers to the "Plan of Defense of Cumberland" that he is trying to push through Congress and the troops he is preparing to send at the first opportunity.[74] Secretary of War Henry Knox himself wrote to Blount in 1791 to assure him and his territory that they would "never want [for] the firm support of the Supreme executive of the United States [George Washington]."[75]

Robertson, however, continued to face great internal pressures towards intrigue. On the first of February, 1792, Tennessee County, a part of the newly organized Mero Distric that was named in honor of Esteban Miro by Robertson, sent Robertson a petition that asserted

> We already feel the effects of the navigation of the [Mississippi] river being shut up…We also beg leave to assure you that *the Frontiers will break* unless some speedy method is Taken to secure them from the Inroads of the Savages which must be followed with the most fatal Consequences. *We are much afraid Sir, that Government has not vested their officers in this Country with Authority* to Carry on Expedition against any Nation or Village of Indians – yet we are confident that something must be done with the Indians that do the mischief on our Frontiers.

[74] William Blount to James Robertson, September 3, 1791; September 21, 1791; April 1, 1792; April 27, 1792, in AHM 1, no.2-4 (1896): 192, 193, 237, 390.
[75] Henry Knox to William Blount, November 19, 1791, in AHM 1, no.2 (1896): 194.

> *We are willing to pursue every Lawful means to procure peace and Tranquility among us.*[76]

These 'common' frontiersmen seemed to lack Robertson's early faith that the U.S. government *could* eventually protect them. As the next chapter will show, they were actually much closer to the truth than they could have thought. Presently, however, they demanded swift and significant action. At times, the policies they advocated amounted to little more than thinly veiled statements of intrigue similar to those seen in the 1780s. In February of 1792, the citizens of Tennessee County wrote

> We beg leave to suggest to you the Idea that an Express from you to the *Commandant at New Madrid* setting forth to him that it is his people [Spaniards and Indian allies] that does the mischief in our Country, and *what ever you think most proper, might answer some good purpose.* We also think that *a full representation of our grievances & Situation had better be immediately laid before Governor Blount.* We have the greatest Confidence that you will immediately do everything in your power to relieve the Distresses of the people under your command.[77]

These wishes would have been very serious business in the eyes of Robertson. The frontier was still a dangerous place in which the settlers would certainly act in their own best interests if they felt their authorities were not. If Robertson wished to keep his privileged place as General and most favored son of Cumberland, he would have to try and find the 'best possible solution' to the grievances of his people. Complete compliance with the federal government as it slowly moved toward the fulfillment of their promises to Cumberland did not fit well with the immediate needs

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[76] Tennessee County to James Robertson, February 1792, in AHM 1, no.3 (1896): 284.
[77] Ibid

to which the common frontiersman was subject. It is also significant to note the degree to which the settlers failed to differentiate between aid from Spain and aid from the U.S. This is indicative of both their willingness to engage with whatever nation should offer them protection and the unsettled sentiment that kept the intrigues alive after 1789.

The seriousness of the threat to Robertson's position as esteemed leader is even more evident in an anonymous letter sent to Robertson in July of 1792. The enraged citizen, who identified himself only as "A Citizen of Mero District," wrote in reference to an Indian fighting party Robertson had recalled in order to comply with federal orders

> I was much surprised when I heard of your wishing to stop Capt. John Edmonson from going against the Indians with a Volunteer Company in order to retaliate for the damage they are daily doing us. But hearing it generally reported in the Country that it has been always your endeavor to stop all those that wish to [do] good to this Country and damage to the Indians, *I must join with those of my Countrymen* and wish Edmonson great success *and you gone hence and a better in your room.*[78]

Robertson's ability to maintain his position of power depended on the loyalty of his followers as well as the approval of his superiors (i.e. Blount, Knox, and Washington). This placed him in the predicament of how to sustain a balance of interest until either the U.S. government came through with their promises or the Spanish did so with theirs.

Thus Robertson was forced to pursue a complex policy in the wake of the Constitution as the situation of the frontier settlers became ever more complicated and perilous. Instead of merely looking for *any* helping hand, they now had to choose the better of two equally viable yet frustrating nations. As the 1790s progressed, the initially boundless hope the federal government

[78] Anonymous to James Robertson, July 10, 1792, AHM 2, no.1 (1897): 68-9.

had originally offered began to develop cracks. The U.S.'s hand was certainly present, but not in the way Robertson or his followers had expected. Blount and Knox would begin to progressively restrict rather than encourage the discretion of frontiersmen to defend themselves. Robertson was kept under strict orders on exactly what he could spend (in the way of federal money) and when he could and couldn't call out his militia. The Mississippi question also remained unresolved as Spain continued its efforts to lure settlers into its fold via promises of land grants, navigation rights, commercial freedom, and religious toleration. The Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and Choctaws also began entering the international fray in a more proactive way. Robertson's papers reveal that they recognized the potential power of the federal government just as much as the frontiersmen did. Despite the U.S.'s fairly stable Indian policy during the 1790s under Secretary of War Henry Knox, new waves of jealousy and outrage would begin to wash over the frontier as its people perceived (many times wrongly) an American state who sided with natives more than its own setters and neglected the Southwest Territory in favor of its northern counterpart. Within these sentiments, the flames of intrigue would continue to smolder throughout the 1790s. The threat of intrigue would remain alive as long as the frontier remained unsatisfied. The full complexity of these post-Constitutional evolutions in diplomacy and the ultimate death of the Spanish Intrigues are the substance of the final chapter.

Aftermath

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Ratification of a federal Constitution dramatically altered the political landscape of the frontier. Residual diplomatic assumptions dissolved in the face of a cohesive federal government. New levels of complexity arose within the intrigues as talks between frontiersmen, Spaniards, and Indians were forced to include the U.S. as a true power for the first time. The U.S. government, which had exacerbated feelings of discontent within both frontier and Indian communities throughout the 1780s, began attempts to extend its newly appointed domestic powers into frontier territories. For Cumberland settlers, hope mingled with reservation as their settlement was integrated into the new Southwest Territory and brought under the jurisdiction of George Washington's administration. The manner in which the U.S. government was able to harness its new political powers, however, was not as cohesive and protectionist as traditionally thought.

