

DIVIDED FRONTIER: THE GEORGE ROGERS CLARK EXPEDITION AND MULTI-  
CULTURAL INTERACTION

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## **Abstract**

The land west of the Alleghany Mountains and along the Ohio River and Great Lakes was an area of hotly contested land and sovereignty claims during the colonial period, complete with shifting loyalties and highly factionalized alliances. Warfare and diplomacy in the western territories often hinged on the actions of just one man or a small group of people, with consequences that could cause the collapse of entire empires. The long-standing battle for land and power throughout the Ohio Valley has been called the Long War because once conflict began between the French, British, and Indians in 1754, no one power was truly able to claim the land and its people until the British were forced out of their Great Lakes forts in 1815.

George Rogers Clark uniquely united these groups for a short moment in history, a feat made all the more impressive when we consider how long the region remained contested ground between empires. These factions united only once prior the era of American control. During the expedition of George Rogers Clark in 1778, backcountry settlers, French habitants, Indian chiefs, and Spanish officials all united during a small window of time to overthrow British control of the Illinois Country. Clark moved freely from the top political circles of Virginia to the remote frontier outposts of the Illinois Country. This thesis argues that George Rogers Clark was especially successful at gaining the cooperation of diverse groups of populations and coordinating those groups to work together toward his own goals. Clark certainly owes part of his success to being the right man in the right place at the right time, but it must be remembered that he was the only man to ever bring all of these factionalized groups together.

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## Preface

The land west of the Alleghany Mountains and along the Ohio River and Great Lakes was an area of hotly contested land and sovereignty claims, shifting loyalties, and highly factionalized alliances. In 1778, George Rogers Clark led an army of volunteers down the Ohio River to the remote Illinois Country and took control of several British outposts that were undefended by the British. Clark entered an area that had long been factionalized, but for a short time Clark created harmony among Indians, French, Spanish, and backcountry settlers. He also briefly stopped Indian raids into Kentucky, while making the only claim the United States would have on the territories of the Old Northwest, as that region was decidedly not a natural American territory. It was in fact culturally diverse and claimed by numerous peoples, but Clark's transient presence proved to be the first in the long American wave of attempts to control the area. The Ohio Valley though had also been a hot spot as conflicting claims over the valley ignited the French and Indian War and the frontier struggle that continued through the War of 1812. Warfare and diplomacy in the western territories often hinged on the actions of just one man or a small group of people, with consequences that could cause the collapse of entire empires. The long-standing battle for land and power throughout the Ohio Valley has been called the "Long War" because once conflict began between the French, British, and Indians in 1754, no one power was truly able to claim the land and its people until the British were forced out of their Great Lakes forts in 1815.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Francois Furstenberg, "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," *American Historical Review*, 113 (June 2008): 650.

The early battles for European control of the Ohio Valley were small, but complicated. Settlers, soldiers, merchants, and officials from France, Great Britain, Spain, and the various American colonies were all active along the frontier. Numerous groups of Native Americans became intertwined with European conflicts, or as was often the case, became the cause of European conflict as they shifted alliances and sought out their own rewards.<sup>2</sup>

Large shifts in power and influence hinged on the actions taken by small groups of settlers or ambitious Indian chiefs as great empires rose and fell far away from the Atlantic centers of power in Boston, Philadelphia, and Quebec. The shifting nature of alliances and interests made it difficult for any single group to control the Ohio Valley. For example, the French prior to and during the French and Indian War, 1754-1763, went to great lengths to stop British influence and trade goods from reaching their Indian Allies.<sup>3</sup> Once the British gained victory over the French, they struggled to secure control of the West, battling undefeated Indian warriors under Pontiac's leadership, a remaining French presence throughout the Ohio Valley, and the emergence of Spanish power as they occupied Louisiana and the new French town of St. Louis.<sup>4</sup> The West continued to be a factionalized frontier that was difficult to control, especially along the Ohio River. The American Revolution did little to create unity as backcountry settlers from the American colonies continued to offer little loyalty to anyone outside of their local communities. This trend continued through the War of 1812 as international intrigue and sectional conflict remained common.<sup>5</sup>

In the end, the United States did take complete control of the West and the Ohio Valley, but it was only because of events around the globe that allowed a single power to dominate this

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 650, 663-664.

<sup>3</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 25-30.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 518-527, 535-546.

<sup>5</sup> Furstenberg, "Trans-Appalachian Frontier," 663-664.

factionalized region. As Napoleon and France were defeated in Europe, the British withdrew from the Great Lakes, and the Spanish came under internal pressure from independence movements in their own colonies, little support was left for Native Americans to resist the United States.<sup>6</sup> Before 1815, all of these powers were active, and any could have tipped the balance of power in a potential conflict.

George Rogers Clark launched an expedition into the Illinois Country during the American Revolution that briefly united these extraordinarily contentious factions in order to achieve the conquest of and occupation of land coveted by many different groups,, a feat made even more impressive when one considers how long the region remained contested ground between empires. The various groups living or trading in the Illinois Country were united only once prior the era of American control. During the expedition of George Rogers Clark in 1778, backcountry settlers, French habitants, Indian chiefs, and Spanish officials all united for a small window of time to overthrow British control of the Illinois Country. In light of Clark's accomplishments, it is important to take a closer look at Clark as a leader and a negotiator. He moved freely from the top political circles of Virginia to the remote frontier outposts of the Illinois Country. This George Rogers Clark was especially successful at gaining the cooperation of diverse groups of populations and coordinating those groups to work together towards his own goals. Clark certainly owed part of his short-lived success to being the right man in the right place at the right time, but one must be remember that he was the only man to bring all of these factionalized groups together. He was also an opportunist and his ambition drove many of his decisions, including his move to the frontier, acceptance of military command, and his land claims. All of these factors played a part in Clark's life from the peak of his military career to his

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 675.

desperate attempts at redemption in his debt-ridden middle age. Clark was wildly successful for a short period and it is important to remember that the American Revolution was just a short phase in the long conflict over the Ohio Valley and Old Northwest that began as the British and French battled for the fur trade and allies and lasted well into the nineteenth century. The Revolution in the West did very little to solidify the identity of the area or who would control it, and Clark's ability to do so for any amount of time is a remarkable feat.

Since the people who occupied the Ohio Valley during the American Revolution were such a factionalized lot, the scholarship on Clark's expedition and the area is rather factionalized as well. Historians have focused on Clark and his men, with little regard to the complexities of French habitants or Miami Indian warriors.<sup>7</sup> Other historians have focused on only the French inhabitants or the Spanish officers in St. Louis.<sup>8</sup> Scholars focusing on native peoples spend little time discussing the complexities of Clark's achievements and instead focus on his brutal style of warfare and diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> The key that is missing from the historical literature of Clark is an overall assessment of accomplishments that examines his interactions with Indians, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and backcountry settlers. Many historians examine small pieces of Clark's accomplishments, but without an in-depth look at his interactions with all of these groups simultaneously, it is impossible to appreciate his accomplishments.

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<sup>7</sup> For Clark as a hero see John Bakeless, *Background to Glory: The Life of George Rogers Clark*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1957); Lowell H. Harrison, *George Rogers Clark and the War in the West*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1976); For the standard work on Clark's life see James Alton James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928).

<sup>8</sup> For more traditional interpretations of the French see the introduction to Clarence W. Alvord, *Cahokia Records 1778-1790*, (Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Historical Library, 1907); John Francis McDermott, *The French in the Mississippi Valley*, (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1965); For more modern scholarship on the French see Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times*, (Urbana, Ill: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1998); For the Spanish see, , Abraham Phineas Nasatir, "The Anglo-Spanish Frontier in the Illinois Country During the American Revolution," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 21 (1928): 291-358.

<sup>9</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Collin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



Clark constantly operated with the need to appease simultaneously the French, Spanish, and Indian allies along with his own soldiers who were primarily backcountry settlers. Clark lacked the strength to conquer and occupy the Illinois Country without support, which made it impossible for him to keep everyone happy and cooperative indefinitely. Clark's ability to create alliances for nearly a year made his feats extraordinary. Without a close examination of all these influential factors at once, one cannot grasp the magnitude of Clark's alliances, and many historians, because of their narrow approach, have overlooked the complexities Clark faced.

A common factor in the West that united and divided different groups of people was control of land. In Clark's case almost every group he was dealing with was seeking a clear title to land they either occupied or wanted to occupy. Indians wanted to keep most whites off their land, the backcountry settlers often sought out land retroactively while speculators were seeking legal title to the same lands.<sup>10</sup> In wartime settings, might often makes right and that was the case in the Illinois Country. Clark not only had the largest army and the element of surprise, but many of the nearby Indians and French were just as dissatisfied with the British as Clark and his settlers were, leading to the creation of effective alliances until the British were thrown out of the Illinois. The removal of the British left Clark with no way to pacify his allies, as it became clear to all the parties involved that only one group would eventually have a valid claim to the land, leading his coalition to crumble as self preservation became the key motive for most involved.

In highlighting Clark's skill with diverse groups of peoples from Virginia to Illinois, one must draw on a large amount of scholarship from the Revolutionary period. Clark and especially his interactions with diverse groups of peoples brings out the complicated story of the American Revolution, with various social groups struggling toward diverse visions of liberty, as Gary

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<sup>10</sup> Collin G. Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen: 1763 and the Transformation of North America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59-65.

Nash has depicted in his work., Clark also had to deal constantly with the ramifications of the French and Indian War that Fred Anderson has identified as a continuing strain of conflict.<sup>11</sup> Francis Frustenberg's work on the interior of North America clearly illustrates how Clark's expedition and his failure to hold together his coalition is part of larger and longer struggle for identity and power in the Ohio Valley.<sup>12</sup> The standard work on Clark is the biography written by James Alton James, which neglects the complexities of Clark's accomplishments. Although it does at least acknowledge the existence of Spanish and French influences. Other biographies of Clark, such as John Bakeless', tend to turn Clark into a hero with little critical analysis. John Barnhart takes the opposite approach of Bakeless in his evaluation of Henry Hamilton, the British commander who orchestrated British Indian policy in the Great Lakes region and led the counter-attack against Clark by downplaying Clark's accomplishments and focusing on the problems the British faced in maintaining their Indian alliances.<sup>13</sup>

Scholarship on Native Americans provides the backbone for much of this study. Perhaps the key conflict in Clark's alliance was managing backcountry volunteers' hatred for Indians and their culture regardless of the situation. Peter Silver's work illustrates that the development of an Indian-hating culture fueled much of the conflict between whites and Indians, and Clark had to balance this hatred with his need for the French and their Indian allies' support.<sup>14</sup> Other works such as Richard White's *Middle Ground*, establishes the complex situation of created identities and competing factions, which complicated any attempts at building alliances. Collin Calloway carries these complex identities across North America during the American Revolution

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<sup>11</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War*; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Francois Furstenberg, "Trans-Appalachian Frontier," 650.

<sup>13</sup> James Fisher, "A Forgotten Hero Remembered, Revered, and Revised," in *The Life of George Rogers Clark, 1752-1818: Triumphs and Tragedies*, edited by Kenneth C. Carstens and Nancy Son Carstens, 273.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Rhoads Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

illustrating that native communities across the continent were fractured, creating opportunities and tragedies alike as many groups spilt amongst themselves over local concerns.<sup>15</sup> The struggle over choosing sides and being tempted by false promises did not just happen in the Ohio Valley. Clark was met with complex societies in transition in many places. Clark also had to deal with Indian nations on the edges of the Illinois Country, like the Sac and Mesquakie nations which maintained independence from Euro-American demands and alliances as Kathleen DuVal has examined with Arkansas River Valley nations.<sup>16</sup> Even the French, who were closely intertwined with Indian societies, have to be examined carefully, as modern scholars like Carl J. Ekberg have fundamentally changed how history views the French settlements in the Illinois Country.<sup>17</sup>

The frontier or backcountry settler was also a complex character, and one with whom Clark had constantly to deal. Not only did Clark work diligently to form alliances with French, Spanish, Indians, and frontiersmen, but he also had to win the support of gentry class leaders in Virginia. At the same time, he had to earn and maintain a frontier creditability that was key to the respect of the frontiersmen compromising his army. Clark had to deal with all the troubles involved in recruiting in a southern state, as Woody Holton and Michael A. McDonnell have explored, while also balancing the complex interactions between gentry government leaders, Indian leaders, and frontiersmen whom often rejected leaders who they felt were not one of their own.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*; White, *The Middle Ground*.

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen, DuVal. *The Native Ground: Indians and Colonists in the Heart of the Continent*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, 263.

<sup>18</sup> For recruiting difficulties see Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999); John Resch and Walter Sargent, ed., *War & Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and the Home Fronts*, (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007); For the complexities in Indians negotiations see James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999); Jane T. Merritt, *At the Crossroads: Indians & Empires on a Mid-Atlantic Frontier, 1700-1763*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); For the nature of frontier leaders and frontier culture see

In examining Clark's career in the West it is important to understand a wide range of background information, for in the end Clark was an opportunist, albeit one with considerable personable advantages, and to truly appreciate Clark's accomplishments it is critical to understand the situations he stepped into and his ability to take advantage of long standing power struggles. We will begin our look at Clark by exploring his roots in Virginia and then his early adventures and investments in the West. From here, Clark's political involvement in Virginia and Kentucky politics illustrates his first successful attempt to gain support from groups of people while advancing his own interests at the same time. It will also take a close look at the recruiting difficulties Clark faced as he tried to appeal to different social groups. The second chapter will examine the situation on the ground in the Illinois Country, including the French settlements and the Spanish, British, and Indian people who lived and interacted with each other and Americans prior to the American Revolution. There were many complex situations with roots going back a hundred years or more, and to understand the magnitude of rivalry that Clark was stepping into is impossible without(?) a closer look at what was actually happening on the ground in the Illinois Country; winning the support of all these diverse groups was crucial to Clark's success. The third chapter will look at Clark's actual campaign in the Illinois Country, his initial occupation, his legendary counter-attack against the British at Vincennes, and the general amount of cooperation between Clark and his allies. This is the sole event that made Clark famous, and the culmination of his success in this study; but even at his peak, some of the pressures that will eventually break Clark's alliance began to show. Finally, the fourth chapter will demonstrate how Clark lost the support of his previous allies and how the Americans could

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Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, ed., *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Elizabeth A. Perkins, *Border Life: Experience and Memory in the Revolutionary Ohio Valley*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

no longer maintain an occupation of the Illinois or even muster the forces necessary to attack British held Detroit. The removal of the British as a common enemy once again split the coalition Clark had worked to build and no comparable situation existed or ever would exist as long as different groups occupied the area that allowed anyone to control the area as effectively as Clark had.

Throughout his career, George Rogers Clark remained a complex man with the ability to appeal to different people. His expedition to the Illinois Country highlighted an ability to accomplish much in frontier society. The Revolutionary War ruined Clark financially as it did many of the officers that served the American cause.<sup>19</sup> Clark's driving force for many years was his opportunistic and restless nature and in the end, he succumbed to the same temptations for fabulous gain that lured in men like James Wilkinson and Aaron Burr in their attempts to seize power in Louisiana. As late as 1793, Clark received a commission as a Major General of the Armies of Revolutionary France from French agent Edmund Genet. Clark even claimed to have an army of several thousand frontiersmen ready to seize New Orleans from the Spanish and declare loyalty to the French.<sup>20</sup> Although the French invasion never materialized, Clark still maintained his skill at finding a common path for different factions to follow. Clark's success was based on his ability to face the localism of frontier communities successfully as he turned it into opportunity, just as other Revolutionary leaders across the continent did.

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<sup>19</sup> For example see the biography of Mary Fish and her husband's struggles. Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr. *The Way of Duty: A Woman and her Family in Revolutionary America*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company).

<sup>20</sup> Furstenberg, "Trans-Appalachian Frontier," 667.

## CHAPTER 1 - Ambition and Opportunity: Surveyor to General

The American Revolution ushered in dramatic changes for many Americans, yet for some it was just another chapter in a long struggle. Settlers from Virginia had been pouring into Kentucky since the 1760s, and by 1776 the nearby Shawnees had begun striking back leading to the report that “From [the] Back Countries we have certain intelligence that the Nations are Joined and are Killing, sculping, and Driving our people from their plantations, in a surprising manner.”<sup>21</sup> George Rogers Clark’s brother John wrote these words as he passed along the latest news he had heard regarding conditions on the frontier. That violence was escalating should not have been “surprising” to Clark and his contemporaries.

During Clark’s famous campaign in the Illinois Country, he was able to see the needs of potential allies and successfully provided them with the motivation they need to join Clark’s fight without alienating any of the other members of his coalition. While this is an impressive accomplishment in itself, Clark dealt with divisive forces and conflicting motives from the very beginning of his journeys in the West. This chapter will examine the complex situation that existed in the Fort Pitt area where Clark attempted to recruit many of his soldiers as well as the equally complex political dealings taking place in Kentucky prior to the American Revolution. To illustrate Clark’s accomplishments this chapter begins with Clark’s ventures into the West and his rise to the status of leader. Clark’s next task was to recruit his army. To understand the difficulties he overcame it is first necessary to understand the tensions and resistance to authority

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<sup>21</sup> John Clark to Jonathan Clark, 12 August 1776, in James Alton James, *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781*. Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Volume VIII. Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Historical Library, 1912, 17. (Hereafter cited as *Clark Papers*)

that existed on frontier, so the chapter will jump backwards chronologically to explore the relationship between Virginia and Pennsylvania and its relevance to recruiting in the Fort Pitt region. The chapter will then close by examining how Clark dealt with the difficult situation that existed. The drive for success that Clark possessed combined with his family connections in Virginia and his personal persuasiveness all combined with the unruly situation he faced in the early years of conflict and before illustrate Clark's genius at uniting groups for his own purposes.

The Shawnees, and later the other nations along the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes, reacted to the aggressive actions of white settlers who were moving into an area that the Shawnees believed had been stolen from them by force. Conflict between whites and Indians occurred throughout the 1760's with Pontiac's War and came to a head again in the early 1770's with Lord Dunmore's War in 1774. Violence continued into the American Revolution as well with the flow of American settlers not stopping. Conflict near Fort Pitt and the Forks of the Ohio can be traced back to the 1740's as the imperial ambitions of Great Britain and France mixed with the colonial trade and expansion efforts of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, and North Carolina. As the American colonists first fought the French and Indians, they also competed with one another for control of trade and lands—native inhabitants like the Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingoies controlled and contested these lands as well.

No one colony gained a strong enough claim to oust the others, and as the British Board of Trade refused to mediate the conflicting borders and land claims by different companies, a flurry of activity to arrange private land grants occurred by the outbreak of the American Revolution. While colonial investors battled one another and the ministers in London, individual settlers continued illegally crossing the Alleghany Mountains, which created friction between whites and natives. These long standing feuds were also a major factor in pushing colonies like

Virginia into the American Revolution. Conflict with the natives and land speculation dominated the motives of many of the most prominent leaders in colonial society, leading them to consider their personal and local interests above all else, even patriotism.<sup>22</sup> George Rogers Clark also sought his own enrichment in Western lands. He chose a course that attempted to bring these different forces together to secure the West for Virginia. Clark, who deemed it necessary to launch an expedition against the British held Illinois County in order to stop native attacks on Kentucky, faced many difficulties from the outset. The long history of conflict around Fort Pitt made it especially difficult for him to create the necessary types of relationships that were required in outfitting an expedition to the Western territories, specifically recruiting soldiers and supplying his army.

One of the most difficult aspects of George Rogers Clark's Illinois expedition was the initial formation of his small army. The Illinois expedition targeted the old French settlements along the Mississippi and Wabash Rivers controlled by the British. Many of the colonial settlers also saw the people and officers in the region as stirring up Indian resentment against the colonial frontiers. In the opening years of the Revolutionary War, Clark very quickly became one of the primary leaders of the frontier settlements in Kentucky. He achieved his high stature by encouraging the settlers to appeal to Virginia for their protection, as opposed to North Carolina proprietor Richard Henderson. Following the official decision of a convention of the Kentucky settlers to make an appeal to Virginia, Clark was elected to deliver this message to the Governor of Virginia, Patrick Henry. Clark successfully appealed to Governor Henry and the Virginia Assembly, and again took the initiative and proposed an expedition to the Illinois

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<sup>22</sup> Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), xii-xxi.



Country with the goal of providing relief from the constant Indian raids on Kentucky. Kentucky had been threatened from north and west of the Ohio River as the British began to support all the natives who would come to council at Detroit. They hoped their efforts would lead to the expulsion of settlers in Kentucky. With the necessary orders in hand, Clark set out to secure the men and supplies he needed for his expedition.

Many problems faced Clark as he set about raising his army. Throughout these difficulties, Clark drew on both his gentry upbringing in Virginia and his frontier experiences as a surveyor and soldier in the Ohio Valley. First and foremost, he convinced the frontier settlers, many of whom had moved along with the frontier from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas to Kentucky. These men were driven by cheap land and were encouraged to settle on the frontiers as a buffer between white settlements and Indians. They were constantly moving west with the frontier, and found the need to come under the protection of Virginia as Indian-White conflict escalated. No record of exactly why the settlers wanted to be part of Virginia exists, but it is a safe assumption that as the largest and most powerful colony, only Virginia could provide the resources that the isolated settlers needed for their protection. This also happened to align with Clark's own interests for his pending land claims with that colony. He also used his understanding of frontier life to proactively work around the common frontier resistance to military service. He was especially successful in overcoming soldiers' fears of joining a far ranging expedition that would be difficult and of long duration. Clark's gentry upbringing allowed him access to the highest levels of Virginia's government and gave him the necessary credibility to establish and lead his expedition to the Illinois Country. Clark, like most officers who served in the Fort Pitt region (present day Pittsburg), also struggled with the factional boundary disputes resulting from the long-standing claims of Virginia and

Pennsylvania, but he did understand the limitations he faced in regard to recruiting, and he actively worked toward better methods of recruiting and then retaining his soldiers in the service. Clark's ability to work among the various social classes was absolutely critical in his efforts to outfit and then hold together any expedition into the Illinois Country. Attracting the support of these different social groups was Clark's first successful attempt in gaining cooperation for his plans.

George Rogers Clark marked his twenty-fifth birthday in 1775, just as the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies was heating up. Clark also had a wide range of life experiences as he sought to make his way in the world. He was excited about and involved in the migration of colonists into the interior of North America, and he played an active role in the various attempts at developing a colony west of the mountains. As a member of the planter class of Virginia, Clark's desire to become rich through the acquisition of western land was common. Unlike many other speculators, he went West in person. He worked as a surveyor while he also staked out his own personal claim. This in turn aided in the development of new settlements as well. Here, Clark took his gentry upbringing and used the advantages and authority that were accorded a man of his position, while also learning about survival and the people in the West. This taught him valuable lessons in the leadership of frontier settlers.

The West into which George Rogers Clark plunged was one filled with conflicting claims of ownership and authority. The conflict between Virginia and Pennsylvania over the hotly-contested Forks of the Ohio had hindered not only the growth of trade at times, but had been especially problematic in terms of native diplomacy and the defense of white settlers in the

area.<sup>23</sup> The issues of conflicting borders, competing trading companies, and shifting loyalties based on personal gain all affected Clark's efforts at recruiting and maintaining his own army.

Clark's efforts were closely linked to those of his home colony of Virginia. His first trips to the West mirrored those of many Virginians, passing through the Fort Pitt area and down the Ohio River. While Fort Pitt served as conduit for westward bound Virginians, it had also served as a locus of conflict for much of the eighteenth century. At the time Clark moved west, only Virginia and Pennsylvania (not withstanding the presence of Shawnee and Delaware claims to the area) were active in attempting to claim the area around Fort Pitt, but these colonies had competed with one another as well as the French since the 1740s. The two colonies came into conflict as both laid claim to the area according to their founding charters. Conflict also arose because Pennsylvanians, commonly interested in trade, wanted to preserve the native hunting grounds that yielded valuable deerskins, while the companies organized in Virginia, namely the Ohio Company, were most interested in obtaining large tracts of land and selling it to settlers from that colony.<sup>24</sup>

Diplomatic relationships with Native Americans, like the nearby Delawares, Shawnees, or Mingoes, were made more difficult because settlers and traders from Virginia and Pennsylvania competed with one another to establish a colonial claim to the new lands, which were key to gaining a legal title. Traders from the two colonies often fought one another for supremacy in the area as well. With the growth of settlements around the newly created outposts, whether for trade or defense, new settlers continually created conflicts with the natives living and hunting on the same lands.<sup>25</sup> Clark took employment with the Ohio Company of Virginia, and

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 284.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

looked to further his own interests, which were like those of many Virginians, linked to the fortunes of the company.

The Ohio Company served as a motivator for many Virginian politicians, as many men held stock in the company, with conflicting claims over the Ohio River Valley coming to the forefront of relations between Great Britain and France. As the Ohio Company pushed into the Forks of the Ohio (present day Pittsburg), negotiators hired by the company manipulated the Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingoes into allowing construction of a trading post. They falsely claimed to have been acting with the consent of Pennsylvania. Renowned Pennsylvania trader George Croghan even was present with the Ohio company delegation because he had acquired a large land grant around Fort Pitt. It was illegal under the laws of Pennsylvania to acquire land as far West as the Forks of the Ohio, so he joined the other delegates from the Ohio Company to push for land cessions and trading rights.<sup>26</sup>

The Ohio Company also was one of the keys to igniting the French and Indian War. As the French pushed to counter the movements of the Ohio Company and the Pennsylvanian traders (that the colonies were also competing with each other was not apparent to France) the Governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, who also happened to be a stockholder in the company, ordered troops to the frontier to establish defensive posts. In fairly quick secession, George Washington, also a company stockholder, was dispatched to the frontier where he mistakenly attacked a French envoy, igniting the spark of what turned into a world wide war. The actions of men like Washington who were reluctant to ally themselves with Native Americans were

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

partially driven by their desire to clear the original Indian inhabitants from the land for their own financial gain.<sup>27</sup>

Efforts were made during the early years of the French and Indian War to reclaim the French post Fort Duquesne (later renamed Fort Pitt by the British). Surprisingly, Pennsylvania and Virginia managed to cooperate to a small degree in military affairs. With the fort retaken and the native raids ceasing because of the fall of Fort Niagara due to a lack of French supplies to their allies, resistance by the Shawnees, Delawares, Miamis, and Potawatomis became pointless. Peace with the Shawnees, Delawares, and Mingoes was achieved officially in 1758 at the Treaty of Easton, and upon resumption of trade, Virginian and Pennsylvanian interests immediately began clashing once again.<sup>28</sup>

The French were isolated from native attack because for generations they had married into the various villages as a part of the fur trade and were connected through family, which was also a political connection in these societies, to the villages across the Great Lakes along the Missouri River in ways that the British failed to full comprehend.<sup>29</sup> Those nations located further in the interior, like the Mesquakies, Illini, Miamis, and others still had contact with French traders and still had not seen an increased flow of British trade goods or of British soldiers. The pleas to royal authority failed to provide justice to any natives that appealed, and the increasing likelihood of frontier warfare began to worry many of the white settlers.

As far as Euro-Americans were concerned, Clark had descended into an ill-defined and violent world. The Treaty of Paris, which ended the Seven Years War between Britain and France in 1763, appeared to guarantee Indians the right to their land, but official promises were

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 106-107.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-278, 322-324.

<sup>29</sup> Tanis C. Thorne, *The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1996), 20-21, 64-65.

worth little. The spark that led to the French and Indian War was conflict over control of the Ohio Valley, and at the end of the war, exactly who controlled western lands was at the center of most ongoing conflicts. Indian nations from Pennsylvania to Louisiana wanted to prevent white encroachment into their lands and hunting grounds. Even the government sanction of Indian rights to their land in the West by the Proclamation of 1763, which forbade settlement in the West by whites, did little more than annoy those seeking legal title to land. In turn this created inevitable conflict between whites and Indians.<sup>30</sup> The British government issued the proclamation as they attempted to tighten control over their North American colonies at a time when the colonists were hoping for more freedom. This included their desire to settle the interior lands occupied by natives, and while the Proclamation Line was intended to preserve Indian land, the British inability to control white settlers created more white-Indian conflict as squatters moved into the land, while land speculators saw their potential land claims being occupied without being able to gain legal title to the land.<sup>31</sup> The British attempt to better control their empire and maintain peace had quite the opposite effect.

Clark's western activities are documented as early as 1772, when he joined a party of explorers who pushed their way west along the course of the Ohio River. He explored land that was capable of "surpassing any thing you ever saw."<sup>32</sup> As the following map shows, trading posts and forts already existed, occupied by Frenchmen and British soldiers, throughout the Ohio Valley, and by 1778 a number of settlements existed in Central and Eastern Kentucky as well. Clark's passion for pushing west might have been inherited from his father, who had himself helped to push the Virginia frontier closer to the interior of the continent before being pushed

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory E. Dowd, *War Under Heaven: Pontiac, the Indian Nations, & the British Empire*, (Baltimore, Md. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 2, 177-179.

<sup>31</sup> Calloway, *Scratch of a Pen*, 11, 16-17; Holton, *Forced Founders*, 28-31.

<sup>32</sup> John B. Roy to Jonathan Clark, 22 November 1772, in James, *Clark Papers*, 1-2.

eastward again by fears of Native American raids during the French and Indian War. Regardless of the origins of his desire to push westward, Clark might have felt the desire to acquire a greater fortune than his family had thus far achieved. He was a member of the planter class and well connected; Clark grew up very near Thomas Jefferson and was later introduced to George Mason by his father. His family was also connected to some of the highest members of Virginia's society, and the abundant correspondence between these men and Clark throughout his life attests to these relationships.<sup>33</sup> Clark was comfortably established as the eldest of ten children and had the ability to invest in the West. It appears that the opportunity to enlarge his wealth in the west was too great for Clark to resist.

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<sup>33</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 1-5.

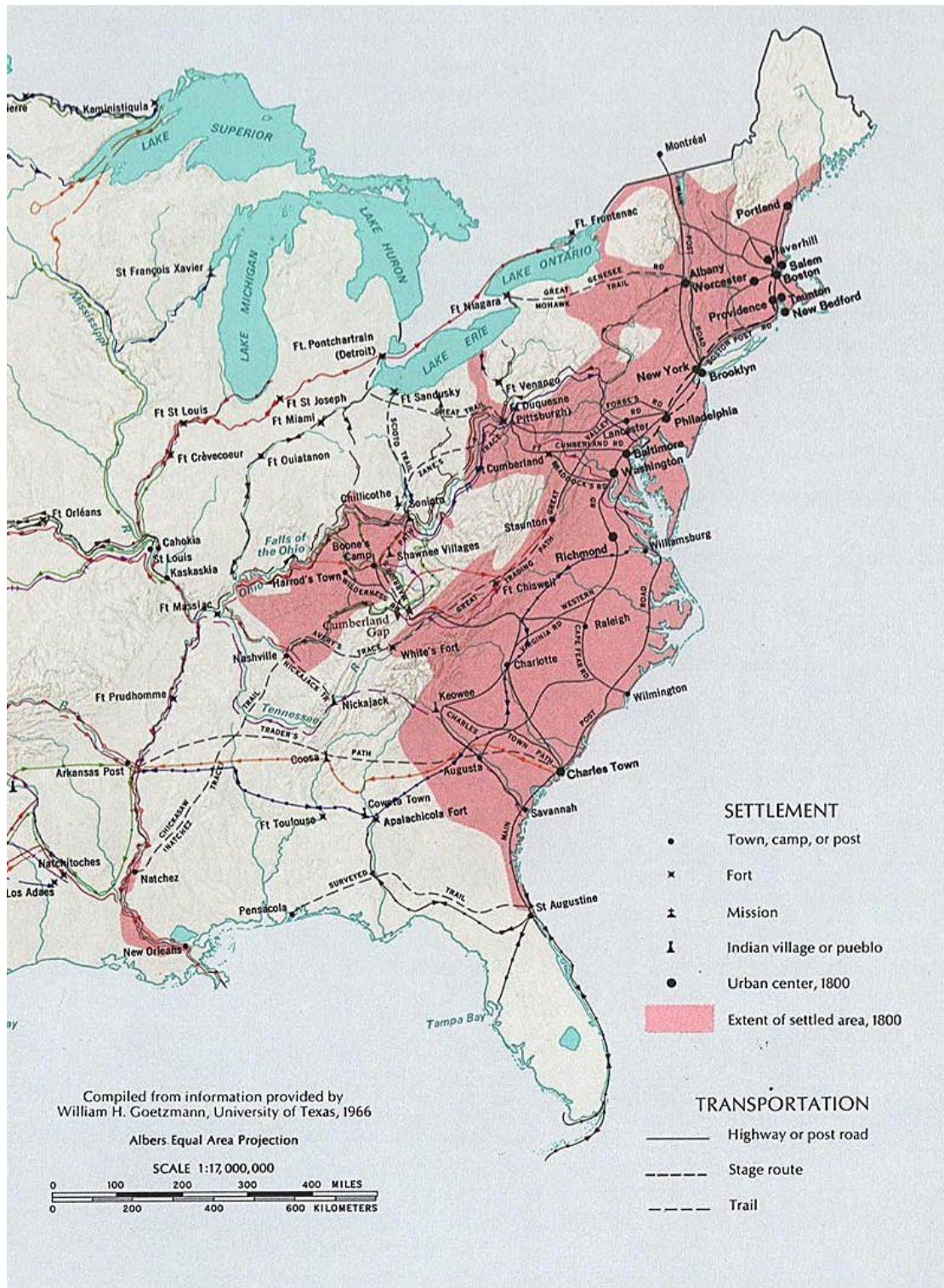


Figure 1.1: Source: University of Texas Libraries,

[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united\\_states/exploration\\_1675.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/exploration_1675.jpg), accessed on 9 May 2009.



