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AMERICAN SEIZURE OF AMELIA ISLAND

by RICHARD G. LOWE

IN 1817 THE United States took actions at a small island off the northeast coast of Florida which aroused protests from the Spanish government. A band of South American adventurers had occupied Spanish-owned Amelia Island in June and had been using their base as a smugglers' gateway into Georgia and the southern states. In December 1817, the United States purged the island of its invaders, apparently trying to get rid of this group of troublesome ruffians and smugglers that were agitating along the southern border. A closer examination of this event, however, reveals an additional motive as well.

Amelia Island is small, about as large as Manhattan Island. Located some fifteen miles northeast of Jacksonville, it is one of the sea islands lying off the coast of Georgia and Florida. In 1817 the only settlement was the village of Fernandina at the north end of the island.

The small Spanish garrison on Amelia Island in 1817 was soon to meet an ambitious general and adventurer, Sir Gregor MacGregor. Born of Scottish nobility in 1786, he was later attracted by the struggle of the South American colonies for independence. He journeyed to Venezuela to join the revolutionaries and there met and married Senora Josefa Lovera.¹ After some campaigning for his wife's native land, MacGregor left South America and found his way to Philadelphia.

In that city he received a military commission on March 31, 1817, from three South Americans, Lino de Clemente of Venezuela, Pedro Gual of New Granada and Mexico, and Martin Thompson of Rio de la Plata.² The commission instructed MacGregor to liberate East and West Florida from Spanish power, and called for "due observance of the laws of the United States, and particularly those regulating their neutrality. . . ." ³ Ironically,

1. T. Frederick Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion of Florida, 1817," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VII (July 1928), 3.

2. Clemente, Gual, and Thompson were *not* legal deputies of the countries they professed to represent. See fn 35.

3. Commission in *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 6 vols. (Washington, 1833-1859), IV, 415.

MacGregor's recruiters had themselves violated United States neutrality laws by operating in an American city.

MacGregor naively believed that the American government would be pleased with his campaign against the Floridas. He intended to encourage the Florida inhabitants to attach themselves to the United States, since he believed no other power could hope to control the territory adequately. Florida's geographic position made these regions a natural extension of their northern neighbor.⁴

The Scottish adventurer left Philadelphia and began recruiting sailors, adventurers, and street brawlers in Baltimore, Charleston, and Savannah.⁵ By various means he acquired funds and patrons who promised him more men and money. One of the principal methods used to acquire resources was to offer land in Florida for a dollar an acre.⁶ After gathering his provisions and men, MacGregor sailed from southern Georgia to Amelia Island. There he and his fifty-four followers landed and marched through mud and marshes to the village of Fernandina. On June 29 the Spanish commander, Don Francisco de Morales, gave up the island and his garrison of eighty-four men without a fight. Amelia passed from the possession of the King of Spain to that of Gregor MacGregor.⁷

The Scottish leader addressed his forces on July 1, praising their accomplishments and stating their aim: "To free the whole of the Floridas from tyranny and oppression."⁸ Despite this high-sounding proclamation, MacGregor's major concern seems to have been profits rather than patriotism. He was prepared to sell the newly "liberated" territory to the United States "for the most he could get" if Spain threatened his project with force. More-

4. *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States* (Boston, 1819), XII, 390-91.

5. For a detailed description of MacGregor's activities in the United States and at Amelia written "by one concerned," possibly a participant, see *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, October 10, 1817, and succeeding issues.

6. Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion," 7.

7. Vicente Pazos to James Monroe, December 23, 1817, *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, XII, 408; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, October 3, 10, 1817. For the surrender terms see *Niles' Weekly Register*, August 2, 1817, 365-66.

8. *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, 15 Cong., 1 Sess., p. 1814. Cited hereafter as *Annals of Congress*.

over, during his stay on Amelia Island there were illegal sales of African slaves to American buyers.⁹

After the first days of confusion and disorganization, MacGregor began making some changes on the island. He established a post office, ordered a printing press for the publication of his many proclamations, and began issuing his own currency. He entered into negotiations with privateers and buccaneers from the West Indies, intending to make Amelia a depot to collect and sell plunder taken from Spanish vessels.¹⁰ He also planned to advance on St. Augustine, aided by the inhabitants of the "Northern Division of East Florida."