For example, the American mythology of Manifest Destiny gives one the impression that Cumberland's prospects should have immediately benefited from federal protection, money, and order when it was integrated as an official territory. It was certainly in this spirit that Abernethy wrote

> On April 2, 1790, the federal Congress accepted [North Carolina's cession] offer, and on May 26 the Territory South of the River Ohio was created with essentially the same form of government as that already adopted for the Northwest Territory. William Blount was appointed governor; he in turn appointed Sevier to command the militia of the East Tennessee settlements and Robertson to command in the Cumberland Region. All along, these men [frontiersmen] had desired the support

> of their fellow citizens east of the mountains, and now that they had it, no more was heard of the Spanish Conspiracy in the country which was soon to become the State of Tennessee.[79]

From this statement, it would seem that Cumberland was able to seamlessly integrate into both the territory and federal union. With Blount as its head and Robertson and Sevier as its local commanders, Abernethy argued that the Territory South of the River Ohio should have fallen into a more stable and secure existence. The intrigues, he argued, should have dissolved with the new administration. The validity of this assertion, however, depends heavily on two factors: the geo-political perspective from which the intrigues are considered and the basic definition of intrigue to which one subscribes.

First, let us consider the problem of perspective. Abernethy's assertion that intrigue ended for Cumberland in 1789 is typical of the existing historiography. This is primarily due to the prominent instances throughout the Old Southwest in which the federal government was able to immediately snuff out the intrigues via the creation of strong local allies. The most visible of these allies was William Blount. His position as territorial governor depended completely on the good graces of his federal superiors. He was, after all, hand-picked by President Washington to lead the territory. Some historians have even argued that Washington "used his power simply to buy Blount" in order to check the intriguing tendencies he had displayed in the 1780s.[80] Surviving letters strongly suggest that Washington's ploy paid off handsomely. Flush with power and prestige, Blount proved a reliable voice for the diplomatic restraint the new

[79] Abernethy, 60.
[80] Walter Lefeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1994), 44.

administration was preaching. "I am doing all I can in conformity to the wishes of the President for the entire reestablishment of Peace," Blount wrote in February of 1793.[81]

As we will soon see, however, the 'wishes of the President' did not always align themselves with the needs of the Cumberland frontiersmen. Instead, the policies Blount conveyed to Robertson often put them at odds. Robertson's need to hold a hard line against the Indians who still threatened his citizens daily led to many instances in which Blount reprimanded him either directly or via talks with Indian leaders. In September of 1792, for instance, Blount responded to the complaints of The Glass, a Cherokee chief, concerning Robertson. The Glass claimed that Robertson had written him a letter that claimed "there had been a great deal of blood spilt in his [Robertson's] settlement and that he would come and sweep it clean with our blood." In an attempt to defuse the Glass' anger, Blount assured him that "He [Robertson] is only a warrior under me and your people ought not to be so offended at it as to make war against the United States. It is my talks you ought to attend to and not to those of any body else except to those of the President or the Secretary of War; it is we and nobody else the United States have authorized to talk to you and transact with you on their part."[82] Such rhetoric undermined Robertson's credibility as a leader, general, and diplomat with the surrounding Indian nations. While President Washington would eventually appoint Robertson as an authorized Indian Agent to the Chickasaws so that his diplomatic and military actions could be more closely supervised, the political barriers separating Robertson's Cumberland from Blount's East Tennessee settlements and the federal government were great in the early years of the territory and the divide separating the them only grew wider for most of the first half of the 1790s.

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[81] Blount to Robertson, February 13, 1793, in AHM 2, no.2 (1897): 176.
[82] Blount to The Glass, September 13, 1792, in AHM 2, no.1 (1897): 73.

This disconnect between Robertson's government in Cumberland and Blount's administration in East Tennessee weakens the ability of historians like Abernethy to conclude that the integration of the more isolated Southwest governments went as smoothly as those with closer connection to federal power. Just as previous chapters established Cumberland's early involvement in the intrigues as unique, this chapter will seek to establish Cumberland's circumstances in the final years of intrigue as equally distinctive.

The second factor that must be resolved is one of definition. Abernethy and others have either declared the intrigues over in Cumberland or simply ignored the region in the post 1789 years due to a conceptualization of intrigue that is limited to the classic diplomatic sense. While Robertson's papers confirm the absence of the kind of intrigue-laced language so prevalent in the 1780s correspondence between Spain and Cumberland, this does not necessarily mean that one can declare the intrigues null and void. Instead, one must realize that the intrigues existed almost exclusively as verbal threats. Measurable action had always been scarce if present at all. Instead, rhetoric was the medium that had dominated the existence of the intrigues. For the frontiersmen, Spaniards, Indians, and federal officials, verbal threats of destruction, invasion, expulsion, or secession, respectively, had kept the intrigues smoldering throughout the 1780s.

Viewing the Spanish Intrigues as communicated threat allows one to scour the surviving documents with a fresh eye as to the evolved nature the intrigues took on in the wake of federal emergence. The threat of war posed by the new, more powerful U.S. government was enough to suppress openly seditious language in the newly integrated Southwest Territory, but the historiography neglects to address the residual possibility that such sedition could once again flare from the ashes into full-blown intrigue. Abernethy and others were wrong to declare the frontiersmen satisfied under the new federal government. Instead, the exact opposite may have

been true. Inadequate funds, seemingly empty promises of military support, and the constant suppression of their ability to pursue their Indian attackers led to great frustration among the settlers of Mero District. The *threat* that the frontiersmen could once again open the door to intrigue in order to solve these lingering problems remained strong. For this reason, it is impossible to dismiss the intrigues as a legitimate threat to the loyalties of Cumberland until the 1794-95 period. This chapter, therefore, will also seek to explore issues that kept the possibility of intrigue in Cumberland alive in the first half of the 1790s as well as the circumstances that eventually led to the demise of intrigue. U.S. Indian policy was a major source of frustration during this period and, therefore, warrants further explanation.

