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J. Leitch Wright, Jr.



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BRITISH DESIGNS ON THE OLD SOUTHWEST: FOREIGN INTRIGUE ON THE FLORIDA FRONTIER, 1783-1803

by J. LEITCH WRIGHT, JR.

IT IS WIDELY recognized that for years after the American Revolution Britain played an important role in the affairs of the Old Northwest. In spite of the peace treaty's provisions, she continued to occupy military posts ceded to the United States. Using these posts as centers, Canadian traders continued to monopolize most of the Indian commerce north of the Ohio, and the Indians in this vast region still looked to Detroit, Niagara, and Quebec, rather than to New York, Pittsburgh, or Philadelphia for commercial and political leadership. In theory the Old Northwest was an integral part of the United States; in fact from 1783 until the mid-1790s this region was actually dominated by Britain's Indian allies. After ceding the Northwest posts in the Jay Treaty, and after Anthony Wayne's victory over the Indians, Britain's influence waned in the area, though it revived just before and during the War of 1812.

Less well known, and denied or unrecognized by some historians, is that there was in some measure a similar situation south of the Ohio in the Old Southwest - a large part of which Spain claimed was either directly part of Spanish Florida or a Spanish sphere of influence. At the same time, the United States insisted that much of this area had been ceded to her in the 1783 peace treaty. Here, too, after the Revolution, British interest and influence were still manifest and remained so until 1803 with the French cession of Louisiana, which the Americans said included West Florida, to the United States. Later British involvement waned, but, as in the Northwest, it was revived just before and during the War of 1812. There were two aspects of this British involvement: directly on the scene in the Old Southwest there were the activities of merchants, land speculators, and adventurers; while some distance away at Whitehall occasionally there was concern over the ultimate fate of the Old Southwest in which immediate gains from the fur trade or land speculation were secondary. The purpose of this article is to analyze Britain's role in the Old Southwest from the Revolution until the Louisiana

Purchase. Subsequent British activities during the War of 1812, another story in itself, are omitted.

Complicating any discussion of British, Spanish, or United States sovereignty of the Old West - the area between the Appalachian Mountains and Mississippi River - is the fact that in the period under discussion most of this region actually was controlled by Indians. During the Revolution the British had been well aware of this and under the leadership of Indian superintendents had formed a loose alliance of western Indians to help combat the rebels. The Indians, however, were completely ignored at the Paris peace negotiations in 1783, even though, at least for the time being, they still dominated most of the Old West. The Western Indians were furious. Those in the Old Northwest-the Six Nations under Chief Joseph Brant, and especially the Shawnee, Ottawa, Miami, and other tribes to the west-did not recognize the Paris settlement and demanded that the United States treat them as an independent confederate nation with the Ohio River as the boundary.¹ The Indians in the Old Southwest-Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and Choctaws-likewise did not recognize the provisions of the Paris peace treaty, and maintaining they were independent, attempted to uphold their ancient boundaries.

After 1783 Britain was supposed to evacuate all the Old West and to stop subsidizing the Indians. Because of a long association with these Indians and because of the lure of trade, this only partially occurred. Britain had made wartime commitments to the Indians in the Old Northwest, and Canadian traders were loath to relinquish their profitable trade. Britain, therefore, retained the forts on American soil, and her traders used them to further their commerce, all the while insisting they had the right to use the Mississippi River.² Britain retained no forts in the Old Southwest-but here too her traders remained in the Indian country. Before the war British merchants at Charleston, Savannah, and Pensacola dominated Indian trade in the hinterland. These merchants supplied scores of local traders who frequently lived among

1. An excellent treatment of the northern Indians is Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: a Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 1795* (Pittsburgh, 1940).

2. Alfred L. Burt, *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812* (New Haven, 1940), 85-93.

the Indians, had Indian wives, and in many instances were part Indian. Most of these white or mestizo traders were Tories, and their number was augmented during the Revolution. Though affluent South Carolina, Georgia, or Florida merchants, usually Loyalists, frequently were forced to withdraw to the Bahamas or elsewhere, the local traders continued to live among the Indians, to supply them with the indispensable guns, powder, and clothing, and to exert a powerful influence at their councils. These traders and the wealthy exiled merchants hoped that by swapping the Floridas for Gibraltar or by some other adjustment there might be at least a partial return to pre-Revolutionary conditions.³ It was because British traders remained among the Indians and because these Indians in fact controlled most of the Old Southwest, that British influence was not immediately dissipated here after 1783.

Naturally these local traders could have little influence over the Indians unless they continued to exchange manufactured goods for deer skins in the accustomed fashion. The most important British firm engaging in the southern fur trade was Panton, Leslie, and Company, which shortly after the war was given a monopoly of this commerce by Spain. Acquisition of Florida posed difficult problems for Spanish officials, and among the foremost was the Indian trade. After expending so much blood and treasure in acquiring the Floridas, whatever their boundaries, certainly it would be absurd to allow Britain to continue reaping the benefits of this commerce. But what were the alternatives? The ideal one was to replace British merchants with Spanish ones. Spain, however, in spite of an eighteenth century economic revival, was unable to supply the manufactured needs of the Floridas or her other colonial possessions. Another alternative was to look to France, her Bourbon ally. But the French firm awarded this commerce at the end of the Revolution suffered many setbacks and was not a success. The Indians could not be expected to wait indefinitely, and if Spain could not make arrangements for a dependable trade, then Georgia or the United States soon would find a way. American designs and expansion alarmed Spain and it was with