Although the motivation for large financial gains existed, speculating was risky because companies had to receive official recognition for the land grants, many of which were dubiously obtained in fraudulent treaties with natives falsely claiming to represent their nations or villages. So while settlers continued to stream into the western territories claiming land, the speculators could not sell the title to the land without recognition of their large tracts. This created frustration as investors became convinced that the royal government was deliberately keeping them from their rightful profits, which many expected from the profits tied to selling western land gained from France thanks to colonial efforts in the French and Indian War. Also frustrating was that gaining official recognition was a matter of who could most effectively influence the most powerful ministers in London.

This frustration was another key element that pushed Virginia into the American Revolution. The gentry class in Virginia was not necessarily ready for independence, but was angry with the British government's attempts to limit western expansion. The British government had also frustrated the white gentry investors while siding with the Shawnees and Cherokees in efforts to preserve their lands as well. The formation of a new and independent government, the gentry thought, would give them unrestricted access to western lands and ensure better control over the non-white (Native American and slave) and poorest parts of the population. It is also important to note that the lower classes were in some cases also pushing for independence as they saw an opportunity to gain more influence and power as well as greater access to native lands.<sup>34</sup>

While gentry interests were pushing Virginia to war, the various land companies competed among themselves to legalize their land claims west of the Alleghany Mountains. For

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<sup>34</sup> Holton, *Forced Founders*, xii-76.

example, the initial claims of the Ohio Company were relatively small, amounting to about 200,000 thousand acres in present day West Virginia. The Loyal Company of Virginia made a conflicting claim for much of Kentucky and West Virginia. This in turn overlapped part of the Ohio Company's claim. Still others had bought, negotiated, swindled, or been granted land by the Shawnees and Delawares, such as the grant held by George Croghan around Fort Pitt or North Carolina Judge Richard Henderson's purchase of Kentucky from the Cherokees. Much of the political maneuvering involved in receiving official recognition of these claims took place in London, with royal authorities. This in turn spurred the creation of even larger companies, such as the Greater Ohio Company, which combined several different claims as speculators worked together to gain royal recognition.<sup>35</sup> Other companies had plans to settle in the Illinois Country and along the Mississippi River. All these groups were competing with one another, not only in London, but also in colonial circles as stockholders of different companies often promoted their own interests at the cost of others, and sometimes at the cost of their prescribed governmental duties. People had many reasons to become involved in speculating, as men like George Washington and later George Rogers Clark did. In Virginia, many planters were caught in a cycle of indebtedness from growing tobacco. Speculating in land offered an opportunity to invest and make large profits without selling off assets, such as slaves and cultivated plantations.<sup>36</sup> Following his early exploring expeditions, Clark returned to the West to stake out his claim and continue working there. Clark took a job working for the Ohio Company of Virginia in 1775 and was engaged in surveying lands for newly arriving settlers. He was also eagerly staking out his personal claim as well. In a letter to his brother, Clark stressed the importance of sparing "no Money nor pains to get that patent for me as soon as possible as it will

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<sup>35</sup> Anderson, *The Crucible of War*, 525-528.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 593-594; Holton, *Forced Founders*, 3-38.

be of [the] greatest importance to me.” Clark was so anxious to have his land claims registered in his name that he repeated his desire for a patent just a few lines later in a letter that was no more than a short paragraph.<sup>37</sup> While working for himself, he was also helping to expand the new settlements that formed along the Ohio River in Kentucky as well. Optimistic as always, Clark in a letter dated July, 1775 again told his brother of the “Beautiful Cuntry” and of his own efforts at speculation, “Ingrossing all the Land I possibly Can,” while Clark and others “laid out a Town seventy Miles up [the] Kentucke [River] whare I intend to live.”<sup>38</sup>

While Clark laid claim to lands for himself and his family, he also banded together with new settlers streaming down the Ohio River into Kentucky. The new settlers sought him out because of his role as surveyor. He also firmly embedded himself in the growing western community by his active participation in Dunmore’s War in 1774. Dunmore’s War was triggered by the Shawnees’ and Mingoes’ violent reaction to the continued expansion of white settlers into the Ohio Valley. In 1768, the Iroquois, at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix, sold the rights to the hunting grounds in Kentucky used by the Shawnees and other Ohio natives. Of course, the Shawnees disputed the right of the Iroquois to sell this land out from under them, but settlers continued to pour into the disputed area, which in turn led to isolated incidents of violence between settlers and natives. After a group of traders murdered the sister of the Mingo chief Cornstalk, the Mingoes and later the Shawnees launched retaliatory attacks on the settlers. This provided an excuse for Lord Dunmore, Governor of Virginia, to send an army to Fort Pitt to confirm Virginia’s land claims as Dunmore had personal interests in western land companies as well. The resulting Battle of Point Pleasant forced the Shawnees to cede their claims to

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<sup>37</sup> G.R. Clark to Jonathan Clark , 1 April 1775, James, *Clark Papers* , 9.

<sup>38</sup> G.R. Clark to Jonathan Clark , 6 July 1775, *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Kentucky.<sup>39</sup> This left bitter resentment among many Shawnees that drove some of their warriors to be among the first to resume hostilities when open conflict broke out between the British and the American colonists. It was during this conflict, which was the culmination of pre-revolutionary white manipulation and aggression against the Western Indians, that Clark served as a captain. His position as captain allowed him to share in the defeat of the Shawnees by 3,000 Virginia militiamen, and even though Clark did not see combat,, he did make important connections. He became acquainted, for example, with Joseph Bowman, who later recruited a company of soldiers for the Illinois expedition and served as Clark's most trusted subordinate.<sup>40</sup> Participation for Clark also clearly showed the settlers of the area where his interests would lie (with Virginia) and that he was more than a mere speculator seeking profits.

The settlements continued to grow in Kentucky, especially with Lord Dunmore's 1774 victory. Most of the settlers who came down the Ohio River were from Virginia. These settlers felt ties to their home colony, much as Clark did, but their interests ran counter to those of Colonel Richard Henderson, a former high court judge from North Carolina. Henderson was a well connected lawyer who played a prominent role in putting down (?) the North Carolina Regulator Uprising. The Regulators were a group of frontier farmers in North Carolina that saw their economic and legal rights curtailed by the North Carolina gentry and eventually turned to violence to address their concerns when peaceful means did not work. Henderson, appointed as a judge to help maintain order in the backcountry, was hated by the Regulators, who stormed his courthouse at Hillsboro, and later burned his barn. No sooner had the Regulator crisis passed then Henderson negotiated a land sale with the Cherokees and justified purchasing land declared

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<sup>39</sup> Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*, 33, 161-163.

<sup>40</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 17.

off limits by the Proclamation of 1763 by a precedent set in a British legal decision in India.<sup>41</sup> The precedent held that a grant from the British government to land purchased directly from indigenous peoples was not necessary for use of that land. This meant that Henderson did not need government sanction to acquire land from Cherokees. Henderson, at least through his self-interested interpretation of the law, did not need government approval of his purchase of title to land because he was dealing with independent people. The British government, however, did not consider the Cherokees independent in the same way as they did the various groups in India, although that was of little concern to Henderson. With this in mind, Henderson purchased a large part of the present day states of Kentucky and Tennessee and hoped to establish a new colony named Transylvania.<sup>42</sup> A divided group of Cherokees met with Henderson at Sycamore Shoals and agreed to sell their Kentucky hunting grounds for 10,000 pounds. Although they were divided about the sale, they hoped that the settlers could be directed away from the Cherokee villages and give them some separation. The Cherokees were disappointed in two ways. First, Henderson only delivered two wagonloads of goods for the land, and second a group of young warriors led by Dragging Canoe broke away from the Cherokees' elder leadership. The men led by Dragging Canoe became known as the Chickamaugas and continued to fight American settlers throughout the Revolution.<sup>43</sup> Since the initial legal precedent justifying this massive land transfer came from India, it created controversy almost immediately. Henderson was a powerful man politically, but his claims did not proceed without any challenges from the competing claimants waiting for the British government to legalize their land claims.

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 59-62.

<sup>42</sup> Clarence W. Alvord, "Virginia and the West: An Interpretation," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. 3 (June 1916), 27-28; James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 21-22.

<sup>43</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 35-37.

Clark's records and correspondence indicate that he was ambivalent at first about the legality of the purchase, and he noted in the margins of his memoirs that "The Cherokees [had] no...Right to Kentucky." This indicated that Clark believed the Cherokees had no right to sell the land to Henderson. Clark's Memoir, which was written in 1791, illustrates that Clark in hindsight agreed with the decision of the Virginia Assembly that the purchase was of dubious legal standing. At the time the purchase occurred, however, Clark was less sure who was legally right, noting "Many thought [Henderson's Claim] was good [whereas] others doubted whether or not Virginia could...have any pretensions to the Country."<sup>44</sup> Clark had no problem with the legal justification that Henderson used to dispossess the Cherokees, but it is likely that he was opposed to Henderson controlling the lands that he thought belonged to Virginia because of the Point Pleasant concessions. According to his interests, Clark chose to accept the claims of the Shawnees over those of the Cherokees.

Clark eventually called for a meeting of Kentucky settlers to determine whether or not to send delegates to make an appeal to the Virginia Assembly, but despite action against Henderson, he was not initially opposed to the proprietorship. While he was establishing his initial land claims, Clark wrote that "Col. Henderson is heard and Claims all [the] Country...If his Claim should be good, land may be got Reasonable Enough."<sup>45</sup> Even writing sixteen years later in his memoir, he remembered Henderson and his associates taking "great pains to ingratiate themselves in the favor of the people." Clark attributed their decline in popularity to an attempt to raise quit-rents on the land, a practice that many saw as a form of vassalage.<sup>46</sup> As long as Clark saw a fair chance for his own prosperity in land dealings to continue, he was willing to

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<sup>44</sup> "Clark's Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, 208. (Hereafter cited as Memoir)

<sup>45</sup> G.R. Clark to Jonathan Clark, 6 July 1775, *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> "Memoir," in *Ibid.*, 209; James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 24.

accept the rule of Henderson. But with the threat of economic deprivation staring him squarely in the face, he was one of the first and most important to call out for recognition as a part of Virginia.<sup>47</sup>

Clark's decision to work against Henderson opens up an interesting area of speculation. While Clark did not write at length, either for or against Henderson's colony, it appears several conclusions can be drawn from his few words and actions. Henderson was a member of the North Carolina elite and enjoyed the support of the royally appointed governor, lawyers, and merchants in his home colony, and at the same time he antagonized the farmers and settlers, or Regulators, in the North Carolina Piedmont in almost every attempt they made to receive legal redress.<sup>48</sup> Clark as a landed gentlemen had few initial misgivings with Henderson and his colony or his reputation for stifling the economic rights of small land holders, as Clark saw his own chances for success. The North Carolinians invited to settle in Transylvania refused for the most part because of the potential of abuse by Henderson, and hence the colony became an extension of Virginia.<sup>49</sup> Despite Henderson's initial gestures to lure settlers to his colony, his fees that stymied economic independence were antagonistic to the goals of the settlers. In Kentucky, as in North Carolina, the settlers and farmers chose legal redress as their first avenue of complaint, and led by Clark this appeal was made to Virginia and not an unsympathetic Henderson as had been the fate of the Regulators.

Henderson's attempts to control the land and settlers in Kentucky would not been surprising, considering his involvement in the Regulator crisis in North Carolina. Settlers in upstate New York also had protested the control of proprietors and their vast estates, and

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<sup>47</sup> Alvord, "Virginia and the West," 28-29.

<sup>48</sup> Majorleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 169, 183-184.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-217.

continued that fight beyond the American Revolution.<sup>50</sup> Although the Kentuckians did not have to resort to violence to wrest control of their land from Henderson, they had the support of another colony, which settlers in New York and North Carolina did not. Violence did not erupt from settlers in Kentucky because, unlike their peers in other colonies, the settlers themselves were immersed in the speculation system seeking their own profits, and with the constant threat of Indian attack, little opportunity or reason to revolt against the Virginia land system before or during the Revolution existed.<sup>51</sup> Some similarities can also be drawn between George Rogers Clark and the famous Vermont settler, Ethan Allen; the boisterous and often violent leader of the Green Mountain Boys was willing to initiate direct conflict with the Governor of New York, but was at the same time fighting to preserve his own land claims and speculating ventures.<sup>52</sup>

Another question to be resolved was who would control the profits from issuing title to the newly acquired lands. Defense of the new settlements was also a vital issue. Initially the western frontier was relatively quiet as British and American forces clashed along the Atlantic Seaboard, but this changed in June 1777 when Henry Hamilton received orders from the ministry in London. Hamilton, as Lieutenant Governor of Detroit and head of Indian Affairs in the West, was ordered to dispatch Britain's native allies to attack the frontier settlements in Kentucky. The Shawnees and others in Ohio needed little motivation, and Hamilton also held conferences with the loyal nations from the Great Lakes region located nearer to Detroit, arranging for raids from nations such as the Ottawas, Hurons, Chippewas, and Potawatomi.<sup>53</sup> Kentucky was sparsely populated and poorly stocked with military supplies. This created a state of paralysis, forcing

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<sup>50</sup> Nash, *The Unknown American*, 79; E. Wilder Spaulding, *His Excellency George Clinton: Critic of the Constitution*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938), 228-233.

<sup>51</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 80-81.

<sup>52</sup> Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 79-80, 110-113.

<sup>53</sup> John D. Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with The Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton*, (Crawfordsville, Ind: R. E. Banta, 1951), 28-31.



many settlers to flee back to the East, with a clear need for outside military aid to those who remained. As the different Indian nations from all across the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes converged on Kentucky, they were just continuing a fight to protect their lands that had been a part of native thinking and diplomacy since the earliest conflicts between Britain and France. Just as the French had armed Indian allies from their Great Lake military posts in earlier conflicts, so too did the British. This led to a wave of fear on the frontier, sending settlers fleeing east to safer settlements as warriors now had both supplies and European sanction to attack encroaching settlers.<sup>54</sup>

Clark called for a meeting at Harrodsburg and was elected deputy to Virginia, as was John Gabriel Jones. The newly elected deputies were charged with carrying a petition to the government of Virginia. Two appeals to Virginia have been preserved. The first was signed by the inhabitants of Kentucky at Harrodsburg on June 15, 1776, and the other was signed five days later by the “gentlemen” leaders of the community, George Rogers Clark included. The documents were similar. Both claimed that Henderson’s purchase from the Cherokees was illegal and that land was being sold at “exorbitant” prices, while the proprietor’s system of government did not “at all harmonize with that lately adopted by the United Colonies.”<sup>55</sup> Common to both also was a statement legitimizing Virginia’s claim to western lands under the colony’s original charter and by the military victory over the Shawnees. Each also stated the willingness of the settlements to bear the burden of filling their fair share of recruitment quotas and the cost of the war against Great Britain as well.<sup>56</sup> By controlling the public gathering, Clark was able to secure

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<sup>54</sup> See numerous instances of frontier conditions during warfare in Anderson, *Crucible of War*; Merritt, *At the Crossroads*; and Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*.

<sup>55</sup> Probably refers to the quit-rents. “Petition from the Inhabitants of Kentucky,” 15 June 1776, in James, *Clark Papers*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13; and “To the Honorable the Convention of Virginia,” 20 June 1776, 14-16.

his own land claims through Virginia's legal system and gain prestige among the Kentuckians by being elected to deliver their appeals to Virginia.

Those that had settled in Kentucky by 1776 were not preoccupied with the Independence movement like colonists in the East were. At the same time the Declaration of Independence was being written in Philadelphia, the settlers of the Transylvania Company were attempting to achieve their own "independence" from proprietor Richard Henderson. Their major concerns were establishing clear titles to the land they had improved and protecting themselves from Shawnee raiders from the Ohio Country. Once the settlers were under Virginia's law, it was the British effort to arm Indians across the Ohio Valley against Kentucky settlers that goaded them into the fight. In Kentucky, as across North America, local interests trumped national calls to patriotism, and joining Virginia's fight against the British was seen as better than watching friends and neighbors be slaughtered by Shawnee raiders.<sup>57</sup>

While Clark was successful in convincing the settlers of Kentucky to reject the claims of Henderson and his partners, it was still necessary for the Virginia Assembly to accept their appeal and recognize Kentucky as a county of that state. By the time they arrived in Virginia, Clark and Jones had missed the legislative session as it had adjourned for the summer. While Jones set off for Holton to fight Cherokees, Clark began immediately to advocate Kentucky's claims by visiting Patrick Henry, then Governor of Virginia, at his home in Hanover where Henry was recovering from sickness.<sup>58</sup> The settlers of Kentucky had done well to send Clark, as he received a favorable audience with Henry and received written instructions from the governor that were presented to the state council when the Virginia Assembly reconvened in the fall.

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<sup>57</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 37-41, 67-68.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, "Memoir", in James, *Clark Papers*, 212.

During the fall legislative session, Clark again showed his adroitness, appealing to the Virginia Assembly and “imploreing their immediate Protection” for the greater interests of Virginia.<sup>59</sup>

Although gunpowder was voted as aid to Kentucky, the House expected Clark and Jones to transport the powder at their own expense. Clark rejected this premise, claiming that if a “Cuntrey was not worth protecting [,] it was not worth Claiming,” while he also threatened to apply for aid and protection to other colonies. This seemed to convince the members of the House, as Clark, “being a little prejudiced in favor of [his] Mother Cuntrey [Virginia]” was happy to accept the compromise offer of delivering the goods to Fort Pitt.<sup>60</sup>

Despite gaining supplies and partial transportation, Clark was still forced to battle powerful foes in the House to gain recognition of Kentucky as a county. Richard Henderson was one of the main forces of opposition, as he maintained a large amount of influence as a native son of Virginia, as a respected official in North Carolina, and the head of a speculation company. Henderson was able to find favor among those speculators who did not stand to gain from an enlargement of Virginia and the land its speculating ventures had access to, while he was opposed by those that held stock in companies with conflicting claims. Also contesting Kentucky’s claim to be a part of Virginia was Arthur Campbell, a representative from the county from which Kentucky was carved. Clark was not seated as a voting member, but late in the fall session, the Assembly recognized the settlers’ desire to be joined to Virginia as a separate county.<sup>61</sup> Although he was ultimately unsuccessful, the Virginia Assembly later awarded Henderson another large claim as compensation in present day Tennessee.<sup>62</sup> Another contributing factor in Henderson’s defeat was his unwillingness to allow Patrick Henry and some

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<sup>59</sup> “Petition by John Gabriel Jones and George Rogers Clark,” October 1776, in *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19, and “Memoir,” 213.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, note 1, and G.R. Clark to Jonathan Clark, 6 July 1775, 10.

of the other Virginia gentlemen to buy into the company. Henderson's fear of being overshadowed as the leader of the Transylvania Company meant he alienated powerful political allies that resulted in a core of political opposition in Virginia.<sup>63</sup>

Clark's journey was just beginning as he headed to Fort Pitt to escort the gunpowder and supplies back to Kentucky. Once safely arrived in the West again, Clark wrote to Patrick Henry of his plans for the conquest of the Illinois. The report he received from two spies he had dispatched disguised as hunters contained a military report and they also offered a description of one of the targeted settlements:

The Town of [Kaskaskia] contains about one hundred families of French and English [who] carry on an extensive trade with the Indians; and they have a considerable number of negroes that bear arms...and [they] send a considerable quantity of flour and other commodities to New Orleans. The houses are framed and very good, with a small but elegant stone fort situated [near] the center of town.<sup>64</sup>

Not only had Clark worked hard to get supplies and recognition for Kentucky, he had also worked behind the scenes to convince Henry of the necessity for an expedition into the Illinois. Clark forwarded the reports of his two spies, including accounts of how British officers gave "large presents...[to] the Waubash Indians to invade the frontiers of Kentucky; [and that he] was daily treating with other nations."<sup>65</sup> While Clark's report overstated the activities of the British in the Illinois, most attacks were coordinated by Hamilton in Detroit, where he accepted scalps and offered abundant presents and trade goods; a letter still illustrates the diplomatic ability of Clark to work among the frontier settlers and the elite of Virginia. This letter masterfully addressed the main concern of the settlers, and the main source of their expense to

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<sup>63</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 63-64.

<sup>64</sup> G.R. Clark to Patrick Henry, 1777, in *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-32.

Virginia. Kaskaskia and the Illinois were lightly garrisoned and closer to Kentucky compared than the post at Detroit. Kaskaskia and its nearby villages, as well as Vincennes, located to the east on the Wabash River, were populated with French traders and farmers who had excellent relations with many of the natives along the nearby Wabash River and in Illinois, as well as nations like the Potawatomi, Sacs, Foxes, and others west of the Mississippi River. Since the lands had been ceded to the British in the Treaty of Paris in 1763, there was also a sizeable Anglo-American trader population that maintained contact with the other colonies as well. The benefits this conquest could draw in commerce and improved relations with Native Americans, especially the Miami along the Wabash River, were obvious to Clark. “[Virginia] must either take the town of [Kaskaskia], or in less than... twelve month[s] send an army against the Indians on [the] Wabash [River], which will cost ten times as much, and not be of half the service.”<sup>66</sup> Clark’s objectives in Williamsburg had been met with nearly complete success, and with orders in hand, he turned once again to the frontier settlers that had empowered him. Clark now turned his attention to raising an army that could conquer the Illinois Country.

George Rogers Clark was authorized to recruit his soldiers from the western counties of Virginia and the frontier settlements of Kentucky. In this regard, Clark met resistance from his potential soldiers on many different occasions. Since Clark was ordered to recruit in the west, specifically in the Fort Pitt area, he ran into jurisdictional problems because of the long-standing feud between Virginia and Pennsylvania. The situation on the frontier was never clear to any of the settlers or to the seats of government in Philadelphia, Williamsburg, or London. Not only were there a multitude of purchases for land around and west of the Fort Pitt frontier, most overlapping one claim or another, but the Proclamation of 1763 had forbidden white settlement

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-32.

beyond the Alleghany Mountains. This in turn meant that the crown had not recognized or mediated any of the conflicting claims. As the British-American conflict broke out, any hope for a royal settlement of the border was abandoned. All of these conditions generally proved harmful to state and Continental efforts toward recruiting and supplying troops around Fort Pitt.

The initial push into the Ohio Valley, via Fort Pitt, was aimed at capturing the Native American fur trade, with traders from as far away as the Carolinas and New York competing with traders from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and those from New France. Although the Carolinians, Marylanders, and New Yorkers quickly fell out of the race, this vital western trade and territory immediately became a source of conflict and suspicion between Virginia and Pennsylvania, even amidst the French threat.<sup>67</sup> The threat from French traders did cause Virginia and Pennsylvania to meet with the different groups of Native Americans at Logstown. Virginians and Pennsylvanians were competing directly with each other as early as 1748 and continued to do so up into the American Revolution. At this early meeting, the Virginians almost failed to send any official representatives, but the Ohio Company saw to it that its interests were at the forefront of the discussions. Following the French abandonment of Fort Duquesne and the building of Fort Pitt by the British, the fur trade flourished, and as Pennsylvania traders gained greater control, the Virginians responded by creating the Ohio Company with a land grant and a monopoly over the Virginia traders. Pennsylvanian traders countered by spreading stories claiming that the Virginians were more interested in stealing land than trading.<sup>68</sup>

The early trades and negotiations served to open up the region for increased white settlement and these tensions between settlers and Native American groups, especially the

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<sup>67</sup> W. Neil Franklin, "Pennsylvania-Virginia Rivalry for the Indian Trade of the Ohio Valley," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 20 (March 1934), 464-465.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 466-468.

Shawnee, began to heat up leading to conflicting claims between all the parties involved in three decades of deals. The authority to raise a militia also came into focus, as part of a chain of events that led to Dunmore's War of 1774. The problem was simple for many of the settlers. They viewed an attack by the Shawnee or other Ohio tribes as imminent, and they sought protection from a higher authority. Confusion reigned and loyalties shifted as no clear boundaries existed, and colonists aligned with whichever colony they believed could best protect them and allow trade to flourish.<sup>69</sup> Although Pennsylvania began drawing up counties near Fort Pitt in 1771 and had issued land titles, they had previously refused to extend protection to many of the settlers based on a claim that they were stationed beyond the boundaries of Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Assembly, dominated by pacifist Quakers, also refused to vote funds to form any militia companies and twice refused to build a fort at the spot that would become Fort Pitt.<sup>70</sup> As Pennsylvania now attempted to extend its claims westward, many of the settlers who had migrated from Virginia turned to that colony for protection, allowing John Connelly to receive a commission from Virginia to grant land and offices, and to tax the fur trade. Connelly also attacked and jailed those who refused to recognize the sovereignty of Virginia. This attempt to strengthen Virginia's claim gained support among many settlers because of the inaction of the Pennsylvania government.<sup>71</sup>

While the claims of Pennsylvania persisted, despite holding a somewhat weaker position, the settlers of the area were caught up in a propaganda war between the two sides. This propaganda war blurred and weakened authority, making it very difficult for military leaders like Clark to recruit or collect supplies under the aegis of particular state without coming into

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<sup>69</sup> Edward G. Williams, "Fort Pitt and the Revolution on the Western Frontier," *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 59 (January 1976), 9-10.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5; Franklin, "Pennsylvania-Virginia Rivalry for the Indian Trade of the Ohio Valley," 470.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 479; Williams, "Fort Pitt and the Revolution on the Western Frontier," 14.

conflict with at least a segment of the populace. An agent for Pennsylvania, Arthur St. Clair, took action in 1774 to keep Connelly from acting in favor of Virginia. St. Clair ordered Connelly arrested, but “about eighty persons in arms assembled themselves...proceeded to the Fort where a cask of rum was produced...I thought it most prudent to keep out of their way.”<sup>72</sup> As St. Clair had reported to Governor John Penn, controlling the settlers was not an easy task. One year later in 1775, the violence still continued as Robert Hanna reported to Governor Penn that “a number of armed men...demanded entrance in the jail...On the Jailer refusing to admit them, they in a violent manner broke said jail with a sledge, which they took...without leave.” The leaders of the mob assured Hanna they were acting “by the authority of Virginia.”<sup>73</sup> Mobs and public gatherings were becoming more common as the colonies moved towards a break with Britain. Especially in Pennsylvania, the disenfranchised citizens began to gather and work outside of the normal political system to force changes in policy. This was especially true as the military threat from the British increased and Pennsylvanians joined the independence movement.<sup>74</sup>

During this time, Lord Dunmore was still the governor of Virginia, and as a proponent and investor in the western expansion of his colony, he sanctioned men like Connelly and their violent methods, by proclaiming the prohibition of the “execution of any act of authority on behalf of the Province of Pennsylvania.”<sup>75</sup> In fact, Governor Penn had little recourse, “As the government of Virginia hath the power of raising militia, and there is not any such in this province, it will be in vain to contend with them in the way of force.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Arthur St. Clair to Governor John Penn, 1775 in *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Robert Hanna to Governor John Penn, *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>74</sup> Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebel Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 143-171.

<sup>75</sup> “A Proclamation of Lord Dunmore,” 1774 in Williams, “Fort Pitt and the Revolution on the Western Frontier,” 24.

<sup>76</sup> Governor John Penn to Westmoreland County, 1775, in *Ibid.*, 31.



Although Pennsylvania could not match the force of the Virginians, the escalation of the Revolutionary conflict, increased raids from the Shawnees and Cherokees, the stationing of Continental troops at Fort Pitt, and finally the ability to raise militias in Pennsylvania stopped the actual inter-colonial violence. The overthrow of Lord Dunmore by Virginians who feared the Governor would unleash an army of slaves against them after he removed the colonists' access to militia gunpowder stores combined with a number emancipated slaves willing to enlist in the army, created fear and suspension and led to the installation of a pro-independence minded government.<sup>77</sup> Regardless, this did little to cool the rivalry or increase the ease with which officers could raise and supply troops.

The earliest attempts by Continental forces operating in the Fort Pitt area to defend the region from Indian raids and to supply them turned into difficult balancing acts. The first officer sent to command at Fort Pitt was General Edward Hand. George Washington selected Hand because of his familiarity with the area, but this turned out to be a serious drawback as he was eventually forced out of his command because it was believed he was playing favorites with the Pennsylvania faction.<sup>78</sup> Despite his eventual removal, Hand demonstrated the need for officers to be wary of becoming involved in the border dispute even though he did not take his own advice. One of his first acts was to declare anyone who would “foment the present unhappy disputes between the states of Virginia and Pennsylvania to public injury” as “dangerous and disaffected to the American Cause.” His subordinate Daniel Brodhead repeated these orders in later operations.<sup>79</sup> In fact, the settlers were reported as being in a “great confusion and Distress at

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<sup>77</sup> Holton, *Forced Founders*, 143-152.

<sup>78</sup> Louise Phelps Kellogg *Frontier Advance on the Upper Ohio, 1778-1779*, (Madison, Wisc: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1916), 14.

<sup>79</sup> Edward Hand to David Shepard, 3 June 1777, in Louise Phelps Kellogg and Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778*, (Madison, Wisc: Wisconsin Historical Society, 1912), 1-2; Daniel Brodhead to George Washington, 21 March 1779, in Kellogg, *Frontier Advance*, 262.

present. The prospects of fixing a permanent boundary between Virginia and Pennsylvania, gives the people much satisfaction. Next to Chastising the Indians they desire that may take place.”<sup>80</sup> As these troubles continued to ferment, Clark found it difficult to avoid the rivalry.