* * *

Broader Contexts

In the years following the Revolution, the United States developed an Indian policy that "lacked both practicality and a sense of principle."[83] In the absence of the restraining Proclamation Line of 1763, Americans began moving west in both the northern and southern regions of the country. Hoping to provide land for these settlers as well as alleviate the new nation's financial burdens, Congressional committees shaped Indian policy in the 1783-1785 period to reflect these interests with little regard to Indian land rights. Americans generally did not differentiate between the Indians who had fought alongside the British during the Revolution and those that had not. Consequently, all the Indian nations suffered from equally harsh and indifferent treatment when the central government decided to expand influence over their lands.[84]

[83] Reinald Horsman, "The Indian Policy of an 'Empire for Liberty,'" in *Native Americans and the Early Republic*, Frederick E. Hoxie, Ronald Hoffman, and Petere J. Albert ed (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 37-38.
[84] Ibid

For these reasons, U.S. interest quickly settled on the lands northwest of the Ohio River. Unlike their counterparts south of the Ohio, northwestern territories were quickly ceded to the central government by their respective states. This allowed the government to take full control of their division and reap the full benefits of their sale. The potential revenues from such sales were incentive enough for the government to devote far more military and economic resources to controlling and eventually expelling the northern Indian tribes than the southern ones.[85]

By any account, however, the new government was ill-equipped to handle the responsibilities of controlling the northern territories. Historian Reginald Horsman notes how "the impoverished, ill-armed United States did not have the means to carry out the policy of force that it had adopted." At the time, the U.S. commanded only one regular regiment ready to bear arms and had little to no money to raise additional troops in order to face the thousands of Indian warriors preparing to defend their homelands should the U.S. attempt organized settlement. In the southern territories, hundreds of settlers remained undeterred by the U.S.'s failure to gain control in the north. Spurred on by land speculators like Richard Henderson, Carolinians and Georgians began spilling over the Appalachian Mountains to take advantage of the huge tracts of land being offered. Copying their northern counterparts, these settlers held little regard for Indian rights of soil. Unlike the north, the vast backwoods to which the settlers traveled were retained by the states of North Carolina and Georgia. These state governments, however, shared their citizens' contempt for Indian rights. Treaties were signed covertly and often by force with the few chiefs in a given nation open to American expansion.[86] During this entire period, North Carolina issued land warrants "without regard for Indian land claims" while Georgia moved forward with western developments that would eventually become the four

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

Yazoo Land Companies in 1789. Even as early as March 1775, three Cherokee Chiefs, Attakullakulla, Oconostota, and Savanucah, feeling the unsettling effects of waning British power, signed away around twenty million acres, comprising most of Kentucky and all of Middle Tennessee, to Richard Henderson in the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals despite protests from many other prominent Cherokee leaders, including Attakullakulla's warrior son, Dragging Cannoe.[87] In addition, some of the lands ceded by the Cherokees were highly contested by the Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Shawnees, especially in the future Tennessee region. As the Cumberland settlement would develop directly out of the Middle Tennessee lands gained through this treaty, one can more fully understand why Robertson and his followers would face such fierce Indian hostility throughout Cumberland's existence.

The effect of these early Indian policies was the development of intense Indian hostility, disappointment and conflict for both northern and southern settlers, and an initial sense of failure within the U.S. government concerning their ability to effectively raise revenues via territorial expansion.

* * *

Continued Grievances

In April of 1795, James White led the Hamilton District Superior Court of Law in submitting a formal protest to the territorial government concerning four specific grievances:

> (1) "the Executive officers of the General Government have withheld the pay of the Militia who in 1793 followed the trail of the Army of Creeks and Cherokees...under the pretense that such a pursuit...was an offensive operation;"

[87] Paul H. Beregeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 25-27.

(2) "that taxation should be extended to this Country without representation in the federal Legislature, as in the case of the Excise on ardent spirits;"

(3) that as ample protection has not been afforded to the Inhabitants of this Territory, as to the Inhabitants of States, having Representation in Congress to-wit, when our sufferings, unprovoked and without cause, at the hands of the Cherokees and Creeks have been in a ten fold degree, to the whole of those States;"

(4) "that a delay or neglect has taken place in paying [the] Militia for the withholding of whose pay the Executive officers of the General Government, are without protest while the Mounted Infantry of Kentucky have been paid in advance."[88]

While these complaints emanate from Hamilton District instead of Cumberland, their articulation of common frontier grievances in a formal and organized manner reflected conditions that kept the possibility of intrigue alive in Cumberland. The end of the previous chapter illustrated how frustrations were already rising among the Cumberland settlers in the years 1789-1792. Complaints of vulnerability, undue restriction of force, and lack of funds had already begun showing up on Robertson's desk. His papers show ample evidence that he viewed the federal government's weak presence with just as much consternation as the settlers he represented. Not only was Blount constantly reminding him of the need to restrict his forces and check his defense budgets but Robertson's own salary was often delayed by either hold-ups in Philadelphia or an inability to acquire forms of money useful on the frontier.

"The Depredations committed by the Indians…on the peaceable Inhabitants of the District of Mero..will certainly justify with the President the calling a part of the Militia into actual Service for the Defense and Protection of the Frontiers and *I have no doubt but they will*

[88] Hamilton District, Superior Court of Law, April 1795, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 336-37.

be allowed for their Services the Pay of the United States."[89] Thus are the early promises of William Blount to Robertson and his embattled citizens. "I beg you and the District [Cumberland]," he would later write, "to believe that no man can participate in whatever affects them more than I do, that I am ever mindful of their welfare and happy in promoting it."[90] While Blount's affection toward the Cumberland people may have been sincere, he was inescapably bound to the will of a federal government whose sentiments toward the southern territories was markedly cooler. "The most rigid economy is enjoined on me by the federal government," Blount admitted in October of 1793. This 'rigid economy' reflected Knox's new policies concerning expense-conscious expansion and revealed the degree to which Blount had become a mouthpiece for the changes taking place at the federal level.