3. Marques del Campo to Conde de Floridablanca, March 16, 1784, Archivo General de Simancas, Simancas, Spain, estado, legajo 2619. Cited hereafter as AGS. Floridablanca to Campo, March 23, 1784, AGS, estado, legajo 2617.

some misgivings that she allowed the Loyalist firm of Panton, Leslie, and Company, formerly of Georgia but now of St. Augustine and Nassau, to remain in Florida with a monopoly on its commerce.⁴

Panton's monopoly was not the only way Britain had retained influence in the Old Southwest. Other British merchants located in the Bahamas eyed Panton's monopoly and intrigued with the Indians and Spaniards to break it. Having less to lose than Panton's Florida firm, their conduct was more reckless, and at least some of them did not confine their attention solely to the southern Indian trade. They hoped to restore Florida and the entire Old Southwest, either directly or indirectly, to Britain and possibly to link it with a British-dominated state north of the Ohio. At least a few were interested in cooperating with dissatisfied Westerners who might separate from the East and form a western state with close British ties.

Britain could play a role in the Old West after 1783 because United States authority here was weak. At the end of the Revolution there were relatively few Americans west of the Appalachians, though with the return of peace they began streaming through Cumberland Gap and down the Ohio, forming infant settlements in what would become Knoxville, Nashville, Lexington, and elsewhere. Though these immigrants pouring rapidly into the West were one of the marvels of the time, they, from their isolated log cabins listening to every sound in the nearby forest, from their stockaded forts warding off a full-scale Indian attack, or from within armed barges floating downstream and observed by hostile eyes ashore, would be the first to affirm that, at least for the time being, it was not the whites who were masters of most of the West.

It did not automatically follow that settlement of the West would soon bring this region under effective American control. Geography separated the West from the East; the Mississippi and its tributaries were vital western arteries. That the East was not sufficiently aware of this, as evidenced by the Jay-Gardoqui

4. Crown to Vicente Manuel de Zespedes, May 8, 1786, included with Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, March 22, 1784, Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid, Spain, estado, legajo 3901. Cited hereafter as AHN. Photostat in the Library of Congress. Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier: 1783-1795* (Boston, 1927), 38-46.

negotiations with Spain in 1786, when the United States offered to forego immediate free navigation of the Mississippi, was a prime reason why Westerners were dissatisfied. It was not just a handful that considered the possibility of completely separating from the United States and perhaps forming a close connection with Britain or Spain. The obvious advantage of a western alliance with Spain was that she controlled New Orleans and the Floridas and therefore all routes to the Gulf of Mexico. The motive for allying with Britain was that cooperation between western militiamen and a British fleet could soon yield New Orleans, and the British navy in the future could insure that the sea lanes to New Orleans remained open.⁵

Holding forth assurances of British sympathy combined with vague promises of support, and capitalizing on western dissatisfaction, Dr. John Connolly in 1788 journeyed from Detroit to Louisville in an attempt to secure western cooperation. Connolly was a Tory, a close friend of Governor Dunmore of Virginia, and like Dunmore an avid speculator in western lands. At the Revolution's onset, Connolly and Dunmore had contrived to raise the western Indians against the rebels, but Connolly was captured en route to the West and the plot collapsed. The doctor, like other militant Tories, had his lands confiscated. Never far from his mind as he traveled from Detroit and talked with James Wilkinson and other prominent Kentuckians, was the expectation that if the West separated from the East and linked up with Canada, he would have his confiscated lands or their equivalent restored. With the Kentucky legislature barely defeating a resolution for independence, and with the leaders of the unsuccessful State of Franklin at loose ends, Connolly was hopeful that a Canadian alliance might come into being.⁶ His mission attracted interest, and his proposals—apparently more extensive than authorized by the Canadian governor, Lord Dorchester—had a real appeal.⁷ But in

5. An example of western dissatisfaction is "Letter from a Gentleman at the Falls of the Ohio to His Friends in New England," December 4, 1786, Samuel C. Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, 1924), 123-24.

6. Arthur St. Clair to John Jay, December 13, 1788, William H. Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, 1882), II, 104-05.

7. The Canadian governor had instructed Connolly to gather information about western dissatisfaction and to establish contacts valuable for the future. It may be, as both the Americans and Spaniards charged, that the doctor, liberally interpreting his instructions, actually tried to enlist Westerners for a New Orleans attack. George Morgan to Diego de Gardoqui, December 19, 1788, AHN, estado, legajo 3888

spite of genuine western dissatisfaction, the frontiersmen at this time were reluctant to throw themselves into the arms of the Canadians who were frequently notorious Tories and who allegedly still incited the Indians to hostility.

Connolly's proposals were not accepted, and it is necessary to put aside temporarily possible British designs on the lower Mississippi Valley, conceived in Canada or the West Indies, and to make a critical examination of affairs in the Old Southwest itself. For the Indians the overriding concern was to maintain their hunting lands in face of relentless American expansion. The Creeks and Cherokees immediately adjacent to the frontier settlements in Georgia and Tennessee had most cause for alarm, though in view of the Yazoo land speculation none of the southern Indians could be complacent. The Spaniards no less than the Indians were concerned with western immigration: the question, or rather the dilemma, was how to contain the Americans. An obvious solution was to support and cooperate with the Indians, which had been the normal policy since the Revolution. In practice it was difficult to make the southern Indians pliant tools of Spanish diplomacy, and there was always the danger that furnishing munitions to the Indians might lead to a crisis with the United States. Dorchester and Connolly confronted the same hazard in Canada.