I found opposition to our Interest in the Pittsburgh Cuntrey as the whole was divided into Violent parties between the Virginians and pensilvanians respecting Territory [and] each trying to Counter Act the [other.] [The] Idea of men being for the state of Virginia affected the Vulgar of the one party, and as my Real instruction was [kept] conseald...Boath parties conceived it to be Injurious to the publick Interest to draw men at so Critical a moment.<sup>81</sup>

Clark and other officers were frustrated repeatedly. As the war continued, attempts at recruiting in and around Fort Pitt grew only more difficult. Militia service was not as reliable as in the New England colonies and the nature of the warfare was different. Settlers were concerned with the need to protect their families from frontier warfare with Native Americans. The unique demands of the frontier limited a commander’s ability to operate traditional campaigns. The local population on the frontier was first and foremost concerned with Indian raids and establishing their new homesteads. Fighting the British in far away posts like Detroit was unlikely to garner much enthusiasm amongst the general population.<sup>82</sup>

These conflicting boundaries and jurisdictions created a long-term problem of command, control, and supply in the Fort Pitt area, one that hampered the formation of all expeditions that set out towards the West. These were not new problems. Fort Pitt had always been a difficult post to maintain, both for the French and later for the assortment of Virginian, Pennsylvanian,

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<sup>80</sup> Edward Hand to Jasper Yeates , 25 August 1777, Kellogg and Thwaites, *Frontier Defense*, 48.

<sup>81</sup> “Memoir, “ in James, *Clark Papers*, 220.

<sup>82</sup> John Resch, “The Massachusetts Rank and File of 1777,” 42-69; Walter Sargent, “The Revolution as a People’s War,” 70-102, both in *War and Society in the American Revolution: Silver, Our Savage Neighbors*, 74-85, 123, 259-260.

and royal forces that tried to hold Fort Pitt during the French and Indian War.<sup>83</sup> The area was especially vulnerable to attack from the nearby Shawnees and Delawares, who could cut off supplies and prevent crops and livestock from being maintained in the area, not to mention the terror and havoc they had the potential to wreak upon the frontiers. Just as settlers had found during the French and Indian War, it did not take long for native raids to empty the British frontier of settlers.<sup>84</sup> The potential for complete disruption of society on the frontier at any time made recruiting and maintaining soldiers along the frontier a difficult task at best.

When Clark set out from Williamsburg to begin gathering his forces, he had two sets of instructions. The public instructions spoke about raising men for the defense of Kentucky, while the secret instructions identified the Illinois posts as the real objective of the expedition.<sup>85</sup> One of Clark's immediate problems was that since the public did not know his real objective, he could not over-ride existing recruiting orders from his own state. While Virginia opposed recruiting men for a Continental expedition to Detroit, they did authorize the new commander at Fort Pitt, Lachlan McIntosh, a Continental General with experience dealing with southern Indians, to recruit men for an Indian expedition aimed at attacking nearby villages, all at the same time Clark and his officers were trying to recruit as well.<sup>86</sup> Within the bounds of Virginia, conflicts of authority appear to have been unavoidable. The issue was even more complicated as Clark was only recruiting state units. The Illinois Regiment was a long term enlistment unit, or regular unit. This unit formed the core of Clark's army and was considered part of the Virginia State Line,

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<sup>83</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 325-326.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 108-109, 204-205.

<sup>85</sup> "Secret Instructions to Clark," 2 January 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, , 34-36.

<sup>86</sup> "Resolution of Virginia Council," 7 July 1778, in Kellogg, *Frontier Advance*, 104; McIntosh was experienced in dealing with natives along the Georgia frontier, had performed well militarily under George Washington in the Continental Army, and was recommended for the command by Henry Laurens. He was removed by his own request to return to help with the defense of Georgia the following spring. Kellogg and Thwaites, *Frontier Defense*, 297-298.

which consisted of regular army units. The location of some counties and their ability to fulfill the required quota of men for the Virginia units serving in the Continental army meant that there was often confusion about who was eligible, because those men that joined Clark would not have been exempt from the Continental draft. Most of the settlers living along the frontier preferred the short-term militia service to any type of regular service anyway, making it all the more difficult to obtain recruits.<sup>87</sup>

By the summer of 1778, as Clark was preparing his expedition, things had not improved in the area. An earlier plea by members of the Pennsylvanian and Virginian delegations to the Continental Congress had asked the settlers to set aside “all animosities which have heretofore subsisted among you as inhabitants of distinct Colonies, [and] may now give place to generous and concurring efforts for the preservation of every thing that can make our common Country dear to us.”<sup>88</sup> Despite this plea, the commanders at Fort Pitt continued to struggle. Lachlan McIntosh, who replaced General Hand in May, 1778, was forced to ask for men and supplies by implying he supported one colony’s claim over the others, especially when speaking to leaders of the local county governments. In a request for supplies from a Pennsylvania county, he reasoned, “I have the more reason to expect your assistance in this, as the people of Virginia think me Partial to your State.”<sup>89</sup> Difficulties with calling up the militia arose in nearly every county because of the frequent call-ups that disrupted the planting and harvesting schedule of farmers. In addition, it was common for a unit to be called up it while it had not received pay from an

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<sup>87</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, “Fit for Common Service?,” in *War and Society in the American Revolution*, 103-130; Rudolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio: A Narrative of Indian Affairs in the Upper Ohio Valley until 179*, (Pittsburgh, Penn: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1968), 265-268; Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 53-56.

<sup>88</sup> Williams, “Fort Pitt and the Revolution in the West,” 32-33.

<sup>89</sup> Lachlan McIntosh to John Campbell, 25 October 1778, in Kellogg, *Frontier Advance*, 148.

earlier term of service. Also supplies were not available to properly equip the unit for its new mission.<sup>90</sup>

While Clark was initially able to raise men to take to the Illinois, his later attempts at recruiting illustrate the problems that were never completely solved throughout the course of the war. In 1781, Clark had approval from the President of the Pennsylvania Council, Joseph Reed, to recruit men for an expedition to Detroit. Reed declared that “[Pennsylvania] authorizes you to declare, that so far from giving offence to this Government, we shall consider [Pennsylvanians] service with you, as highly meritorious.”<sup>91</sup> Although Reed stopped short of offering any direct help, he did give Clark his approval to carry on his recruiting efforts. Clark’s efforts to enlist soldiers were met with a draft riot because of complaints about high taxes and long tours of military duty that kept men away from their vulnerable farms and families. An apology from local officials followed, but Clark wrote to Thomas Jefferson explaining his great frustration at the resistance against service in a cause that was of so much potential benefit to the local population who thwarted it:

Whoever undertakes to Raise an army in this Quarter will find himself disappointed... This country calls aloud for an Expedition wishing me to put it into Execution but so strangely Infatuated that all the methods I have been able to pursue will not draw them into the field.<sup>92</sup>

Nephew to the famous American trader and Indian agent George Croghan, William Croghan summarized the situation well: “The reason so few went with him from this place, is Owing to the dispute that Subsists here between the Virginians and Pennsylvanians respecting

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<sup>90</sup> Philip Ranlet, “Did Revolutionary Era Farmers Avoid the Draft?,” *Continuity*, Vol. 22 (1), 79-80; David Shepherd to Edward Hand, 22 August 1777, in Kellogg and Thwaites, *Frontier Defense*, , 47.

<sup>91</sup> Joseph Reed to G.R. Clark, 15 May 1781, in James, *Clark Papers*, 550.

<sup>92</sup> “Agreement on the Part of Some of the Inhabitants of Monogalia County to Submit to Future Military Orders,” 19 June 1781; and G.R. Clark to Thomas Jefferson , 4 August 1781, both in *Ibid.*, 568, 579.

the true bounds of the Latter, And the General [Clark] being a Virginian was Oppos'd by the most noted men here of the Pennsylvania party.”<sup>93</sup> Even the acquisition of supplies could be difficult as John Canon wrote to Clark in reply to an inquiry about supplies when he was stationed in Illinois: “I Could wish you had been a Continantal officer instead of a state one for the good of the whole it would [have] prevented jelosies from ariveing and you would been Better supported.”<sup>94</sup> Despite the difficulties involved, Clark was able to recruit an army large enough to attack and capture the Illinois posts, and he managed to hold his men together against dangerous odds once assembled.

The recruiting environment along the western frontier of the colonies was clearly not an ideal one for creating or supplying armies, especially given the type of service and hardship that were required for Clark's expedition. Although Clark struggled to recruit for some of his later expeditions, he did have more success with his initial recruitment efforts. Despite resistance from frontier settlers, Clark was able to find creative ways of filling his recruiting quotas.

The Virginia militia, like the militia in other southern colonies, predominately consisted of people from the lower classes. There was a long history, beginning in England and transported to the South, that called for filling the militias with men who were jobless or homeless. These men were often forced to serve, being selected by a draft or by responding to some sort of bounty offering from the state. This meant that the overall character of the Virginia militia was not vested with the interests of patriotism. Clark had to deal with this legacy directly because he relied almost exclusively on Virginians, finding little support from Pennsylvanians, and because he was working with a commission and orders from Virginia. Middling classes, such as the

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<sup>93</sup> William Croghan to Colonel Davies, 18 August 1781, in *Ibid.*, 589.

<sup>94</sup> John Canon to G.R. Clark, 19 March 1780, in George Rogers Clark Papers, Clark Family Collection (microfilm), Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

yeoman farmers, and the upper classes refused to enlist in the militia, especially for service in the regular army units; they were also hesitant to join their local militia groups because of the hardships they perceived or the contributions they had already made.<sup>95</sup> Even attempts at reforming the militia ended in failure. Virginia proposed that new minutemen units be formed at the outbreak of war, but they failed to attract recruits because the Virginia Assembly refused to allow the election of officers in these units. The middling classes correctly perceived this as an attempt by the gentry to solidify their social control, which caused resentment and a severe lack of recruits.<sup>96</sup> Middling farmers that owned slaves were also reluctant to serve for long periods of time because they feared for their families safety should their slaves rise up in the masters absence.<sup>97</sup>

Virginia approached the Revolutionary War just as it had approached earlier conflicts. Instead of indiscriminately drafting from the population at large, committees were formed to ensure that only the lower classes of people were drafted, and when that began to encompass lower class farmers who could not afford to buy a substitute, the drafts were often met with violence.<sup>98</sup> Throughout the war, the various regions of Virginia had a terrible record of recruiting and maintaining men in the field. Even during the attacks from Benedict Arnold and Lord Cornwallis in 1781, the yeoman and upper class farmers failed to meet their militia call-ups, leaving few men from Virginia present to meet the threat of a direct invasion.<sup>99</sup>

As established earlier, Virginia did place an onerous task before the state's militias in the form of frequent call-ups, drafts, and lack of supplies. Simply put, there were too few men to fill

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<sup>95</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, "Fit for Common Service?," in *War and Society in the American Revolution*, ed. John Resch and Walter Sargent, 105-106; Ranlet, "Did Revolutionary Era Farmers Avoid the Draft?," 77-78.

<sup>96</sup> Holton, *Forced Founders*, 168-169.

<sup>97</sup> McDonnell, "Fit for Common Service?," 104.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

the ranks, and the ones that could be coaxed into any type of long term service usually deserted before their time of service was up. A failure by the state military to adequately protect the farms and towns angered the non-serving citizens that paid a hefty taxes for protection that they did not receive.<sup>100</sup>

Clark himself had to battle with the desertion of his men, especially while he was stationed at the Illinois posts. There was a “great...incouragement for Disertions when a soldier has only to cross the [Mississippi] to free himself from the service of his Country.”<sup>101</sup> As Clark was forced to recruit mostly among the settlers who were from Virginia, he faced the same types of problems as officers did further to the east. He could promise his soldiers “three hundred Acres of Land...out of the Lands which may be conquered,” along with normal pay and bounty for volunteers, and not be able to meet his quotas. Interestingly, in a rare moment of concern for some Indians, the Virginia council was explicit in saying the lands should come from the conquered territory “so as not to interfere with the Claims of any friendly Indians.”<sup>102</sup> The politicians were already licking their lips at the lands held by the Miamis and Illinois, while they also hoped to calm the irritated Shawnees and Cherokees. Land bounties were included in recruiting ploys to attract the type of landless lower class soldiers desired for the regular service (they also helped to offset the high cash demands of enlisting soldiers), yet keeping soldiers in the service was an expensive proposition.

By the end of Clark’s initial capture of the Illinois posts, he was forced to offer soldiers \$750 for service covering the duration of the war, and \$100 for one year of service. This cost

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>101</sup> G.R. Clark to Richard Winston, 17 December 1778 in George Rogers Clark papers on Miscellaneous Reels, The Library of Virginia.

<sup>102</sup> Wythe, Mason and Jefferson to G.R. Clark , 3 January 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, , 37-38.



Clark and the State of Virginia \$15,400 in bonuses to keep just seventeen men in the service.<sup>103</sup>

When Clark ran into these types of difficulties, he was willing to try to work around his orders to fill up his recruiting quotas. Unfortunately for Clark his attempts at recruiting in counties away from the frontier caused Governor Henry to express his “Concern at [Clark’s] Conduct,” claiming the men from other regions were not well suited to the type of service Clark desired.<sup>104</sup>

While recruiting was not easy for Clark, he did have a number of options available to him, including his efforts to work around the spirit of his orders to recruit what would become the core of the Illinois Regiment.

One of the key motivations for frontier settlers who were willing to serve in the militia was their hatred of Native Americans. Settlers and various Native Americans had been pushing against one another along the frontier boundary since the earliest days of European settlement. Over time, this conflict evolved into a hatred of Native Americans and their customs, along with the refusal to recognize their rights to the land they occupied.

This was especially true of the English who never developed the type of Métis population that the French used to integrate themselves into native cultures. The French were comfortable seeking a “middle ground” as Richard White describes it, the meeting of two different cultures, where an understanding regarding trade and diplomacy can be created and understood as a new, common culture.<sup>105</sup> While the British did not utilize the middle ground as the French Métis did through living in native communities, there were British traders that were familiar enough with native customs to begin constructing a new middle ground. This never occurred on a large scale because Pontiac’s resistance to the British caused the death of many of the most skilled traders,

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<sup>103</sup> The State of Virginia to John Girault, 1779, in George Rogers Clark papers on Miscellaneous Reels, The Library of Virginia.

<sup>104</sup> Patrick Henry to G.R. Clark, 24 January 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, , 39.

<sup>105</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, x.

and therefore left the British with few people capable of constructing a middle ground environment.<sup>106</sup> The American colonial attitude had little room for accommodation, and Americans were unwilling to accept native customs and culture. Americans were interested in controlling the land; something they eventually achieved based on their numerical superiority and unwillingness to work with native groups. There also was never a long “native ground” period, which historian Kathleen DuVal has shown to be a period when Europeans must adapt to native practices, not create a new middle ground.<sup>107</sup> The closest group to maintaining a native ground balance was the Miamis, but even in their protected villages along the Wabash River they were subject to the trading and military desires of whoever the strongest European at the time was.

The hatred was part of a cycle of unending violence, as French supplied natives had attacked settlers during the French and Indian War, and the settlers in turn retaliated after Pontiac’s uprising, leaving both sides filled with hatred and revenge after witnessing years of violence.<sup>108</sup> By 1776-1777, the settlers had real motivation to desire action against the natives. Clark recorded seventeen casualties, killed, wounded, and captured in native raids in a five-month period, a considerable number for the sparsely settled Kentucky posts.<sup>109</sup> Settlers were so incensed against the natives that even the thought of supporting friendly groups was out of the question. When Daniel Broadhead sought support from Pennsylvania for the friendly Delawares, Pennsylvania’s President Joseph Reed replied that it was impossible to help because of a lack of funds and his doubting “whether the People in the back Counties would suffer [trading goods] to

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-323.

<sup>107</sup> DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 10-11.

<sup>108</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, 344-345.

<sup>109</sup> “Clark’s Diary,” December 1776 through June 1777, in James, *Clark Papers*, , 20-22.

proceed [through their territory], so violent are the Prejudices against the Indians.”<sup>110</sup> Any attack against natives was generally well received along the frontier, but at times, this hatred could also dominate the outcome of other campaigns. Throughout the war, the desire to attack native settlements often directly prevented supplies and men from being gathered for larger pushes against posts like British held Detroit, but when this hatred was harnessed, it proved to be a major motivating force. Clark found both success and failure. He used the settlers’ hatred to his benefit during his initial campaigns, yet he found it to be a hindrance later on.

Clark felt he was hindered initially in his recruiting efforts because of the secretive nature of his orders, as it was difficult to convince volunteers from Fort Pitt to advance into Kentucky. In order to keep his army together, he wisely chose to keep the secret goal of capturing the Illinois posts from his men until they were well on their way to their objective. This made desertion a dangerous gamble, with the men being so far into enemy territory. This decision was crucial in holding his meager army together. Clark also had to act with speed because most of his men were raised under short terms of enlistment.

While Clark struggled to recruit Pennsylvanians to join his cause, it is doubtful whether they would have been of much use, as the Continental commander at Fort Pitt discovered. In addition, as various officers found, the Pennsylvanians closest to Fort Pitt in Westmoreland County refused to answer their militia call-ups, and they would not offer supplies at their own expense. At the same time they were quick to call for help from other quarters. The short three month terms of enlistment hampered their effectiveness in anything other than short term and nearby raids against natives. The constant fear of native raids, similar to the ones taking place in

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<sup>110</sup> Joseph Reed to Daniel Brodhead, 8 July 1779, in Kellogg, *Frontier Advance*, , 385.

Kentucky, and the necessity of protecting families and farms, made it nearly impossible to draw men into the service<sup>111</sup>

The same types of problems were common for the Virginian men Clark recruited as well. Clark, who did not want to give up the element of surprise, refused to offer any explanation to recruits other than that stated in his public orders. He was authorized by Governor Henry to “inlist Seven Companies of Men...[and] to proceed to Kentucky.”<sup>112</sup> This authorization provided little motivation as the recruitment of men for the defense of Kentucky drew protests from both sides of the border from men who did not consider it worthwhile to protect a “few detached Inhabitants [in Kentucky] that had better be removed.”<sup>113</sup> Nonetheless, Clark did manage to recruit about 150 soldiers, with an additional 25 joining the expedition en route as they passed through Kentucky.

Clark’s secret instructions were much more detailed than the public ones. Again, he was authorized to recruit seven companies, but this time the object was clearly stated; to “attack the British post at [Kaskaskia]. The orders also included instructions to “keep the true Destination of your Force secret.” Also included were instructions to be kind to the French citizens of Illinois if they proved loyal and for establishing a fort at the mouth of the Ohio River.<sup>114</sup> Clark knew there would be trouble once he revealed the true goal of the expedition, and he planned to stop the “desertion [that he] knew would ensue on Troops knowing their Destination.” He was “sensible of the impression it would have on many, to be taken near a thousand miles [from the Body of their Country to attack a People five times their number and merciless[ly] [to face] Tribes of

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<sup>111</sup> Lachlan McIntosh to Archibald Lochry, 30 October 1778, and Daniel Brodhead to Archibald Lochry, 3 June 1779 both in *Ibid.*, 155-156, 357; John Gibson to Edward Hand, 21 October 1777, Kellogg and Thwaites, *Frontier Defense*, , 140-141; Ranlet, “Did Revolutionary Era Farmers Avoid the Draft?,” 90.

<sup>112</sup> “Public Instructions to Clark,” 2 January 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 36.

<sup>113</sup> “Memoir,” in *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>114</sup> “Secret Instructions to Clark,” 2 January 1778, in *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Indians[,] their Allies[,] and determine[d] Enemies to us.” Clark had held his small army together thus far by not revealing their true mission, but in order to prevent desertions, he made camp on Corn Island, which was located at the Falls of the Ohio near present day Louisville, Kentucky. This island was large enough to construct a blockhouse on and had room enough to begin cultivation of a crop as well. While being an island, it also allowed Clark to issue patrols that prevented men from deserting upon learning their real destination.<sup>115</sup> Clark thus managed to bring together a reluctant group of men to serve in his army and went to great lengths to make sure they could not leave against his will.

While there were many challenges involved in gaining first the recognition of Kentucky, and then in creating an army amidst the anti-recruiting environment that existed along the frontier, Clark was remarkably successful, both politically and militarily. Clark, with creditability among the gentry and among the frontier settlers, was uniquely positioned to not only assure the recognition of Kentucky as a Virginia county, but he was also adept at winning over the opinions of the frontier settlers towards opposing the rule of Henderson’s proprietors. As help was dispatched, and with the acceptance of plans for an Illinois expedition, Clark was able to navigate the difficult situation involved with recruiting and gathering supplies around Fort Pitt. He used his knowledge of frontier settlers to entice or trick them into serving in his force. Clark’s experiences had taught him the skills necessary to work with disparate groups of people and find ways to unite them in their goals.

The beginnings of George Rogers Clark’s expedition gave him, or in a sense forced upon him, situations in which different types of people had to be brought together. This included people with different goals in mind, and Clark needed to meld these together in order to achieve

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<sup>115</sup> G.R. Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in *Ibid.*, 118.

a greater goal that none could reach on their own. If Clark had sided with Richard Henderson, with the formers attachment to North Carolina, it is doubtful that less populated North Carolina could have offered the support necessary for the Illinois expedition, as the wealthier and more populous Virginia barely had the resources to spare itself. In addition, it is doubtful Clark would have played any meaningful role because his connections to government were in Virginia. Clark was decisive in his actions and used his connections with people of different classes to find a common cause for the defense of Kentucky, for personal financial reasons, and eventually for the long-term safety of the settlers, which he expected to achieve through an invasion and occupation of the Illinois Country. The genesis of these and other western conflicts of the period can be pinpointed in the aggressive behavior of whites toward Native Americans. The battle for land between the Kentucky settlers, or the existing arguments concerning titles to land purchases involving Native Americans, led natives to defend their lands. These conflicts widened the scope of players involved considerably, to include British royal authority, the French, and the Spanish. Nearly every decision or obstacle Clark had to face was in some way related to the various groups of Native Americans living along the Ohio Valley, while the many villages themselves faced an array of options upon the arrival of George Rogers Clark as well.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Life on the Frontier: The French, Indians, and Spanish in the Illinois Country**

The settlers of Kentucky had sparked conflict with the various native nations of the Ohio Valley, leading George Rogers Clark to form an expedition aimed at occupying the Illinois Country, which he hoped would curb the raids into Kentucky. Upon his capture of Vincennes, Clark proclaimed to the citizens that they were guilty of exciting Indians to “assassinate the inhabitants of the frontiers” and his army was the result of a “cry for vengeance” from the United States.<sup>116</sup> There were many different factors at work during Clark’s expedition to the Illinois Country. The situation was very complex, involving large numbers of Native Americans from the far western edge of the Great Lakes to eastern Ohio. The influence of the Spanish Empire and the remnants of France’s North American Empire also loomed large in any expedition headed for the Illinois Country. Not only were Native Americans struggling to deal with the profound shifts in power that occurred following British victory in the French and Indian War, but the remaining French settlers and the Spanish who were struggling to take control of the vast land concessions gained from France also faced radically different situations on the North American continent.

Clark had honed his abilities as a leader and cultural negotiator by the time he set out for the Illinois Country, but on the far western frontier, he faced more diversity than ever before. While the situation near Fort Pitt was somewhat convoluted, the situation in the Illinois was more so as Clark faced, exotic Indians like the Sacs, Iowas, and Illini and was as French and Spanish settlers. The Illinois Expedition highlights the greatest achievement of Clark’s career and also

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<sup>116</sup> “Clark to the Inhabitants of Vincennes,” 13 July 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 50-51.

highlights his ability to gain the cooperation of diverse groups of populations to work towards his own goals. To understand the complexity of the situation Clark encountered it is necessary to look at the conditions on the ground in the Illinois Country prior to his arrival and how that situation came to exist as Clark would need to gather alliances that had never existed before or after his arrival. Therefore, this chapter will look at each group separately, beginning with Indians to illustrate why they were not hostile to Clark and then move on to examine why the French and Spanish were willing to work with Clark as well.

The long-standing conflicts over land among various groups of settlers and Native Americans continued to fester, at times hampering recruitment. This chapter will primarily focus on British Indian policy following Pontiac's War when natives in the resisted British power and subsequently rose up to fight against encroachment. According to Colin Calloway, this was because of a lack of gift giving and British "disregard for the strength of...Indian sentiments."<sup>117</sup> These resentments survived a British victory over Pontiac and his allies and continued to fuel native resistance against the advances of colonial society. The French remained to try and maintain their ways of life under British dominion, while the Spanish struggled to find a balance between economic progress and the huge expenses involved in managing the newly acquired and sparsely settled Louisiana territory.<sup>118</sup> The British victory ensured an English-speaking North America, but by the time that Clark's expedition set out, he was still dealing with the failed efforts of assimilation and subjugation of the British and the divide in the British Atlantic Community.<sup>119</sup> The question of how Indians fit into the British Empire as subjects and efforts to

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<sup>117</sup> Colin Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, 66-67.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113, 133-134.

<sup>119</sup> The English need for military manpower led to the acceptance of first Scottish and then Irish soldiers into the army with limited conditions. This served to help integrate these groups into the "British" culture, especially the Scottish. The English were also seeking added security and loyalty in the Empire, and thus they chose to not Anglicize the French in the St. Lawrence settlements after the French and Indian War as they had the Acadians



protect the land promised to them by the Treaty of Paris, along with the failure to do so, left many hard feelings between whites and Indians.<sup>120</sup> The British found it difficult to subjugate the conquered French as they had done in Acadia, but rather learned with their occupation of Canada that assimilation into the British Empire was a much more viable alternative. The Illinois French were mostly isolated fearing neither British authority nor any widespread assimilation campaign because of their remote location and the lack of clear British policy in what they considered Indian Country.<sup>121</sup> Clark was forced to deal with all these different cultural forces as he prepared for his invasion. He also needed to find a way to work with the other groups, especially the French settlers, who could help neutralize the advantages the British and their native allies could muster if properly mobilized. Once the rift between Britain and the colonies was clearly understood, Indians would have the diplomatic options that two rival powers provided. The former allies of France could not help but remember how their diplomatic options were reduced when there was only one trading partner available.

Pontiac's War and the continuing influence of the French were just two of the factors that Clark had to deal with upon his arrival in the Illinois. One of the key groups for Clark during his expedition were natives, both nearby groups like the Illini and the more distant Miamis. These groups had their own long and complicated histories and by the time Clark arrived in the Illinois they had shifted alliances numerous times over the previous thirty years. Clark's ability to capitalize on the discontentment of the natives was impressive on his part since had no real supplies to share. His diplomatic accomplishments though were not simplistic as this chapter will

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earlier. That same attempt and security, and the need for unquestioned authority and loyalty, which was viewed as necessary to maintain control of the Empire, left the American colonies constantly at odds with England because they would not submit to unlimited English authority, despite their desires to be "British". See for example P.J. Marshall, "A Nation Defined By Empire, 1755-1776," in Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer, eds., *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1995).

<sup>120</sup> Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, 1-2.

<sup>121</sup> Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, 18.

illustrate, native people long endured poor relations with supposed allies. Although the scope of this chapter is large, covering various Indian nations, the French, and Spanish, all of those groups played a key role in Clark's success. Without an understanding of the situation in the Illinois, it is impossible to understand how Clark was able to gain the support of various groups. Clark's abilities as a diplomat and negotiator were enhanced tremendously by the situation that existed in the Illinois. Clark believed that by capturing the French-inhabited posts in the Illinois Country, he would cut off the British supplies that passed through the region's trading posts. The Illinois could also serve as a staging point for a campaign aimed at capturing British held Detroit. The purpose of this chapter is to examine why key native peoples in the Illinois Country acquiesced to the presence of George Rogers Clark's army and to establish what favorable conditions existed in the French towns of the Illinois and the Spanish controlled colonies on the west bank of the Mississippi River.

British Indian policy failed to supply adequately their Indian allies and trading partners caused some native leaders, especially those most impacted by Clark's arrival like the Illini and Miamis, to support the Americans or remain neutral. Some nations, particularly those west of present day Ohio, even overlooked the aggressiveness of American settlers for a short period of time. By presenting a temporary alternative to the neglectful British, Clark was able to gain some acceptance in native circles.

Also critical to Clark's success were the French settlers living throughout the Illinois. Despite British and Spanish political authority over the area, the French had retained, for the most part, control of the fur trade, and continued to be the largest European population in the region. Conflicts between French and British merchants were common, and in the face of the constant threat of Spanish invasion, Britain chose to withdraw the garrison stationed in the Illinois. This

left the region vulnerable to foreign or native attack or even rebellion by the French inhabitants. This weakness was rooted in the British policy of cutting expenses, in this case the expensive frontier garrisons, to make the occupation of America more profitable.

Finally, the Spanish used their new position of authority in Louisiana to employ French traders and encourage the development of French towns in Spanish territory. The Spanish courted Indians in Missouri and Iowa as military and trading partners, while also negotiating with the Miamis, Illini, and others living in British territory hoping to prevent them from becoming British allies. They attempted to control the trade of nations in the British sphere of influence as well. Spain also sought to increase its power in the Mississippi Valley and was willing to aid the Americans if doing so presented a strategic opportunity to increase Spanish influence.<sup>122</sup>

To understand the decision made by natives near the Illinois, such as the Illini, Miamis, and Potawatomi, to initially aid George Rogers Clark, it is important to understand the state of affairs between the various native peoples and the British Empire prior to Clark's invasion. Following the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the British were in a position where they needed to win over the former French allied Indians. They had failed to win the allegiance of most native nations who had the opportunity to ally with the French, and the British realized a new effort was necessary to secure their western territories. While the British looked to improve their methods of trade and management, they moved towards a system of imperial control, rather than the previous practice of colonial control. When put into practice, this system of trade and control failed because it was poorly funded, unable to control American frontier settlers, and undermined

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<sup>122</sup> Abraham Phineas Nasatir, "The Anglo-Spanish Frontier in the Illinois Country During the American Revolution." *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 21 (1928): 297-300.

by the influence of French and Spanish traders. This in turn left the native peoples open to outside influences. British Indian policy and the British system of trade failed because of the lack of funding from London conflicts between the imperial center and various colonial governments, and competition from French and Spanish traders continued to weaken a British system had not been strong from its inception.

The withdrawal of the French from east of the Mississippi River left a partial void in Indian trade and diplomacy that the British attempted to fill with their new trade system and an influx of British merchants. The history of Britain's Indian trade and management policy is a long and complex tale, filled with dialogue between North American commanders and officials in London. Efforts were made to pacify the native peoples, provide new lands for American settlers, reap the benefits of the fur trade, and cut back on the huge expense of maintaining military posts throughout North America. Tracking the changes in British policy from the end of French rule to the American Revolution is easily entire an work in itself; in fact, Jack Sosin's *Whitehall and the Wilderness* is an excellent study of British policy decisions during the period. Here we will examine only the final phase of Indian management that led to increasing hostilities between native peoples and American settlers at the time of Clark's invasion.<sup>123</sup>

A consistent theme in British officials' discussions of Indian trade and diplomacy was the need to cut expenses. Budgetary constraints meant that none of the interior forts or Indian agents were allowed to give out the customary presents, such as gunpowder for hunting, leaving many peoples desperate for their everyday goods. Complicating the situation was the lack of regular Indian agents in the interior, as George Croghan who operated out of Fort Pitt, was responsible

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<sup>123</sup> For a British diplomatic viewpoint, especially how events were viewed in London see Jack M. Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy, 1760-1775*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1961). For a more detailed account of Indian actions, see Dowd, *War Under Heaven*.

for relations with nearly every nation in the Ohio Valley, meaning everyday relationships were managed by the post commanders at Vincennes and Kaskaskia who had few resources with which to work. The British did not make a major effort to fully supply their Indian allies until after the Clark expedition. Traders and their merchandise initially flowed through British posts specifically designated by the government, instead of the traditional method taking goods to the Indian villages. They were also policed by imperial soldiers. This created decreased trading opportunities for British and American traders because the French were willing to illegally trade goods in the Indian villages. The Commander of British forces in North America, General Thomas Gage felt this system allowed “The Officers Commanding...to protect the traders, to prevent the Indians from being cheated or defrauded, [and] to take precautions respecting Rum.”<sup>124</sup>

As early as 1766, the idea of abandoning some of the interior posts to cut expenses became popular. “By evacuating Such Posts as shall be deemed not worth Maintaining” Gage wrote, “a Saving will be made in the Article of Expence.”<sup>125</sup> Northern Indian Superintendent William Johnson opposed closing the posts warning that the “Expedient” was “fraught with many dangers, and...will open a door for Fraud on our sides[,] Chicane on that of the French[, and]... may end in much bloodshed and infinite Expence.”<sup>126</sup> While the system of imperial control was not perfect and abuses occurred, it did give the imperial government a constant presence in the interior and provided a larger degree of control than if the trade were administered by the colonial governments.