For Cumberland, however, Knox's 'rigid economy' had much more pragmatic consequences as it effectively restrained the degree to which the settlers could afford to take offensive or defensive military action against the Indians. Even as Blount gave Robertson permission to muster small companies of troops, he warned that "it is impossible for me to make arrangements at this distance for supplying these companies with Rations." He continued that if Robertson should "delay even for a short time" in sending him detailed invoices, the arrival of salaries and supplies could be postponed for "more than a year" as "every Sum of money for any Service is now paid only by Appropriation previously made by Congress. [91] As time passed, such delays in funds would put increasing pressure on both Cumberland's resources and its patience.

To further infuriate the frontiersmen, while Blount and his superiors were claiming they could not provide support for frontier defense, orders were coming in to supply Indian groups

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[89] William Blount to James Robertson, April 1st, 1792, in AHM 1, no.3 (1896): 287.
[90] William Blount to James Robertson, April 27, 1792, in AHM 1, no.4 (1896): 305.
[91] William Blount to James Robertson, April 1, 1792, in AHM 1, no.3 (1896): 287.

passing through Cumberland on their way to and from meetings in Philadelphia. It was not uncommon for horses, clothing, food, whiskey, and even munitions to be among the items Robertson was asked to supply.[92] This was especially true for the Choctaws and Chickasaws, who were emerging U.S. allies against the more hostile Creeks. While Robertson had long standing relationships with some of the Chickasaws that would have made contributions to them less onerous, relations with the Creeks and Cherokees were less amiable. Even for the Creeks, however, Knox's efforts to peacefully and 'morally' expand the U.S.'s land holdings through treaties and Indian relationship building often outweighed Cumberland's complaints. Secretary of War Knox wrote to one of his majors in April of 1793 that "The Chickasaws are at war with the Creeks; who are represented by Governor Blount to be extremely troublesome to the Cumberland Settlements, and other parts of his government, but…it is the policy of the Government to endeavour to preserve peace with the Creeks."[93] Thus Cumberland's original hope for a new era of peace and protection under the Constitution in 1789 seemed to be dissolving into a body of lies. While the origin of these orders lay in Knox's plan to 'civilize' the southern tribes, the people of Cumberland would have perceived such efforts as only slightly short of betrayal. To them, Cumberland seemed to be just as isolated and besieged as in the previous decade. When viewed from Cumberland's perspective, the government's emerging policies of restricting frontier military movements without providing immediate support to supplement the loss of such freedoms, while also threatening swift retaliation for crimes committed within Indian territory, would indeed have seemed both intrusive and unfair. It is this growing resentment that would keep the possibility of intrigue alive until resources were

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[92] Henry Knox to Chickasaw Nation, April 7, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 336-37..
[93] Henry Knox to General Wayne, April 27, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 362..

available at the federal level to carry out Knox's policies in a way that seemed satisfactory to the Cumberland settlers.

Residual Spanish Influences

At the same time that federal effectiveness was falling suspect within Cumberland, word of Spanish actions among the Indians continued to filter into the settlement. On May 9, 1793, Spanish commandant of New Madrid, Thomas Portelle, wrote to Robertson assuring him that he would "not fail" to encourage peace "to the Different Tribes that are, or may come to this Post with regard to your Citizens."[94] Two weeks later, a letter from the Baron de Carondelet arrived from New Orleans. Among discussions of the wisdom, or lack thereof, in arming the Chickasaws with American cannons, Carondelet offers Robertson several explanations as to how the Spanish are really the force keeping the Indians at bay, not the new American government. He wrote

> I prevailed on them [the Cherokee Nation] to stop every hostility against the Cumberland Settlement and the neighboring ones lest they should be found to take up arms in their own defense whilst my most gracious king whose protection they requested will indicate with the Congress to direct the fixing of certain boundary lines which being advantageous to both Nations may prevent altogether further contest. The same has been observed with the Creek Nation whose Indians I distracted from being hostile to the Georgians while the affair of the limits is in a fair and friendly way treated at Madrid between the minister of his Majesty and the agents of the United States.[95]

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[94] Thomas Portelle to James Robertson, May 9, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 364.
[95] Baron de Carondelet to James Robertson, May 21, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 365-66..

The effect this statement would have had on Robertson's thinning patience with the federal government is significant. While it is unclear if Spain would have actually been capable of restraining Indian hostility in the face the overtly expansionist Georgians, Carondelet was holding out the promise of a "general peace" for "the settlement of Cumberland and their neighbors...without which the said settlement would not flourish" that stood in stark contrast to the more pessimistic and unreliable news coming out of Philadelphia.[96] In fact, a series of letters from Blount and Daniel Smith would arrive at Cumberland a month after Carondelet's that reported continued silence from Philadelphia concerning the Indian issue and the general belief that "war will be unavoidable by fall."[97]

Such reports as these certainly seemed to suggest that the Spanish government held greater sway over the Indian nations and were acting with greater haste to end the frontier boundary conflict than the U.S. The dilemma Robertson faced in his perception of Spain is clear in a December 9th letter to the Baron de Carondelet. Robertson wrote, "Various reports have circulated with us of the Spanish Government having incited the Indians to war against us, of which I hold it my duty to inform the Government; though at the same time I knew not how to reconcile them with information I receive through the channel of correspondence with several Spanish officers, and other corroborating circumstances wholly incompatible with such measures which I also remarked in representations to Government."[98] This letter suggests that Robertson both continued to maintain open lines of communication with 'Spanish officers' and hesitated in believing one power over the other. His inability to reconcile the conflicting reports he was receiving speaks to his continuing distrust of the federal government's intentions to provide aid.

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[96] Ibid

[97] William Blount to James Robertson, June 6, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 366; Daniel Smith to James Robertson, June 19, 1793, in AHM 2, no.4 (1897): 367-68.

[98] James Robertson to Baron de Carondelet, December 9, 1793, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 270-71.