Another way to stop the Americans was to fight fire with fire - encourage them either to settle on Spanish soil or to separate from the East, thereby providing a Spanish-dominated buffer to the United States. During the same period that Connolly was in Louisville, and for the same general reasons, Spain was encouraging western discontent and holding forth the lure of free navigation of the Mississippi River. To further placate the Westerners, Spain in 1788 drastically reduced her supplies of arms and powder for the Indians. These Indians were not as interested in the subtleties of Spanish diplomacy as they were vitally concerned with securing ample supplies of powder and ball - necessary for both sustenance and defense.⁸

bis, photostat, Library of Congress; Dorchester to John Connolly, January 15, 1788, Public Record Office: Colonial Office 42/60. Cited hereafter as PRO:CO. Microfilm is in Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

8. McGillivray to Miro, August 12, 1788, Archivo General de Indias, Papeles Procedentes de Cuba, legajo 1394. Cited hereafter as AGI, Cuba.

It was at this juncture that ex-Loyalist William Augustus Bowles and his Providence Island backers, merchant John Miller and the governor, the Earl of Dunmore, stepped in and offered the distracted Indians ample supplies of munitions. Bowles' immediate objective was to break the Panton, Leslie monopoly and to reap the profits of the southern fur trade. But there were other considerations, especially for Dunmore. He had been governor of New York and Virginia, had an avid interest in the West, and had acquired extensive holdings there. As a result of the Revolution he had lost all his possessions, and now from his vantage point of Nassau, he viewed the West in the same light as did his fellow land speculator and comrade-in-arms, Doctor Connolly from Detroit. Both would like to see some type of independent Mississippi Valley state linked to or directly under the control of Britain. There would be profits for Canadian and Nassau merchants, and Dunmore and Connolly could resume their western land speculation which had been interrupted by the Revolution.⁹

Bowles' expedition to Florida in September 1788 began auspiciously. Earlier he had met with the powerful Indian half-breed, Alexander McGillivray, in Creek country and arranged for Bowles to furnish munitions and soldiers to aid in the Georgian conflict. In Nassau Bowles had enlisted almost fifty ex-Loyalists and seamen, with the assistance of Dunmore who had opened the doors of the island prison. John Miller and his partner Bonnamy provided two vessels stocked with arms and powder.¹⁰ The expedition sailed first to the Indian River half-way down Florida's east coast, where the half-breed John Galphin appeared with over 100 pack horses to transport the goods inland. Bowles hoped to continue the trade by building a fortified trading post between the Altamaha and St. Johns rivers, but after the initial success things began to go awry. The Spaniards, alarmed by Indian dissatisfaction and Bowles' intrusion, reversed their policy and promised the Indians ample presents, regardless of the effect on frontiersmen. And McGillivray, who in desperation had turned to Bowles, gladly went back to Panton and the Spaniards. Most of Bowles' followers, after undergoing great privation in the woods,

9. Dunmore to Dundas, August 28, 1792, PRO:CO 23/31.

10. Memorial of William Panton, John Leslie, and Thomas Forbes to William Wyndham Grenville, June 19, 1789, PRO:CO 23/29; Stephen Haven to John Wells, August 20, 1789, *Bahama Gazette*, August 15-22, 1789.

deserted to Panton's St. Johns store and to the Spanish outpost; only a few of the leaders remained with Bowles, who had to report this initial failure to his Nassau backers.¹¹

Except for continuing Indian hostility on the white frontier, for a brief period there was relative calm in the Old Southwest. Then unexpectedly the threat of a general war loomed and all the latent ambitions of the British, Spanish, Americans, both eastern and western, and Indians toward the Old Southwest were revived. This international crisis was triggered by Spanish seizure of British vessels at Nootka Sound on Vancouver Island, and it opened up the question of ownership of the entire Pacific Northwest. War seemed likely unless Britain or Spain backed down. With France, Spain's Bourbon ally, in turmoil as a result of revolution, British statesmen thought it a good time to settle old scores with Spain. How to do this was the question. Britain was aware that Spain, likely to obtain only partial or no support from the French fleet, would be pressed to defend her extensive colonies. Francisco de Miranda, a revolutionary Creole from Venezuela, counseled Prime Minister Pitt on the best way of ousting Spain from all America, including Louisiana and Florida.¹² In a British assault against any part of Spanish America, the British navy naturally would be required. But British troops were another matter. Profiting from prior failures in West Indian campaigns and from the disaster of the American Revolution, Britain had qualms about committing large numbers of troops anywhere in America.

These troops did not necessarily have to be British. Miranda emphasized creole eagerness to fight for independence. Regarding seizure of Louisiana and Florida, one source of soldiers was the nearby Americans who were anxious to open up the Mississippi River to navigation. It was primarily because of this possibility that George Beckwith, an informal agent from Canada, held several conferences in the summer of 1790 with Alexander Hamilton. In any joint Anglo-American venture the United States would obtain free navigation of the Mississippi River and at least some territory; Britain would acquire New Orleans, or at least extensive

11. "Declaraciones referentes a Guillermo Bowles," AGI, Cuba, legajo 1395.

