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Spanish Observers and the American Revolution, 1775-1783. By Light Townsend Cummins. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. xv + 229 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth).

In 1763 Spain found itself in possession of Louisiana, a vaguely delimited area west of the Mississippi. It also found itself cheek by jowl with its traditional rival, Great Britain. The disconcerting losses suffered by Spain during the Seven Years' War and the new threat to her northern colonies posed by a common frontier with British America fueled Spain's desire to weaken her adversary. The growing unrest in Britain's North American colonies prompted Spanish leaders to make plans to exploit it. Clearly Spain needed policies to deal with revolt and possible warfare. But before they could respond to the events unfolding in North America, Spanish planners needed current and accurate information. To gather it, the Spanish court instructed the captain general of Cuba to create a network of intelligence agents.

Spain had to proceed cautiously, however, because circumstances in the 1770s dictated that she remain officially neutral. Furthermore, there were ideological considerations that cooled any impetus toward an active involvement with the rebels; Carlos III did not want to contribute to undermining monarchical authority. Therefore, the information-gathering process necessarily had to be unofficial and discreet. The corps of observers developed by the captain general had no formal status with the Spanish government, but were recruited over time from his contacts with merchants, sea captains, and even included a clergyman. Their task was to provide the crown with strategic intelligence from a broad selection of sources. They were to provide the political, economic, cultural, and military information needed to enable the court to formulate national policy.

It is on this diverse group that the author has focused. After examining the political and diplomatic conditions that led to the creation of the observers in Louisiana, Florida, and Philadelphia, he shifts to the leading individuals involved. There seems little doubt that the observer who had the most influence with both the Continental Congress and the captain general of Cuba was Juan de Miralles. The first permanent, albeit unofficial, Spanish observer in Philadelphia from 1778, Miralles was able successfully to open *sub-rosa* relations between Spain and the Continental Congress. After his sudden death in April 1780, Miralles was ably replaced by his assistant, Francisco Rendón, who remained in Philadelphia as an observer *cum* diplomat until 1786. The activities of the two men, says the author, constituted the beginning of diplomatic and commercial relations between the United States and Spain.

With this finely researched work, Light Townsend Cummins' has filled a niche in the historiographies of the colonial era and the American

Revolution that has been vacant too long. The role Spain played in the American Revolution, as well as its impact on the affairs of the Atlantic nations in the late eighteenth century, have generally received short shrift from American historians during the past few decades. Professor Cummins' welcome contribution will help to reawaken interest in Spain's place in American history. His careful organization and clear exposition in a narrative style make *Spanish Observers* a very readable work that should appeal to both the specialist and the general reader.

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The Aztecs. By Richard F. Townsend. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992. 224 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.)

The Aztecs is an analysis of the Mexica, the last people who populated the Valley of Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards under Hernán Cortés. Townsend's description of these people is detailed, though lacking in depth. He begins by giving a generalized account of the Aztecs—inheritors of centuries of beliefs, practices, and institutions from other civilizations that existed in the Valley of Mexico before their arrival from a mythical homeland called "Aztlán"—and the birth and expansion of their empire under the last five emperors. The religion, way of life, socio-political environment, and material culture of the Aztecs are well observed from Townsend's anthropological perspective.

The author has used such sources as Sahagún, Díaz del Castillo, and Cortés's letters to King Felipe V for his study, plus other accounts of this magnificent civilization. Material objects of the culture which were sent back to Spain, as well as other documents or codices detailing this way of life still in existence today, supplement his research basis.

The book begins with the coming of the Spaniards and their sense of wonderment when viewing Tenochtitlan, a city unequaled by any in Europe. The author describes the usual architecture, the open markets with their variety of foodstuffs and objects of artistic value, and people speaking different languages and dressed in strange ways. This capital had a zoological park, aqueducts, and causeways with raised bridges that allowed the canoes of merchants and others to go from one section of the city to the other. There the Spaniards were horrified to observe what they thought to be a barbaric practice: the offering of human sacrifices to the myriad of Aztec gods.

In this part of the book, the author delves into the beliefs of the