Yet he does not fully trust Spain either. They remain a foreign power with a vastly different culture that may have at one time campaigned for Cumberland's destruction via Indian attacks. The fact that Robertson remains skeptical of both sides, however, opens the possibility that he was not as fully integrated into the federal system as Abernethy and others have supposed. Indeed, it would seem from this letter that he still harbored a good deal of distrust. The *threat* that Cumberland still retained the capacity to reject the U.S. in favor of Spain is enough to justify dismissing Abernethy's assertions in favor of a more nuanced analysis that is both skeptical of the traditional American narrative of expansion and attentive to the fact that Cumberland's perception of events rather than their reality shaped the nature of intrigue in the area.

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The Demise of the Intrigues

Thus we have reached virgin soil in the historiography of Cumberland. Instead of assuming that Cumberland settlers were immediately content under federal rule, and thus immune to Spanish intrigues, we have allowed the surviving documents to reveal a previously overlooked truth: the Cumberland frontiersmen were actually quite discontented with the federal government's performance in the years 1789-1793. While the direct rhetoric of intrigue had faded, the threat of secession that fueled the intrigues persisted in the face of inadequate funding, military protection, and representation. If this is the new path of Cumberland history, however, what happened to finally solidify Cumberland's allegiance to the federal government as part of the State of Tennessee? The answer lies in the way Cumberland settlers perceived the shift in federal attention and supplies that began to show up in Robertson's letters around 1794. While 1794 marked no definite change in the Indian policies established by Knox, Robertson's letters reveal how the ability of the federal government to finally divert resources to the Southwestern

conflicts would have given the Cumberland settlers the impression that federal policy was changing in their favor.

The first glimmer of a more active, assertive federal government appears in Robertson's papers via a January 9th letter from William Blount to James Seagrove, agent of the United States to the Creeks. For the first time, a federal official seemed to directly confront the boundary issue that had plagued Cumberland for so long. Blount argued that according to the Cherokees, Chickasaws, and even many of the Creek leaders, the Creeks had not shown interest in the Cumberland region until they were "driven from their traditional sea shore hunting grounds" by white settlements; thus, their claim of ancestral right to the land was null and void[99]. Blount then turned his attention to certain aspects of a four year-old agreement between the U.S. government and the Creek Indians, the 1790 Treaty of New York.

Under the Treaty of New York, Secretary of War Knox had succeeded in getting Alexander McGillivray and twenty-six other chiefs from the "Upper, Middle and Lower Creeks and Seminoles" to agree to a set of conditions consistent with his new Indian policy. In addition to generic clauses concerning "perpetual peace and friendship" between the two nations, the treaty laid out a framework by which a new, more tightly controlled and clearly defined boundary could be established and regulated. In exchange for the right to punish "as they please" any citizen of the United States who attempted to settle on Indian lands and, thus, forfeited the "protection of the United States," Knox was able to garner a concession by which "the undersigned Kings, Chiefs and Warriors, do hereby for themselves and the whole Creek nation, their heirs and descendants, for the considerations above-mentioned, release, quit claim, relinquish and cede, all the land to the northward and eastward of the boundary herein described

[99] William Blount to James Seagrove, January 9, 1794, AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 273.

[which amounted to 34°47"].[100] In addition, both nations agreed to deliver any citizen who committed a violent crime or robbery against a citizen of the other nation and allow the offender to fall subject to the laws of the nation in which the offense took place. For frontiersmen, this would have seemed a disaster as it effectively restricted them from raiding Indian towns or even hunting in Indian territory without risking the loss of their status as a U.S. citizens and punishment under Indian law.

Yet discussions of this treaty do not appear in Robertson's surviving documents either in 1790 or any year thereafter until Blount invokes it in the above mentioned January 9, 1794 letter. While this does not conclusively establish that Robertson was largely unaware of the deal struck at New York, it does suggest that his perception of the treaty would have been shaped by Blount's 1794 portrayal of its frontier-friendly aspects. Let us, then, turn to the language of Blount's letter to attempt an understanding of how its assertions would have been received.

As he wrote his January 9th letter, Blount focused on the Creek concessions rather than those of the U.S. His reasoning for doing so is not difficult to imagine. When the U.S.'s willingness to allow Indians the right to freely punish trespassing American citizens as they should see fit is removed from a discussion of the treaty, it does, in fact, appear to be a very pro-frontier document. Blount took advantage of this fact as he invoked both the agreed upon boundary line and the conditions of mutual cooperation in maintaining peace and criminal punishment standards in order to scold the Creeks for what he saw as unjust infractions.
He proclaimed, "I am thus particular in explaining to you this boundery, because I am told the Creeks affect to say as a justification for the many murders and robberies they have unprovokedly committed on the exposed Cumberland people, that they are not under the protection of the United States, otherwise a line would have been drawn between their Nation

[100] "Treaty of New York, August 7, 1790." http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/newyork.htm

and this territory by the treaty of New York."[101] Speaking as an official of the federal government, which he argued had been properly represented at the New York treaty signing by Secretary of War Knox, Blount claimed to have "very correct" information that the Creeks and their Cherokee cohorts had "killed and made prisoners and slaves of upwards of two hundred citizens" while the "the citizens of the United States resident in this territory" had "done the Creeks no injuries except in defense of their persons or property, or in pursuit of such parties as have injured them." Blatantly overlooking that the Indian attacks mentioned in his 'very correct' information could have been the reciprocal outcome of attacks by frontiersmen, Blount concludes that "the most southern of the Cumberland settlers are in the latitude 35° 55" leaving 1°8" space between them and the Creek line…so that upon every principle the Creeks for the murders and thefts they have committed on the citizens of this territory are without the justification."[102]

As previously mentioned, federal leaders like Knox were well aware that the settlers of both the northern and southern frontiers were anything but innocent bystanders in the ongoing Indian conflicts. Knox's 1789 assertion that "injuries and murders have been so reciprocal [in the frontier Indian conflicts], that it would be a point of critical investigation to know on which side they have been the greatest" provides full proof of such sentiments.[103] Given the close ties Knox and Washington had established with Blount, he would have certainly been aware of this viewpoint, which was regularly bolstered by Knox's orders to limit frontier military movements against the Indians to prevent unnecessary wars. Since he was sending a copy of this letter directly to Robertson, however, Blount's tone was far more conciliatory toward the frontiersmen and accusatory toward the Creeks. As Blount was the primary avenue through which Robertson