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<sup>124</sup> Thomas Gage to H. Seymour Conway, 24 June 1766 in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage*, Volume I (Archon Books: 1969), 97. (Hereafter cited as *Gage Papers*)

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>126</sup> William Johnson to Thomas Gage, 7 January 1766, in Alexander C. Flick, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, Volume V (Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York, 1927), 4. (Hereafter cited as *Johnson Papers*)

Eventually most of the western posts were abandoned, and the Indian trade, though not Indian diplomacy, was turned over to the individual colonies. These gradual changes a decade before Clark's expedition set the stage for his eventual success in winning Indian allies. The results of this new policy of colonial control at that time though quickly became evident to the men who dealt with Indians the most, William Johnson and his agents. Responding to a report from William Johnson, his nephew and deputy Guy Johnson complained that the colonies "would do little or nothing with regard to Establishments for the Indian Trade, and that a Union of Sentiments thereon could not be expected from them."<sup>127</sup> Even the natives were apprehensive of colonial management. Appealing to the king through William Johnson, who "gave them many assurances...that these matters...were under consideration...sent to the Gov. of this Province...they answered that they had no expectation from that quarter, and that their application to his Majesty's was founded on a certainty that they could expect no redress elsewhere."<sup>128</sup> Alexander McKee, a British agent of half-Shawnee ancestry, who had worked in the Northern Indian Department since 1759 and was intimately connected with events in Ohio, lamented the failure of decentralized control, complaining that he lacked resources and was isolated because of the withdrawal of the British military from the interior.<sup>129</sup> These were the policies that affected the nations of the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes. Clark would fail to match the British when it came offer adequate supplies and trading goods, but a show of force and the hope that the Americans offered something better than the British were powerful motivators.

The area known as the Illinois Country constituted a large area of the present day state of Illinois. The western border was along the Mississippi River with the territory encompassing

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<sup>127</sup> Guy Johnson to Thomas Gage, 6 July 1769, in Milton W. Hamilton, ed., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, Volume XII (Albany, NY: The University of the State of New York, 1957), 743.

<sup>128</sup> William Johnson to The Earl of Shelbourn, 26 October 1767, in Flick, *Johnson Papers*, Volume V, 762.

<sup>129</sup> Larry L. Nelson, *A Man of Distinction Among Them: Alexander McKee and the Ohio Country Frontier, 1754-1799*, (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1999), x, 85, 88.

prairies east to the Wabash River, which originates in North-Central Indiana and flows Southwesterly towards the Ohio River. North to South, the territory stretched from Lake Michigan to the conjunction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

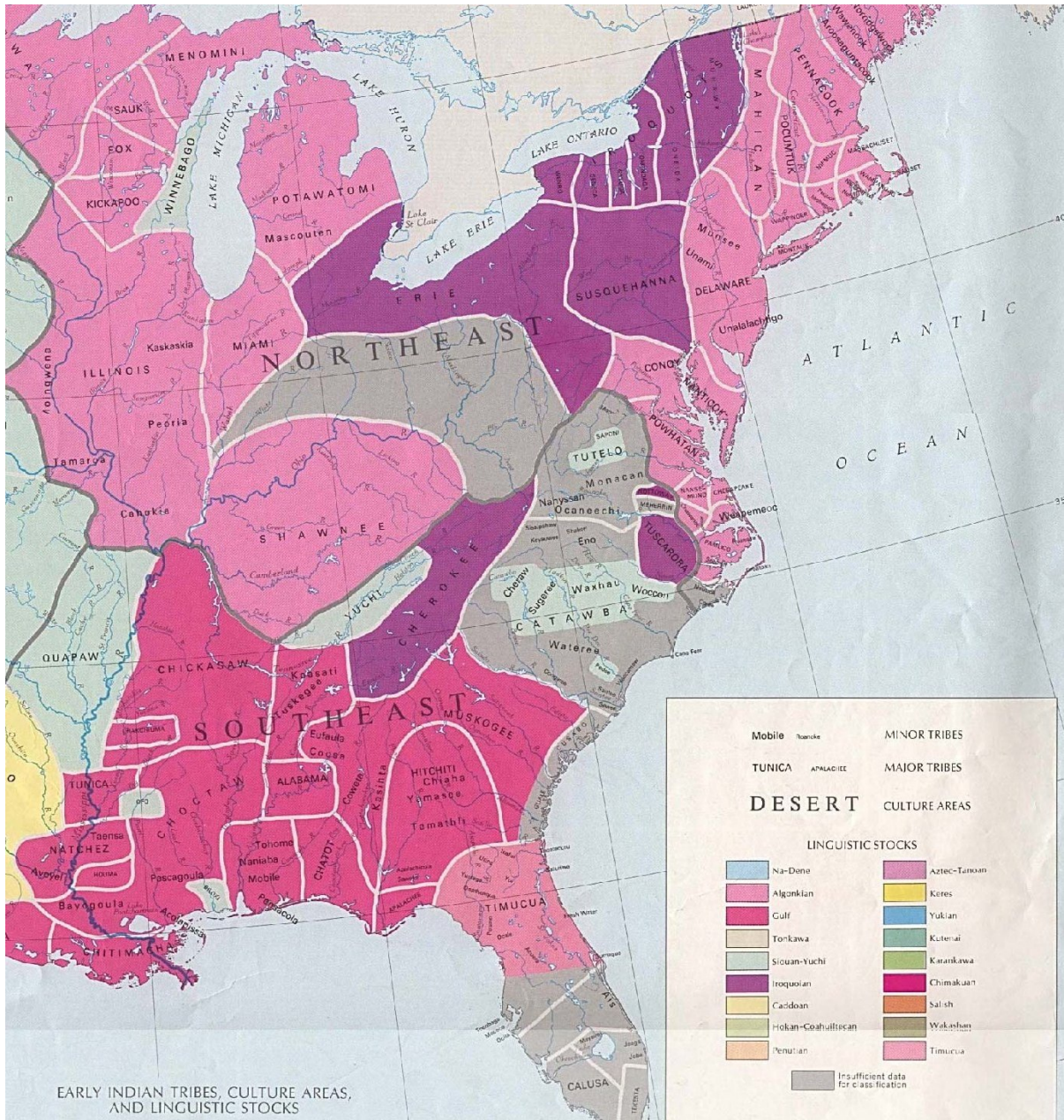


Figure 2.1: Source: University of Texas Libraries

[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united\\_states/early\\_indian\\_east.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states/early_indian_east.jpg), accessed on May 9,

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The Indians of the Illinois Country constantly shifted locations and participated in local rivalries, but the various villages and cultures can be divided into three geographic groupings. Central and Southern Illinois was populated by the Illinwek Confederation, made up of various groups like the Peoria. Along the Wabash River on the eastern edge of the territory villages can be labeled as the Wabash Nations, consisting mainly of Kickapoos, Mascoutens, Miamis, Weas, and Piakenshaw nations. In the north, the Potawatomi were the most active in the Illinois Country, but they were closely allied with their northern neighbors the Ottawa and Chippewa nations. The Shawnee, Delaware, and Mingo nations also played an important role in the area, but they mainly operated out of the Ohio area to the east. Throughout the period prior to the American Revolution and even throughout that war, dividing these nations as either pro or anti British is problematic. Many of the nations and villages were split throughout the war while others changed sides several times. Therefore despite many internal divisions, most of the nations not directly under American military control sided with the British as the war continued. Even though most ended up on the British side, enough dissatisfaction with British policy existed for Clark to successfully argue the American case, if only temporarily.

Clark faced a variety of cultures with a variety of problems. Typically of those nations that had felt the constant pressure of white expansion was the Shawnees, and as Clark found warfare was the only exchange he would have with these alienated nations. Lord Dunmore's War pushed the Shawnees out of their Kentucky hunting grounds, and the eruption of the American Revolution offered a chance for the Shawnees to renew their war against American settlers, but many Shawnees were resistant to the war calls. The Shawnees are a good example of how Indian nations remained divided throughout the war as they sought out self-preservation in a war zone. The Shawnees were not totally committed to war against the Americans until the final year of the



Revolution in 1783, and many chose to migrate west rather than stay and fight. Being located between pro-British nations around the lakes and aggressive frontiersmen made neutrality a difficult and often bloody path to steer.<sup>130</sup> Efforts across the continent to create a pan-Indian alliance to resist white settlers gained momentum as nativists and those that favored British alliances and trade now had a common cause to champion, while those who favored peace often left their villages and settled at neutral outposts like the Delaware village at Coshocton. Self-interest and preservation served as powerful motivators that left many villages divided about how to deal with this conflict.<sup>131</sup>

The nation in most immediate contact with Clark and his soldiers came from the Illini, who nominally controlled a large swath of land in the Illinois, but were weak militarily. The Illini are typical of some of the smaller nations that were extremely dependent on Euro-American forces and therefore were easier for Clark to control. The constant pressure from other native raiders had dispersed the Illini, and their fondness for the French led to increased trade with the Spanish, not the British. Clark found a weak confederation, many years removed from being a military power. They were, therefore, willing to negotiate with him.

Finally, the third type of nation Clark dealt with were those groups that were far enough away from Clark in the Illinois, the British at Detroit, and the American settlers in Kentucky that were able to maintain their independence without resorting to outright warfare. At Vincennes along the Wabash River, the powerful and independent minded Miamis were Clark's main concern. The Miamis had moved frequently and by 1776 had migrated from area around present-

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<sup>130</sup> Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*, 167-173.

<sup>131</sup> Gregory Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*, (Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 47-49, 65-66.

day Chicago into the lower Wabash Valley, and encounters with British traders along the Ohio River.<sup>132</sup> This created a long history of French and British competition for their trade.

When Louisbourg fell to British forces in King George's War, 1744-1748, it created a demand for goods in the Ohio Valley that British trader George Croghan filled by setting up a trading post at Pickawillany with the support of Miami Chief Memeskia. In 1752 the French reacted to British intrusions into the Ohio Valley with an attack led by the French-Ottawa officer Charles-Michel Mouet de Langelade on the native village and trading post of Pickawillany, located in present day Ohio. The Miamis stayed in the French sphere of influence because the colonies of Pennsylvania and Virginia elected not to aid their newly acquired trading partners.<sup>133</sup> However, in the aftermath of the French and Indian war, the Miamis proved much less hostile to the British than many of the other western nations. Despite their friendliness towards the British, they also maintained friendly relations with French traders. The Miami were adept at playing the game of diplomacy, as demonstrated during Pontiac's War when they balanced British interests with those of their western relatives who supported the war, all to maintain a semblance of Miami neutrality.<sup>134</sup> Despite the Miami efforts at neutrality, the Pinkashaws, closely related to the Miamis, preferred to deal with the Spanish and the French.<sup>135</sup>

The Miamis occupied a position which greatly aided their efforts to remain sovereign. Along the Wabash River, the Miamis were located far enough away from Detroit to resist direct British control, but were far enough north of the Ohio River and west of Pennsylvania and Virginia to only be slightly affected by frontier settlers before and during the American Revolution. In fact, most of the Miamis' hostility towards the frontiersmen emanated from the bitter warriors of the

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>133</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 24-30.

<sup>134</sup> Bert Anson, *The Miami Indians*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 75-76.

<sup>135</sup> Wayne C. Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Historic Tribes*, (Springfield, Ill: State of Illinois, 1966), 69, 77.

eastern nations like the Mingoes, Shawnees, and eventually the Delawares who were bearing the full brunt of Anglo-American western expansion.<sup>136</sup> In the end, only the Piankeshaws, farthest south along the Wabash River and closest to Clark's invasion, allied with the Americans, but overall the Miamis' advantageous location allowed them to treat with both sides during the conflict. Although the Miamis were to some extent more independent in their actions than other nations in the Ohio Valley, their close blood ties to the French and the dominance the French had exerted in trade over them prior to the British occupation, meant that they were still dependent on European powers for necessary trade goods.

Clark's army was made up of men that played a large role in igniting frontier violence. Conflict between white settlers and Indians had taken place since the first Europeans landed on the Atlantic coast, and as Clark built up his army, his soldiers had been the lead wave of an invasion of the Indian land in the backcountry. Both Indian hating culture, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and the Indian resistance to white settlers along the frontier and their willingness to negotiate with Euro-Americans had deep roots in colonial history. This was just another layer of conflict Clark had to manage as he created his alliances. The failure of the British to manage the Indian trade created major problems, but the British failure to control the American settlers pushing into Indian Country created even more tension between Native Americans and Euro-Americans, often erupting in armed conflict. Problems started from the very beginning with the Proclamation of 1763, which forbid new settlement in the interior of North America as a temporary act, and through the events of 1774, which saw Lord Dunmore's War, 1773-1774, and the passage of the Quebec Act, which officially locked speculators out of title to the western land they coveted.

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<sup>136</sup> Ansen, *The Miami Indians*, 66-67.

Following the conclusion of the French and Indian War, Britain issued the Proclamation of 1763 which forbade white settlement, with the exception of some veterans, west of the Alleghany Mountains. The British Commander in Chief for North America, General Thomas Gage, was optimistic about the Proclamation's effects on the restless native population, believing his Indian agents would "make the best use of this, and it must convince [the natives] of His Majesty's Sincere Intentions to favor and protect Them."<sup>137</sup> Despite his early optimism, Gage showed a shrewd understanding of the frontier just two years later, as "Indian Affairs seem to take a favorable turn, and there is a very good Prospect of a General Pacification, unless it is interrupted by the lawless and Licentious Proceedings of the Frontier Inhabitants."<sup>138</sup> Gage could see the big picture from his position and correctly saw that his greatest challenge was in controlling the frontier settlers.

Lawlessness on the frontier was one of the primary complaints that General Gage and his Northern Indian Superintendent, William Johnson, reported. Johnson, for example, related to one of his agents an account of how difficult it was to force the Governor of Pennsylvania to bring a particular murderer to justice: this incident "with the rest of the conduct of the back settlers will render a peace very uncertain and of a short duration."<sup>139</sup> Traders and natives often had violent conflicts that resulted in murder; the effects of alcohol and profit were ever present. Giving the local Indians justice was difficult because, prior to 1774, there was no colonial law in effect in the interior. So when "two Squaws were barbarously murdered...by an English Negro," Johnson wished "with all [his] heart he could be tried here and if condemned to suffer death, his being made an example of in the presence of the Indians...and convince them that we never screen bad

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<sup>137</sup> Thomas Gage to the Earl of Halifax, 9 December 1763, in Carter, *Gage Papers*, 2.

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Gage to the Earl of Halifax, 1 June 1765, in *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>139</sup> William Johnson to George Croghan, 28 March 1766, in Flick, *Johnson Papers*, Volume V, 119.

people from Justice. Whereas if the Negro is sent down...the Indians will...believe he is sent on purpose out of the way.”<sup>140</sup> Johnson’s immediate superior, North American Commander in Chief Thomas Gage, sent his report to London. In the report he mentioned “fresh Complaints from the Indians of Murthers committed,” in relation to this incident. Gage also illustrated his proactive attempts at governance by offering “Assistance to drive the settlers off Indian Lands...but whether the Councils [colonial governments] would...apply for Military Aid, may be rather doubtful.”<sup>141</sup>

The problem only became more acute as time passed. In 1768, Indian Agent George Croghan noted a tremendous influx of settlers into the Ohio Valley following the Fort Stanwix Treaty, while he also claimed credit for defusing a possible Indian uprising.<sup>142</sup> In 1769, Gage wrote to Johnson complaining that the settlement boundary lines were not being observed, and that “The Frontier People are too Numerous, too Lawless and Licentious ever to be restrained...[despite] the most severe Laws to restrain their People, but those Laws will never be executed.” Johnson wholeheartedly agreed with “[Gage’s] opinion as to the Conduct which may be expected from the Frontier Inhabitants, particularly the Virginians.”<sup>143</sup> In response to the continued conflict between settlers and Indians, Johnson was a supporter of establishing a permanent boundary between White and Indian settlements.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> John Campbell to Thomas Gage, 10 April 1766 and 10 May 1776, in *Ibid.*, 160-161.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Gage to H.S. Conway, 15 July 1766, in Carter, *Gage Papers*, 100.

<sup>142</sup> Albert T. Volwiler, *George Croghan and the Westward Movement: 1741-1782*, (Cleveland, OH: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1926), 221-223.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Gage to William Johnson, 3 April 1769, and 14 April 1769, in Hamilton, *Johnson Papers*, Volume XII, 709, 715.

<sup>144</sup> Fintan O’Toole, *White Savage: William Johnson and the Invention of America*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 270-273.

By 1774 William Johnson described the continuous pattern of encroachment as “so many and increased so fast that they alone would be sufficient to bring on a War.”<sup>145</sup> Johnson’s agent, Alexander McKee, squarely placed blame for the 1774 war (Lord Dunmore’s War) on the “Expeditious Settlement of this Country.”<sup>146</sup> Agent George Croghan concurred: “[The Shawnees] earnestly remonstrated to me—That the country westward of the Allegany Mountains was their property.”<sup>147</sup> Thomas Gage also received reports from several agents in the field that the Shawnees, Delawares, and Mingoes “threatened an open Rupture with Virginia.”<sup>148</sup> The native peoples’ continued violence was led by the Shawnees, Mingos, and Delawares, who suffered the most from settlers moving west after the Fort Stanwix Treaty, which the Shawnees had refused to recognize. In response the Shawnees were defeated in Lord Dunmore’s War and were forced to cede their Kentucky hunting grounds.<sup>149</sup> Encroachment by settlers led directly to Lord Dunmore’s War in 1774 and left a lasting bitterness with many nations.

Another key to Clark’s victory was the dislike of the British common among all of his allies. As with Indians nations, the French settlers under British control were also unhappy and their history of discontent with the British illustrates how Clark was able to gain their cooperation and then lose it when he made his own management mistakes. As the British failed to control their own subjects from encroaching on Indian lands, they faced other threats as well, namely those from French and Spanish traders positioned deep in the interior of the Mississippi Valley. Besides the hindrances caused by British policy that restricted traders to specific outposts instead of trading directly in Indian villages, there were long established relationships that existed between the natives and the French, and traders in New Orleans paid better prices for furs. The

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<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>146</sup> Nelson, *A Man of Distinction*, 76.

<sup>147</sup> George Croghan to William Johnson, 3 June 1767, in Flick, *Johnson Papers*, Volume V, 560.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Gage to William Johnson, 28 June 1767, in *Ibid.*, 574.

<sup>149</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, 362-365.

British had to face all these disadvantages when fighting for the trade and loyalty of the former French allies. This failure to secure the trade meant that many tribes, despite being in British territory, were more loyal to the seemingly borderless French traders.

One of the biggest problems for British traders was their inability to become a part of native culture or actively participate in both a Euro-American and native world. Richard White has termed this the “middle ground,” a place where natives and whites came together and through common experience created a new culture or a modicum of understanding. British traders did not integrate into Indian society, and even the British cultural mediators (closest equivalent to the French Métis) were not multi-cultural, but tended to only be a part of one or the other group’s culture.<sup>150</sup> These British “go-betweens” were the men working behind the scenes, the men who actually accomplished the hard work of negotiations. Unlike the French who became part of a new culture, the British tended to simply facilitate communication between two distinct cultures, and as the colonists pushed harder for land cessions, there was less and less need for talk, illustrating the fragile position the go-betweens maintained.<sup>151</sup> This left British traders at a severe disadvantage when competing for trade away from the designated military outposts. This creation of a “middle ground” was not unique to the Ohio Valley, but the idea of a new cultural creation and the role of mediators have been proven to be present throughout New France, as Jennifer Brown has illustrated in *The New People*. Bruce Trigger has also illustrated that the French fur trade companies were aware of the need for cultural mediators, despite the ignorance of the governing officials.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-317, 324-325.

<sup>151</sup> Merrell, *Into the American*, 31, 38-39.

<sup>152</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 37. Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered*, (Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985), 315-321.

Besides losing valuable trade revenues, British officials were worried that the French and Spanish were inciting the natives against Britain as well. The Illinois Country was particularly vulnerable to foreign influence as George Croghan dispatched more deputies to “remove dangerous Jealousies, and Suspicions, which the French had Industriously propagated against us.”<sup>153</sup> Here economics also came into play for Britain because the French, with easy access to trade goods from New Orleans could more easily attract Indian trading partners: “it [would have been] very difficult, if not impossible, except at a vast Annual Expençe in Presents, to retain the Indians, in our Interest.” Croghan was convinced that “the Skins and Furs, received [from Illinois and New Orleans are] Shipped to France,” as opposed to Britain.<sup>154</sup>

While attempting to occupy and pacify the Illinois Country, General Gage thought that “the French may contribute greatly to our Success, or by secret Endeavors create as much Disturbance and Opposition.”<sup>155</sup> Gage also reported that the Spanish were quick to take advantage of the Franco-Indian connection, as they adopted “the Plan of the French with respect to Indian Affairs, and the Agents employed by the latter, will continue in the Service of the Spaniards...It is reported that [the Spanish Governor] has already engaged in the Trading Company of the Illinois.”<sup>156</sup> Interestingly enough the Spanish worried about losing control of their trade to residents in British Illinois, though they frequently courted many of the native peoples from British territory.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> George Croghan to William Johnson, January 18 1767, in Hamilton, *Johnson Papers*, Volume, 407.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.

<sup>155</sup> Thomas Gage to the Earl of Halifax, 13 July 1764, in Carter, *Gage Papers*, 32.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Gage to H.S. Conway, 24 June 1776, in *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>157</sup> “Report of Don Pedro Piernas to Gov. O’Reilly, Describing the Spanish Illinois Country,” 31 October 1769, and “Report of the Indian Tribes who Receive Presents at St. Louis,” 15 November 1777, both in Louis Houck, *The Spanish Regime in Missouri*, Volume I (New York: Arno Press Inc., 1971), 71, 145. (Hereafter cited as *Spanish Regime*)



Prior to the American Revolution there were many different influences active in the Illinois Country. The British were unable to control effectively such a complex and fluid situation, especially on a tight budget. While the Native Americans were not fully being provided for as they expected, they did have options to circumvent the British system of trade. While the British had to contend with Native Americans and their needs, they also had to deal with the expansionistic minded American frontiersmen and the profit minded French and Spanish merchants. British Indian policy and the British system of trade proved unsuccessful due to a lack of money, unwieldy settlers, and foreign competition. This situation created the opportunity for the right man at the right time to shift the balance of power in the Illinois Country by courting native peoples who were anxious to improve their lot.

France ceded all of her land claims west of the Mississippi in 1763 to Spain, while all of the French colonies east of the Mississippi River, Quebec and part of Louisiana, were ceded to Great Britain. Settlement in the interior of the continent was sparse, with the French concentrating in several settlements in the Illinois Country that the British occupied. The three primary settlements were located at Cahokia, just across the Mississippi from modern St. Louis; at Kaskaskia, to the south and along the Mississippi; and at Vincennes, on the eastern edge of Illinois on the Wabash River. Throughout the American Revolution and despite British control and trade regulations, these settlements remained predominately French, even enduring an exodus of many Frenchmen west of the Mississippi River into Spanish territory. They also continued to hold tremendous influence among many of the nearby nations of the Illini, northward to the Potawatomi, and east to Miamis and their relatives along the Wabash River. The influence and cooperation of these settlers was a vital part of the efforts of both the British and Americans in maintaining control of the settlements and conducting successful diplomacy

with natives, as well as for the maintenance of any garrison in the country. The need for French support was evidenced by their continued dominance of the fur trade and later their ability to influence whether or not their trading partners initially supported Clark and his men.<sup>158</sup>

The population grew little in the Illinois. The French settlers in the area were attracted to fur trading or missionary efforts along the Mississippi, which did not create a population of families and farmers. The Illini and Miamis came from all directions to the French towns to conduct trade, further strengthening their cultural ties.<sup>159</sup> The slow development of town sites and agricultural led to a perception of laziness and incompetence that colored outside interpretations of the region. Contemporary visitors, as well as historians, have described the French males in the Illinois as having “habits of indolence,” and their wives as “indolent and shiftless as their husbands.”<sup>160</sup> Many historians from the first half of the twentieth century, such as James Alton James and Clarence W. Alvord, continued to use the prevalent Anglo bias of British observers in the eighteenth century. Alvord, much like James, considered the French settlers, despite their experience as woodsmen, hunters, traders, and soldiers, to be “generally timid and resourceless,” or unable to exhibit “boldness and initiative in action.” Alvord even goes so far as to attribute the formation of villages, rather than individual farmsteads across the landscape, as due to the “social character” of the settlers.<sup>161</sup> Voluminous accounts of British opinions back up these claims, such as those contained in the reports and letters of British agents like Alexander Fraser and George Croghan who claimed that the French were “unconscientious

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<sup>158</sup> Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio*, 123-133.

<sup>159</sup> Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, 123-124, 126-127.

<sup>160</sup> James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 74.

<sup>161</sup> Clarence Alvord, *Cahokia Records, 1778-1790*, (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Volume II. Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Historical Library, 1907), xviii, xxii.

Rascals” and an “idle and lazy people [,] a Parcel of Renegadoes from Canada and much worse than Indians.”<sup>162</sup>

A closer look at the French settlements shows a reality that was much different from the British and American stereotypes that have survived in the historical record. The Illinois initially attracted the French as traders and missionaries. As agriculturally based communities appeared in support of the traders and priests, the settlers gathered in villages for defensive purposes, not because of their “social character.” This allowed the settlers to live with protection and to work in their fields as groups, fostering the creation of a common field that each settler had the right to sow and harvest. A collective right to put livestock to pasture on the fields in the winter existed. A common pasture area for livestock and woodcutting developed all around a nuclear village. This common land usage was unique in French North America. Most of the unsavory reputations attributed to the French are because of the more transient population of traders that moved through the area, not the permanently settled farmers, or *habitants*.<sup>163</sup>

The French maintained a spirit of independence, possibly due to their distance from central authority for most of the settlements’ existence. Most settlers saw political independence as the status quo in the Illinois Country despite the stereotype that the French were unfamiliar with democracy when the Americans arrived. The French community traditionally made involved in decisions involving the local government, the church, and trade affairs. The French

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<sup>162</sup> John Francis McDermott, “French Settlers in the Illinois Country in the Eighteenth Century,” *The French, the Indians, and George Rogers Clark in the Illinois Country: Proceedings from an Indiana American Revolution Bicentennial Symposium*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1977), 11-13.

<sup>163</sup> Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times*, (Urbana, Ill: Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, 1998), 28-33, 48-49, 113, 263. For more on the French fur trade culture and economy see the bibliography in William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: From Wilderness Outpost to Statehood*.

also had a tradition of successful military service.<sup>164</sup> The French conducted in inter-continental commerce, exporting wheat to New Orleans as early as 1710, while the Illinois was known for producing the best wheat in North America, quite a compliment since the French relied heavily upon a wheat bread diet. Wheat was an important part of the economy, both for the Illinois as an export and for provisions in New Orleans. Around sixty-eight percent of Illinois farmers used some sort of non-family labor (black and native slaves and hired), illustrating how valuable the large grain exports were to the area.<sup>165</sup>

Following the British occupation of the Illinois, many of French settlers moved into Spanish territory. These new settlers established St. Louis in 1764, opposite Cahokia and to the south; opposite of Kaskaskia, St. Genevieve grew in population, after initially serving as a satellite farming community to the former throughout the 1750s.<sup>166</sup> Approximately 2,000 settlers fled into Spanish territory, leaving nearly 1,600 on the British side of the Mississippi, consisting of 1,000 white settlers and 600 black slaves.<sup>167</sup> Although British and American traders and merchants began to take control of the trade, in both furs and grain as intermediaries, the French still did most of the actual production.<sup>168</sup> Production continued to be significant as well. In 1773, Thomas Hutchins wrote that “The inhabitants raise large Quantities of Grain and yet they don’t neglect carrying on a constant commerce with the Savages. The Peltrys they get...may amount to

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-125; Joseph P. Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault, Missionary 1737-1802*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1971), 13; Margaret Kimball Brown, “Kaskaskia and the French Kaskaskians as Seen by Clark,” in *The Life of George Rogers Clark, 1752-1818: Triumphs and Tragedies*, edited by Kenneth C. Carstens and Nancy Son Carstens, 18-31, (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 33-34, 38.

<sup>165</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, 162, 173-174, 189, 215, 223; James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 80; McDermott, “French Settlers,” 26-27.

<sup>166</sup> Ekberg, *French Roots*, 88-91.

<sup>167</sup> Calloway, *Scratch of a Pen*, 125; James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 69-70; Ekberg, *French Roots*, 91.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-227; Alvord, *Cahokia Records*, xxviii.

the Sum of 3,000 pounds sterling – This exclusive of the Profits of Agriculture, which are sometimes more and sometimes less.”<sup>169</sup>

This uncontrolled economic power left the British suspicious of French activities. The settlers continued their loyalty to the French Crown, because people of circulated rumors of the French returning to take possession of the country. British officers worried about the French “power to spread reports and poison the minds of the Indians.”<sup>170</sup> While the French remained critical to the success of an Imperial British presence in the Illinois, their loyalty was constantly questioned, probably with good reason. British officers feared what would happen should the French militia be called upon. Lt. Governor Henry Hamilton felt that of all the “French inhabitants, at all the out Posts...not one in twenty[‘s]...oath of Allegiance would have force enough to bind him to his duty.” While “An Officer’s presence with Troops is much wanted, for the minds of the Indians [specifically the Wabash nations], in remote posts are poisoned by the falsehoods and misrepresentations of the French.”<sup>171</sup> Hamilton stressed the loyalty of the Wabash nations because of the need to employ them as a defense against any advance on Detroit.<sup>172</sup>

During their occupation of the Illinois Country, 1766-1778, the British failed to gain the loyalty of the French settlers or to control the fur trade, leaving an opening for Clark to exploit upon his arrival. Much of the conflict undermining British authority was due to squabbles between French and British traders. The squabbling in the Illinois Country made it even more likely, that should an outside threat, like Clark arrive, it would be easy to gain the initial

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<sup>169</sup> Thomas Hutchins to General Haldimand, 14 December 1773, in Kathrine Wagner Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure in the Illinois and Selected Documents of the American Revolution at the Frontier Posts*, (New Orleans: Polyanthos, 1981), 141.

<sup>170</sup> Arent De Peyster to Governor Haldimand, 15 August 1778, in Clarence W. Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records, 1778-1790*, (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Volume V. Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Historical Library, 1909), 45-46.

<sup>171</sup> Henry Hamilton to Governor Haldimand, 5 September 1778, and Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 25 April 1778, both in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 283, 234.

<sup>172</sup> Henry Hamilton to Governor Haldimand, 1778, in British Library, Haldimand Papers, Register of Correspondence with Officers commanding at Detroit, 1776-1783, specifically roll H-1451, slides #123, #150.

cooperation of at least a faction of the French. Although Clark went much further and gained near total cooperation during his early actions. When the British withdrew their forces from the Illinois to counter the American invasion of Canada in 1775, they left Philippe-François de Rastel de Rocheblave as the administrative commander of all the Illinois Country. Rocheblave endured difficult circumstances because of his lack of military authority and small budget. He was also criticized by many British traders because he had recently been employed by the Spanish as commandant at St. Genevieve before returning to Kaskaskia. Around 1774 he returned to Kaskaskia, where he was named commandant by the British. Born into the minor nobility of France, he was one of the few noblemen to permanently reside in the Illinois. He seemed to get along well with the French inhabitants, but had trouble controlling the British and American traders that began arriving.