MacGregor's activities in East Florida alarmed many citizens in the United States. There had been much discussion recently of a possible cession of the Floridas to the United States. "Should a bargain have been struck between our minister at Madrid and the Spanish government, for the Floridas, how can it be carried into effect, if Sir Gregor M'Gregor takes possession of St. Augustine and Pensacola?"¹¹ Furthermore, many of the inhabitants around Amelia Island seemed opposed to the South American forces; an observer at the scene noted that settlers in that region desired a cession of the Floridas to the United States.¹² Apparently MacGregor's seizure of Amelia had added a troublesome third party to preliminary negotiations between Spain and the American government.

The Scottish general's project soon foundered, however. Disease, death, and desertion quickly thinned his army's ranks; junior officers began quarreling among themselves, and the troops became insubordinate and disorderly. When his American patrons failed to deliver the much-needed arms and reinforcements which had been promised and when he learned that Spanish

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9. For evidence that MacGregor was willing to sell out see the unsigned letter to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, January 19, 1818, *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XII, 398. For indications of illegal proceedings at Amelia during MacGregor's control see *Charleston Courier*, July 19, 1817, and Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), IV, 75.
 10. *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XII, 390; *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, September 5, 1817; Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion," 18.
 11. *Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, July 25, 1817, reprinted from the *Alexandria (Va.) Gazette*.
 12. *Charleston Courier*, September 19, 1817.

Governor Coppinger was planning to move against Amelia Island, MacGregor decided to withdraw. He resigned his commission on September 4, 1817, and sailed away, leaving the command to Jared Irwin, former congressman from Pennsylvania, and Ruggles Hubbard, once sheriff of New York.¹³

Amelia, however, was not to be free of filibusters; another privateer, Luis Aury, was already enroute to the island aboard his brig *Mexico Libre*. Like MacGregor, Aury had been in the service of the Latin American republics for several years, and had commanded the navy of New Granada for several months in 1813-1814. From the profits gained by raiding Spanish shipping, Aury had built his own private fleet which he staffed with Haitians. In September 1816, he allied with an abortive Mexican Republic and established a base at Galveston Bay on the coast of Texas where he continued his raids on Spanish vessels in the Gulf. Following two mass desertions by some of his followers, and perhaps fearful of an American occupation of Galveston, Aury decided to continue his operations off the Florida East coast. In late July 1817, the former Cartegenan commander and Galveston raider set sail for Fernandina, planning to join Gregor MacGregor there.¹⁴

After reaching Amelia Island in mid-September,¹⁵ Aury

13. Washington *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 13, 1817. MacGregor had been having similar troubles since July 1817. See the letter from Jersey Point, Georgia, to the *Charleston Courier*, July 25, 1817, and the issues of August 6 and 8.
14. Stanley Faye, "Commodore Aury," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (1941), 622-44. In actual fact, by the time Aury began operating under his Mexican commission, the so-called government which had issued it had been dispersed and dissolved by Spanish forces. Thus, Aury could not truly claim that his actions at Galveston and Amelia Island were sanctioned by any existing government. See Captain J. D. Henley and Major James Bankhead to James Monroe, January 10, 1818, *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XII, 400-01. See also Aury's address of December 12, 1817, to the Amelia legislature in the *Charleston Courier*, January 9, 1818, and letters from Beverly Chew, customs collector in New Orleans, to Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford, August 1, 30, 1817, *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XI, 348-52.
15. There is some disagreement as to whether Aury arrived at the island before MacGregor sailed away. An unsigned letter to Secretary of State Adams claims that the two commanders met at Amelia. According to Aury, he arrived in Fernandina after MacGregor had left. See ? to Adams, January 19, 1818, *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XII, 399, and Aury's December 12, 1817 address to the Amelia legislature in the *Charleston Courier*, January 9, 1818.

claimed it in the name of Mexico. A Georgia planter described the buccaneer's succession to power: Aury declared that ". . . the flag of the Florida republic must be struck, and that of the Mexican hoisted; and that Fernandina should be considered as a conquest of the Mexican republic. . . ." ¹⁶ The new commander dismissed MacGregor's claim to the Floridas on the grounds that he had invaded the area without a valid commission. Jared Irwin and Ruggles Hubbard opposed Aury when he first appeared in Fernandina, but they eventually yielded to his stronger forces. ¹⁷