12. Francisco de Miranda to William Pitt, September 8, 1791, Chatham Papers, CCCXLV, British Museum.

commercial rights there, and could expect to dominate commercially, and perhaps politically, the entire Mississippi Valley.¹³ While there were good reasons why the United States and Britain should cooperate, there were also reasons why they would not. Britain continued to occupy the Northwest posts, and there was the question whether Britain at New Orleans, even though she allowed free navigation, would be in the long run more desirable than Spain. In the end the Hamilton-Beckwith negotiations bore no tangible results.

One of Britain's drawbacks to cooperating with the United States would be confusion over the relative position of each nation in Louisiana and Florida in the aftermath of a successful campaign. Aligning with dissatisfied Westerners and not with the American government, by-passed this dilemma, and was the course urged by Phineas Bond, British consul at Philadelphia: "Nature, my Lord, seems to have pointed out a plain line of division between the Eastern and Western parts of this continent-that wonderful range of mountains which runs between the Atlantic Ocean and the river Mississippi."¹⁴ At the same time that Beckwith was feeling out Hamilton in New York, other Canadian agents were conferring with George Rogers Clark and his son-in-law, James O'Fallon, wanting to know how many Westerners they could raise for an attack on New Orleans and Florida, and if after a successful campaign, whether the Westerners would become in effect a British protectorate.¹⁵ Had Spain not backed down in the Nootka crisis, one can only speculate as to the result of this British intrigue.

13. George Beckwith's memo in Lord Dorchester to Crown, September 25, 1790, PRO:CO 42/69, microfilm in Public Archives of Canada; Beckwith to Grenville, November 3, 1790, *ibid.* 42/21; Julian P. Boyd, *Number 7: Alexander Hamilton's Secret Attempts to Control American Foreign Policy, with Supporting Documents* (Princeton, 1964), clearly demonstrates that Beckwith was a secret, unofficial British agent, that his conversations - especially those before 1790 - were with Hamilton as a private individual, and that Hamilton at times misrepresented these conversations to his superiors.
14. Phineas Bond to Duke of Leeds, November 10, 1789, Public Record Office: Foreign Office, 4/7. Cited hereafter as PRO:FO. Microfilm in Library of Congress. "Occurrences from July 5 to August 3, 1790," *ibid.*, 4/8.
15. James O'Fallon to Miro, February 18, 1791, AGI, Cuba, legajo 2371; Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier*, 143. In this same period when it appeared the United States might break up, Levi Allen was in London discussing the possibility of annexing Vermont to Canada.

Another way to avoid committing British regulars to an American campaign was to follow Warren Hasting's maxim for India by using native Sepoys for the bulk of the land fighting. This is what Bowles, Dunmore, and Miller, their hopes revived at the possibility of a Spanish war, proposed. Their Sepoys would be Indians, but in this case Creeks, Cherokees, and perhaps Choc-taws and Chickasaws, reinforced by a liberal sprinkling of ex-Tory Indian traders and disgruntled Westerners. With Dunmore's blessing, Bowles and five Creek and Cherokee chiefs set out for London to plead their case.

But they did not go directly to Europe. By stopping first at Quebec they went hundreds of miles out of their way, but in all likelihood Bowles would have come here to confer with Governor Dorchester even if there had been no possibility of a Spanish rupture. The Six Nations and other northern Indians, as well as the southern Indians, were alarmed by American expansion, and there were frequent hostilities all along the frontier. After 1783 there had been much Indian talk about forming a general confederation to contain the Americans: recently Mohawks had been in the Creek country for this purpose, and Creek and Cherokee delegations frequently were at important northern Indian councils. What Bowles urged was that Dorchester give presents to the southern as well as the northern Indians so that all the western Indians, under British auspices, could cooperate more effectively against the Americans. With the possibility of a Spanish war there was even more reason why Dorchester should support the southern Indians. Dorchester received Bowles' request with mixed emotions. The governor had problems enough with the northern Indians and was not inclined to add the southern ones to his Canadian sphere. But should hostilities break out with Spain, Bowles and his Indians would be valuable allies. Another consideration was the Beckwith-Hamilton negotiations in New York. If Britain aided the southern Indians it would be more difficult to reach an agreement with the United States. With misgivings Dorchester finally agreed to pay the fare of Bowles and his fellow chiefs to London.¹⁶

When they arrived at the end of October 1790, the Spanish crisis was at its peak, and Bowles, greatly exaggerating, insisted

16. Dorchester to Grenville, July 26, 1790, PRO:CO 42/68. Microfilm in Public Archives of Canada.

that his 20,000 man Creek-Cherokee army, easily reinforced by a like number of Choctaws and Chickasaws and several thousand frontiersmen, was eager to serve under the British banner. With only limited British reinforcements, Florida, Louisiana, and even Mexico should fall.¹⁷ In part this might have occurred had not hostilities been averted by the Spanish capitulation. News of Spain's concessions at Nootka reached London shortly after Bowles' arrival, and he had to lower his sights. What he asked for and finally obtained was permission to have vessels flying the flag of the independent Muskogee Indian state bring colonial produce to Nassau in exchange for British manufactures. Although less than reaffirming Britain's pre-Revolutionary treaties with the Creeks, this was an indirect recognition of Muskogee's independence.¹⁸