In April of 1777, Rocheblave's superiors received a petition from the Kennedy and Bentley trading company. The company agent complained that "Mr. De Rocheblave's being vested with the Government...[we] find to Our most bitter Grief our Liberties trampled upon and common Justice in almost all cases refused us." The accusers claimed that Rocheblave favored the French and their customs; when complaints were filed, he was accused of informing the merchants that he would take no action because "such are the laws of France which he orders us to follow telling us he knows no other refusing the English Laws." Rocheblave was operating as the French had always done in their dealings in the fur trade, and his refusal to completely open up the fur trade to non-French traders left many British and American traders frustrated.

The community had also passed laws forbidding the sale of alcohol to the natives for its own safety. The British traders also resented the connections the Frenchmen had with the

surrounding Indians.<sup>173</sup> Writing to Lt. Governor Hamilton, Rocheblave was clearly frustrated with the multicultural situation he faced. “At present one is obliged every day to imprison young men who demand that if the English law is favorable to them it should be followed; on another occasion the same people will the very next day demand the old French laws which have always been followed. If I were not a little crazed already, I believe they would cause me to become entirely so.”<sup>174</sup> Just the fact of being French made Rocheblave feel he was now at a disadvantage, “I beg of you to give [my responsibilities] to some other person[,] a native Englishman, in order to escape the too common jealousies of some.”<sup>175</sup> Conflict was constant throughout this period between the merchant Thomas Bentley and Rocheblave. Bentley was a British merchant who had recently moved to the Illinois County after trading near New Orleans, and he accused Rocheblave of outright disloyalty, saying it was impossible to trust a man after he has “taken the Oaths of Allegiance to the three Kingdoms of France Spain and Great Britain.”<sup>176</sup>

Bentley created some serious problems for Rocheblave’s regime. Upon his arrival, Bentley went into competition with the already established French traders, engaging them at times in legal disputes. Bentley also maintained his connections to the British colonies and was suspiciously knowledgeable about American activities on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in 1776 and 1777.<sup>177</sup> Lieutenant Governor Hamilton was well informed of Bentley’s meeting with Americans at the mouth of the Ohio, believing him to have delivered “Powder and other Stores”

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<sup>173</sup> “Bentley’s Copy of the Petition of Daniel Murray , Agent of Kennedy and Bentley, Address to General Carleton,” 30 April 1777, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 197-8.

<sup>174</sup> Rocheblave to Hamilton, 11 August 1777, in Edward G. Mason, *Early Chicago and Illinois*, (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1890), 391.

<sup>175</sup> Rocheblave to Carleton , 4 July 1778, in Mason, *Early Chicago and Illinois*, 416.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Bentley to Daniel Murray, 1 August 1777, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 9.

<sup>177</sup> David G. Thomas, “Thomas Bentley and the American Revolution in Illinois.” *Illinois Historical Journal* 83 (1990), 4, 7.

to the Americans.<sup>178</sup> It was not uncommon to have suspect loyalties in the region, especially among the French citizens and the independent minded traders. Even after Clark took control of the Illinois, the British were still worried about sedition. In June, 1779, the commander at Detroit was authorized to “apprehend any person or persons whom you may have cause to believe is in any matters directly, or indirectly, aiding or abetting the Rebels.”<sup>179</sup> Jealousies existed on both sides as Bentley certainly went out of his way to aggressively challenge the well-established French, and he did cause problems for Rocheblave by trading alcohol to the natives. It also seems clear that Rocheblave did business almost entirely with the French merchants when he purchased goods for diplomacy and trade with the natives that came to Kaskaskia.<sup>180</sup>

Tensions ran high in the Illinois Country, yet the British believed it was too expensive to maintain a garrison in the region. Garrisons in the West had fallen victim to cost-cutting efforts of the British following the French and Indian War. This policy and general way of thinking was still in place right up to the Clark’s capture of the Illinois Country. Not only did this effectively eliminate the enforcement power of the commandant, but also left the area vulnerable to attack by the Americans and their native allies or by the Spanish.

Rocheblave with his small budget of two hundred pounds sterling a year had few options. Knowing that French loyalty to Britain was tenuous at best, he remarked that without a significant increase in his resources, any troops in the region could be attacked by the “inhabitants [probably French and natives], all foreign relations could be cut off and travel on the [Ohio] river rendered somewhat dangerous.”<sup>181</sup> Relations with the local Illini and Wabash nations also created problems for Rocheblave. The removal of all other officers from the Illinois

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<sup>178</sup> Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 1 February 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 220.

<sup>179</sup> Governor Haldimand to Captain Lernout, June 1779, in *Haldimand Papers*, Reel H-1451.

<sup>180</sup> Paul L. Stevens, “‘To Invade the Frontiers of Kentucky?’ The Indian Diplomacy of Philippe de Rocheblave, Britain’s Acting Commandant at Kaskaskia, 1776-1778.” *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 64 (1990), 218-19.

<sup>181</sup> Philippe Rocheblave to Guy Carleton, 18 February 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 225.



Country by 1778 left Rocheblave isolated, and the refusal to reimburse him for the continued expenses of diplomacy left the Illinois commandant working on his own credit. While attempting to thwart the “evil intentions” of the Spanish, the cheapness of the British high command led Rocheblave to issue a warning that their current plan “runs the risk of having the doors shut upon [us] for a long time to come by the Indians who have been tampered with by our neighbors [Spanish and Americans].”<sup>182</sup> Rocheblave throughout his command wrote frequently to varied officers for help, ranging from his immediate superiors in Detroit to cabinet ministers in London. Rocheblave, though not a general, was not afraid to discuss military affairs. Concerning the withdrawal of soldiers in 1775 to meet the American invasion of Canada, Rocheblave in 1778 wrote that the absence of soldiers in the Illinois “should have been remedied when the face of affairs had changed...this country...will soon become the center of communication between the Colonists and the Spaniards.”<sup>183</sup>

Rocheblave turned out to be correct in all accounts. The Americans and Spanish did use the waterways on the Illinois to maintain communication and transport supplies, while the native allies of the British were neutralized by Clark’s arrival in the summer of 1778. Lt. Governor Hamilton, after the capture of the Illinois, reported that if “the [Wabash] Indians are supported properly it will curtail a considerable additional expence, at the same time it is well known to your Excellency that these nations are the only barrier to...the inroads of the Rebels.”<sup>184</sup> The lack of foresight left the British in an extremely vulnerable position in the Illinois Country prior to and following the arrival of Clark’s expedition.

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<sup>182</sup> Philippe Rocheblave to George Germain, 22 January 1778, in Mason, *Early Chicago and Illinois*, 396-397.

<sup>183</sup> Philippe Rocheblave to George Germain, 28 February 1778, in *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>184</sup> Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 8 August 1778, in *Haldimand Papers*, Rell H-1451.

The Spanish presence in the West was critically important to Clark because while the Spanish struggled to solidify their authority they were well supplied when compared to Clark, and without their support, Clark might have failed. Understanding the motives of the Spanish is also critical because while Clark gained Spanish support, they were the most independent and potentially aloof of all Clark's allies. Clark and the Spanish were able to use one another, but by the end of the Revolution, the Spanish had the strength to act on their own, although an eager ally until British were thrown out of the Illinois Country. At the outset of the Revolutionary War, Spain was not in a position to capture the Illinois or take on the British, that came later, but understanding Spanish goals, leading up to Clark's arrival puts their actions and willingness to support Clark in an important light. Upon the conclusion of the French and Indian War, France ceded all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi River to Spain. Most of this territory was sparsely populated by Europeans, but was well traversed by fur traders who integrated themselves into different native cultures ranging from the Missouri River to Spanish Texas. This wilderness, as Europeans saw it, was one that was dominated by Native Americans. Along other parts of the frontier, groups like the Quapaws at the mouth of the Arkansas River could force European traders to accept their societal norms and authority.<sup>185</sup> The Spanish, unlike the British and French in the Ohio Valley, also had to deal with a native population that was strong enough to make demands upon Spain and prevent excessive penetration of Spanish power. Spain had a particularly difficult time controlling groups like the Osages, but also struggled to reign in the actions of faraway groups of Kansas, Otoes, and Pawnees. As Spain inherited this land dominated by natives, with few French inhabitants and virtually no Spanish, they sought to maintain control by encouraging French immigration west of the Mississippi River, using the

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<sup>185</sup> DuVal, *The Native Ground*, 4-11.

established Franco-Native connections, and finally by subverting British influence in the Upper Mississippi Valley.

The Spanish quickly learned that the British would aggressively attempt to take control of the native trade now that the French were no longer in possession of Louisiana. Spain was vigilant in the fight against the British, as a report from a Spanish official reveals that “two Englishmen” had “one thousand, four hundred and seventy-three pounds of deer skins” confiscated and then were convicted of “contrabanding.”<sup>186</sup> In other efforts to control trade, Spain looked to the French residents of the territory, many of whom chose to settle in Spanish territory upon the ascension of British rule in Illinois. In St. Louis Monsieur de St. Ange, an “elderly commandant of the Illinois,” was placed in command because of the “credit he maintains with Indians.” To the south of St. Louis, at St. Genevieve, Monsieur de Rocheblave, “another retired officer,” was also put in control because of the growing French population and proximity to the British at Fort Chartres.<sup>187</sup> The Spanish never did find a better way to interact with natives or maintain a militia than by using the French. In 1777 with the death of St. Ange, another Frenchman, who had served as a “captain in the Illinois for twenty-five years,” was appointed.<sup>188</sup> The Spanish militia in 1780 was also dominated by Frenchmen, with officers like the traders Auguste Chouteau and Eugenio Pouree. Twelve of the thirteen officers listed in the troop return were born in a French possession. The enlisted men were similarly dominated by men born in Canada, Illinois or France, with fully 212 of 214 enlisted men of French background, and the other two being listed as Americans by birth.<sup>189</sup> Even as Fernando De Leyba

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<sup>186</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 9 December 1778, in Lawrence Kinnaird, *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, Part I, 1765-1781*. Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945, Volume II, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1949), 317. (Hereafter cited as *SPM*)

<sup>187</sup> Antonio de Ulloa to Grimaldi, 4 August 1768, in Sienke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 121.

<sup>188</sup> Bernardo de Galvez to Jose de Galvez, 21 March 1777, in *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>189</sup> “Roster of St. Louis Militia Companies in 1780,” in Houck, *Spanish Regime*, 182-189.

began making plans as the new Commandant of St. Louis in 1778, he lamented, “The plan and the explanation thereof are in French because of my poor writing and since there is not at this post anyone who can write Spanish even moderately well.”<sup>190</sup>

Maintaining and supplying troops in the interior of North America was an expensive and difficult process. The British learned this very early as they took over the former French posts in the Illinois, and the Spanish learned the same lessons. The only local source of provisions was the French population scattered across the Illinois Country, although many were primarily traders, there was a considerable quantity of wheat milled into flour and it made up a valuable part of the French trading system at New Orleans. De Leyba noted in 1778 “There is not a foot of soil in this country which is not suitable for all kinds of crops,” but the “settlers are interested only in trading with the Indians and neglect their farming.” His solution was to post more soldiers in the region, which would enlarge the gain market and spur production.<sup>191</sup> Leyba was also under special instructions to act with “zeal” in his efforts to lure “Apostolic Roman Catholics in English territory” into the colony, especially Acadians, Irish, Canadians, and Germans. Additionally, the Spanish government also provided the necessary lands and tools for settlers to begin farming.<sup>192</sup> Even as the American Revolution was being waged, Spain was still acting aggressively to increase the population into their territories, making them more viable economically as well as making it easier to support military garrisons. As the Revolution pitted the British against her colonies, Spain was presented with the potential to secure control of the North American interior.

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<sup>190</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo de Galvez, 16 November 1778, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 312.

<sup>191</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo de Galvez, in *Ibid.*, 312-313.

<sup>192</sup> “Special Instructions to Leyba,” 9 March 1778, in *Ibid.*, 258-259.

Countering British influence in the Mississippi Valley was one of the major concerns of the several Spanish commandants that served at St. Louis, from acquisition of the territory to the end of the American Revolution. From the time Spain took control of Louisiana, the colony which produced limited profits was seen as a defensive barrier to keep British soldiers and traders away from the valuable colony of Mexico.<sup>193</sup> British meddling in Spanish territory arose frequently in correspondence with the Governor of Louisiana who commanded from New Orleans and the commandant at St. Louis. Traders from both British and Spanish territories competed in the names of Spain and Great Britain even though many of the traders were French. The British pushed the hardest to win over the trade of the Sacs, Mesquakies, and Iowas in the present day state of Iowa, while the Spanish maintained relations with the Illini, Miamis, Kickapoos, and other tribes of the Illinois Country and Wabash River.<sup>194</sup>

A high level of distrust existed even when the local Spanish and British commandants worked together to end native conflict for the sake of commerce and peace. In 1777 Francisco Cruzat, Commandant of St. Louis, received a pass to British territory from the Illinois Commandant, Monsieur de Rocheblave, to help restore peaceful relations between the Illini and Missouri nations, both of which traded heavily with the Spanish. Although the mission was a success and both commandants agreed that it was good for both territories to restore peace, it was viewed very suspiciously. Cruzat was accused of “sending subjects to [British Illinois] draw away the tribes located in their domains.”<sup>195</sup> Perhaps those that were suspicious of Cruzat may have been right, for he was reappointed commandant three years later with instructions from New Orleans that ordered him to continue “attracting to our devotion those tribes of the English

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<sup>193</sup> Calloway, *Scratch of a Pen*, 133-134.

<sup>194</sup> Nasatir, “The Anglo-Spanish Frontier,” 292-3, 296-7.

<sup>195</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Francisco Cruzat, 26 November 1777, Cruzat to Philippe Rocheblave, 12 June 1777, Rocheblave to Cruzat, 18 June 1777, all in Houck, *Spanish Regime*, 134-37.

district, making use, for that purpose, of whatever ways and means conduce to its attainment.”<sup>196</sup>

While it is impossible to say for sure what may have happened on Cruzat’s mission to the Illinois, both the Spanish and British engaged in a fair amount of intrigue during peacetime.

The outbreak of armed conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies placed Spain in a delicate situation. The two nations shared a long border along the Mississippi, yet Spain was much more vulnerable than Britain because, should the port of New Orleans be seized, then the only way for Spain to communicate with its Mississippi Valley colonies was overland from Texas, a perilous journey to say the least. Spain did not officially enter the war until June 1779, and entered only as an ally of France, despite an already long history of aid to the Americans. The risks involved in war with Britain were obvious, as well as the risk of angering native allies by helping the land hungry Americans. Nevertheless, Spain, driven by its ambition to expand its power in the Mississippi Valley, aided the American cause even before George Rogers Clark took possession of the Illinois Country.<sup>197</sup>

In early 1778, James Willing, an American agent charged with capturing the British posts on the lower Mississippi if possible and securing supplies, was dispatched from Fort Pitt to New Orleans in order to retrieve the supplies that Spanish authorities were holding for the Americans. Willing floated down the Ohio and the Mississippi, wreaking havoc along the way. Several traders were taken along the Ohio River, as rumors swirled in the Illinois that these were secret meetings designed to plan attacks on the British. Further south, Willing sacked the British post at Natchez as he continued toward New Orleans. The American presence, not to mention violence, left the Governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Galvez, in a possibly explosive situation.<sup>198</sup> Despite

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<sup>196</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Fransico Cruzat, 25 July 1780, in *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>197</sup> Nasatir, “The Anglo-Spanish Frontier,” 297-300.

<sup>198</sup> Kathleen Abbey Trimmer, “The Intrigue of a British Refugee Against the Willing Raid,” *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series* 1 (1944), 397-98.

this, the Spanish offered asylum to the American ships, as well as to British refugees from Natchez on the Mississippi. The Americans were also trusted with delivering letters between Spanish commanders in St. Louis and New Orleans.<sup>199</sup> By this time, there was already a history of communication and willingness to help existed between Galvez and the various colonies. Galvez had been corresponding with Governors Patrick Henry of Virginia and John Rutledge of South Carolina, both of whom emphasized the need for military supplies, loans, and the opening of free trade in New Orleans and along the Mississippi. Galvez responded warmly to these overtures by offering any help he could offer.<sup>200</sup> Confidential orders were also dispatched from Galvez to de Leyba in St. Louis with instructions that in case there was any “correspondence with any American chief of the American provinces, he shall observe the greatest secrecy, and report [the] same to me.”<sup>201</sup>

Plenty of risks existed in any scheme Spain employed to aid the Americans. The British grew more suspicious and Spain’s native allies grew uneasy with every bit of assistance that gave to the Americans. Both Indian allies and the British were being told Spain was neutral, but they could see the Spanish were leaning towards the Americans. Willing’s raiders attained sanctuary in New Orleans, but fears of retaliation from southern natives concerned with the attack on Natchez grew. As Galvez described the situation, it was necessary to use “zeal and prudence in knowing what measures to take to prevent the attacks of the Chickasaw Indians, on account of the aid you gave those Americans.”<sup>202</sup> Henry Hamilton at Detroit also grew nervous about the Spanish, especially considering the lack of defenses in the Illinois Country. An

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<sup>199</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Don Carlos de Grandpre, 22 February 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 227-28.

<sup>200</sup> Patrick Henry to Bernardo Galvez, 14 January 1778, Henry to Galvez, 14 January 1778, J. Rutledge to Galvez, 23 January 1778, Galvez to Henry, 6 May 1778, all in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 241-242, 248-249, 250, 272.

<sup>201</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Fernando de Leyba, 9 March 1778, in *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>202</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Baltasar de Villiers, 5 March 1778, 256.

American presence in the West also caused worry for Hamilton as he warned the Spanish that “it is important that the Honorable Governor not ignite the flames of war without authority from [his] court.” Hamilton also cited various instances of the Spanish providing supplies for Americans and allowing them to incite the natives to war against the British.<sup>203</sup> He also feared the effects the Spanish were having on the natives. In the case of conflict between Spain and Britain, Hamilton feared that the Wabash nations would “no doubt be courted by the Spaniards,” a sobering thought for Hamilton, as he considered the nations along the Wabash as essential to the defense of Detroit.<sup>204</sup> The Miamis and Kickapoos, and the other groups living on the Wabash, presented a challenge to Hamilton because of their strategic location. Since the Wabash River served as the easiest route to attack Detroit from the south (also the best route for the Americans to use), Hamilton attempted to justify to his superiors the “considerable additional Expence” required to maintain the loyalty of the those nations because they served as the “only Barrier to...the Inroads of the Rebels.” Not only was increased expense required to offer gifts to the Wabash nations, but their loyalty also required in the “neighborhood...some force to keep them to their professions.”<sup>205</sup> Increased gifting and military outposts were exactly the type of things the British had refused to bear the expense for in the previous decade, and because of their delayed effort to ensure the loyalty of the Wabash nations, they remained neutral for much of the Revolutionary War.

The Spanish acted aggressively in their desire to protect and expand Louisiana upon acquisition from the French. They successfully lured French citizens into new settlements upon the west bank of the Mississippi, while also employing them in their relations with Native

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<sup>203</sup> Henry Hamilton to Spanish Commandant, 7 October 1778, in Seinkie, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 316-17.

<sup>204</sup> Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 11 August 1777, in *Haldimand Papers*.

<sup>205</sup> Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 8 August 1778, Hamilton to General Haldimand, 18 December 1778, both in Seinkie, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 269, 335.



Americans and in controlling the fur trade. The French also proved to be enthusiastic in their support of Spain, joining militias and actually taking part in successful combat against British forces in 1780. Spain's ambitions or at least the ambitions of Louisiana's Governor Bernardo de Galvez led to an aggressive policy of support for the American cause. Despite the risks involved to Spanish possessions, Spain was established as a firm friend of the Americans before the arrival of George Rogers Clark.

The situation in the Illinois Country prior to the arrival of George Rogers Clark was complicated to say the least. The Americans sought to end the raids of the Shawnees and Mingoes by attacking the British held posts in the Illinois. Despite nominal control by the British, primarily French settlers who had good relations with the Miamis on the Wabash River, the Illini, and other western nations occupied the Illinois. The Spanish also had an eye on the Illinois Country and worked hard to gain the trade and influence of nations ranging from the Missouri River to the Wabash. The nations along the Great Lakes, like the Wyandots and Potawatomi, were the most dependent on the British because of their proximity to Detroit. On top of all this, the American frontier settlers tended to blame their problems on all natives, not just those that made up the majority of the war parties invading the American frontiers. Clark could not have neatly ended the raids on Kentucky with one fell swoop, but he did take advantage of the weakness of British control over both the French and the natives in the Illinois, while also working with the Spanish to expel Britain from the Mississippi Valley by uniting these diverse groups into a common cause against the British.

## **CHAPTER 3 - Surprised Twice: Clark's Expedition to the Illinois Country**

George Rogers Clark was able to seize control of Kaskaskia, the most important town in the Illinois Country, by attacking it in the middle of the night, and catching the town's commandant and militia unprepared for an attack. Although historians have disputed just how much Clark surprised the French villagers, the next day Clark found himself and his army surrounded and outnumbered in potentially hostile territory. In forming the expedition, Clark had shown his ability for cajoling different groups of people to cooperate in achieving his goal of capturing the Illinois Country, including the governing class of Virginia and the frontier settlers who hesitated to leave their farmsteads and endure long terms of service. While he sometimes had to bend the rules or the truth to achieve his goals, Clark managed to recruit and hold together his small army during the considerable voyage from Fort Pitt to Kaskaskia. Upon the acquisition of Kaskaskia, Clark again had to depend on his skills as a diplomat to preserve the image of conqueror and even to gain the support of the different populations of natives and French in the area. James Willing, an American officer in the West who had battled the British along the Mississippi and who potentially worked to sow the seeds of rebellion in the Illinois, illustrated just how difficult finding loyal allies was in the Illinois Country. He was "pleased" that Clark peacefully spoke with some Indian nations upon his arrival in the Illinois, but warned him to

“beware of them [,] they are a Treacherous People and when you least expect will fall on you.”  
Clark was even warned about the French whom Willing considered “damn’d Rogues.”<sup>206</sup>

George Rogers Clark’s ability to seize control of the Illinois Country and maintain his position depended on his skills as a diplomat in gaining the cooperation of the French, the Spanish, and the Native Americans. Clark recruited a small army and set out from Kentucky down the Ohio, making surprise appearance and seizing the posts in the Illinois without a fight from the French militias charged with their defense. He then launched a second surprise attack against British forces that had reclaimed one of the Illinois posts, forever knocking the British out of the Illinois Country. This chapter details Clark’s expedition chronologically from its outset to his final expulsion of the British with an examination of how history remembers one of the most iconic moments of frontier warfare. Just as he worked with the gentry of Virginia and the frontiersman in Kentucky, now Clark exercised his considerable skills of diplomacy on a new set of potential friends and enemies, and in accomplishing this, he sought to unite them in common cause against Great Britain. He successfully used the existing trade relations and movement of people between the American colonies and the French settlements and sent spies to the area to gain valuable intelligence. He capitalized on the French resentment of British control to gain volunteers and provisions, while he used the villagers’ influence with their relatives and neighbors to gain the surrender of the other towns in the Illinois Country. He convinced the French population to help make peace with the Native Americans that came to see him. He persuaded the existing French militias to help capture Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton after his reoccupation of Vincennes. While at Vincennes, Clark used the capture of several of Hamilton’s native allies to send a powerful message to the allies of the British, yet he also

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<sup>206</sup> James Willing to Clark, 1 September 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, , 67.

revealed the different mentalities of the French and Americans for the first time during the campaign. Finally, Clark depended on the friendship of the Spanish, especially the extensive personal efforts of help extended by the Lieutenant Governor, Fernando de Leyba, and the supplies and intelligence from merchants operating from Spanish territory like Francis Vigo. Overall Clark was particularly effective at assimilating the goals of diverse groups into his own.

Clark was as well informed as possible when he proposed his campaign to Governor Henry, and as he set out, prospects were good that he would learn even more about the situation in the Illinois Country before his arrival there. About a year before the expedition, Clark had dispatched two spies that moved in and out of Kaskaskia unnoticed because they were disguised as hunters. Not only did Clark take advantage of the existing traffic to and from the Illinois Country, but upon his arrival he leaned heavily upon the generosity and kindness of the French settlers as well. This free flow of information and people was critical to Clark's preparations for the attack on Kaskaskia. He also acted in a brazen manner toward the French villagers to ensure their cooperation against the British and their native allies. Then, after a shift toward a more generous occupation strategy, he accepted French help in the form of supplies and influence in his efforts to secure the other towns in the Illinois Country.

Despite the remote location of the Illinois Country, British and American traders had pushed down the Ohio River and settled in the area hoping to capture the fur trade revenues previously controlled by the French. Despite their failure to control the trade, these merchants maintained influence in the Illinois, and the movement of people and furs back up the Ohio was not uncommon, allowing Clark to gain valuable intelligence about the colony. Therefore, in April 1777, Clark dispatched two young Kentuckians, Samuel Moore and Benjamin Linn, who

would later be officers under his command, disguised as hunters and carrying the latest express mail to gather information.<sup>207</sup>

Clark dispatched his scouts with “proper Instructions for their conduct to prevent suspicion;” he also withheld any information pertaining to his proposed expedition. Upon their return to Kentucky, Clark noted they brought “all the information I could have Reasonably expected,” with a report that the inhabitants of the Illinois “had but little expectation of a visit from us” and that the “greatest pains were taken to inflame the minds of the French Inhabitants against the Americans” by the British authorities. While it appears Rocheblave was working to repel any American penetration into the Illinois, one finds it difficult to ascertain the overall attitude of the French as even Clark was told that his men had discovered “traces of affection” towards the American cause, despite reports of anti-American propaganda.<sup>208</sup>

While there were some people in the Illinois who sympathized with the Americans, it appears unlikely that Linn and Moore knew the need to seek out contact with any of the pro-American parties because they did not know why they were gathering information.<sup>209</sup> Whether Linn and Moore sought out sympathizers is doubtful, but they gained information pertaining to one of Rocheblave’s councils with the Wabash nations. Without any knowledge of French, they misinterpreted an attempt to maintain the natives’ loyalty to the British cause as encouragement to go to war against the American frontier.<sup>210</sup> Despite their misinterpretations, this was the type of information that Clark was looking for to justify an attack against the Illinois. From Clark’s perspective, Moore and Linn fulfilled their objectives by reinforcing his previously held views.

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<sup>207</sup> James., *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 69.

<sup>208</sup> “Memoir”, in James, *Clark Papers*, 218.

<sup>209</sup> Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault*, 65.

<sup>210</sup> Stevens, “To Invade the Frontiers of Kentucky?,” 229-231.

While Linn and Moore appear to have been poorly informed, the merchants who favored America were not. As discussed earlier, Thomas Bentley had been accused of giving aid to Americans on the Ohio River, an act he staunchly denied when accused by British authorities.<sup>211</sup> British authorities from Rocheblave to Hamilton believed he was implicated with the Americans in some way. Although they had little concrete evidence to justify his arrest, they nonetheless did imprison him based on their suspicions. Despite being out of town on business when Linn and Moore arrived, Bentley did write back to fellow merchant Daniel Murray asking about the appearance of any traders. Murray confirmed their arrival but had no other news to report. Historian David G. Thompson has proposed that this is evidence of Bentley's cooperation with the Americans, and one cannot know for sure, Bentley appears to have been the sort of character who always served his own interests before attaching loyalty to any greater cause. Later in the war, as American power began to wane in the Illinois, he began a correspondence with Governor Haldimand of Quebec professing his loyalty to the British cause and securing forgiveness for his earlier miss-steps.<sup>212</sup>

While men like Bentley are difficult to pin down, Rocheblave had no problem imagining the growing threat against the Illinois. In March, 1778, Rocheblave wrote to Hamilton, "I think more and more that this country is to become [the Americans] retreat." His pessimism about holding onto the Illinois was clear, ending the letter with the promise that "If the rebels should take possession I will warn you in time."<sup>213</sup> While he was still concerned about the Willing Raid, the possibility of American and Spanish intrigues never left his mind. Suspicions lingered, as just

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<sup>211</sup> "Defense of Thomas Bentley," 1 August 1777, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, , 12-16.

<sup>212</sup> David G. Thompson, "Thomas Bentley and the Illinois," *Illinois Historical Journal* 83 (1990), 7.

<sup>213</sup> Philippe Rocheblave to Henry Hamilton, 17 March 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 232.

one month later Hamilton interrogated some “Traders [headed] to [Sandusky] having given room for suspecting they were carrying on a correspondence with the Rebels.”<sup>214</sup>

Both officers were right to be suspicious, for as Clark descended the Ohio River on his way to the Illinois Country, he received exactly the type of help that they feared. Just past the mouth of the Tennessee River, Clark’s men “took a Boat of Hunters,” and required an oath of allegiance from them before questioning could begin. The traders were not from Kentucky, but “appear’d to be in our Interest,” according to Clark. Although their “intilgence was not favourable,” the men requested to join the expedition which raised the morale of the men.<sup>215</sup> Clark worried about the report that the “Militia was [kept] in good order, and [there were] spies on the Mississippi, and that all Hunters both Indians and others ware ordered to keep a good lookout for the rebels.” Despite the fact that the “fort [at Kaskaskia] was [kept] in good order...they believed the whole to proceed more from the fondness of parade than the expectation of a visit...but that if we could surprize the place...they made no doubt of our being able to do as we pleased.”<sup>216</sup> From the earliest stages of planning to the final days before the capture of Kaskaskia, Clark had found many of the British traders willing to aid the American cause, but he did not know whether the French would be as helpful.

The actual capture of Kaskaskia proved an easy task for Clark, as he described in his letter to George Mason written in November 1779. On 4 July 1778, Clark’s men approached a farmhouse about one mile north of town, where his men commandeered some boats and transported themselves across the Kaskaskia River in about two hours. Around midnight Clark split his command into two or three groups, and “broke into the Fort, secured the Governour Mr

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<sup>214</sup> Henry Hamilton to Guy Carleton, 25 April 1778, in *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>215</sup> “Mason Letter,” in James, *Clark Papers*, 118-119.

<sup>216</sup> “Memoir,” in *Ibid.*, 225-226.

Rochlblave [and] in 15 minutes had every Street Secured.”<sup>217</sup> After disarming the citizens, Clark felt that “nothing could excel the Confusion these People seemed to be in, being taught to expect nothing but Savage treatment from the Americans.” After his men secured the town, Clark met with the Catholic Priest, Pierre Gibault, and some of the town elders, offering them freedom of religion and the protection of Virginia if they would take an oath he would give in a few days time. Clark informed them that the Roman Catholic faith has as “great Priviledges as any other” in Virginia. This was a great relief to Gibault and the inhabitants, since they were now controlled by Virginia, and this helped to secure their allegiance.<sup>218</sup> The citizens of Kaskaskia also had not heard that France and America had entered into an alliance, news of which Clark brought with him. Clark reported later that “Our alliance with France has entirely devoted this people to our interest.”<sup>219</sup>

While the letter to Mason in November 1779 contains Clark’s earliest complete account of the expedition, the description in his Memoir, written in 1791, recreated the scene in a less benevolent light. Once across the river, the Clark of the Memoir sent “men of each detachmt that could speak the French Language to Run through every streat and proclaim what had happened and inform the Inhabitants that every person that appeared in the streats would be shot down.”<sup>220</sup> Next, as the citizens began to fraternize with one another, Clark had a “few of the principal militia officers put in Irons without Hinting a reason,” so that the “worst was now expected by the whole.” When Father Gibault and the town elders met with Clark to discuss what would happen next, Clark’s “savage appearance” left them “shocked and it was some time before they would Venture to...speak.” The citizens, after assembling at the church with Clark’s permission,

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<sup>217</sup> “Mason Letter,” in *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-1.