Under Aury Amelia Island became a base for naval assaults on Spanish shipping and a depot for contraband slaves. The Mexican freebooter commissioned privateers and sent them out into the Gulf and the Caribbean, where, according to reports received in London by the first of November, they performed so well that prize goods valued at \$500,000 had been sold in Fernandina. ¹⁸ One observer noted that even before the end of September, Aury had captured a "number of prizes of considerable value." ¹⁹ According to another resident, Aury in two months had sold more than 1,000 slaves into Georgia, utilizing the winding rivers and small inlets along the coast for this lucrative trade. ²⁰

Meanwhile, the United States became increasingly more concerned with what was going on in East Florida. In October 1817, President Monroe consulted with his cabinet on the advisability of seizing the Fernandina settlement, and preparations began for American military involvement. ²¹ On December 22,

16. McIntosh to Crawford, October 30, 1817, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 138.

17. Conflicts between Aury and his followers on one side, and Irwin and Hubbard's group on the other, repeatedly erupted from September to November. Some observers of the activities on Amelia feared widespread bloodshed before a definite power status could be established. By early November Aury had gained enough authority to proclaim martial law on the island. See the *Charleston Courier*, October 21, 24, 1817. For Aury's proclamation of martial law see *ibid.*, November 14, 1817.

18. Faye, "Commodore Aury," 644-45.

19. Thomas Wayne to Benjamin Homans, September 27, 1817, *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, XI, 385.

20. Davis, "MacGregor's Invasion," 45. See also the letter of Captain John H. Elton to the Secretary of the Navy, November 15, 1817, *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, XI, 381.

21. For the orders preparing for American seizure of Amelia see *State Papers and Public Documents of the United States*, XI, 403-04, 407-08.

1817, a naval force under Captain J. D. Henley and an army detachment under Major James Bankhead appeared off Amelia Island. The commanders informed Aury that they were under orders to take possession of Amelia "as soon as it will be convenient for your troops to evacuate it."²²

Aury informed the Americans that he would submit their request to his government's representatives and would presently inform them of their decision.²³ In the meantime, he assured the commanders he would offer no resistance in force. He insisted that his government was not only genuine, but that it posed no danger to the United States: "As we consider the people of the United States as unquestionably the only free people on the surface of the globe, we cannot admit that you have now become the adherents of a tyrant [the King of Spain]; otherwise, your demand is inadmissible and unjustifiable in the eyes of the world; and if we must yield to it, all the blame rests with you."²⁴ He denied that any unlawful practices had occurred at Amelia and asked that his letter be sent on to Washington so as to convince President Monroe that his island establishment was legitimate. Aury's eloquent rhetoric did not prevent the American occupation, and on December 23, 1817, Major Bankhead's troops took control of Amelia Island without resistance.²⁵

Aury and Dr. Pedro Gual, who had earlier signed MacGregor's Philadelphia commission, protested the American occupation to the United States government. Lino de Clemente's agent Vicente Pazos, also protested in the name of Venezuela.²⁶ Clemente's letter contained an interesting observation, blustery as it was: "The motives alleged by the Government of the United States, in justification of their hostile measure, serve to prove

22. J. D. Henley and James Bankhead to Luis Aury, December 22, 1817, *Annals of Congress*, 15 Cong., 1 Sess., pp. 1803-04.

23. Aury to Henley and Bankhead, December 22, 1817, *ibid.*, 1804.

24. *Ibid.*, 1805.

25. *Ibid.*, 1801. For Aury's December 23 note of peaceful surrender see *ibid.*, 1806. American forces remained in control of the island until after Spain surrendered Florida to the United States in 1821. See James G. Forbes to Andrew Jackson, May 7, 1821, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 744, and Clarence Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 26 vols. (Washington, 1835-1962), XXII, 20 fn.