With the Spanish crisis resolved, Bowles, having obtained all he could reasonably expect, concluded his conferences with Home Secretary Grenville and bid farewell to London's cosmopolitan delights. The Creek and Cherokee chiefs stopped at Nassau and again conferred with Dunmore and Miller before returning to Florida. Bowles, stretching the truth, told the Indians he had been commissioned British superintendent and proceeded to proclaim the mouths of the Indian and Ochlockonee rivers free ports. At the latter site, Bowles and his Indian and white followers constructed warehouses to facilitate trade with Nassau. These free ports were in areas controlled by the Florida Seminoles and Lower Creeks, and it was from these Indians that Bowles drew his main support. They were dissatisfied with Alexander McGillivray's recent American treaty whereby Creek lands were ceded and were alarmed by the activities of land speculators in Georgia and elsewhere along the Florida frontier.¹⁹

Many natives therefore eagerly looked to Bowles who denounced McGillivray's treaty and promised ample presents and cheap goods. But his promises were one thing and his performance another. Militant opposition by both Spain and Panton, Leslie, and Company curtailed Bowles' Nassau commerce, and the seizure

17. London *Daily Advertiser*, October 30, 1790.

18. Bowles to Grenville, January 13, 1791, PRO:FO 4/9. Microfilm in Library of Congress. Grenville to Dorchester, March 7, 1791, PRO:CO 42/73. Microfilm in Public Archives of Canada; *Bahama Gazette*, August 2-5, 1791.

19. Bowles' proclamation, October 26, 1791, Personal miscellaneous, account 6662, photostat in Library of Congress.

of Pantón's warehouse at St. Marks, Florida, only temporarily changed matters.²⁰ Unless Bowles could make good his promises to the Indians regarding presents and trading goods, his following would soon dissipate. Taking a gamble, he began negotiating with the Spaniards, who, induced him, under a safe conduct pass, to go to New Orleans. The Spaniards, wondering how to maintain their influence over the Indians, were sincere to some extent in treating with Bowles and considered backing him instead of Alexander McGillivray. Finally, however, they decided to ignore

20. The best published account of this seizure is Lawrence Kinnaird, "The Significance of William Augustus Bowles' Seizure of Pantón's Apalachee Store in 1792." *Florida Historical Quarterly*, IX (January 1931), 156-92. Arthur P. Whitaker in *The Mississippi Question, 1795-1803* (New York, 1934), 164-65, insists that Bowles' 1791-92 incursion represented nothing more than rivalry between competing British merchant houses and that Britain would not gain a farthing should Bowles succeed. In a narrow sense this is true, but it should be emphasized that Bowles and his backers expected to see the British or Muskogee banner flying over the Old Southwest in order to oust Pantón, that they and others expected the Old Southwest would be linked to the British dominated Upper Mississippi Valley, and that in this period it was still widely held that the United States would break up or lose part of its territory. The Canadian fur traders who almost monopolized trade in the Upper Mississippi Valley were interested in New Orleans for the same reasons as the American frontiersmen and had much to gain should Britain replace Spain on the Gulf Coast. Pantón, of course, was doing quite well under Spain and was not, and in fact could not be, so zealous to see the British flag restored in the Old Southwest. It also must be recognized that Pantón's Spanish concession could be revoked at any time. Kinnaird considers that in a general way Bowles reflected British imperialism, but he does not stress the connection between the Upper and Lower Mississippi Valley.

Whitaker's contention that there was no need for Britain to try to take Florida because Spain willingly would have parted with this unprofitable colony at best is misleading. There is no question that it was a financial drain and that there were proposals to get rid of it at any price - or none. But these were old arguments dating from shortly after the time of Menendez de Aviles. What is significant is that, in spite of these arguments, from the sixteenth century on Spain retained Florida and that twice since the American Revolution she had almost gone to war with Britain to preserve fringe areas of her American empire - Nootka and the Mosquito Shore - having no more immediate economic consequence than Florida. A careful examination of the diplomatic documents in Simancas, Seville, and London does not indicate that Spain was pressing Britain to take Florida gratis. It would be entirely another matter if Florida could be exchanged for Gibraltar. There are numerous documents in Boyd, *Number 7, 94, 116, 132*, indicating that Jefferson, Jay, and Hamilton were convinced that Britain after the Revolution was planning to take the Floridas and Louisiana by force. All of the evidence refutes the thesis that Spain would willingly give the Floridas to Britain without compensation.

Bowles' safe conduct pass and sent him as prisoner first to Spain, and ultimately to the Philippines.²¹

Though Bowles did not return to Florida within the forty days allocated in his safe conduct pass, his followers were still active. Leadership now fell on the ex-Loyalist, George Wellbank, who remained at the mouth of the Ochlockonee River trying to maintain commercial intercourse with Miller and Dunmore. He had even less success than Bowles, and finally the combined pressure of the Spanish and Creek supporters of McGillivray forced Wellbank to seek refuge among the Cherokees. Those Cherokee towns on or near Chickamauga Creek where Wellbank now resided became the most militant against land-hungry Americans, and, in contrast to a majority of the tribe, often refused to make peace with the United States. Some of the chiefs from here had accompanied Bowles to London.²²

