

1928

## Book Review: The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1785

Kathryn T. Abbey



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Abbey, Kathryn T. (1928) "Book Review: The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1785," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol7/iss1/9>

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Spanish-American Frontier: 1783-1795*, By Arthur Preston Whitaker. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1927. III+245 pp. Maps and Index.)

One of the long neglected aspects of American history has been the Spanish ambitions, desires, and intrigues in relation to the infant republic which the treaty of 1783 established in the new world. The territorial expansion of that republic was most closely interwoven with Spain, and the expansion itself was made largely at the expense of her holdings or those of her former colonies. It is of the plans and policies arising from such border situations in the years immediately following the Revolution, that Dr. Whitaker treats in his recently published book entitled, *The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1795: The Westward Movement and the Spanish Retreat in the Mississippi Valley*.

The period is one of extreme complexity, for the war with England left many questions unsettled between the United States and Spain. The boundary between the Floridas and the southern limits of the new nation was in dispute; the right to navigate the Mississippi, so glibly given to the Americans by their former mother country, was vehemently denied by Spain; the commercial treaty, so keenly desired by the Eastern States, had not been negotiated; while permeating the whole situation were the ever-present fear of the Spanish of American expansion and the restless ambition of the frontiersmen. The twelve years under discussion was a tangled maze of Indian alliances, secession plots, land-jobbing schemes, and fur-trading

interests. The author had before him no easy road when he set himself the task of discovering the unity of the many events—the meaning of the apparent confusion. It is greatly to his credit that he is able to reconstruct a fascinating story and to set forth, as the narrative progresses, some excellent examples of historical synthesis. It is an additional tribute to him that the reader is repeatedly conscious of a curiosity to know more of certain events—to sink the plumb line of research deeper into specific situations. Dr. Whitaker will probably satisfy this desire in the years to come. The present volume is obviously a fairly general treatment of the whole period, as the *Acknowledgment* informs one that further study of the subject has already been planned.

The most important source from which the book has been drawn is the Spanish Archives at Seville and Madrid, but a satisfying amount of American, French, and English material is cited. Few secondary books or articles are mentioned, but this is due to the scarcity of such work among both Spanish and American historians. Two criticisms of the technical handling of the material might be made: First, there is no general list of sources; hence, the reader who wishes to know whether certain books, articles, or documents have been consulted must scan fourteen chapters of footnotes. Second, all the footnotes, although clearly and concisely arranged by chapters, have been placed by the publisher at the end of the volume. For the layman who is reading for the tale alone, this is well; for the critical student who wishes from time to time to check and verify the author's statements, it is a decided inconvenience.

The volume as a whole is interesting as well as worth while, which is more than can be said of much

of our present-day historical writing. It is stimulating because of the added information which is set forth and on account of new approaches to-and new interpretations of-old situations. To repeat an earlier statement, the reader is left with a genuine desire to learn more.

KATHRYN T. ABBEY.