[101] Ibid
[102] Ibid
[103] Horseman, 41.

received information on federal policy, this alteration of tone is significant to the perception Robertson would have formed concerning developments in federal approaches to the frontier. By laying the claims of the United States before Seagrove in such clear and forceful terms, Blount portrayed a United States that was embarking down a new, more focused path of Indian diplomacy in the Southwest Territory. Previously, the federal rhetoric that reached Robertson had been less accusing toward the Indians and more focused on the compromises necessary for peace. This letter, however, portrayed a nation-state that was stepping into its own power. At last, the government appeared to be on the side of the frontiersmen. The wall of central power that the settlers had long hoped could separate them from the "almost daily massacre of [their] Inhabitants" seemed to finally be materializing, even if the reality was that the wall was meant to keep them in as much as it was to keep the Indians out.[104]

The tone of U.S. predictions for peace also began to brighten. While Robertson still faced threats of federal retaliation should he or any of his settlers try to invade West Florida or any other 'friendly neighbor,' communications from Blount and Seagrove began to regularly forecast a much more peaceful future with respect to the Indians and Spaniards.[105] "I have reason to believe," wrote James Seagrove, "that the frontiers of Cumberland will enjoy a greater share of tranquility this winter than any since its settlement" as "heretofore there was not any person in this Nation to restrain the Indians from going there to do mischief." Instead, Seagrove claims, "the Spanish Governors and their Commissaries in the land in public and private encouraged and rewarded them for making war on that unfortunate frontier, this, Sir, I have the most ample proofs of."[106] While Seagrove doesn't lay out these proofs, his testimony as to such

[104] Cumberland Compact in "Landmark Documents," *Tennessee State Library and Archives* (2008). http://tsla-teva.state.tn.us/landmarkdocs/files/188.php.
[105] William Blount to James Robertson, January 18, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 278-80.
[106] James Seagrove to William Blount, February 10, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 285.

would have been a powerful signal to the Cumberland settlers that perhaps Spain had been the genesis of so many of their sufferings rather than their ally against them. Seagrove, after all, had been an agent living among the Creeks for quite some time and could, therefore, be expected to have extensive knowledge of Spain's movements therein.

Even more exciting news crossed Robertson's desk that March, however, when Governor Blount reported that the U.S. House of Representatives was considering building several military posts around the district. "In their recommendation of places proper for posts, [Congressmen] have mentioned the following: In the County of Sumner one at Bledsoe's Lick, one at Morgan's Station and one at Gibson's on Cumberland River; in the county of Davidson one at Hayes Station on Stone River and *the others as General Robertson shall think proper*."[107] This recognition of Robertson's authority and the frontiersmen's ability to govern themselves effectively is an unprecedented site in Robertson's papers up to this point. Never before had Cumberland been given jurisdiction over such a decision or been given such specific outlines for military intervention on their behalf.

As Cumberland waited to hear further about the proposed posts throughout the frontier, seemingly genuine reports of Indian chiefs eager for peace with the U.S. and its territories began to arrive.[108] Between April 14 and 16, 1794, a series of letters arrived at Blount's office in Knoxville that can arguably be positioned as the genesis for the demise of the Spanish Intrigues in Cumberland. Written by Secretary of War Knox, the letter laid out the orders given by President Washington concerning the fate of Cumberland. "In pursuance of the representation made upon the subject of the danger to which Mero District is exposed, the President of the

[107] William Blount to James Robertson, March 8, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 288-90.

[108] Seagrove to Blount, March 18, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 291-92; John Thompson to William Blount, March 28, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 293-94; The Turkey [Cherokee Chief] to William Blount, March 28, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 294-95; William Blount to the Cherokee Nation, November 7-8, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898) 372.

United States authorizes you to make the arrangement herein directed for the protection of the said District, provided you judge the measure necessary until the first day of December next, or longer if the danger shall render the said defense indispensible. *A Post and garrison to be established at the ford at the crossing of Cumberland River*."[109] With this letter, Robertson and his citizens are assured not just money, supplies, or a few troops but a military post that is charged to remain active as long as they are under threat from the remaining bands of Indian warriors not actively engaged in the peace process. Two days later, a dispatch from the Congressional Committee charged by President Washington to deal with the frontier matter arrived. It laid down the three resolutions the Committee had settled upon:

> (1) The President of the United States be authorized to call out such a number of the militia of the said States as may be requisite to carry on offensive operations against such tribes or towns of Indians as may continue hostile, if, in his opinion, such offensive measures may be necessary for the security of the frontier inhabitants, by compelling the Indians to a strict compliance with their treaties...[110]

With this resolution, the government seemed ready to commit human resources to help bolster the small population of weapon-bearing men available in the Mero District. In addition, directly addressing plans to hold the Indians to strict compliance with established treaties helped bolster sentiments that the government was prepared to step in for the good of the frontier and not just the Indians as the frontiersmen had thought in the past.

> (2) The President to be authorized to establish such military posts as he may judge necessary, to prevent, as far as practicable, any depredations of the

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[109] Henry Knox to William Blount, April 14, 1794, in AHM 3, no.3 (1898): 295-96.
[110] Congressional Committee to William Blount, April 16, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 348-49.

> Indians within the boundary lines fixed by the treaty between the United States and them, and also to prevent any lawless attacks by the white inhabitants on the Indians…

A direct promise from a Congressional Committee to establish a military fort within Cumberland would have been an exciting prospect despite the final condition that it was to restrict both Indian *and* frontier attacks. While such a condition had always been onerous to the frontier settlements, the need for strong federal protectionism likely outweighed the price of ceasing raids into Indian territories. From its settlement, Cumberland had continuously sought the protection of North Carolina, the U.S., or whatever nation seemed willing to give it. It is unlikely, therefore, that they would have considered turning down such a direct offer from their parent country. After all, there would have been little incentive for the settlers to risk their lives and property in conflicts the government now seemed ready to step in and fight for them.