From his base near Lookout Mountain on the Tennessee River, Wellbank endeavored to promote British and his own interests among the Cherokees and other western Indians. Now a connection with the British at Detroit rather than at Nassau offered the best possibility. The northern Indians, flushed with victories over American Generals Harmar and St. Clair, and encouraged by Britain, were demanding more insistently than ever that the Ohio River become the boundary, and at the same time were encouraging the southern Indians to unite in a general war against the whites. These pleas had a genuine appeal to many Indians in Florida and throughout the South. In the past, Creek and Cherokee delegations were represented at conferences in or near Detroit, and small parties had fought against Generals Harmar and St. Clair.²³ Wellbank strove to increase this cooperation among all western Indians - naturally under British auspices - and expected that first the Cherokees, then the Creeks, and ultimately all the southern Indians would join their northern counterparts. Should this occur, then it was hoped that the western Indians would safeguard their lands, and British merchants at

21. Jose Hevia to Bowles, February 22, 1792, AHN, consejo, legajo 21,067, Spanish transcripts in Library of Congress. Bowles to Floridablanca, June 18, 1792, *ibid.*

22. Wellbank to Miller, June 10, 1792, PRO:CO 23/31; Baron de Carondelet to Conde de Aranda, December 15, 1792, AHN, estado, legajo 3898, apartado 3/25, photostat in Library of Congress.

23. Grenville to Hammond, April 25, 1792, PRO:FO 115/1; James Carey to William Blount, November 3, 1792, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1832-1834), I, 327-29.

Nassau and Detroit would dominate western trade without reference to Spain. And Spain, briefly allied with Britain against French Jacobinism, might even give its stamp of approval.²⁴

With this sweeping vision before him and the more limited objective of increasing commercial ties between Detroit and the Chickamaugas, George Wellbank, accompanied by several chiefs, made the long journey to Detroit in 1793. This was a critical period. The northern Indians were demanding, more belligerently than ever, the Ohio as a boundary. The United States commissioners were trying to negotiate a peace with these Indians but were making no headway. The northern Indians were at the same time stepping up their overtures to their southern counterparts (Shawnee emissaries without authority already had promised Canadian aid to the southern Indians).²⁵ And Britain, in view of her prior commitments to the Indians and the increased likelihood of war after her seizure of American merchant ships in the West Indies, was resolutely supporting the Indians and insisting that the United States accept most of the Old Northwest as an Indian buffer state. Wellbank conferred with John Graves Simcoe, the aggressive lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, and urged closer ties between Detroit and the southern Indians, and either a resumption of Canadian commerce with the Tennessee area which had been cut off by the advancing Americans, or the lieutenant governor's endorsement of direct British trade between Nassau and the Creeks. Simcoe was impressed with Wellbank and was sympathetic to his plea. For the present, however, continued British meddling with the northern Indians could easily plunge the mother country into a war with the United States—something British statesmen hoped to avoid. Detroit's support for the Cherokees and Creeks would further complicate matters. In the future, perhaps after General St. Clair's fate was meted out to General Anthony Wayne and the United States became more reasonable, Wellbank might expect more tangible aid from Detroit.²⁶

24. Charles Stevenson to John G. Simcoe, July 12, 1793, Ernest A. Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe, with Allied Documents relating to His Administration of the Government of Upper Canada*, 5 vols. (Toronto, 1923-1931), I, 384.

25. Simcoe to Alured Clarke, July 29, 1793, *ibid.*, I, 392-93.

26. Benjamin Lincoln, "Journal of a Treaty Held in 1793, with the Indian Tribes North-West of the Ohio, by Commissioners of the United States," *Colonial Massachusetts Historical Society*, V (1836), 3rd ser., 169ff; Philip M. Hamer, "The British in Canada and the Southern Indians, 1790-1794," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, II (1930), 109ff.

Wellbank's dreams in 1793 were dashed to pieces the following year. Wayne roundly defeated the Indians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, forcing them to sue for peace on American terms. In the aftermath of Fallen Timbers, Britain signed the Jay Treaty with the United States and agreed to relinquish all posts on American soil. Finally Wellbank, who had returned to the Chickamaugas, ventured among the Upper Creeks, and in a dispute, was killed when he was knocked on the head with a "lightwood-knot."²⁷ The outcome of the Battle of Fallen Timbers and the Jay Treaty were of great significance to the Old Northwest, and in the aftermath British influence decreased in this area. The Treaty of San Lorenzo, the Pinckney Treaty, had equally profound effects on the Old Southwest. Spain acceded to American demands and agreed to the thirty-first parallel as West Florida's northern boundary and promised the United States free navigation on the Mississippi River.²⁸

American influence seemed assured now from the Atlantic to the Mississippi and from Detroit to the Florida border. In reality Indians still controlled much of this region, and British traders, though not so numerous, were still present both north and south of the Ohio. And the violently fluctuating international diplomacy in the aftermath of the French Revolution again posed the possibility of British involvement in the Old Southwest. The main reason Spain had made the important Florida and Mississippi River concessions in the Pinckney Treaty was that her British alliance was broken and she was once again a French ally. The danger of an Anglo-American attack on Louisiana and Florida was reason enough to conciliate the United States. With Spain in France's camp, Britain, as expected, declared war, and the outbreak of this Anglo-Spanish conflict in 1796 again threatened to involve Britain in the Old Southwest.

Since the English were openly at war with Spain, Louisiana and Florida were fair game, and there were the customary strategic and economic reasons why they should seize these provinces. But there was a new concern at Whitehall: if Britain did not

27. Diary of John Hambly, June-August 1794, New York Historical Society, B. Smith Papers, transcript in the Lockey Collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida.