26. Pazos to Monroe, December 23, 1817, *State Papers and Publick Documents of the United States*, XII, 408.

their own futility, and clearly demonstrate that the sole object was the acquisition of the Floridas. . . ." ²⁷

With the island occupied by American forces and with his diplomatic objections falling on deaf ears, Aury vacated Amelia and began making plans for an expedition against the Isthmus of Panama. ²⁸ He was last heard of in a report appearing in a Nassau paper in 1820 that his buccaneering ships were operating off the coast of Cuba. ²⁹

Meanwhile, on January 8 and 24, Luis de Onis, minister to the United States, protested the American seizure of Spanish territory. Onis insisted that the United States had no cause to sanction such acts of violence. ³⁰ Secretary of State John Quincy Adams answered Spain's objections on January 16 and March 12, 1818, and in effect claimed that the United States' actions were justified. Adams referred the Spanish ambassador to President Monroe's message to Congress on January 13 in which the President claimed that Spain's inability to control her Florida territories and the pending negotiations between the two countries for the area, were some of the reasons which compelled the United States to take this positive action. ³¹ Unofficially it was believed that Secretary Adams favored holding Amelia Island subject to continued negotiations with Spain. He also seemed to share a fear that adventurers might take the Floridas while the United States was involved in bargaining for them with Spain. Hearing of a possible re-invasion of Amelia by Gregor MacGregor in the spring of 1818, Adams " . . . urged that if we should not come to an early conclusion of the Florida negotiation, Spain would not have the possession of Florida to give us." ³²

In order to understand Washington's reaction to the Amelia

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27. William R. Manning, ed., *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations*, 3 vols. (New York, 1925), II, 1175.
 28. Luis Aury became embroiled in the Venezuelan and Granadan struggles for autonomy during the next four years. He was thrown from a horse on an island in the Gulf of Mexico and died from the fall on August 30, 1821. Faye, "Commodore Aury," 647, 697, *passim*.
 29. Nassau *Royal Gazette*, August 16, 1820, in A. J. Hanna and Kathryn Abbey Hanna, *Florida's Golden Sands* (Indianapolis, 1950), 48.
 30. For Onis' protests see *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 464-68.
 31. For Adams' replies to Onis see *ibid.*, 463-64, 468-78. For Monroe's message of January 13 to Congress see the discussion on page 26.
 32. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, IV, 36, 42.

occupation, governmental proceedings from December 2, 1817, three weeks before actual American occupation, must be considered. On that day President Monroe sent a joint message to Congress in which he noted both MacGregor's and Aury's activities in Florida. He described Amelia as being ". . . a channel for the illicit introduction of slaves from Africa into the United States, an asylum for fugitive slaves from the neighboring States, and a port for smuggling of every kind." The President expressed the fear that conflict between Spain and her colonies would have an adverse effect on United States shipping and commerce in the surrounding area. The MacGregor expedition, Monroe stated, was an unauthorized adventure financed by sources within the United States.³³

Monroe added another point for Congress to consider. Florida, surrounded by the United States, for months had been a subject of negotiation with Spain as indemnity for spoliation losses.³⁴ The United States was surprised that the Latin American colonies countenanced the filibusters' seizure of Amelia.³⁵ Not only had American smuggling and neutrality laws been violated, but apparently efforts were being made to block possible expansion into Florida; American-Spanish negotiations would be superfluous if Florida was occupied by a third force. For this reason, and in order to protect the country's interests,³⁶ the

33. James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1902*, 11 vols. (New York, 1897), II, 13.

34. As early as August 1817, the Floridas were mentioned by a Spanish minister in Madrid as the objects of a possible cession to the United States. See Jose Pizarro to George W. Erving, August 17, 1817; and Erving to Pizarro, August 19, 1817, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 447, 449. During the summer and autumn of 1817 *Niles' Weekly Register* repeatedly alluded to negotiations for a Florida cession. For example see the issues of July 19, September 6, and December 20.

35. By March 1818, Monroe was informed by the Latin American nations concerned that they disapproved of MacGregor's and Aury's activities in Florida and that the two adventures had no authority from any of the South American governments to take any action whatsoever. See Monroe's message to the House of Representatives, March 25, 1818, in Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, II, 32. See also *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, IV, 271, 292, 412, for the opinions of Buenos Aires, Chile, and Venezuela.