> (3) That every officer…who shall go armed over the mutual boundary line, and commit murder…without being legally authorized...shall be considered as having put himself under military power, and shall be tried by a court martial, and if convicted of the murder of the Indian, shall suffer death.

This resolution provides an excellent example of Knox's overarching policy in action. It recognized Indian rights via the punishments necessary for those who violate their territory. It also continues the theme of restriction for both frontiersmen and Indians. Just as in the second clause, however, the presence of federal power negates the need for grand, retaliatory expeditions and, therefore, avoids inciting further resentment from most frontiersmen. If the government could sustain the kind of peace it promised, then the deterrent of punishments for crossing the boundary with intent to do harm could actually benefit the frontiersmen by helping

to prevent a rogue settler from igniting another Anglo-Indian war that would undoubtedly claim the lives of more frontier families and devastate Cumberland once more.

It was sure to be a surprise to the Cumberland settlers when on June 14th of that year, yet another dispatch arrived that made good on the government's promise of military support. For the first time, a list of commanding officers, the troops they were bringing, and the specific dates at which they would arrive in the Mero District were detailed. "Six Howitzers and the ammunition" to supply them were also promised to accompany the in-route troops.[111]

By July 9th, word reached Robertson concerning the first of the posts to be established and the government appeared to be making good on its promise of enforcing existing peace treaties.[112] On July 14th, John McKee wrote to the Glass and other Chiefs of the lower Cherokee Towns, "I hope they [the Lower Towns] are sincere as I am when I assure you that peace is the wish of the U.S., and your interest. But do not deceive yourselves – *Peace does not consist in writing or Beads, but in one and all of your people leaving off to kill the Citizens of the United States*...unless the lower Towns [make] peace immediately, they [will] feel what war is before winter."[113] This direct threat of all out war with the U.S. is another unprecedented moment in the history of Cumberland. While most of the early 1790s was dominated by an Indian policy in the Southwest that seemed to emphasize compromise and friendship, this statement marked a change in federal tone. The divergence of resources and attention to the Southwest allowed federal officials there to legitimately issue threats of national intervention should treaties continue to be broken. While such threats of force from the federal government appear earlier for Cumberland, this was primarily due to the small size and limited resources of Cumberland. As a territory settlement that was already part of the U.S., the federal government would have risked little in

[111] William Blount to James Robertson, June 14, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 350.
[112] Commander of Fort Massac to James Robertson, July 9, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 351.
[113] John McKee to the Glass, July 14, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 352..

forcefully taking it over should they have felt the need to do so. It took new influxes of supplies, however, for federal leaders to feel comfortable in issuing direct threats of military invasion to whole Indian nations as they held far more resources and warriors than Cumberland could have mustered. In addition, by threatening any sort of military action in the Old Southwest, the U.S. risked inciting Spain should the conflict move too close to Spanish territory or threaten the native relationships that had largely led to the intrigues in the first place. The flexing of this diplomatic muscle, therefore, is important in two ways. First, it helped to bolster the psyche of anxious frontiersmen and further tied them to the United States as they interpreted the action as a major alteration of federal policy. Second, it provides direct evidence that a shift in federal supplies and attention, not any real change in policy, took place. Knox's overarching ideas on Indian diplomacy had already been established years before and remained fairly constant during this period.

Frontier perceptions of a change in federal policy were furthered when Blount echoed McKee's warning later that year during a conference with Cherokee Chiefs at Tellico Blockhouse on the 7th and 8th of November. This time, however, he chose to direct the threat at the remaining belligerent sects of the Creek Nation. "If they [the Creeks] do not immediately desist from murdering the frontier Citizens & also cease to rob them of their property," Blount warned, "next Spring or Summer *they will see a strong and powerful Army in their Country.*" "You are at liberty to tell the Creeks what I say," he continued, "not so much as a threat but as information to them to enable them to *judge how best to seek their happiness.*"[114]

In a later letter to Robertson, Blount would confess that "the Cherokees I believe sincerely wish Peace but the Creeks must be humbled before you can enjoy Peace and I fear that wished for Period will never arrive until this Territory becomes a State and is represented in

[114] William Blount to the Cherokee Nation, November 7-8, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 367.

Congress."[115] While the sentiment that war with the Creeks was necessary to 'humble' them into a Peace agreement may at first appear disheartening, I am doubtful that its impact would have been quite so doleful. Instead, this letter marks the first instance in Robertson's papers in which the prospect of statehood is seriously considered. Cumberland had dreamed of statehood in its early years, but the practical concerns of survival combined with the stubbornness of both North Carolina and the Articles of Confederation government to allow such a transition had long ago buried any such thoughts. With the federal government's seemingly stronger interest in Cumberland, however, the dream of statehood revived. Cumberland was becoming ever more politically and militarily linked to the new government, and therefore had ever increasing arguments for induction into the union as a state instead of merely a territory.

Finally, on August 2nd, 1795, Robertson received a letter he and his settlers had waited a long time to receive. It was from Jon Sommerville of Knoxville. He wrote, "I have it in command from the Board of Commissioners for the cutting and clearing a wagon Road from South West Point in Hamilton District to Bledsoe's Lick in Mero District – to request you will make all possible hast in collecting monies arising from the sale of the Salt Licks & Springs &c. in Mero District as well as the monies due from subscription to the fund for cutting and clearing the aforesaid road and to hold the same in your hands subject to the future orders of the Board."[116] While brief, the impact of this note would have been tremendous. For months, the military and political presence of the federal government in Mero District had helped to strengthen ties between the two once disillusioned regions. Yet here was proof that the geographic isolation that had plagued Cumberland from its very inception was also being lessened by the ever more powerful hand of the central government. With the creation of a more

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[115] William Blount to James Robertson, November 22, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 374.
[116] Jon Sommerville to James Robertson, August 2, 1795, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 381.

traversable roadway than the single, rugged trail that had existed before, Cumberland's isolation from the union, its resources, and its military power would have been greatly decreased and the threat of absolute ruin from the loss of the Mississippi lessened even though the river remained the primary object over which the Tennessee frontiers lusted. Spain's ability to hold protection and navigation rights as carrots before the face embattled Cumberland settlers was therefore weakened on two fronts, dealing a devastating blow to the core drivers of the intrigues.