<sup>219</sup> GR Clark to Patrick Henry, 29 April 1779, “Memoir,” Patrick Henry to GR Clark, 15 December 1778, all in James, *Clark Papers*, 174, 231, 87; James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 120.

<sup>220</sup> “Memoir,” in James, *Clark Papers*, 227.



thought that the “loss of their property they could reconcile but was in hopes that I would not part them from their families.” Once they reached “the point [Clark] wished to bring them to – [he] asked them very abruptly whether or not they thought they were speaking to savages.” Clark had no doubts about their convictions, as he “was certain they did from the tenor of their conversation.” At this point Clark began to play the role of benevolent conqueror and promised the citizens their property and their religion.<sup>221</sup>

Some historians have challenged Clark’s later description, most notably Clarence Alvord, who discounts any French fears based on the frequent contact between Illinois and the colonies, the knowledge of the Franco-American alliance, and the toughness of frontier settlers that had developed in the Illinois.<sup>222</sup> James A. James in his narrative of the events, bases his description on the earlier letter to Mason as well.<sup>223</sup> At the same time, Joseph Donnelly makes the case that there may have been some legitimate concerns among the French because they knew of the experience of the Acadians, who had been harshly expelled from their lands after conquest by the British in the French and Indian War.<sup>224</sup> As for contemporary accounts, Lieutenant Governor de Leyba in St. Louis noted that Clark deserved the “greatest courtesy” from the inhabitants of the Illinois because they were “debtors to him for his pleasant manner, clemency, and upright administration of justice.”<sup>225</sup>

While Clark may have over emphasized the amount of terror that he inflicted upon the French inhabitants in his later recollection of the capture of Kaskaskia, a grain of truth common to both versions probably exists. The basic timeline for events is almost identical in the Mason

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-231.

<sup>222</sup> Alvord, “Virginia and the West,” 33.

<sup>223</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 119-121.

<sup>224</sup> Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault*, 69.

<sup>225</sup> Fransico de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 21 July 1778, in Lawrence Kinnaird, “Clark-Leyba Papers,” *The American Historical Review* 41 (1935), 98.

Letter and the Memoir, and the same people are involved. Clark identified the same waiting period before administering the oath of allegiance to the citizens, and the same meetings as well. Most likely Clark did enter the town and achieved a certain degree of surprise. Knowing the citizens outnumbered him, he chose to play the part of a conqueror first, and once he came to the realization that he was among friends and not foes, he quickly changed his ways and accepted the French views as genuine and welcomed their service to the State of Virginia.

Once Clark captured Kaskaskia and accepted the loyalty of the citizens, he next had to occupy the other prominent posts of the Illinois, including Cahokia to the north and Vincennes to the east. Both settlements were smaller than Kaskaskia in population, but Cahokia was an important trading post for the nations to the north and west of the Illinois such as the Potawatomi, Saks, Mesquakies. Vincennes contained the most formidable fortifications as well as being the key to controlling access to the Wabash nations from the south. In this task, Clark found the French at Kaskaskia to be helpful as they offered their services in gaining the capitulation of the other towns.

Clark's descriptions of the capture of Cahokia and Vincennes in both the Mason letter and the Memoir were very similar, and will here be used in tandem to provide as complete a picture of events as possible. Rather than strike out immediately for Cahokia, the next target, Clark lingered in Kaskaskia and allowed more freedom of movement in and out of that town, having "no doubt but that any Report that would be now made of us through the Cuntrey would be favourable." At the same time he "prepar'd a Deatchment on Horseback, under Capt Bowman to make a Descent on [Cahokia], the men traveled on horses loaned by the French to assist the fatigued soldiers. In addition to the horses, some of the citizens of Kaskaskia also volunteered to go along as "their friends and relations [in Cahokia] would follow their Example [in

surrendering].” The French provided a welcome addition to Bowman’s men, whom Clark praised as soldiers “but little Inferior to the one we had Marched into the Cuntrey,” but the expedition was slow to depart. The French were “so Elated at [the] thought of the Perade they ware to make at [Cahokia] that they ware too much Ingaged in Equiping themselves to appear to the best advantage.” Clark appears to have felt the French militia was more concerned with a proper military appearance as opposed to their actual fighting ability. Cahokia surrendered when Bowman and the French arrived, taking an oath of allegiance. The various Indians that had been in town scattered away from the American force as well.<sup>226</sup> Clark displayed an interesting pattern in his descriptions concerning the French, both complimenting them and their officers as good soldiers, yet criticizing them as well. It appears that Clark used the French to his advantage but had little respect for their culture overall. Clark made it clear on numerous occasions that he needed the help of the French, and throughout his occupation of the Illinois, gaining their cooperation appeared foremost in his surviving notes, but he never showed more than a begrudging respect for them in a military sense.

Vincennes also proved to be willing to capitulate to Clark quite easily as well. Here Clark found even more influential help in securing that post’s surrender. Father Gibault, the only active Catholic priest working in the area, offered his help if Clark would also send someone else under his authority to help, such as one of his officers to officially represent American power. In order to secure cooperation from the Kaskaskians, Clark bluffed that he was about to “send an Express to the falls of the Ohio for a Body of Troops” in order to aid in an attack on Vincennes. This bluff produced several “Advocates...among the people in [Vincennes] behalf.” Among those who offered services, Father Gibault now stepped forward. Although he swore he had nothing to

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<sup>226</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, “Memoir,” both in James, *Clark Papers*, 122-23, 232-33.

do with “temporal business,” he gave Clark every indication that he would give the inhabitants of Vincennes “such hints in the Spiritual way that would be very conducive to the business” at hand.<sup>227</sup> The help received from Gibault should not have come as surprise since he had a history of rocky relations with his British superiors in Quebec, and he had shown a willingness to work with other cultures, especially the Irish soldiers that served at Fort Gage before its abandonment by the British Army. Gibault, highly respected in Vincennes, became a natural choice to go there as well.<sup>228</sup>

Clark chose Dr. Jean Laffont to lead the mission to Vincennes, reminding him that should Vincennes choose to resist his peace offering, they would shortly “feel the miseries of...war.” He also ordered Laffont to “act in concert with the priest [Gibault],” who was to “prepare the inhabitants to grant you your demands.”<sup>229</sup> Clark also noted that he had given Gibault “Verbal Instructions [concerning] how to act in certain cases.”<sup>230</sup> Clark, while still using the bluff of force to maintain his position as a conqueror, clearly controlled of the situation, understanding the absolute necessity of gaining French help. The mention of private verbal instructions coupled with the influence of Father Gibault also shows Clark developing intimate relationships with the French while still maintaining power over them. In fact, Clarence Alvord has hypothesized that Father Gibault was a particularly easy target, as he considered him as so emotional and high strung an individual that a man with such strong fortitude as Clark may have been able to easily influence him.<sup>231</sup> It should also be noted that although no evidence of anti-Catholicism in Alvord’s writings exists, it was still a pervasive belief when he was writing and may have influenced his interpretations, as well as stereotypes about the volatile emotional nature of

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<sup>227</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>228</sup> Donnelly, *Pierre Gibault*, 49, 53, 62.

<sup>229</sup> GR Clark to Jean B. Laffont, 14 July 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 53-54.

<sup>230</sup> “Memoir,” in *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>231</sup> Alvord, *Cahokia Records*, xviii-xxiii.

French settlers as well. While this may be true, Clark also had clearly won over the support of Dr. Laffont who eagerly offered his services, as well as the other French who “Set about preparing...a great numbers of Letters...to the Inhabitants” of Vincennes.<sup>232</sup> Vincennes, like Cahokia, quickly submitted to the State of Virginia and swore an oath of loyalty.<sup>233</sup> Again, news of the Franco-American alliance proved to be helpful as Clark carefully mentioned it in his proclamation asking Vincennes to submit to his authority.<sup>234</sup>

George Rogers Clark used the elements of surprise, force, and bluff to ensure that he would have the support of the French villagers in the Illinois Country. Once the French settlers had submitted to Clark’s control and even showed a tendency to support the American cause, Clark, in the same persuasive way that he had gained support for his expedition and recruited along the frontier, encouraged and accepted all the help that the French offered. While the French were helpful in convincing their neighbors and relatives to surrender without a fight, they proved even more helpful in Clark’s next goal, which was to achieve peace with natives from the Wabash River to the Great Lakes.

Long after gaining the surrender of the Illinois posts, the French villagers continued to give aid to Clark. He used them to influence the different Native Americans he encountered, gaining peace and neutrality from nearly all the nations that visited him. He also convinced the French to aid in the defeat of Lieutenant Governor Henry Hamilton’s counter attack against Vincennes because of their dislike of British authority. Clark also capitalized on the American soldiers’ hatred of Indians and used the capture of Hamilton to temporarily end any threat from his Indian allies. This also highlighted some of the cultural differences among the French and Americans.

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<sup>232</sup> “Memoir,” in James, *Clark Papers*, 238.

<sup>233</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 121-22.

<sup>234</sup> “Clark to the Inhabitants of Vincennes,” 13 July 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 51.

The Natives in and around the Illinois Country did not unanimously support for either the British or the Americans. Although Clark believed that the Indians were “generally at War against us,” and he immediately set out to take care of Indian affairs in the area.<sup>235</sup> The sudden appearance of Clark and his army forced the hand of the weak Illini who “immediately treated for peace.”<sup>236</sup> Clark then sent out a speech to the various tribes, who had assembled for a council at Cahokia. Clark felt his speech had a “greater effect than [he] could have imagined” as Natives flocked to the town from as far as five-hundred miles away, including tribes from Spanish territory.<sup>237</sup> His speech compared “The Big Knife” (Virginians) and the “Red peoples” as both being dependent on the British for manufactured goods, and portrayed the British as evil for trying to stop the Americans from learning to make these goods themselves.<sup>238</sup> Certainly the Natives could relate to the need for an external source for goods and the problems caused by the external control of those goods. Clark’s speech had the desired effect, completing a treaty which stretched American influence “among the Nations even to the Border of the Lakes.” After the conference, he remained in Cahokia settling peace “with ten or twelve different Nations.”<sup>239</sup>

The sudden appearance of an American army in an area that had never seen more than a token force of British soldiers, plus the dominance of French traders (now favoring the United States) left many nations willing to sue for peace in the hope of securing a new source of supply. They saw this as an appealing option considering the lack of British trading supplies since their accession to power in the region. Weak nations like the Illini and those in close proximity like the southern Wabash nations were the quickest to make peace because they had the most to gain

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<sup>235</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-125.

<sup>238</sup> “Memoir,” in *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>239</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in *Ibid* 128-129.

from trade with the Americans, and the most to lose in combat.<sup>240</sup> A reliable source of supplies was one of the key factors in how Indians aligned in war, and as the nations in the West looked to increase their own power and protection, they needed a steady European supplier. A lack of promised supplies made Indians willing to desert their allies because of unfulfilled promises and new options for trade and supply where none existed proved powerful motivators.<sup>241</sup>

The influence of the French and Spanish contributed to the success of George Rogers Clark's efforts to limit the participation of native nations. Henry Hamilton understood native customs and was prepared to offer much more in the way of presents than Clark ever was willing or able to. Only with the support of the ever influential French enabled him to solidify the early shock value of his army's appearance.

Clark believed that the British did not deal effectively with the Indians. He instead strove "to make [himself] acquainted fully with the French and Spanish Methods of Treating Indians." To his credit, Clark understood the close relationship between the French traders and Indians, and quickly admitted that "in a short time the Indians of Vareous Tribes Inhabiting this Region at Illinois...came to make peace with us from the Information they Generally got from the French." The Spanish, though operating mainly through French traders, provided an important source of supply and offered a decidedly anti-British opinion and Clark saw them as possessing "great influence" as well.<sup>242</sup>

Finally, the Franco-American alliance had a tremendous impact on both the French willingness to aid Clark and for the legitimization of the American cause for the native peoples, most of whom were old allies of France. Clark counseled the native peoples that "The French

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<sup>240</sup> "Patrick Henry to VA Delegates in Congress," 16 November 1778, in *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>241</sup> Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*, 129-133, 173; Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 73-75.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243, 124.

King...sent to the Americans and told them to be strong and fight the English like Men,” leading to the large turnout of peoples seeking peace at Cahokia.<sup>243</sup> While Clark used the Franco-American Alliance and a little fear to “win their affection,” he was “to weak to treat them any other way,” especially considering the strength Spanish influence among the native peoples, and their abundance in trade goods and gifts when compared to what the Americans had to offer.<sup>244</sup>

The British commander at Michilimackinac, located west of Detroit, understood the problems involved in mobilizing the Great Lakes Indians to counter attack in the Illinois. “The Inhabitants [French] of that country are not to be depended upon should [they] offer to interfere; otherwise should they join the rebels, it would be thro’ fear of being plundered by the stranger Indians.”<sup>245</sup> While Clark faced difficulties in maintaining the friendship of the French and their Indian allies, the two tasks closely related, as the Indians often followed the French example. Clark early in the occupation had constantly to work to keep both the French and the natives pacified. While Clark was holding council among the nations that came to Cahokia, several Winnebagos made an attempt to capture Clark in his lodging.<sup>246</sup> The natives though were deterred and captured thanks to the “elacrity of the Serget” and the quick reaction of the French militia assembling in reaction to this threat, which “convinced the Savages that French were in [Clark’s] interest.” It appears the natives were not entirely wowed by Clark’s appearance and his loud talk at the conference table, and in a matter that most of Clark’s backcountry soldiers would recognize, the Winnebago warriors decided to test the personal manhood and power that Clark held. In foiling the plot, it appears the rest of the Indians accepted Clark’s leadership role for the

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<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-122.

<sup>245</sup> Arent De Peyster to General Haldimand, 24 October 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 297.

<sup>246</sup> Nations that came to Cahokia included the Chippewa, Ottawa, Pottawatomie, Missisauga, Winnebago, Sauk, Mesquakie, Osage, Iowa, and Miami. GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 125.



time. Clark held his attackers prisoners and declared that the natives and their associates were a “set of Villians, that they had Joined the English and they were welcome to continue in the Cause they had espoused...that I did not care who was my Friends or Foes.” The French in Cahokia who hosted these nations from far away, suddenly were “Alarmed” by Clark’s brashness, but to soothe them over Clark “assembled a Number of Gentlemen and Ladies, and danced nearly the whole Night.” The next day, he met with the leaders of the assembled nations, and in ceremonial event set the captives free, and gained the support of many of the natives.<sup>247</sup> Clark served two purposes in this; first he showed indifference to any threat the natives could muster ,and this in turn gave the French confidence that Clark actually controlled the situation.

While historians such as Richard White have criticized Clark’s brazen native diplomacy, some like James A. Thom have defended his brand of diplomacy. White is most critical concerning Clark’s attempts to negotiate as a “warrior” and not a “counselor,” saying Clark did not fully understand his own actions and what they meant diplomatically in his “middle ground.” White presents Clark as a violent racist immersed in an Indian hating culture and bent upon the destruction of native societies and the British whom Clark saw as enabling the Indian warriors.<sup>248</sup> Thom, on the other hand, rebuts the idea that Clark was a proven Indian hater, citing many of his later interactions with natives. He also maintains that the Anglo-centric viewpoint of both Clark and Hamilton made it very unlikely that they would have viewed any other race or culture as equal to the heritage of being British or American; whether the other group was native or French did not really matter to them.<sup>249</sup> This clearly did influence the way Clark approached the world,

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<sup>247</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, in James, 126, 123. Clark also used the tactic of feigning a withdrawal back to Kentucky to get the French to beg for support to protect them from the possible return of the British.

<sup>248</sup> White, *The Middle Ground*, 368-72.

<sup>249</sup> James A. Thom, “George Rogers Clark and Indian America,” in Kenneth C. Carstens and Nancy Son Carstens, eds., *The Life of George Rogers Clark, 1752-1818: Triumphs and Tragedies*, 42-59, (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 50-54.

and one of the pressing concerns for Clark was that he had no supplies or gifts for the natives. If he acted any other part than that of the conqueror, his true weaknesses would have been discovered much sooner. Clark also must have made a positive impression on the natives he dealt with. They regarded him highly as an agent of the government later in his career, and he also wrote notes on the mounds near Cahokia, giving credit to ancestors of Native Americans for the construction, not attributing it to another race like many did at the time.<sup>250</sup> In fact it seems that Clark's opinion toward the Indians he negotiated and fought with was more complicated than is commonly allowed. On one hand he was undeniably a member of a culture that fostered Indian-hating along the frontier, but many Indians respected Clark, and his admiration for their accomplishments indicates that he probably realized the need to understand his opponents, but it does not indicate anything more than ambivalence towards their culture overall. Clark's ambivalence may also be attached to his opportunistic neighbor as there was much for Clark to gain by his actions, and Clark often looked toward his best interests, whether that was forging a native alliance or ordering the death of native prisoners. Clark's need to control situations and people often dictated his actions, such as at Vincennes, leaving us with an unclear record in many ways about Clark's real feelings.

Once the threat of native attack was removed, war and conflict with natives was romanticized to large degree by later generations; native combatants initially labeled savages began to be presented as an idealized and romantic reminder of the past whose extinction was inevitable. Conflict during King Philip's War created the language that is used to justify the frontier expansionism of America against all those Europeans and Natives that stood in the

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<sup>250</sup> James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 130, "Clark on the Mound Builders," 495-499.

way.<sup>251</sup> The situations of New England in 1676 and the Kentucky frontier in 1778 were analogous, as isolated settlers were forced into small stockades, allowing Shawnee raiding parties and their allies to plunder their farms and attempt to cut off and starve the settlers, just as King Philip did in New England.<sup>252</sup> This created a situation where the colonists used their written language to justify the conflict, but with the threat of native attack removed, it was easy for Americans to think of the noble savage and the vanishing Indian stereotypes as inevitable fates that justified their exile to reservations. Of course, few native writers had the opportunity or means to offer written counter-narrative.<sup>253</sup> The time and environment in which memories of the past are recovered plays a role in how past events are remembered; that is if events are studied in a time when racism is prevalent and minorities are ignored, then that affects how history is studied and written without the author or reader realizing it much of the time.<sup>254</sup> Bringing these views on history and memory into focus concerning Clark is complicated, but he was a product of his environment, yet was not completely immersed in the prevalent Indian-hating culture. When much of the historical work on Clark was compiled in the early twentieth Century, no prominent role for natives existed in the tale of American expansion, and therefore Clark's victories were emphasized while his scientific notes on the achievements of earlier cultures was not. Clark's observations and actions in dealing with Indians show, if not sympathy, at least a respect for native culture and accomplishments. When Clark made his notes on the mound builders of the Mississippi Valley he disputed the claim of some historians that a different race or even a European like Hernando DeSoto built the mounds. Many of the Illini Clark had close contact with told stories about the mounds and their ancestors and Clark could "see no reason

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<sup>251</sup> Lepore, *The Name of War*, x, xiv.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-74, 175.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>254</sup> Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), xv-xvii.

why it should be received as good History,” at least as accurate as many of the stories passed down in the Euro-American tradition.<sup>255</sup> Perhaps Clark was speaking in the same frame of mind as many of the New Englanders did when they spoke about the Indian’s past greatness that was only the inevitable fate of that culture. Many of the harsh words Clark uttered about Indians and ways to destroy them were from the viewpoint of a successful military commander. Clark never expressed any regret at the lose of native culture, and throughout his Illinois Campaign his efforts were directed keeping Indian warriors on the sidelines, so perhaps it is a safe conclusion that Clark cared little one way or another if native culture was annihilated or not. At the same time, these views do not necessarily represent anything more than how to win an Indian campaign, which Clark spent most of his life conducting at the request of local, state, and national governments.

Despite Clark’s success in working with the natives and the French, Lieutenant Governor Hamilton quickly challenged his position and authority. While the core of Clark’s force was comprised of American frontier settlers, by the time Hamilton arrived in the Illinois he was dependent on French volunteers to replace the soldiers who left when their terms of service had expired. His opponent however was even more dependent on other cultural groups to maintain his force. Henry Hamilton, with his base of operations to the north in Detroit, relied almost exclusively on Indian allies and French militias because of the small number of regular soldiers in Detroit, which increased his reliance on militias and Indians because he did not even have direct military control over that garrison.<sup>256</sup>

Hamilton also had the supplies and influence among native peoples to challenge the gains Clark had made in native diplomacy as well. Through extensive dealings with various native

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<sup>255</sup> James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, “Clark on the Mound Builders,” 498.

<sup>256</sup> Barnhart, *HenryHamilton*, 31.

nations at Detroit, Hamilton had mastered the ceremonial rituals of trade and war and was well positioned to re-assert British influence among the native nations. Hamilton journeyed southward from Detroit to the Wabash and then followed that river to the fort at Vincennes. His counter-attack expedition consisted of about one-hundred and seventy-five white troops, two-thirds of them French volunteers and militia from Detroit. They were also joined by a large number of natives in their march along the Wabash, eventually consisting of about eight-hundred men.<sup>257</sup> Most native peoples along the route were quick to reassert their loyalty to Hamilton, including the Miamis, Piankashaws, and Kickapoos, while they offered excuses for their recent flirtations with Clark. In fact, much of Hamilton's time was spent in various feasts, councils, and ceremonies, as Captain Norman MacLeod, leading the army, often stopped for the "Shaking of hands and lighting [of] the Pipes," promising that "Your father {Hamilton} at Detroit is Coming Meirly to assist you."<sup>258</sup>

Hamilton busily rearranged his Native alliances. He ordered supplies delivered to the Miamis and then sent out Alexander McKee to persuade the Shawnees and Delawares to attack the frontier; while the Potawatomi, Ottawas, and Chippewas all offered to accompany the expedition.<sup>259</sup> Hamilton illustrated the previous lack of British influence in the area as he noted in his journal "These Indians as well as the Illinois, and Missouri Tribes have been kept almost altogether in the dark with respect to the power of the British Nation."<sup>260</sup> Many of the villages along the Wabash feared the Americans because "their families were exposed too much to the inroads of the Virginians," but after talking with Hamilton they pledged in the spring to "appear

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<sup>257</sup> James, *The Life of George Roger Clark*, 132.

<sup>258</sup> "The Journal of Normand MacLeod," 13 October 1778, in William A. Evans, ed., *Detroit to Fort Sackville, 1778-1779: The Journal of Normand MacLeod*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), 32-33.

<sup>259</sup> Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 104.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

like Musketoes and infest the Ohio, and all the rebel frontier,” after complaining of American desires for their land.<sup>261</sup> These were common reactions all along Hamilton’s journey.

On December 17, 1778, Hamilton easily reclaimed Vincennes as the French militia guarded the fort and seemed to have no stomach for fighting. When one contrasts Hamilton’s and Clark’s assessments of Indians as allies in warfare. Clark used little or no native help in his original conquest or his following re-conquest, while Hamilton’s “Indians sent out a few Runners” to scout, and they made up the left column of his move into Vincennes.<sup>262</sup> The lateness of the season meant winter had reached the Illinois Country and flooded the overland prairie routes to Kaskaskia, so Hamilton settled in for the winter dismissing most of the Detroit French militia and his native allies to their homes. He was not inactive during the winter, working to assemble nearby allies and even trying to coordinate action with the Cherokee and Chickasaw nations far to the South.<sup>263</sup>

The French had proven to be an important factor each time one of their villages was seized by an outside force. They offered no resistance to Clark’s forces or even his messengers, and they also proved unwilling initially to fight the British. As Hamilton approached the fort at Vincennes, Leonard Helm, the American commander, was surprised and hurriedly sent out a message to Clark that was intercepted. Helm’s situation, as he reported it, was critical. Helm had “calld the militia and had all assurance of their integrity” but when he fired the fort’s cannon, a signal for the militia to assemble, “not one of the militia” appeared at the fort, causing Helm to sarcastically remark that “before sight of the [enemy’s] army [there were] no braver men.”<sup>264</sup> As had happened earlier, once Helm was forced to surrender, the citizens of Vincennes renounced

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<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

<sup>262</sup> “The Journal of Normand MacLeod,” 11-12 December 1778, in Evans, *Detroit to Fort Sackville*, 102-103.

<sup>263</sup> Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 168.

<sup>264</sup> Leonard Helm to GR Clark, 17 December 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 89-90.

their oath to the Americans and reaffirmed their loyalty to the British, although Hamilton anxiously hoped his “Lenity...might induce” other Frenchmen to follow the example of those at Vincennes, the “conduct of the Canadians at large was but poor encouragement.”<sup>265</sup> The French were required to make quick decisions concerning the best interests of their families; it is not out of reach to imagine the French put their families far ahead of either cause since their loyalties still were tied to France. Just as the divided Indians, like the Shawnee and Miamis, and the citizens of British occupied New York City had to do, decisions were about profit, family, and self-preservation before patriotism.<sup>266</sup>

Clark also needed the loyalty of the French and welcomed them into his ranks. After the capture of Kaskaskia and before the native councils at Cahokia, Clark found “Many of the French fond of the service,” allowing them to serve as replacements for the recruits that were gone home.<sup>267</sup> When Clark needed men to retake Vincennes in January, 1779, he was joined by “two Volunteer Compys of the Principal Young Men of the Illinois,” who had been encouraged by the “Ladies” of the country who showed a “spirited...interest...in the Expedition, which had great Effect on the Young men.”<sup>268</sup> Clark set out with one-hundred and seventy-two men, nearly half of whom were French.<sup>269</sup> During the course of the journey, Clark and his officers privately criticized the stammina of the French, but their support turned out to be vital to the success of the campaign.

The journey was intense as much of the Illinois prairie was submerged by flooded rivers. Clark ordered his men to march across the flooded prairies “frequently to the arm pits in water.”

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<sup>265</sup> Henry Hamilton to General Haldimand, 18 December 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 336; “Hamilton’s Report,” November 1776 to June 1781, in James, *Clark Papers*, 182.

<sup>266</sup> Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>267</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 123.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>269</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 137.

As they neared Vincennes, morale was at a low point, but Clark led by force of example. According to his own account, when he “Viewed their confution for about one minute” he “Whispered to those near me to do as I did – amediately took some water in my hand poured on Powder Blacked my face gave the war hoop and marched into the water without saying a word.” No records exist of any soldiers refusing to go forward, but Clark described this endurance test as “so far Superior to any thing the French Men had an Idea of that they were backward in speaking.”<sup>270</sup> Joseph Bowman described “Many of the Men” as “much cast down,” especially the “Creols Volunteers [who are] talking of returning.”<sup>271</sup>

Although Clark singled out the French volunteers in their recollections of the march, they were the key to the recapture of Vincennes. In defense of the volunteers, it is doubtful that Clark’s American volunteers handled marching for days in water up to their armpits with no food any better than their French counterparts. The officers chose to single out the French because they were more likely to speak up as a return to their homes was feasible, while those from Kentucky or Virginia had no such options available. Either the American soldiers bore their burden more quietly because they had no realistic route home, or Clark and Bowman simply chose not to report their own men’s misgivings.

On the approach to the town, Clark sent out “active young French men to decoy and take...prisoner” some hunters who could provide intelligence, which the soldiers achieved in “such a manner as not to alarm the other.” When the hunters were sent back into Vincennes, they informed the citizens that Clark was approaching the town, but no one informed the British. Clark was also aided by several men in the town as the French had “buried the Greatest part of their powder and ball,” to hide it from Hamilton, and “this was amediately produced and we

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<sup>270</sup> “Memoir,” in James, *Clark Papers*, 272-274.

<sup>271</sup> “Bowman’s Journal,” February 1779, in *Ibid.*, 158.



found our selves well supplied.”<sup>272</sup> Although Clark did not always inwardly respect his French soldiers, he did make sure they served in roles that served to emphasize their skills and by so doing he managed to garner their respect, which was critical to holding his army together. This re-supply was important because most of the powder Clark’s men had carried with them had gotten wet during the journey to Vincennes.

The men inside the fort meanwhile grew uneasy, especially the French volunteers from Detroit who had remained with Hamilton. The British garrison consisted of seventy-nine men in all, with the French making up half the force. Once they spoke up, the chance of effective resistance was greatly reduced, as they “began to murmur, saying it was very hard to be obliged to fight against their countrymen and relations, who they now perceived had joined the Americans.”<sup>273</sup>

Although the French were perceived by both the Americans and the British as less than useful in actual combat, their decisions to fight or not were the key in every engagement that took place in the Illinois in 1778 and 1779. These pragmatic soldiers were not willing to die for an Imperial contest that concerned them but little, although when motivated in their own interests, they proved to be valuable soldiers, especially in terms of their endurance and military support, which Clark employed much more effectively than Hamilton. Clark’s capture of Vincennes was the high point of his military career and of his ability to effectively harness the energies of different cultural groups in the Illinois. It also revealed some of the differences that slowly began to make it difficult for the French and Americans to work together in the coming years.

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<sup>272</sup> “Memoir,” in *Ibid.*, 277-281.

<sup>273</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 144; ; “Hamilton’s Report,” November 1776 to June 1781 in James, *Clark Papers*, 187.

Clark's capture of Vincennes has provided history with one of the most gruesome events of the Revolutionary War. The fort at Vincennes was surrounded during the night, and Clark's men kept up a steady fire upon the fort until morning. Around nine o'clock Clark sent a message to Hamilton asking for an unconditional surrender: Hamilton refused. After another two hours of shooting, Hamilton sent a messenger to Clark indicating he was willing to talk about the terms of surrender. Clark again asked for an unconditional surrender, which Hamilton countered by proposing a three-day truce. Clark rejected the truce but invited Hamilton to come out of the fort and negotiate one on one at the French church in town. Hamilton accepted, but during the truce a party of native and white raiders returned to town and was captured by Clark's men, setting the stage for a massacre that followed at the gate of the fort, where Clark ordered the grisly deaths of his captives to dissuade the British from further resistance.<sup>274</sup> This event has become the singular event that is associated with George Rogers Clark and his expedition. Therefore, it has been common to view Clark only through his actions at Vincennes, but this thesis maintains that Clark's actions at Vincennes were really in response to the growing pressures Clark faced in keeping his culturally diverse army united.

In the Mason Letter, Clark stated that he was unwilling to negotiate with Hamilton because he considered Hamilton and his officers "murderers, And intended to treat them as such." Apparently, Clark had fully absorbed the persona of his frontier army, holding Hamilton and his white officers personally responsible for the native attacks on Kentucky. When Hamilton inquired as to the rationale for such harsh terms of surrender, Clark replied that he "wanted a sufficient excuse to put all the Indians and partisans to death" -- the common sort of bravado Clark had already used during the occupation of the French villages. While Hamilton returned to

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<sup>274</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 142-44.

consult his officers, the truce continued, and the incoming party of warriors and white officers was surprised and taken prisoner entering the town because the British flag flew over the fort and there was no sound of battle. Clark noted that six men were taken and thought he had “now a fair opportunity of making an impression on the Indians that I could have wished for; that of convincing them that Governour Hamilton could not give them that protection that he made them to believe he could.” Clark wanted to “insence the Indians” against Hamilton for not “exerting himself to save their Friends:” so he “Ordered the Prisoners to be Tomahawked in the face of the Garrison.” Having the effect Clark desired, the warriors “upbraided the English Parties in not trying to save their friends” and “believed them to be liers and no Warriars.” One of the white leaders of the native party was spared from the massacre because his father recognized him, although Clark “had...little mercy for such Murderers,” as he considered white partisans, but the Frenchmen’s father had “behaved so exceedingly well in [Clark’s] service,” that he was freed. Hamilton quickly surrendered after this event was reported to him.<sup>275</sup>

Clark’s recollection in his Memoir contains many of the same details. He refused to give generous terms of surrender because he knew the “greatest part of the principal Indian partisans of DeTroit was with [Hamilton] [and he] wanted an excuse to put them to Death.” In this latter report it is interesting that Clark went into more detail, possibly hinting at the importance of maintaining the morale of his soldiers: “that the Cries of the Widows and Fatherless on the Frontiers that they had occasioned now Required their Blood...that I would rather Loose Fifty Men” in storming the fort and “Risque the massacre of [Hamilton’s] Garrison” than allow the opportunity to pass. He even claimed to have entertained the idea of sending “for some of those Widows to see it executed.” Clark reported that this encounter left the British officers flustered.