36. The President was vigorously supported in his decision to seize the island by General Andrew Jackson. This future president wrote Monroe a letter on January 6, 1818, in which he urged that the suppression order . . . be carried into execution at all hazards, and simultaneously the whole of East Florida seized, and held as indemnity for the outrages of Spain upon the property of our citizens."

President concluded that the Amelia establishment should be suppressed.³⁷

Three weeks after the American landing of December 23, President Monroe sent another message to Congress. In this second report on Amelia Island, Monroe announced that the suppression had succeeded and without bloodshed. There was, therefore, "good cause to believe that the consummation of a project fraught with much injury to the United States had been prevented."³⁸ The President justified his order, saying that whenever Spain could not maintain authority and order in her own territories, "her jurisdiction for the time necessarily ceases to exist,"³⁹ but the United States did not plan to "make any conquest of Amelia Island from Spain or to injure in any degree the cause of the colonies."⁴⁰ Monroe reiterated his arguments of December 2: "When we consider the persons engaged in it, being adventurers; . . . the territory on which the establishments were made . . ., on a part of East Florida, a Province in negotiation between the United States and Spain; the claim of their leader . . . comprising the whole of both the Floridas, without excepting that part of West Florida which is incorporated into the State of Louisiana; their conduct while in the possession of the island . . ., it may fairly be concluded that if the enterprise had succeeded . . . much annoyance and injury would have resulted from it to the United States."⁴¹

Monroe cited an 1811 enactment as legal sanction for his military measures. This act authorized the president to "take possession of, and occupy, all or any part of the territory lying east of the river Perdido [present-day western boundary of Florida], and south of the State of Georgia and the Mississippi Territory, in case an arrangement has been, or shall be, made with the local authority . . . or in the event of an attempt to occupy the said territory, or any part thereof, by any foreign Government. . . ." ⁴²

J. S. Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, 1926-1935), II, 345.

37. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, II, 32.

38. *Ibid.*, 23-24.

39. *Ibid.*, 24.

40. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

41. *Ibid.*, 23.

42. *Annals of Congress*, 15 Cong., 1 Sess., 2602-03.

In March 1818, President Monroe was still explaining the United States' action at Amelia. In his congressional message of March 26, he commented on the protest sent in by Vicente Pazos: "It appears by the letter of Mr. Pazos, agent of Commodore Aury, that the [Aury] project of seizing the Floridas was formed and executed at a time when it was understood that Spain had resolved to cede them to the United States. . . ." ⁴³

In justifying its actions in suppressing the establishment of Amelia, the United States explained that the privateers' base was a haven for smugglers and a base of illegal slave trade, that the commerce and property of American citizens were endangered by the filibusters' presence, and that the Floridas were threatened by adventurers at a time when she and Spain were negotiating for a cession of the territories. This latter is a fact that has been generally overlooked by historians. Two legal justifications were also mentioned by the United States: the filibusters had no unasailable authority from any South American government; ⁴⁴ and the law enacted by Congress in 1811 enabled the president to order the occupation of Florida.

A majority of Congress and most of the cabinet favored Monroe's actions. He also had firm support for the seizure policy from his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams. Besides the fact that he wanted Florida for the United States, Adams opposed the filibusters' designs on West Florida, a portion of which the United States had gained as the result of a revolution a few years earlier. In a report to the House Committee on Foreign Relations in January 1818, Adams claimed that because a large part of West Florida was already in the possession of the United States, the privateers' project involved designs of direct hostility. ⁴⁵

Speaker of the House Henry Clay staunchly opposed the occupation of Amelia Island on the grounds that it hindered the Latin American struggle for independence. Secretary Adams recorded in his diary that at a dinner party on December 24,

43. Richardson, *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, II, 32.

44. MacGregor's commission had been issued in Philadelphia, thus rendering it invalid. Aury's had expired with the republic that issued it long before he reached Amelia Island. In any case, the governments of Latin America denied any connections with either of the two commanders.

45. Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, 7 vols. (New York, 1913-1917), VI, 286.

1817, Clay “came out with great violence against the course pursued by the Executive upon South American affairs, and especially in relation to Amelia Island.”⁴⁶ Unfortunately for Clay, he had little support in opposing the Amelia suppression.