28. Samuel F. Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty: A Study of America's Advantage from Europe's Distress, 1783-1800* (Baltimore, 1926), 332-35; Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier*, 205-06, 221-22.

take Louisiana and Florida by force, then France might acquire these provinces by negotiation. This could pave the way for French acquisition of Spain's other American colonies, making Revolutionary France the dominant power in both the Old and the New Worlds. The activities of French General Victor Collot in the West,²⁹ and the fact that France, for the time being unsuccessfully, was pressing Spain for the retrocession of Louisiana, gave Britain cause for concern.³⁰

On the eve of the new war with Spain, Britain, asserting that the Pinckney Treaty was violating her rights of navigation on the Mississippi River, again intrigued with frontiersmen and Indians toward establishing an independent western state linked to Canada.³¹ Once again Dr. John Connolly journeyed down to the Ohio.³² That Britain was, or at least should be, contemplating an attack on Louisiana and Florida was obvious to many Westerners - certainly to the land speculator, Senator William Blount who was being threatened with bankruptcy. He urged that Britain furnish warships, while he, leading both red and white Westerners, descended on New Orleans and East and West Florida. It is quite likely that the senator made overtures to William Panton in Florida. But Blount's machinations were exposed and he was expelled from the United States Senate.³³ At the same time, John Chisholm, an ex-Loyalist Indian trader, independent of William Blount, had been advocating the same project. Robert Liston, the British minister in Philadelphia, sent Chisholm on to London,

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29. Carlos Martinez de Irujo to Prince of the Peace, February 18, 1797, AHN, estado, legajo 3889 bis, expediente 10, photostat, Library of Congress.
30. Elijah Wilson Lyon, *Louisiana in French Diplomacy, 1759-1804* (Norman, 1934), 89-90; Phineas Bond to Grenville, December 20, 1795, PRO:FO 115/4.
31. Duke of Portland to Simcoe, October 25, 1795, PRO:WO (colonial, secret entry book); Frederick J. Turner, ed., *Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-1797, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1904), II, 990.
32. St. Clair to James Ross, September 6, 1796, Smith, *St. Clair Papers*, II, 411.
33. Blount to Carey, April 21, 1797, Marcus J. Wright, *Some Account of the Life and Services of William Blount . . . together with a Full Account of His Impeachment and Trial in Congress, and His Expulsion from the U.S. Senate* (Washington, 1884), 15-16; William H. Masterson, *William Blount* (Baton Rouge, 1954), 303-07.

where, after some deliberation, the government turned down his offer.³⁴

The British realized that an expedition against Spain's Florida and Louisiana possessions, organized on American territory, might involve her in a war not only with the Spanish but with the United States also. One possible way of resolving this problem was to combine with the United States against Spain; and when, in 1798, because of seizure of American merchant ships, the United States was on the verge of war with France - and France's Spanish ally - such cooperation seemed probable. In an Anglo-American attack the United States would acquire at least part of the territory that Britain could have secured through the Blount-Chisholm-Liston project; but in any case Britain would obtain advantages for her efforts, and France would be denied a foothold on the American continent. But because the United States patched up her difficulties with France in the convention of 1800, Anglo-American cooperation never got beyond the discussion stage.³⁵ However, the mounting fear of French acquisition of Spanish America, particularly Louisiana and Florida, and the appeal of obtaining New Orleans and the West Florida ports, establishing commercial supremacy over the entire Mississippi Valley, thus dominated Britain's thinking whenever the Old Southwest was considered at Whitehall.

In view of Napoleon's designs on all Spanish America in general, and Louisiana in particular, the Old Southwest was receiving more attention in London. Miranda had returned to England from the Continent and, as during the Nootka crisis, was pressing for the liberation of Spanish America, thereby keeping it out of French hands and enriching the British exchequer.³⁶ To com-

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34. Robert Liston to Grenville, May 10, 1797, PRO:FO 115/5; Grenville to Liston, April 8, 1797, Bernard J. Mayo, ed., *Instructions to the British Ministers to the United States, 1791-1812, Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1936*, 3 vols. (Washington, 1941), III, 132.
35. Grenville to Liston, June 8, 1798, PRO:FO 115/6; Alexander Hamilton to Rufus King, August 22, 1798, Charles R. King, ed., *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*, 6 vols. (New York, 1894-1900), II, 659. The United States always assumed she would acquire New Orleans and the Floridas, while Britain would be rewarded elsewhere. There was never any formal agreement, and, should a British expedition have appeared in the Gulf of Mexico, it was quite uncertain how Spanish territory would be divided.
36. William S. Robertson, *The Life of Miranda*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, 1929), I, 165-70.

plete the picture, Bowles, the Florida adventurer, had escaped his Spanish captors and was also in London, urging the conquest of Florida and Louisiana. During the Nootka crisis, Bowles had hoped to include the Old Southwest in a general Mississippi Valley state or protectorate which would be dominated commercially and politically by Britain. But by 1799, Britain had abandoned the Northwest posts, and Americans, encouraged by this withdrawal and by Spain's agreeing to the thirty-first parallel, were more numerous and more firmly entrenched than ever in the West. It was less likely now that Westerners would want to separate from the East. Bowles had hope that with British backing he could be instrumental in keeping Florida and Louisiana out of French hands. Rumor had it that the French flag was already flying over Pensacola. It was also obvious to Bowles that these provinces in British hands could supply naval stores and food necessary for the French war.³⁷