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<sup>275</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 144-45.

Clark's motives are clear, but nearly twenty years after the event described, Clark placed much less emphasis on the effects of the massacre, as he wrote just one line, "and [the] Indians [were] Tomahawked by the Soldiers and flung into the River."<sup>276</sup>

Other contemporary accounts from the American side include the journal kept by Clark's trusted lieutenant, Joseph Bowman. Bowman wrote that the white prisoners were released and then they "brought the Indians to the Main Street before the Fort Gate there tomahawked them and threw them into the River."<sup>277</sup> Following the victory, Clark wrote back to Governor Henry in Virginia to report, but while he mentioned the taking prisoner of the native party during the truce, he made no mention of the massacre.<sup>278</sup> The American sources overall seem to downplay the massacre, but it appears to be a safe conclusion that Clark did in fact order the killings in an attempt to force Hamilton's hand.

Henry Hamilton and his officers did not recount events exactly as Clark portrayed them. While his general account of the events was very similar to other accounts, he placed much more emphasis on the massacre. Hamilton explained that "the manner [of death] (was related to me by different people and among others by the man at whose door this execrable feat was perpetrated)," and described the events as follows:

One of them was tomahawk'd immediately. The rest sitting on the ground in a ring bound—seeing by the fate of their comrade what they had to expect, the next on his left sung his death song, and was in turn thomahawk'd, the rest underwent the same fate... The Chief of this party after having had the hatchet stuck in head, took it out himself and deliver'd it to the inhuman monster who struck him first, who repeated his stroke a second and a third time, after which the miserable spectacle was dragged by the

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<sup>276</sup> "Memoir," in *Ibid.*, 286-88.

<sup>277</sup> "Bowman's Journal," February 1779, in *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>278</sup> GR Clark to Patrick, 29 April 1779, in *Ibid.*, 171.

rope about his neck to the River, thrown in, and suffer'd to spend still a few moments of life in fruitless struglings.

Hamilton squarely placed the blame on Clark's shoulders, claiming he actually committed the murders. When the two officers met again, "Colonel Clarke yet reeking with the blood of these unhappy Victims came...before the Fort Gate...He spoke with rapture of his late achievement, while he washed off the blood from his hands stained in this inhuman sacrifice."<sup>279</sup>

One of the key points in any interpretation of Clark is to what extent he was a part of the Indian-hating culture. Leaders on the frontier, like Clark, could become powerful by offering protection from native attacks and by leading retaliatory raids. At the same time a failure to live up to expectations resulted in a loss of power and influence as well.<sup>280</sup> The frontier culture also emphasized the links between natives and the Europeans that they saw as empowering the native warriors, which in turn created a special hatred first for the French and then the British. As all enemies on the frontier eventually became linked to or were themselves "savages," it was particularly important for the frontier settlers to believe Clark was an Indian-hater whether he actually was or not.<sup>281</sup>

At the time of the massacre, there were different points of view on what exactly took place, and historians have offered various opinions about the massacre and Clark. James A. James briefly describes the events similar to Clark's short version, while he offers no analysis or justification of any kind for the events. John Bakeless retells the entire narrative in a way that justifies Clark's deed, by focusing on the native attacks that had taken place in Kentucky and the commonness of Indian hating; Bakeless justifies Clark with an eye for an eye approach. Richard White reconstructs the scene as a battle of symbols that took place over the following years,

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<sup>279</sup> "Hamilton's Report," November 1776 to June 1781, in *Ibid.*, 189-90.

<sup>280</sup> Silvers, *Our Savage Neighbors*, 74-75, 123. On frontier leaders and their qualifications for leadership also Perkins, *Border Life* 132, 133-135, 137.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-251, xxii-xxiii.

when both Clark and Hamilton attempted to paint each other as the true savage. He concludes that Hamilton had more success painting Clark as the “chief priest” of the sacrifice as opposed to Clark painting Hamilton as the “savage Hair Buyer.” Bernard W. Sheehan finds both men guilty and a bit hypocritical in the process. Noting that Hamilton had taken the time to understand and participate in native culture, Sheehan maintains he was self-delusional when it came time to take responsibility for sending out native raiders to the frontier. Clark is portrayed as the classical Indian hater who turns into a “savage” himself and therefore has no right to accuse Hamilton of savagery.<sup>282</sup>

Most of the debate then has focused on just who was more savage or who was more deserving of his fate. From the works above and the primary sources, it is clear that both sides felt justified in their claims, and for anyone looking to throw around the accusation of savagery, no shortage of evidence exists for either side. Sheehan is probably most correct in his analysis of Hamilton, who attempted to remain aloof from the realities of frontier warfare. He issued scalping knives, and scalps were brought to him in Detroit, yet it is not surprising that he was shocked at Clark’s conduct, because what Clark did was completely unacceptable by any standards of European war, and while Hamilton understood native culture, he did not wish to get his hands dirty.

Clark, on the other hand, can not be as easily justified as he is by Bakeless. Clark clearly did not revel in his act the way Hamilton described because he gives it such small emphasis in all his written accounts, but Clark was in many ways taking a desperate gamble. He had only about seventy or eighty more men than Hamilton (depending on one you accounts for the French

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<sup>282</sup> James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 144-45; Bakeless, *Background to Glory*, 201-204; White, *The Middle Ground*, 374-378; Bernard Sheehan, “‘The Famous Hair Buyer General’: Henry Hamilton, George Rogers Clark, and the American Indian.” *Indiana Magazine of History* 79 (1983), 7-21.

volunteers serving with Hamilton), and their supplies and reinforcements were coming down the Wabash River to aid Hamilton as the siege was underway. Clark was also extremely vulnerable to any British led effort that might gather native warriors from the Wabash. While he could take some comfort in believing the French inside the fort would not resist because the town of Vincennes had turned on Hamilton, he had no such guarantee about the natives, with the exception of the nearby Pinkashaw nation, which most likely would not be willing to protect Clark from their Miami relatives. Clark therefore gambled, albeit gruesomely and in terms of human life, unjustifiably, to force Hamilton into surrendering and to scare away any natives that might consider fighting the Americans.

The most important factor to consider was Clark's personality. Overall he was willing to take risks because he was opportunists and he found himself in this leadership situation because he was initially trying to secure the best title to his lands possible. Maybe Clark was an Indian-hater and maybe not, but his ability to see what others needed and provide that without alienating another group is what is important about Clark's interactions here. Although he did please the Indian-hating tendencies of his men, he acted as he had in the past, in a brazen manner, using fear to bluff his enemies into submission and cooperation and wanted to serve the immediate goal of humiliating Hamilton as well.

Clark was in a delicate situation, while he needed satisfy the Kentuckians he led, especially to keep his claim to power and influence, he also needed to work with the French during his occupation. Clark's solution was to kill the captured natives while he released the captured whites. The White members of the party were a vital example of French integration into native culture, and sparing them was an attempt to win favor with all of this followers. While Clark's men may have relished the efforts Clark put into intimidating the white partisans and natives in

the British service, it was certainly a much scarier prospect for the French. They had worried about Clark's diplomacy with the natives since the Cahokia councils, and the capture and release of some of their men that had been serving with the native raiding party further highlighted the divide that existed between the French and American settlers.

The entire episode of violence and the defeat of Hamilton, whom Clark described as "Deified" by the Natives, had the desired effect. Various nations, especially those along the Wabash along Hamilton's route, now returned to Clark's orbit and "begged [him] to excuse their blindness and take them into favour." Clark, maintaining his consistent policy of neutrality for the native peoples spoke to the various nations chastising them for listening to "the bad talks and deceit of the English...The Big Knives then resolved to shew no mercy to any people that hereafter would refuse the belt of Peace." The immediate result was clear, "Every thing having the Appearance of Tranquility" throughout the Illinois Country.<sup>283</sup> Across the West, Clark's victory had tremendous effect. The natives, upon hearing of the capture of Hamilton quit the siege of Fort Laurens, and officers as far away as Fort Pitt began to receive Indian reports about the event.<sup>284</sup>

While Clark was occupying the Illinois, gaining the support of the French, pacifying the natives, and reacting to Hamilton's invasion, the Spanish were also acting in cooperation with Clark. From Clark's first arrival through his march to Vincennes, he found a welcome friend in the Spanish Lieutenant Governor at St. Louis, Fernando de Leyba, along with many of the merchants that worked under Spanish jurisdiction. As discussed earlier, Spain's policy in the

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<sup>283</sup> James, *Life of George Rogers Clark*, 148-149.

<sup>284</sup> Kellogg, *Frontier Advance*, 25, John Heckewelder to Daniel Brodhead, 28 April 1779, 295-296; Fredrick Vernon to Daniel Broadhead, 29 April 1779, 298; Anonymous Letter, 10 July 1779, 387, all in *Ibid.*



Mississippi Valley was pro-American, but Spanish agents acted more out of a desire to hurt the British than to help the Americans.

Clark was warmly received once Kaskaskia was captured, and part of this may have been because the Spanish had actually expected Clark's arrival. Don Juan de Miralles, a Spanish diplomat, had been informed by Patrick Henry that an expedition was underway to the Illinois. Although no proof exists that de Leyba knew of this, it certainly highlights the inclinations of the Spanish in general.<sup>285</sup> In fact de Leyba was quick to welcome "The Commanding Colonel [who] arrived at [Kaskaskia] in shirt and breeches, barefooted and bare of limb, with his bedding, provisions and gun on his shoulder." Clark's men wore "nothing but breeches, powder horn, gun and knapsack." They could not have inspired much confidence in de Leyba, who even in remote St. Louis had a well provisioned garrison, but he sought cooperation with Clark to show that he was himself "free of charges of being a Royalist."<sup>286</sup>

Clark immediately returned de Leyba's correspondence, describing the Spanish as "Our friends," and doing "every thing in their power to convince me of their friendship. Clearly there was a friendship and respect growing between the two men as de Leyba "omitted nothing in his Power to prove his Attachment to the Americans, with such openness as left no room for a doubt." Clark also frequently offered his best wishes to de Leyba's family when writing to him.<sup>287</sup> In one of their earliest exchanges, de Leyba informed Clark he would "come in person to congratulate you on your happy arrival at...Kaskaskia," while he offered to be "useful to you so as to prove to you the perfect consideration with which I have the honor of being." He also held a

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<sup>285</sup> Alvord,., "Virginia and the West," 32.

<sup>286</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 11 July 1778, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 263-64.

<sup>287</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 122, 129; GR Clark to Fernando de Leyba, 5 February 1779, in Kinnaird, "Clark-Leyba Papers," 105.

number of supplies shipped up from New Orleans for Clark to pick up at his convenience.<sup>288</sup>

Both officers also facilitated communications between their superiors, and worked together defensively, as de Leyba offered Clark “all the force that he could raise in case of an attack by Indians from Detroit.”<sup>289</sup> The men worked so closely together that they frequently shared intelligence, and de Leyba almost despised Hamilton as much as the American frontiersmen did. He described him as a “depraved man who has countless Indians at his service and great ill will toward the Spaniards.”<sup>290</sup>

While de Leyba and other officials in the Spanish government played a vital role in maintaining Clark’s forces, Francis Vigo, a St. Louis merchant also filled a critical role, both for collecting provisions to feed the army and for military intelligence. Not only did Vigo willingly sell his merchandise to Clark and offer him generous credit, but he also supported the other merchants of both the Spanish and American sides of the Mississippi River. In fact, some have proposed that Clark would not have been able to procure supplies without great difficulty had Vigo not advanced money to the local inhabitants.<sup>291</sup> Vigo was very important, and Clark was very conscious of his activities. When Clark learned of the fall of Vincennes, he passed along the intelligence to de Leyba about Hamilton, but also that “Mr. [Vigo] I expect is detained.”<sup>292</sup> Not only was Vigo important to Clark, but he was in business with de Leyba so his status was a major concern to both men. Hamilton detained Vigo, but being a Spanish civilian, Vigo was given a passport to continue with his business and allowed to return to St. Louis.<sup>293</sup> This he dutifully did, but then he re-crossed the Mississippi to Kaskaskia and provided Clark with “every

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<sup>288</sup> Fernando de Leyba to GR Clark, 8 July 1778, in *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>289</sup> GR Clark to Patrick Henry, 16 September 1778, in James, *Clark Papers*, 69.

<sup>290</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 5 February 1779, in Kinnaird, “Clark-Leyba Papers,” 105.

<sup>291</sup> James G. Randall, “George Rogers Clark’s Service of Supply,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 8 (1921), 258.

<sup>292</sup> GR Clark to Fernando de Leyba, 23 January 1779, in Kinnaird, “Clark-Leyba Papers,” 104.

<sup>293</sup> “Hamilton’s Journal,” 10-14 January 1779, in Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 163.

peace of Inteligence that [he] could wish for.” Clark had been waiting for the return of scouts he sent out, but Vigo provided him with the exact number of men Hamilton had and the news that he was settling in for the winter and repairing the fort rather than risking an attack on Kaskaskia before the spring.<sup>294</sup>

The Spaniards’ friendship with Clark and the Americans eventually cost them dearly. Even before the arrival of Clark and his men, supplies, while not in critically short supply, were nonetheless not always easily attainable. For example, in July 1777, the Governor of Louisiana was forced to set prices throughout the colony to counter the “abuses committed by the monopolies” and the “excessive and usurious prices at which they sell the food supplies and farm products to this province,” and “because of the complaint of the public in general that high cost curtails subsistence.”<sup>295</sup> Supplies were also critically short as gifts for the natives, and for traders to exchange for furs as well. When de Leyba lacked provisions to feed all the nations coming to council with him at St. Louis, he was disappointed to learn that Governor Galvez in New Orleans had “no authority to increase the number of...rations.” His advice was simply to give fewer away, despite the increased activities of the British. That was in September 1778. Less than one year later in July 1779 supply boats from New Orleans had failed to bring up adequate supplies. To de Leyba, it was “indispensable that our Indian tribes be provided with their accustomed goods. There are not enough in this post to supply the smallest of them. If nothing is sent to them...they will come furiously to this town.”<sup>296</sup> The situation became worse when the 1778 harvest was destroyed by “constant rains which...has caused the loss of half the wheat.” This “in conjunction with the many soldiers on the other side [of the Mississippi], has made bread and

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<sup>294</sup> GR Clark to Patrick Henry, 3 February 1779; Similarly see GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, and “Memoir,” all in James, *Clark Papers*, 98, 139, 266-267.

<sup>295</sup> “Proclamation Fixing Prices, 15 July 1777, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 239.

<sup>296</sup> Bernardo Galvez to Fernando de Leyba, 2 September 1778, Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 13 July 1779, both in *Ibid.*, 305, 346.

other provisions dear.” Eventually de Leyba had little recourse but to allow Spanish traders to purchase “some goods from the other side...but...they have bought them dearly.”<sup>297</sup>

Times had become very difficult economically, especially with the spike in demand of the occupation of the Illinois by Clark’s army. De Leyba felt that it had been his “good works which forced [the Americans] to live in harmony with the Spanish government...but...dearly this little bit of splendor” cost him. De Leyba suffered from “undermined health” and worried that his daughters would be forced to “beggary” should he die. Not only was de Leyba overextended in credit, but “Several of the inhabitants of [St. Louis], who put their property in the hand of the Americans to please [him], find themselves in the same situation.” De Leyba felt he had little recourse though, considering “orders...to come to [the Americans] aid in view of the fact that even the principal leader...had not a shirt to cover his nakedness.” Even the defenses of St. Louis were in question because if de Leyba defaulted on his large loans, he would be unable to acquire any “unexpected aid” for the troops in an emergency. In the end de Leyba lost his wife, and shortly afterwards he died as well, mired in the debt acquired securing the conquests of George Rogers Clark.<sup>298</sup>

The Spanish were vital to Clark both economically and militarily, offering intelligence and a plan of shared defense. Unfortunately, this friendly stance destroyed the financial standing of many Spanish officials and merchants because Virginia could not and would not pay the expenses of occupying the Illinois. Despite personal tragedy, men like de Leyba and Vigo amazingly extended themselves to such a great extent to support a man who appeared as a conqueror yet could barely feed or clothe himself. De Leyba only spoke highly of Clark; even as

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<sup>297</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 16 November 1778, Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 28 October 1779, both in *Ibid.*, 310, 361.

<sup>298</sup> Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo Galvez, 18 October 1779, in Kinnaird, “Clark-Leyba Papers,” 111-112.

his sickness became worse, he did not criticize him directly. While Spain was interested in gaining power and influence in the Mississippi Valley, the flair and confidence of meeting George Rogers Clark must have influenced these men to place their own fortunes on the line. Perhaps, like the Indians that Clark had bluffed into peace at Cahokia, the Spanish also feared his apparent violent streak. Spanish authorities at times were indeed afraid of a combined Anglo offensive against Spanish possessions.<sup>299</sup>

Although George Rogers Clark successfully seized the French town of Kaskaskia, he found himself in a precarious situation. Clark had only one-hundred and seventy-five men in his small army and was surrounded by 1,600 French settlers as well as thousands of natives within a journey of a day or two. Clark, as he had previously done, demonstrated the ability to work among different cultural groups to achieve his goals. Clark successfully united the French, Spanish, and many of the Native Americans against the interest of Great Britain. Clark did make some mistakes, especially in misunderstanding the possible motivations of the French, but he did successfully achieve his goals, and from an American perspective, Clark did an excellent job of gaining the cooperation on non-Americans, whether it was by free cooperation, or the threat of violence that gained cooperation, he was excellent at gaining the respect and cooperation of outside groups.

Unfortunately for Clark, his success proved to be rather short-lived. While he united his soldiers against a common enemy, once that common enemy was removed, all of the different cultural groups involved proved too unwieldy for one man with limited resources to control. Although it was not clear in 1779, fractures in the understandings between the Americans and the French, Spanish, and their Indian allies were beginning to appear. Even as Clark was achieving

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<sup>299</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Bernardo Galvez, 22 December 1780, in Houck, *Spanish Regime*, 178.

his greatest success, the signs of French resentment at American methods, exhaustion of Spanish credit, and the lack of gifts and supplies for Indian allies, boded ill for future prospects.

## **CHAPTER 4 - It Would Have Been Mine: Clark's Goals Never Realized**

The peak of George Rogers Clark's career came early in his life, as he would never again be as successful, popular, or influential than he was in the immediate aftermath of his victory over Henry Hamilton at Vincennes in February, 1779. His success was far reaching but short lived. Clark's main objective had been to relieve Kentucky from native raids, many of which had originated in Ohio. The capture of the Illinois towns put Clark in a strong position to negotiate with the nations located on the Wabash River, the Illini Confederation, and nations to the north and west of the Illinois, while also allowing him to threaten Detroit, which was the main supply depot for the Ohio based Shawnees, Mingo, and Delaware. The victory, and especially the capture of Hamilton, threw British plans for a native based offensive during the spring of 1779 into disarray, as the nations around the Great Lakes instead focused on attacking American posts in the Illinois Country. The Wabash nations remained largely neutral, and the Ohio nations temporarily restrained their attacks on Kentucky. The real problem for Clark was that he did not have the means to maintain his strong position, and he proved unable to protect Kentucky and the Illinois in the long term. The opportunity to take Detroit slipped away from Clark, and for the rest of his life he would say "it would have been Mine..."<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> GR Clark to Jonathan Clark, 16 January 1780, in James, *Clark Papers*, 382.

The removal of British forces from the Illinois Country led to fragmentation of the French, Spanish, Native, and American forces. The removal of the British as a common enemy meant Clark was no longer able to coordinate these groups and this chapter examines the breakdowns by cultural group as Indians, French, and Spanish all turn away from Clark. Once the members of Clark's coalition realized that removal of their original antagonist, the British, did not validate any claim to land economic supremacy other than the Americans, even the nimble gestures of Clark proved especially empty when he ran out of food and supplies. He could only address the needs of one group at the expense of others. As Larry Nelson has noted in his study of the British trader and diplomat Alexander McKee, this fragmentation of political interests in the Ohio Valley had been common for much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>301</sup> Once the British were expelled from Vincennes, Clark continued to maintain his army as an occupation force, both to ensure the cooperation of the French and the peaceful intentions of the natives. The army also served as protection against any attack against the French towns and as a staging area for any attack on British held Detroit. Clark had a difficult time maintaining a standing army, as he could barely supply his men, let alone offer them the promised pay. This led to resentment among the French, who had to deal with an unsupplied army with no money or credit. Eventually supplies were simply commandeered by the Americans, forcing the French began to look elsewhere for protection. While Clark never was able to organize an attack on Detroit, he continued to advocate that strategy. Frustratingly for Clark, though, he found himself unable to coordinate all the cultural groups required to pull off an expedition and against his will was forced to compromise his plans by instead leading a militia against the Shawnee towns in Ohio.

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<sup>301</sup> Larry L. Nelson, "Cultural Mediation on the Great Lakes Frontier: Alexander McKee and Anglo-American Indian Affairs, 1754-1799," in Robert J. Holden, ed., *Selected Papers from the 1991 and 1992 George Rogers Clark Trans-Appalachian Frontier History Conferences*, (Vincennes, Ind: Vincennes University, 1994), 31-32.



Finally, the Spanish remained active in the Mississippi Valley as well. Once it was clear that the Americans were struggling to maintain their presence in the Illinois, relations between the two countries grew strained, and Spain launched its own offensives against the British, without cooperation of the American officials, but with the support of the French settlers in American territory. As the Ohio Valley fell back into the political fragmentation that had ruled it for so long, the importance of Clark's achievements become all the more magnified because he was able to achieve so much working among so many different interests.

Clark's hopes for even greater successes fueled his desire to maintain an army in the Illinois. It was the most logical staging point for an attack against Detroit, via the Wabash River, while soldiers stationed there also served to deter any major attacks against the French habitants by British or native forces. The hoped-for expedition against Detroit never fully materialized, and the strain of maintaining an army in the Illinois was most prevalent in the relationship between the American soldiers and French habitants. Virginia could not afford to support the soldiers sent to the Illinois, and as Clark exhausted his credit, the French – exasperated with first the American failure to repay bad debts and then with the impressment policy for provisions – began to appeal to outside sources of power for relief. When Clark had arrived in the Illinois, he was at the head of a poorly supplied army and one that had few (if any) prospects for improving the logistical support it would receive. The cost of supplies in the west was high and the quantities were low. Despite initial help from American agents in New Orleans and generous credit from the French and Spanish, the necessity of living off the French inhabitants created much conflict and misunderstanding between the two groups.

The desperate predicament of Clark's occupation force is well documented in the available records. As his men arrived with nothing more than what they could carry on their

backs, they quickly had to find sources of supply while communication was established with Virginia and New Orleans.<sup>302</sup> The situation began to grow more difficult for Clark to manage following the recapture of Vincennes in spring 1779. While Clark wrote to Patrick Henry that the French were cooperating and natives were seeking peace, he reported one “circumstance very distressing.” The French and Spanish “conceived [American money] to be of no value” while they “refused to take a farthing of it. Provision is three times the price it was two months past.” The situation was not yet critical as “Several merchants are now advancing considerable sums of their own property...by which I am sensible they must lose greatly.” Clark recommended that his debts at New Orleans be paid or something else be done by Virginia to improve the value of the currency.<sup>303</sup> When Clark composed this letter, inflation of the American dollar as compared to a Spanish milled dollar was near one-hundred seventy-five percent. One year later inflation had risen to four-thousand percent, making it almost impossible to buy goods with cash, much less get credit.<sup>304</sup>

Within two year’s of Clark’s victory, his lack of supplies led to the collapse of his plans for an effective garrison force in the Illinois Country. The year 1780 was difficult as numerous American posts reported shortages. Colonel John Montgomery at Kaskaskia described the severe privation at his post: “Every thing animate and in animate Groves under amost unseportible Burden of a Severe Winter,” leaving little food for the inhabitants themselves. At Vincennes, Captain Valentine Thomas Dalton wrote that there “was not one pound of Meat in the Store...[and] not one pound of Flour Salt and [etc] was sent here last fall.”<sup>305</sup> Clark’s efforts to

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<sup>302</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 164-64.

<sup>303</sup> GR Clark to George Mason, 19 November 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 173.

<sup>304</sup> Gregory F. Holm, “Supply Issues of the Illinois Regiment Under Clark,” in Carsten, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 150.

<sup>305</sup> John Montgomery to GR Clark, 8 January 1780, V.T. Dalton to GR Clark, 2 March 1780, both in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 422, 423.

procure more meat had proven ineffective, as his “affixing and limiting me [Captain Robert Todd] to a certain price to offer for meat has put it out of my power to procure any.”<sup>306</sup>

Necessities for the day-to-day business of the outpost were also in short supply as orders and provision returns issued from the fort at Vincennes were often written on playing cards.<sup>307</sup>

John Todd, the senior civil authority in the Illinois, attempted to supply Clark’s army by controlling the export market of the region. In a proclamation to the citizens of the Illinois, he announced new stringent rules that affected their trade: “the Demands of the State require that a Stock of Provision be immediately laid for the use of the Troops of the Common-Wealth [Virginia] and that an Embargo be laid upon such Provision for a limited time.” Exceptions to the export proclamation were allowed, but only with approval from the government and the existence of enough supplies in the territory already, which was an unlikely scenario.<sup>308</sup> Despite enacting severe economic controls, both George Rogers Clark and John Todd continued to fight for the allegiance of increasingly resentful French inhabitants. Clark was sympathetic to the plight of the French and explained the dire situation to Thomas Jefferson, requesting that Virginia provision the troops and alleviate the pressure on local colonists.

The Illinois under its present Circumstances is by no means able to Supply the Troops that you Expect in this department with provitions as the Crops at [Vincennes]...so exceedingly bad that upwards of Five Hundred Souls will have to depend on their neighbours for Bread[.] I should be exceedingly glad that you would Commission Some person to furnish the troops in this Quarter with provitions.<sup>309</sup>

Todd also wrote to Jefferson that he received

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<sup>306</sup> Robert Todd to GR Clark, 16 October 1779, in *Ibid.*, 404.

<sup>307</sup> Supply Inventories on the 2 of Spades and 6 of Clubs, 1779, in George Rogers Clark papers on Miscellaneous Reels, The Library of Virginia.

<sup>308</sup> “John Todd’s Record-Book, and Proclamation,” in Mason, *Early Chicago and Illinois*, 306.

<sup>309</sup> GR Clark to Thomas Jefferson, 23 September 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 365.

complaints from the Illinois. [and] that department suffers I fear...they [the French inhabitants and traders and the American soldiers] all vent complaints against each other—I believe our French friends have the justest grounds of dissatisfaction.<sup>310</sup>

Tensions continued to rise, and the French became more vocal in their protests against the Americans. The merchant class was the first to take action, with Gabriel Cerré and Charles Gratiot seeking refuge in St. Louis after the confiscation of their trading goods.<sup>311</sup> Cerré felt he had been particularly wronged as he had been “employed...to buy different supplies for the States,” doing so with “all the zeal possible,” and he had “spared neither pains nor...purse.” He had first politely requested that merchandise equal to the value of his contributions to the Americans be given him because the “discredit” of American letters of exchange prevented him from settling his personal debts, and with no relief in sight fled to St. Louis.<sup>312</sup> Acts of impressment eventually became common as the citizens of Kaskaskia complained that the soldiers would seize animals from the common fields “without paying any attention either to the mark or to him to whom they might belong...and killed them, without giving notice of this to any one.” The arbitrary acts of American soldiers became so common that eventually the citizens of Kaskaskia were compelled to plea for a “glimpse of that liberty which has been so many times promised to us.” They felt the soldiers were committing “brigandage and tyranny” on a “day to day” basis.<sup>313</sup> Whether it was merchants or farmers, self-interest and in some cases starvation served as reasons for resisting impressments of supplies for the greater good of a cause. These patterns of resistance to military supply were common to the American colonists and were evident in the French and Indian War and as well as throughout the conflict with Britain. Things

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<sup>310</sup> John Todd to Thomas Jefferson, 15 April 1781, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 475.

<sup>311</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 176.

<sup>312</sup> , Gabriel Cerre to GR Clark, 12 July 1779, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 102.

<sup>313</sup> Magistrates to John Todd, 21 May 1779, “, Protest of Inhabitants to Magistrates,” 8 December 1779, in *Ibid.*, 88-89, 137.

were even worse in the West because there was no established local government. No justices of the peace or magistrates existed to ease civil and military relations since the military essentially ran the Illinois Country, leaving many of the French residences complaining about abuses to no avail. No matter what theater of operation, there were not enough supplies to go around, especially after 1780 and the result was that the cost of provisioning an army was usually extracted from the civilian population.<sup>314</sup>

Predictably enough, this fostered a deep resentment among the inhabitants of the Illinois. In Cahokia, the French soldiers had deserted the garrison, and the “Inhabitants [were] So Saucey they threaten[ed] to drive...[the] soldiers away.”<sup>315</sup> Other reports also blamed the occupying army for making life difficult in the region. The Americans had “in short...become the Hated Beasts of a whole people by [Im]Pressing horses, Boats...killing cattle, and...for which no valuable consideration is given.”<sup>316</sup> Not all officers were so sympathetic with the needs of the French. John Montgomery, commander at Kaskaskia and highest ranking military officer in the territory when Clark later removed to Kentucky, told one of his deputies who struggled to acquire provisions, to “Allso remind [the French] of the Bad Consequence of Selling their provisions Elsewhre, as it may be a means of Their Familly’s Suffering.”<sup>317</sup> Tension and anger existed on both sides, but the Americans still managed to do more to alienate their newly acquired French citizens.

Amidst the strain in Franco-American relations, the Americans failed to protect the French inhabitants from the natives who surrounded the Illinois Country, nor, if the British could organize another counterattack, was it likely that the Americans could muster much resistance in

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<sup>314</sup> E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1776-1783*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, , 1984), 77-80.

<sup>315</sup> John Williams to GR Clark, 25 September 1779, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 123.

<sup>316</sup> Richard McCarty to John Todd, 14 October 1780, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 463.

<sup>317</sup> John Montgomery to Richard Winston, 5 March 1780, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 150.

that scenario either. The French certainly felt vulnerable as the Americans became weaker, describing themselves as “surrounded by Indians some of whom are our enemies by the changes of war.” The gifts the natives received from the British were widely recognized as a “fatal obstacle” to the safety of the French.<sup>318</sup>

Clark himself was worried about defending the Illinois, as he recognized in March, 1780, that the British were “Regaining the Interest of many Tribes of Indians, and their designs [is] agst the Illinois.” Making matters worse, Clark did not think his forces amounted to more than one-hundred fifty men, which he considered “too few under our present circumstances to think of Deffending the different post we now occupy.” Instead of trying to defend the Illinois, he proposed that the Americans should endeavor to become “Tolerably formidable at any one post that we could subsist at,” and he felt that “Amediatley Evacuating our present posts,” to the Mouth of the Ohio would be the most strategically advantageous.<sup>319</sup> Clark’s plan was based on the complaints of his officers who also advocated consolidating forces at one defensive post . James Shelby was ready to leave the Illinois in October 1779, reporting, “We are in an Exceeding Bad Condition at Present and am afeard that Nesessity will oblig avacuation of this Post [Vincennes].”<sup>320</sup> The natives, especially the nations to the northwest of the Illinois were active against the Americans and the French, as the Potawatomi “brought to the Sauk and Fox<sup>321</sup> ...and two Bostonian scalps.”<sup>322</sup> The situation was difficult for both sides to manage: the French required the defense the soldiers provided, yet they did not have the resources to

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<sup>318</sup> “ Inhabitants of Kaskaskia to Luzerne,” no date, in *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>319</sup> GR Clark to John Todd, March 1780, in Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 429.

<sup>320</sup> James Shelby to GR Clark, 10 October 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 370.

