

# Colonial Latin American Historical Review

---

Volume 2 | Issue 4

Article 11

---

9-1-1993

## Gilbert C. Din, Francisco Bouligny: A Bourbon Soldier in Spanish Louisiana

Thomas E. Chávez

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Chávez, Thomas E.. "Gilbert C. Din, Francisco Bouligny: A Bourbon Soldier in Spanish Louisiana." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 2, 4 (1993): 477. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol2/iss4/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

heart." The language of the courtly class of Europe in that age was so redolent with romantic prose and forms of address, that other evidence is needed to conclude that such intimacy—or deception, if you prefer—was involved.

Both the editors and the press which brought out this study deserve nothing but praise for the quality of their efforts. But it is questionable if the subject of their efforts—Gelvira's letters—bear the substance or importance to merit such first-class treatment.

John E. Kicza

*Department of History*  
*Washington State University*

*Francisco Bouligny: A Bourbon Soldier in Spanish Louisiana.* By Gilbert C. Din. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993. xv + 265 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.)

The late eighteenth-century history of Louisiana and New Orleans is, at best, confusing. From the French and Indian War through the War of United States Independence until Napoleon arranged for the sale of Louisiana, the area was governed by France, Spain, a combination of the two countries, and finally, the United States. In addition, England always lurked as a real and feigned threat to invade the area. Making sense of those forty some years takes a meticulous researcher as well as a minor visionary.

The author of this book has crafted an important history through the example of the life of Francisco Bouligny, whose ancestors originated in Italy although his parents were from the Marseilles area of France. His parents later moved to Alicante, Spain, where he was born around 1737. In 1769, he sailed to New Orleans with General Alejandro O'Reilly. While living in Louisiana he served in many prominent capacities as a career army officer. The stories of his many petitions for promotion, governmental approval for business ventures, as well as familial relationships and politics, mix to create an insider's view of late eighteenth-century Louisiana.

Interesting themes come into focus throughout the book. Not the least of these is a not-too-flattering view of Bernardo de Gálvez, a man who, historiographically until now, had an unsullied reputation. For unclear reasons, Gálvez, whose policies as governor of Louisiana were based on Bouligny's *Memoria* to Bernardo's uncle José de Gálvez, disliked Bouligny. Outside of speculation over Gálvez's intolerance for his subordinate, his obvious unfavorable attitude is not really explained.

Even more interesting are the many personal and cultural ties that the French, now Spanish subjects, kept with one another. This French interrela-

tionship is evident but difficult to grasp. Most of the business ventures and marriages spoke to the connection of French surnamed people maintaining connections. For example, Bouligny's father left Alicante to return to Marseilles where he married Marie Paret. Bouligny, himself, married Marie Louise Le Sénéchal d'Auerville in New Orleans. In addition, the way in which the French connection interchanged with the actual process and functioning of the Spanish colonial government and military is especially well done.

The book concludes with a fascinating chapter tracing Bouligny's descendants and relatives through the succeeding years. Some moved to France, although most stayed in Louisiana after thinking about moving to Havana. Havana was the business center of the Spanish West Indies and remained so after Louisiana became a United States possession. Domingo, who changed his name to the French Dominique, served in the state legislature and briefly as a U.S. senator. Not surprisingly, Bouligny's three surviving sons and a daughter were forced to chose between different loyalties. While their service records in the Spanish military bespoke of their Spanish ties, marriage and business connections leads the reader to wonder.

This is an impeccably researched book by an expert on the subject. Although sometimes pedantic in its writing style, the volume is full of information. The publishers deserve credit for a handsome edition.

Students of borderlands history would be remiss to let this book about a relatively obscure but crucial individual go unread. As the author stated, "Bouligny's life and career spanned most of the Spanish era in Louisiana" from the administration of O'Reilly to the year that Napoleonic Spain decided to "retrocede Louisiana to France." His *Memoria* of 1776 had a major effect on the course of history in the area and left a larger imprint than that of most governors.

One picayune problem is the omission of Alejandro O'Reilly from the index. Nevertheless, the book raises questions and allows the reader to speculate on the basis of solid information.

Thomas E. Chávez  
*Palace of the Governors Museum*  
*Santa Fe, New Mexico*