Whitehall never openly supported Bowles' project, but highly placed government officials, usually associated with the ultra-conservative, anti-Jacobin faction, did.³⁸ It was they and the merchants in Nassau who obtained Bowles' passage to Jamaica in a man-of-war and who furnished him with a store of munitions and Indian goods. The Royal Naval sloop *Fox* then conveyed Bowles and his handful of white followers from Jamaica and Nassau to Florida. Here misfortune struck. The *Fox* ran aground and sank near the mouth of the Apalachicola River, and only part of the cargo was salvaged. Discouraged, but undaunted, Bowles made his way upriver into the heart of the Lower Creek-Seminole country. Again he told the Indians that he held a British commis-

37. Liston to Grenville, April 2, 1798, PRO:FO 115/6; Bowles to Grenville, June 5, 1798, AGI, Cuba, legajo 2371.

38. John Reeves, the king's printer and founder of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Levellers and Republicans, was Bowles' most important backer. Also he could expect support from Grenville, the Duke of Portland, and William Windham, who were the most extreme anti-French cabinet members bent on an aggressive campaign against the enemy. Bowles to Reeves, March 1, 1799, Add. mss. 37.878, Windham Papers, British Museum; Henry Dundas, memorandum, March 31, 1800, Chatham Papers CCXLIII; Windham to ?, November 3, 1802, Earl of Rosebury, ed., *The Windham Papers; The Life and Correspondence of the Rt. Hon. William Windham, 1750-1810* . . . , 2 vols. (London, 1913), II, 200-02; Ferdinand Smyth Stuart to Henry Dundas, February 25, March 27, 1798, Great Britain Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on the Manuscripts of Earl Bathurst, Preserved at Cirencester Park* (London, 1923), 23.

sion, that William Panton was a traitor to both Britain and the Florida Indians, that by following him they would not have to give up land to the Americans, and finally that beneficial commerce with Nassau would ensue. Bowles, eloquently addressing the Indians in their native tongue, told them what they most wanted to hear.³⁹ In order to facilitate communications with the Nassau competitors of Panton, Leslie, and Company, Bowles first captured Panton's store in St. Marks on the Gulf coast. Then he and his followers, a sizeable force of Indians and whites, laid siege to the Spanish fort several miles away. Surprisingly enough, the Indians maintained a prolonged siege, and even more astounding, the Spanish commander, whose garrison was in good health and who still had food and ammunition, surrendered in May 1800.⁴⁰

This marked the high tide of Bowles' success in Florida. The Spaniards soon retook the fort, and the combined opposition of Spain, Panton, and the American Indian agent, Benjamin Hawkins, made Bowles' life unpleasant. But a hard core of Lower Creeks and Seminoles remained loyal to him, and he maintained the fiction of the Muskogee nation's independence. Privateers, flying this Indian banner, preyed on Spanish shipping, keeping Bowles supplied with munitions and Indian presents.⁴¹ With mounting evidence that Spain had ceded Louisiana to France, Bowles kept hoping, with some justification, that Britain would strike at Louisiana and Florida - an operation which he knew would make him a prominent participant.⁴² But in 1802 there was a general European peace, and it now became expedient for

39. Bowles to Reeves, November 26, 1799, Add. mss. 37,878 Windham Papers, British Museum.

40. Vicente Folch to Marques de Casa Calvo, June 2, 1800, AGI, Cuba, legajo 2355. The best published account is in Whitaker, *Mississippi Question*, though the author makes no distinction between Bowles' objectives now and in the 1791-92 incursion, and he considers that Britain officially was not backing Bowles. As far as outside powers are concerned this was technically correct; yet it is hard to explain why the government paid his way to Florida, sent him there on a ship of the Royal Navy, and why the governors at Barbados, Jamaica, and the Bahamas each entertained him and paid his expenses. There is the strong probability that the Jamaican governor gave him munitions. Gov. Dowdeswell to Portland, November 12, 1799, PRO:CO 23/29; Gov. Ricketts to John King, June 20, 1799, PRO:CO 28/65; Gov. Balcarres to Bowles, July 15, 1799, AGI, Cuba, legajo 2371.

41. "State of Muskogee," March 4, 1802, Cruzat Papers, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville.

42. Dundas memorandum, Chatham Papers; Windham to ?, November 3, 1802, Rosebury, *Windham Papers*.

Britain to consider Bowles' vessels pirates rather than privateers. And Napoleon, frustrated in his designs upon Haiti and of reestablishing France's American empire, sold Louisiana to the United States. Bowles' hopes were shattered and, through the influence of Hawkins, he was captured in 1803 while attending an Indian council. The American Indian agent turned his prisoner over to the Spaniards who in turn shipped him off to Havana where he soon died.⁴³ With Bowles' death and the Louisiana cession, which the United States insisted included West Florida, British involvement in the Old Southwest abated. Forbes and Company, successors of Panton, Leslie, and Company, remained, and many of the traders among the southern Indians maintained their British sympathies. Possibly Aaron Burr expected their cooperation in his conspiracy. And once again, just before and during the War of 1812, the Floridas and Louisiana received marked attention at Whitehall. Yet 1803 ushered in a lull of British involvement in the Old Southwest, the first definite abatement since the end of the Revolution.

43. John Halkett to John Sullivan, October 13, 1802, PRO:CO 23/42; Manuel de Salcedo to Someruelos, June 11, 1803, AGI, Cuba, legajo 2355.