<sup>321</sup> Collars: “A shoulder-belt fitted with little loops, in which cartridges were suspended.” In the Oxford English Dictionary , 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1989,

[http://dictionary.oed.com.er.lib.ksu.edu/cgi/entry/50043870?query\\_type=word&queryword=collar&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&result\\_place=1&search\\_id=VKe3-r3rs1Y-7149&hilite=50043870](http://dictionary.oed.com.er.lib.ksu.edu/cgi/entry/50043870?query_type=word&queryword=collar&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=1&search_id=VKe3-r3rs1Y-7149&hilite=50043870).

<sup>322</sup> Pierre Prevost to GR Clark, 20 February 1780, in James, *Clark Papers*, 394.

provision them. The Americans meanwhile wanted to maintain the advantages they had gained by occupying the Illinois, but without more provisions, their only real option was to draw down the number troops deployed to the various posts in the West.

The French found themselves in a desperate situation, not eager to return to British power, but completely disenchanted with the American occupation. In their search for help, they turned to a Frenchmen to redress their many grievances. Their hero arrived in the form of Augustin Mottin de la Balme, a French cavalry officer, who ventured west after having been denied command of the American cavalry under George Washington. De la Balme listened to their complaints and promised to deliver them to the French minister to America.

From the bottom of their hearts and with the frankness which characterizes all good Frenchmen, the Inhabitants of the Post Vincennes, formerly faithful subjects of the King of France, dare to avow to your Excellency, that they are ready to join the troops of this monarch their former and most worthy lord to act sincerely against his enemies whoever they may be.

The French went on to list their common complaints, especially the American's confiscation of provisions and supplies, their worthless currency, and lack of a properly functioning civil government. They explained that it was "not on the assistance of the United States troops that we count to break the yoke which oppresses us," but rather on those of France or even Spain. Things were made even more difficult because the Indian "aversion towards [the Americans] seems unbreakable," while American settlers were becoming a problem "where English blood is already too abundant."<sup>323</sup> While France and America worked together, de la Balme saw that he could use the patriotic Frenchmen of the Illinois for his own ends, despite any consequences to the Franco-American alliance, and in fact the call of Frenchmen to arms against

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<sup>323</sup> "Memorial of the Inhabitants of Vincennes to the French Minister, Luzerne," 22 August 1780, in *Ibid.*, 438-50.

the British was an effort to keep French citizens as clients of France. No evidence shows that de la Balme was planned a Spanish alliance, so although it is not entirely clear, it seems that de la Balme wanted to bring the Illinois back into the French orbit in some fashion.

De la Balme had arrived in June, 1780, and was warmly received by the French in the Illinois. De la Balme was interested in self-promotion and his own glory, having refused to serve in the Continental Army once he learned they would not place him at the head of the cavalry.. While it is easy in hindsight to assume he was primarily selfish in his motives, one can conjecture that he felt some sort of sympathy for the “nation-less” French being abused in the Illinois. After promising to help them and drafting a memorial addressing their complaints, to be delivered to the French minister to America, he began recruiting soldiers for an attack on Detroit that would liberate the French there from British rule. He recruited about eighty French and native volunteers and set out for Detroit from Vincennes. He first stopped at the trading post at present day Fort Wayne, Indiana, which he captured and plundered. De la Balme waited for reinforcements, as he expected about fifty men from Cahokia. The Chahokians never arrived, however, and de la Balme and his men were attacked by a group of Miamis and were massacred. The Miamis, acting consistently with their political history, had sat out most of the war waiting to see who was more powerful and by this point decided that British supplies from Detroit combined with the pressure from Americans at Vincennes was reason enough to join the British. All but three men were killed or taken captive.<sup>324</sup>

De le Balme revealed the resentment towards the Americans and the French willingness to support their former country but in the end he did little to alleviate the problems the French inhabitants faced, and even exacerbated the problem in Illinois. The fact that the habitants never

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<sup>324</sup> Anson, *The Miami Indians*, 66-68, 81, 92-94; James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 214-215.



assimilated into the British Empire, unlike those in the St. Lawrence Valley, and as recently as 1768 rose up against Spanish rule, showed their attachment to France even before they appealed for help to the King of France.<sup>325</sup> While the habitants' desire to be a part of France were constant, French policy also did not rule out the idea of reclaiming Louisiana, but it was the necessity of an alliance with Spain that kept the French government from taking action.<sup>326</sup> After the defeat, a French merchant wrote that this "affair has thrown us into a good deal of consternation, for there is a great scarcity of provisions and ammunition."<sup>327</sup> The defeat of de la Balme made many of the French even more dependent on what few supplies the Americans had. Although the Lieutenant Governor of St. Louis rebuffed them when they appealed to him for aid, the people of Vincennes had been bold enough and desperate enough to appeal to Spain for assistance. As good French subjects, and allies of the court of Spain "they feared the nations on the Miami River, whom they informed the Spanish, have "not ceased during the whole of last summer to give us trouble and raise scalps in our villages." Their request for "whatever aid you may desire" was rejected based on the inhabitants' status as American citizens.<sup>328</sup>

One American felt that the appearance of de la Balme actually did "some good, [as] he Pacified the Indians, [and] he was received by the Inhabitants as the Hebrews would receive the Messiah." Although the Americans saw him as a "Mal Content much disgusted with the Virginian," they were impressed that he could raise morale when the sour relationship between the French and Americans made that virtually impossible for an American commander to

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<sup>325</sup> Elijah Wilson Wood, *Louisiana in French Diplomacy*, (Norman: Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 47-48.

<sup>326</sup> McDermott, *The French in the Mississippi Valley*, 152-153, 157; Wood, *Louisiana in French Diplomacy*, 15-19, 43-46, 60.

<sup>327</sup> J. M. P. Le Gras to GR Clark, 1 December 1780, in James, *Clark Papers*, 469-70.

<sup>328</sup> "People of Vincennes to Cruzat," 1780, "Cruzat to the People of Vincennes," 15 December 1780, both in Kinnaird, SPM, 406-7.

achieve.<sup>329</sup> As the situation between the French and the Americans steadily worsened, military cooperation became impossible, Clark also had to contend with intensification of Indian raids against the Illinois posts and Kentucky. The frontier militias also hesitated to give up their focus on counter-attacking Indian villages.

George Rogers Clark succeeded in winning over the support of many of the Illinois Country peoples after his ouster of the British force. Clark, having for the time stopped the raiding into Kentucky, won over some villages because of his military presence and won over still other peoples because of the influences of the French and Spanish traders in the area. Clark temporarily offered a better alliance with America because of his military presence in the Illinois Country, and his ability to use the support of the nearby French and Spanish traders to his advantage. The Native Americans soon learned that their long-term interests did not coincide with those of Clark and looked back to the British for more and better support than the Americans could offer.

The American forces, poorly financed and poorly supplied, had a difficult time maintaining themselves, not to mention trying to provide for their new Native American allies. Since a large American occupation of the Illinois Country could not sustain itself, Groups like the Miamis no longer saw it in their best interest to stand beside American military forces and in fact began to take offensive actions in response to the Americans. Continued aggression from American settlers and a lack of supplies and money for Clark's expedition pushed many Indian groups back to the British side for the remainder of the conflict. Repeatedly, one time native allies or neutrals turned against the Americans, when the Americans could not supply warriors all across the Old Northwest. As Clark found himself unable to even supply and pay his own

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<sup>329</sup> Richard Winston to John Todd, 17 October 1780, in Alvord, *Kaskaskia Records*, 196.

army, he drew heavily on the local French population and from Spanish friends in St. Louis and New Orleans. The French began to refuse to support the Americans, which in turn led to less support among their trading partners. Eventually increased efforts at diplomacy and supply by the British would unleash more warfare against Kentucky, while the Americans began to target native villages in Ohio instead of British posts like Vincennes and Detroit.<sup>330</sup>

Although Clark primarily focused on raising an army to move towards Detroit, he had to deal with significant supply problems for his garrison of about one-hundred twenty men remaining in and around the French settlements. Clark needed supplies for his men and his Indian agents. Geoffrey Linctot, one of Clark's men in the Illinois, wrote in June 1779 of his recent "embarrassment," as he had not been given the promised supplies of "food and other articles which would be required in the service of the state." Linctot reported that the Natives currently appeared peaceable but that they were being encouraged "to fall upon us...that as soon as we become masters of the country we will poison them all."<sup>331</sup> Another of Clark's officers, John Todd, wrote to the Governor of Virginia reporting that he was "uneasy in knowing that the...quantity as well as the bad condition of the goods" available for trading and gifting. He also reported that Continental money had been pulled from circulation, as it had been rendered near valueless by inflation, making it impossible for Clark's men to buy anything from the French or Spanish.<sup>332</sup>

The Americans in command in the Illinois sensed the delicate situation that they found themselves in, and they issued repeated requests for aid similar to John Todd's request for more money and goods to trade with the Indians, "who I suppose will expect their Cloathing from

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<sup>330</sup> Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio*, 245-247.

<sup>331</sup> Geoffrey Linctot to GR Clark, 16 June 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 341-342.

<sup>332</sup> "Clark's General Orders," 5 August 1779, in *Ibid.*, 355-356.

[me].”<sup>333</sup> Most of the appeals to Virginia for supplies went unheeded. Just as supplies for Virginia’s own soldiers did not arrive, neither did supplies for native allies. Clark’s men, forced to lean more and more on the local inhabitants, found themselves in no position to consider sharing their supplies with the native peoples that came to Kaskaskia, Cahokia, or Vincennes to trade or council with American leaders.

Slowly but surely the British worked to overcome the loss of Henry Hamilton’s leadership role among the natives, making great inroads by the end of the American Revolution under the leadership of Arent De Peyster, who replaced Hamilton as commander at Detroit. He poured an immense volume of gifts into the area, and kept the Natives from joining with Clark and the Americans, although many nations, like the Miami, were still only nominally under British control.<sup>334</sup>

As the Delawares became disenchanted with the unfulfilled promises of the Americans, they increased their confrontations with American settlers, which led to Clark dispatching an expedition against them in 1779. They continued to fight the Americans until 1785 when they moved into Spanish territory.<sup>335</sup> Likewise, many of the Miamis remained hostile to the Americans and did not settle a peace with them until 1792.<sup>336</sup> The Potawatomi were also in league with the British, though their distant location kept them out of most of the raiding in Kentucky. They maintained their ties to the French, Spanish, and British, and remained hostile and suspicious of the Americans.<sup>337</sup> Other nations like the Shawnees resisted American expansion well into the 1790’s, but some groups like the Illini had few choices but to cooperate

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<sup>333</sup> John Todd to the Governor of Virginia, 18 August 1779, in *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>334</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 400-402.

<sup>335</sup> “Memoir,” in James, *Clark Papers*, 298; Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 183-184.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>337</sup> R. David Edmonds, *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire*, (Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978), 114-115.

or voluntarily move west. The Spanish also continued to increase their influence, as the Sauk and Mesquakie, suspicious of the Americans and rejected by the British, looked almost solely to Spain for support.<sup>338</sup>

The American forces did not come to the Illinois Country properly prepared to occupy it, let alone fully support the numerous native peoples in the area. As the luster quickly wore off Clark's initial conquest, native allies and enemies alike saw that their best interest lay with the British, where they probably always had, and because of the increased nature of violent aggression from the Americans, realignment with the British came quickly. Continued aggression from American settlers and a lack of supplies and money for Clark's expedition pushed the Native Americans back to the British side for the remainder of the war. Across the continent other Indian villages were forced to make the same choices. War appeared inevitable for most.

The Iroquois also faced this situation as their location between settlers and military posts from both sides created an attempt to remain neutral, but they were eventually drawn into the conflict on the British side. Although the Oneidas and Tuscaroras generally favored the Americans, the Iroquois League was racked by civil war, breaking up the long standing alliance of the Iroquois groups. The Revolution has been described as a "total disaster" for destroying the unity of the Iroquois and unleashing widespread destruction and suffering as villages and families fought one another.<sup>339</sup> A lack of control over young warriors and the inability of the American government to control frontier settlers or provide supplies made many of the Iroquois British allies, although their location made the violence and conflict fierce in their territory. The lack of clear leadership in New York after the death of Indian agent William Johnson also left the

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<sup>338</sup> Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country*, 97.

<sup>339</sup> Calloway, *Revolution in Indian Country*, 108.

nations in a divided state for some time. The need for leadership was especially clear when compared to the success Hamilton had in stirring up resentment towards the Americans in the West before he was captured.<sup>340</sup>

In the South some similarities to the Ohio Valley existed as well. The Southern Indian Superintendent, John Stuart, like Hamilton, worked hard to maintain British protection of the natives across the south and to incite them against the colonies. With the exception of the Cherokees, the natives in the South faced less direct pressure from frontier colonists because many, similar to the Wabash nations, were not in direct proximity to the white frontier, and therefore, had few reasons to ally with the Americans who could not provide them with supplies. In addition, Clark's victory over Hamilton served to stop a large-scale native alliance and offensive in 1779.<sup>341</sup> While natives certainly had to take the actions of the Americans, British, French, and Spanish into account, they were by no means bound to support any one power if it seemed disadvantageous at the time.

Following Clark's seizure of the Illinois posts, his thoughts turned immediately toward the capture of Detroit. Clark knew that Detroit was the key to severing the British supply line to the natives of the Ohio Valley. Less than a month after capturing Hamilton, Clark wished for "men enough to take the advantage of ye present confusion of the Indian Nations, I could silence the whole in two months." Upwards of five-hundred men were reported to be on their way to the Illinois, and Clark was confident that he could "do something Clever" with enough men.<sup>342</sup> In November, 1779, after consolidating his position in the Illinois but not receiving enough soldiers to advance on Detroit, Clark held a council of war with his officers to determine their best course

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<sup>340</sup> Barabara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 2-3, 294; Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 87-96, 99.

<sup>341</sup> J.Russell Snapp, *John Stuart and the Struggle for Empire on the Southern Frontier*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 3, 6-7, 186-187, 196, 199-200; Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*, 56-58.

<sup>342</sup> GR Clark to Benjamin Harrison, 10 March 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, 305.

of action concerning Detroit. The officers assembled were recorded as believing that “a few well discipline troops” could seize Detroit itself, but that a fairly large contingent of “not less than one-thousand troops” would nonetheless be necessary because of the “long, tedious and fatiguing march all the way through a hostile country, exposed to frequent interruptions and attacks from the savages...as well as many unforeseen accidents.”

The council also determined that supplying an army this large would be impossible if supplies were drawn only from the Illinois and that the British posts on the Mississippi appeared to be an easier target.<sup>343</sup> To raise and supply a force that Clark’s officers deemed necessary for the capture of Detroit presented a daunting task to these isolated soldiers.

Much of Clark’s correspondence following the capture of the Illinois pertained to plans for attacking Detroit. The records show Clark continually appealing for men and supplies and his superiors in Virginia claiming there were none to send. Clark was steadfast in his plan and showed himself to be knowledgeable when it came to the interests of native peoples. Clark understood that as long as Detroit remained in British hands, the frontier settlers could “Expect depredations from Many Nations of Indians,” yet he was “surprised at [his] superiours suffering those Triffling [British] garisons about Du Troit to exist knowing the Mischief they do by exciting the Indians to war and Runing us to Enormus Expencies.” While the frontiersmen clamored for retaliatory attacks against the native villages in Ohio, Clark noted that “Carrying out armies and destroying their [native’s] Town is little or no use when they Can get four fold for what they loose from the English.” Clark wanted to launch a final blow that would isolate the natives and force them to give up the conflict, just as the taking of the Illinois had temporarily stalled them. Perhaps history also provided a lesson for Clark, for his plan would have had

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<sup>343</sup> “Council of War Called by Clark,” 16 November 1779, in *Ibid.*, 375-77.

similar effects as the British capture of Fort Frontenac during the French and Indian War. The capture of the fort, the key supply post for the western part of France's colonial empire, forced many of the French native allies to seek peace with the British when they became isolated from supplies from the St. Lawrence River.

Clark's plans to attack Detroit, although approved in principle by Governor Thomas Jefferson in Virginia, met with difficulties and resistance throughout the Ohio Valley in 1780. Raids into Kentucky became much worse as the settlements became a "Mere scene of Carnage and Desolation" that "nothing less than a Vigorous expedition against the Shawanee Towns will Put an end to."<sup>344</sup> The threat of attack constantly worried the Kentucky settlers, as the natives were "still in our woods, and we fear will do more mischief before they return...In short there will be no living in this country without Carrying on an Expedition...against them." Clark, with his reputation as an Indian fighter and frontiersmen, was called upon repeatedly to "take the command, and Assist," his leadership leaving "no Doubt of Success."<sup>345</sup>

Although Clark was eventually forced to accept command of the Shawnee Expedition, he refused that appointment until it was clear the French and the Kentucky militias would not join an expedition to Detroit. Up until he reluctantly took on the Shawnee mission, he was adamant in promoting his plans to attack Detroit. While he was "hartily sorry for the great loss of Blood and property by the Kentuckians," he was unwilling to "Trifle with Matters" such as an "Expedition against the Shawonee Towns." Clark saw that "The [expedition against the Shawnees] proposed would be so far from giving us Peace that it would only Agravate the war by destroying an Expedition already planed by his Excellency [Governor of Virginia][.]" Clark was also was

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<sup>344</sup> "Petition from Inhabitants of Boonesborough to Clark," 10 March 1780, in *Ibid.*, 398-99.

<sup>345</sup> "Conditions in Kentucky," 10 March 1780, in *Ibid.*, 396-97. For appeals to Clark to lead the Shawnee Expedition, see also Robert Todd to GR Clark, 16 October 1779, Benjamin Logan to GR Clark, 17 October 1779, and Levi Todd to Clark, 18 October 1779, all in *Ibid.*, 371, 372, 373-374.



frustrated by the unwillingness of the Kentucky militias to aid him in attacking Detroit as success against Detroit would “give them an Amediate and Permanent peace with the Savages.”

Looking at the long term, Clark saw the Shawnee expedition as only a temporary means of relief and blamed the Kentuckians for a lack of foresight, as he noted that if there is not “peace by the Fall it Shall be their own Faults and not governments.”<sup>346</sup>

Kaskaskia’s commander John Montgomery described the French for their contributions or lack thereof as a “People...Destitute of Patriotic Sentiments.” Although they favored the expedition, when called upon to provide supplies it was “out of Their power to do aney thing,” unless prompt payment in peltries (not devalued American currency) could be arranged.<sup>347</sup> In fact, Shawnee knowledge of the attack has been linked to information they gained from the disgruntled French.<sup>348</sup>

Historian James A. James counts the 1780 Shawnee Campaign a great success and considers Clark’s actions that year as possibly his best performance as a leader.<sup>349</sup> Whether or not the Shawnee Campaign was a real success, however, has been challenged by J. Martin West, who maintains that it only gave Kentucky a slight break from the native attacks, but it permanently pushed the Shawnees towards the British and made that troubled people even more bitter towards American expansion than they already were.<sup>350</sup> This view reinforces Clark’s own attitudes concerning properly conducted Indian warfare, but the resistance of the French and shortsightedness of the Kentuckians left him unable to gather the men and supplies he needed to attack Detroit. The victory over the Shawnees, which included burning and plundering

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<sup>346</sup> GR Clark to William Fleming, 4 April 1780, in *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>347</sup> Charles Gratiot to Clark, 6 May 1780; John Montgomery to Clark, 7 May 1780, both in George Rogers Clark Papers, Clark Family Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

<sup>348</sup> James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark*, 213.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 210-13.

<sup>350</sup> J. Martin West, “George Rogers Clark and the Shawnee Expedition of 1780,” in Carstens, *Triumphs and Tragedies*, 17-18.

Chillicothe and Piqua (also known as Pickaway) resulted in the loss of eight-hundred acres of corn and many pounds of material possessions, but in the end Clark was prophetic when he wrote that if the “Kentuckians have not peace by the Fall it Shall be their own Faults.”

The Spanish, always operating to gain the upper hand in the Mississippi Valley, proved a more effective force in the area than the Americans. Although the Spanish post at St. Louis did not have everything it needed, especially trade goods for the natives, Spanish soldiers (mainly consisting of French militia) were well armed and supplied compared to their counterparts in American held territory. On Spain’s entry into the war, they aggressively pursued a plan of expansion in both the upper and lower parts of the valley. With the collapse of American power in the Illinois, relations between the Americans and Spanish grew weaker, and this at a time when the French were more willing to seek help from the Spanish.

The Spanish under Louisiana’s Governor Bernardo Galvez had prepared an offensive for the Mississippi Valley intended to gain control of territory and trade that the British held. This aggressive attitude eventually encompassed attacks ranging from Pensacola in West Florida to St. Joseph in present-day southern Michigan. Spanish ambitions not only worried the British, but Clark and the Americans had to take into account Spain’s plans as well. While Clark worried about English and native efforts to drive the Americans out of all their western territories, he feared that “the Spaniards would fondly suffer their Settlements in the Illinois to fall with ours for the Sake of having the opportunity of retaking Both.” While little evidence exists to suggest that Spanish planners entertained such an idea, they clearly did not entirely trust the Americans simply because they had been British.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> GR Clark to John Todd, March 1780, Seineke, *The George Rogers Clark Adventure*, 429.

The British were worried to the Spanish even more than the Americans. Mostly they feared losing the loyalty of the many western nations because the British seemed to be better able to supply the natives from Detroit. After the defeat of de la Balme, Francisco Cruzat, Lt. Governor of St. Louis, feared that his “inhuman enemies who wish to overpower us will not forget to spur on the Indians with this example of success, promising them greater returns in the future.”<sup>352</sup> The activity of de la Balme left the Spanish somewhat confused because the Continental Congress had not sanctioned him, but nonetheless they feared the expansion of the Americans to the North, which caused them organize their own expedition.<sup>353</sup> Not only were the British gaining influence, but they also aroused fear from the Spanish. Another Spanish officer reported, “While we were under the belief that the English had been falsely charged with the atrocities committed in North America,” after meeting them in combat, native allies included, he was “left with not the least doubt” of Britain’s “barbarous” practices, as that nation has “forgotten how to make war according to the system practiced in Europe.”<sup>354</sup>

The Spanish plan, well laid out in August, 1779, and distributed via confidential orders to the various Spanish governors located in Mexico, Cuba, and Louisiana. The King of Spain ordered that:

The Principal objective of his arms in America during the war with the English is to drive them from the Gulf of Mexico and the banks of the Mississippi, where their settlements are so prejudicial to our commerce, as well as to the security of our richest possessions. Specifically targeted were the British bases at Mobile and Pensacola, and then following their capture, forces were “afterwards to attack and clear the English from the banks of the Mississippi.” The main feature of this plan was to maintain Louisiana as a defensive barrier for

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<sup>352</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Don Bernardo Galvez, 21 November 1780, in *Ibid.*, 467.

<sup>353</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Bernardo Galvez, 12 November 1780, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 395.

<sup>354</sup> Martin Navarro to Joseph de Galvez, 5 February 1781, Francisco Cruzat to Bernardo Galvez, 2 December 1780, both in Houck, *Spanish Regime*, 167, 175.

the rich mines of Mexico and to drive out the British competition in the battle for the limited revenues available in the Louisiana fur trade.<sup>355</sup>

The relationship between the two nations was at its best when Clark and Fernando de Leyba maintained their friendly rapport, but on the death of de Leyba and Clark's removal to the falls of the Ohio, suspicions grew on both sides. Conflict over deserters, both Spanish and American, had arisen early, but de Leyba and Clark peacefully came to terms over the matter. By 1780, Clark confessed that he was not a "Sufficient Statesman to Comprehend the Policy of the Spanish Gentlemen," as they were now protecting American deserters "when both Nations are at Warr against the same Enemy."<sup>356</sup> John Todd even went so far as to encourage the construction of Fort Jefferson at the mouth of the Ohio River to

serve as a Check to any Incroachments from our present Allies the Spaniards whose growing power might justly put us upon our guard and whose fondness for engrossing Territory might other wise urge them higher up the River upon our side than we would wish.<sup>357</sup>

The Americans also begrudged the Spanish success in attracting new settlers to their side of the river. While neither Virginia nor the Continental Congress could provide any type of assistance to newly arriving settlers, the Spanish had instituted a policy of providing land and farming implements before the war had started to attract immigrants. Despite the stricter laws and Roman Catholic religion in Spanish Louisiana, many appeared willing to take on the "Spanish Yoke" because of the poverty on the American side.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Joseph Galvez to Martin Navarro, 29 August 1779, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 355.

<sup>356</sup> GR Clark to Oliver Pollock, 11 May 1780, in James, *Clark Papers*, 418-419.

<sup>357</sup> John Todd to Thomas Jefferson, 2 June 1780, in *Ibid.*, 422.

<sup>358</sup> John Dodge to Thomas Jefferson, 1 August 1780, in *Ibid.*, 437.

American attempts to tighten their control over the French and natives who no longer respected their dwindling power also kindled conflict with Spain. In November, 1780, at the same time that the people of Vincennes wrote to Spain for support, the Wabash nations, including the Miamis and Kickapoos, sent belts along with the French delegate, only to have them confiscated by John Dodge, the American commander at Kaskaskia. Dodge, while forwarding the letter from the inhabitants of Vincennes to St. Louis, withheld the messages from the Wabash because he feared the French attempt to “evade the government of America.”<sup>359</sup>

This directly led to resentment among the Spanish and the feeling that the Americans did not acting as proper allies. They reported that the Americans seemed “in their manner of treating the Indians and in their coldness toward us, more neutral in the cause which ought to be a common one for the allies.”<sup>360</sup> By the end of 1780, the Spanish viewed the Americans as “Not very just and, on the contrary, somewhat suspicious,” based especially on their withholding of the Wabash messages. Although much of the blame for negative influences is accredited to British merchants like Thomas Bentley, the one time respect between de Leyba and Clark no longer existed.

The conduct of the Americans with the settlements of their district, which they have abandoned without relief or hope of having it, after having impoverished it, keeps them [the inhabitants] all in conflict...[and] the height of the calamity and misery which all Ylinneses [Illinois] is at present as well as the unhappy habitants of Post Vincene, whom the Americans, after having ruined them refused to protect and defend, without other reasons than those which one desires to assert without any foundation.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> John Dodge to Francisco Cruzat, 11 November 1780, “Examination of Lefevre,” 14 December 1780, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 392,-393, 403-04.

<sup>360</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Bernardo Galvez, 18 December 1780, in *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>361</sup> Francisco Cruzat to Don Bernardo de Galvez, 22 September 1780, in Houck, *Spanish Regime*, 180.

The respect, cooperation, and understanding that had been prominent in the early phases of the American-Spanish relationship were foreign to the later relationships between the two nations.

Spanish forces achieved success against British outposts in Florida and along the Upper Mississippi in the closing years of the war. They reclaimed West Florida under the leadership of Governor Galvez by taking Pensacola and Mobile, and as what amounted to a retaliatory strike for a British attack on St. Louis, they captured the British post at St. Joseph. The British had attempted to attack both St. Louis and Cahokia in 1780, with an army made up mostly of native allies from the north and the lake region, but were driven back. Immediately following the attack a number of Cahokians joined their fellow French from St. Louis during the Rock River Campaign, harassing British traders, and in 1781 around thirty men from Cahokia joined an officially sanctioned Spanish attack which captured St. Joseph. The men from Cahokia had been primarily motivated to join the Spanish because they sought revenge for the death of many of their citizens in the failure of de la Balme's expedition.<sup>362</sup> Because the Spanish routed the British on nearly every front, the weakness of the Americans proportionately increased Spain's influence and power among the natives and French.

The successful removal of British power from the Illinois Country, while one of Clark's main objectives, ironically proved to be one of the key factors in the collapse of American power in the region as well. Without support from Virginia, Clark had exhausted his credit, leaving the French and Spanish unable to support the American force, and, in fact, resentful at the continued demands of the Americans. The withdrawal of most of the American soldiers from the Illinois highlighted that they could not provide protection as promised. While Clark continued to focus

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<sup>362</sup> Nasatir, "The Anglo-Spanish Frontier in the Illinois Country," 322, 330, 348-50. For Spanish report on sacking St. Joseph, see Francisco Cruzat to Esteban Miro, 6 August 1781, in Kinnaird, *SPM*, 431-34.

on his main objective, Detroit, he could not gather the support he needed in Virginia or along the frontier and had to spend the rest of the war protecting a long border from native raids and launching ineffective counter-strokes against native villages. The weakness of the Americans also led Spain to operate independently and to increase Spanish prestige in the region since they had no reason to fear any type of retribution from the scattered frontier forces.

Without a greater cause to unify the different cultural groups in the region, Clark could not forge together a coalition of diverse interests into one common goal. The lack of unity meant that any large operation, such as an attack against Detroit, was impossible. Clark's failure after the capture of Hamilton was not due to his shortcomings or to a changing situation. In fact, the frontier had always existed in a fragmented fashion, and village politics, whether native, Spanish, or French, had long dominated the political and military options available to leaders in the middle ground. Clark's ability to unite these interests in the first place demonstrates a remarkable achievement in itself, and his ability to mask his weaknesses, to force cooperation from strongly independent and often more powerful groups remains truly a testament to his ability.

West of the mountains, in the Mississippi Valley, where settlers violently wrested control of the land away from its native inhabitants, and where Clark's adventures have gone into historical lore, men seem to have always dreamed big. From the first frontiers and those that continued their westward move over the next century, men of ambition, opportunity, and grandiose dreams have always been attracted to them. Clark's talents and accomplishments were great. There is no denying his uniqueness in history for maintaining a rare moment of

cooperation with a few soldiers and supplies in one of the most diverse environments ever created in North America.

Unfortunately, for Clark, he peaked at an early age and ended up destitute, dependant on his family for support because of his inability to pay off the Revolutionary War debts that were necessary for his success but that Virginia refused to pay. In this sad state, the clearest vision of Clark the opportunist is presented. Men like James Wilkinson and Aaron Burr were involved in western schemes and intrigues aimed at creating a new empire in the North American interior, and Clark was no different, driven by his unending desire for greater and greater accomplishments. In the end, he opportunistically accepted a commission in the armies of revolutionary France with dreams of redemption and empire. Clark was still willing to take risks, just as he had in his early attempts at land speculation and then in his military campaigns, but never could put it all together again.

For most historians Clark represents just a tiny footnote in the Revolutionary War, but a close look at Clark reveals a man driven by opportunity that united diverse interests, even in places where that had never before been accomplished as he did in the Illinois Country. At the end of the day there may have been no real chance for Clark to seize and hold Detroit. Maybe the capture of Detroit would not have ended native warfare as he hoped, but that is all speculation. Clark may not have been realistic in his hope to attack Detroit, but at the very least, no matter how temporary his presence was in the fluid history of the region, he did keep the Spanish out of the Illinois leaving the young United States with a real claim to the Old Northwest. Despite the fact that the French and Indians that lived in that region did not want to be a part of the United States, Clark was the first wave in the American assault that eventually overwhelmed the region and established an American identity where none existed before.



Clark was unique and his ability to work with diverse groups of people and unite them for his own goals has seldom been accomplished in American history. Clark, like many great men, had his flaws, including his opportunistic drive that both produced both his great successes and his ultimate failures. History has relegated Clark to footnotes and brief mentions because the things that he did well were not the parts of history that Americans were interested in for a long time. While Clark did not embrace diversity, he certainly worked with it and that story, the truly great part of Clark's story, did not fit into the narrative of American history. The emphasis on Clark's military victories over the British and his massacre of Indian captives at Vincennes really were small affairs in a military sense, but those are the actions that fit the driving narrative in American history. Clark should not be remembered for a small military victory and a failed attempt to Americanize the Illinois Country. He should be remembered for his ability to build coalitions and work in an environment filled with diversity without overwhelming force because that diversity and willingness to work without force became rarer in the United States following the Revolutionary War, and Clark was one of the last examples of it.

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