It was within this context that the events we know as the Spanish Intrigues effectively came to an end in Cumberland. While dissent would have certainly continued to ferment in a minority of frontiersmen even into the era of statehood,[117] the Cumberland that existed as the focus of this research begins to draw to an end in 1794. Robertson was preparing to leave the public office he held so influentially for so long. [118] The geo-political isolation that had defined Cumberland's existence as a settlement for fourteen years was slowly being eroded by the growing presence of the federal government. Just as Abernethy predicted, when the frontiersmen were finally connected to the support of their eastern counterparts, the language and, most importantly, the threat of intrigue with the Spanish fell silent. Perhaps the most telling line from Robertson's papers during this period that points to the end of the intrigues is from a letter from Governor Blount to Secretary of War Thomas Pickering dated August 9, 1795 saying, "Letters from General Robertson of the 27th July report the District of Mero to be in a state of peace."[119]

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[117] see letter from John Sevier to Andrew Jackson dated November 26, 1797 as described in Conclusion
[118] William Blount to James Robertson, September 9, 1794, in AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 357.
[119] Blount to Pickering, August 9, 1795, AHM 3, no.4 (1898): 387.

Conclusion

Eleven months after Robertson's August 9, 1795 report of relative peace within Mero District, President Washington signed the State of Tennessee into existence. Integration into a cohesive state government on June 1, 1796 officially brought an end to Cumberland, the political entity that had engaged in the Spanish Intrigues. The long road that led to that integration, however, can tell us much about the early years of American expansion. From the time that Spain first turned its sights on Cumberland all the way up to statehood, Robertson and his followers repeatedly proved that they were much more than the "rough-necked backwoodsmen of the Daniel Boone type" described by Morison.[120] Instead, they were sophisticated diplomats forced into a game of survival and intrigue.

The delicate diplomatic engagements they conducted with the Spanish, the Indians, *and* the federal government were remarkable. They managed to scratch out a living in one of the most remote posts of Anglo settlement in the 1780s while facing nearly constant Indian hostility, a Spanish government hostile to their economic interests, and a federal government incapable of adequately protecting them for the first fourteen years of their existence. Yet their surviving letters reveal that they were not the only diplomats of the frontier. The Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and other tribes who were actively engaged in protecting their right of soil were just as instrumental in shaping the intrigues as the frontiersmen or Spanish. Evidence suggests that some of their chiefs may have even been instrumental in turning Spanish attention to Cumberland in the first place. Their ability to recognize and exploit policy shifts in both the Spanish and American governments allowed them to at least slow the westward spread of white

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[120] S.E. Morison, "Introduction," in Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier: 1783-1795* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1927),.

settlement. By simultaneously engaging the Spaniards and Americans, they were often able to pit them against one another in a contest for their loyalty, trade, and lands.

The sophistication and relative effectiveness with which the Indian nations delayed federal expansion onto their lands casts doubt on the idea of a concrete American Manifest Destiny. This doubt is reinforced when one considers the grievances Cumberland settlers retained toward the federal government and its ability to provide adequate protection to the frontier even as they were integrated as a territory. While popular history suggests that America's march westward was determined, unbroken, and unstoppable, close analysis of Cumberland's experience during the 1780s and 1790s suggests the opposite. Instead of a steady westward trajectory, early American expansion appears to have been haphazard and broken. Even as white settlers moved into new lands, they were not guaranteed any sort of protection by either their respective state or the central government. Scant resources, frontier-wide territorial conflicts, and the shifting of Indian policies under Knox all contributed to the inconsistencies recorded in the Cumberland documents. Frustrations ran high and loyalty to the new republic was in no way certain. Instead, the federal government walked a fine line between expansion and secession. History could have easily turned out much different had the U.S. government not escalated its attention to the southwest when it did.

This is not to say, however, that all discontent ended with the 1794 arrival of federal power in the Southwest Territory. As late as November 1797, John Sevier was warning Andrew Jackson that "a great number of people are determined to descend the Mississippi, and if the measures are pursued, that now so impertinently stare us in the face, I fear one half our citizens will flock over into another government [referring to Spain], indeed they are now doing it

daily."[121] The 'measure' Sevier found so onerous was one that restricted the ability of Tennesseans to establish a new settlement at Muscle Shoals, an area long coveted by both Sevier and Blount. The language of intrigue is clear in his assertion that half of Tennesseans would be willing to desert the U.S. in spite of statehood if they felt they were being treated like they had been in the 1780s. Yet any instance where intrigue appears to rear its head in the years after statehood is beyond the scope of this text and is, instead, a subject for future historians to consider.

For the purposes of this text, the story of intrigue in Cumberland ends in the 1794-95 period. Despite instances when the frontiersmen acted in direct defiance of federal law, such as Robertson's September 1794 offensive in which volunteers from Kentucky, Holston, and Cumberland crossed into Cherokee territory and destroyed the towns of Nickajack and Running Water, this two-year period saw a general trend toward loyalty to the United States.[122] Even in the Nickajack campaign, however, the frontiersmen found evidence that they needed to side with the U.S. and abandon Spain. After destroying Nickajack, Robertson's men found "a quantity of ammunition, powder and lead lately sent the Indians by the Spanish government."[123] This suggested that the Spanish were continuing to fund the remaining hostile Indian factions' attacks on the frontier. This undermined the assertions Spain had made since 1789 that it was working to restrain the Indians from raiding the American frontier, especially Cumberland. Disillusion with Spain over continuing grievances like this, combined with the ever growing presence of the federal government, dealt a fatal blow to the full-blown intrigues seen in the previous decade and a half.

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[121] John Sevier to Andrew Jackson, November 26, 1797, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume 1, 1770-1803*, Sam Smith and Harriet Chappell Owsley ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 155.
[122] Thomas Abernethy, Thomas Abernethy, *A History of the South: The South in the New Nation 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 200.
[123] Ibid

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