The subject of the occupation of Amelia Island was the main item of business for the House on December 8, 1817. According to John Rhea of Tennessee, the people of the United States were quite interested in what was happening in Florida. He stated that the establishment at Amelia had “already excited much attention throughout the country, which would be still more attracted to that point by the order given to suppress them.”⁴⁷

Representative Hugh Nelson of Virginia favored the seizure and opposed Henry Clay’s position on the subject: “Have they not themselves given further proofs, if proofs are wanting, that they are but a horde of buccaneers?”⁴⁸ Moreover, he staked, “when this course shall be calmly and dispassionately scanned and examined, the judgment of the American people, and of an impartial posterity, will applaud the course, and see in it the result of a wise, virtuous, and patriotic policy.”⁴⁹

A House committee was appointed on December 3 to report on the illicit introduction of slaves from Amelia into the United States.⁵⁰ Henry Middleton, a South Carolina representative and chairman of the committee, delivered the group’s findings to the House on January 10, 1818: “Your committee are of opinion, that it is but too notorious, that numerous infractions of the law prohibiting the importation of slaves into the United States have been perpetrated with impunity upon our Southern frontier”⁵¹ Furthermore, he reported that if “the Floridas, or either of them, had been permitted to pass into the hands of such a Power, the committee are [*sic*] persuaded . . . to point out . . .

46. Allan Nevins, ed., *Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845*, (New York, 1951), 190.

47. *Annals of Congress*, 15 Cong., 1 Sess., 410.

48. *Ibid.*, 411.

49. *Ibid.*, 412.

50. Members of the committee included Henry Middleton (South Carolina), James S. Smith (North Carolina), Nathaniel Upham (New Hampshire), Lemuel Sawyer (North Carolina), William Lee Ball (Virginia), George Mumford (North Carolina), and Zadock Cook (Georgia). *Ibid.*, 397-98, 405.

51. *Ibid.*, 646.

the pernicious influence which such a destiny of the territories in question must have had upon the security, tranquility, and commerce of this nation."⁵² According to Congressman Middleton, the objects of the campaign against Amelia by the South Americans appeared to be the occupation of Florida, the spoliation of commerce by piratical privateers, smuggling, and illegal slave trading with Americans.⁵³ The opinion of his committee, then, was that the establishment at Amelia was a nuisance and menace to the United States and deserved therefore to be suppressed.

A speech that has been generally overlooked in the Amelia episode, but which should be considered for its historical significance, was one given by William Henry Harrison, congressman from Ohio, on December 8, 1817. Mr. Harrison did not think the reasons put forth for suppression by the President on December 2 were sufficient to authorize occupation of Amelia. In fact, he stated, "that which seemed to be most relied upon was, that a negotiation was pending between this country and Spain, for the cession to us of their claim to the Floridas. . . ." ⁵⁴ Mr. Harrison thought that if Aury or MacGregor "had succeeded in conquering all the Spanish part of the Floridas, . . . it would be as easy to obtain it from them as from the King of Spain." ⁵⁵ Harrison's emphasis on America's fear of losing the Floridas was not challenged by any member of the House; all seem to have understood that the expansion of the United States into the Floridas was a matter of great importance.

The seizure and occupation of Amelia Island by the United States reveal two important facts. The inability of Spain to police her territories adequately was demonstrated once more. MacGregor's and Aury's meager forces could easily have been ousted from their pirates' nest if the Spanish government had sent a force superior in numbers and equipment. Ferdinand VII was unable to do this; he could not provide enough men to control Florida and protect it from adventurers and the United States. Secondly, one of the major reasons, possibly the major reason, for United States seizure of Amelia has been overlooked or ignored by writers

52. *Ibid.*, 648.

53. *Ibid.*, 649.

54. *Ibid.*, 415.

55. *Ibid.*

of American diplomatic history. This was simply that the American government was expecting the cession of the Floridas to the United States by Spain. With the expansionist ambitions of Jefferson and other Americans so near fulfillment, the United States could not stand by and see revolutionary privateers seize their hoped-for prize and upset negotiations with Spain. Therefore, in order to obtain the Floridas and to rid the United States of a nuisance, the American government purged Amelia Island of adventurers and occupied it with troops in late December 1817.