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Nathaniel Millett



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Britain's 1814 Occupation of Pensacola and America's Response: An Episode of the War of 1812 in the Southeastern Borderlands

By Nathaniel Millett

With the appointment of Alexander Cochrane to Commander of the North American Squadron in the summer of 1814, Britain began to formalize a strategy that called for a systematic series of campaigns against the Chesapeake, New England, South Carolina, Georgia, and New Orleans with the ultimate aim of bringing the United States to its knees while protecting Canada.¹ The bulk of the attack on New Orleans was to be carried out in a straight-forward assault by the

Nathaniel Millett is a visiting assistant professor at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in New York. His dissertation, "Slave Resistance During the Age of Revolution: The Maroon Community at Prospect Bluff, Spanish Florida" was completed in 2002 at Cambridge University.

1. Among the newest accounts of the Battle of New Orleans and the events and strategies leading up to it are Robert Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America's First Military* (New York, 1999) and C. J. Barlett and Gene Smith, "'Species of Milito-Nautico-Guerilla-Plundering Warfare': Admiral Cochrane's Naval Campaign Against the United States, 1814-1815," in Julie Flavell and Stephen Conway, eds., *Britain and America Go to War: The Impact of War and Warfare in Anglo-America, 1754-1815* (Gainesville, Fla., 2004), 173-204. Older, but still useful, is Robin Reilly, *The British at the Gates: The New Orleans Campaign in the War of 1812* (London, 1974) and Frank Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderland: The Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans* (Gainesville, Fla., 1981). Studies that address the broader war tend to focus on political and military aspects. Some of the better treatments include Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (New York, 1969); John Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville, Fla., 1972); J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830* (Princeton, N.J., 1983); and Donald Hickey, *The War of 1812* (Chicago, 1989).

Royal Navy, but forces were to come from a number of directions. In the build-up to the attack, it was envisioned that some of these armies would launch raids across the Deep South at strategically important locations designed to distract American forces. Over the course of 1814 and into 1815, Colonel Edward Nicolls of the Royal Marines, and George Woodbine, a white trader from Jamaica, were put in charge of raising one of these forces from the slave and Indian populations of the Southeastern borderlands. Nicolls and Woodbine erected a fort on the Apalachicola River in West Florida and between August and November of 1814, occupied the capital of Spanish West Florida, Pensacola.² This study examines Nicolls's and Woodbine's efforts to raise a multi-racial army from their Pensacola base and considers the extent to which the Southeast's unique conditions shaped their efforts as well as America's response.³

While Britain's dealings with the Indians of North America had contributed to the outbreak of the War of 1812, their deci-

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2. The exploits of Nicolls and Woodbine have been discussed in Mark Boyd, "Events at Prospect Bluff," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1937): 3-115; William Coker and Thomas Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Panton, Leslie and Company and John Forbes and Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola, Fla., 1986); James Covington, "The Negro Fort," *Gulf Coast Historical Review* 5 ((1990): 78-91; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, Il., 1999); John Mahon, "British Strategy and the Southern Indians," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 44 (April 1966): 285-305; Frank Owsley, "British and Indian Activities in Spanish West Florida During the War of 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46 (October 1967): 111-123; Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the Frontier* (London, 1971); Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge, U.K., 1999); and John Sugden, "The Southern Indians in the War of 1812: The closing Phase," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 60 (January 1982): 273-312.
 3. Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *The American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 814-841 provides a theoretical framework for studying the Borderlands as well as a review of the relevant literature. David Gaspar and David Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, In., 1997); Eugene Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, La., 1979); and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (New York, 1975) combine to provide an excellent picture of the intellectual and physical challenges faced by slavery during the Age of Revolution. The most common way that race and the War of 1812 have been addressed is in the studies on Native Americans during the period: Kathryn Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815* (Lincoln, Nb., 1993); Gregory Evan Dowd, *A Spirited*

sion to utilize American slaves in the war effort had evolved over the course of 1813 and 1814.⁴ In many ways, much of the decision to target American slaves had been left up to military leaders in the field, and the chief architect of the policy was Alexander Cochrane who, as the former Governor of the Leeward Islands and a slave owner himself, had a keen sense of the tensions that defined slave societies. Furthermore, Cochrane had a great deal of respect for the fighting abilities of former slaves, gained when he successfully organized Caribbean slaves against the French a few years earlier. In short, Cochrane was very much aware of the numerous advantages potentially offered by the recruitment of slaves. However, much of the initial impetus for the use of American slaves came from the slaves themselves as they flocked to the British standard across the South. As early as 1813, Captain Robert Barrie of the Royal Navy noted that Chesapeake "slaves continue to come off by every opportunity amongst the slaves are several very intelligent fellows who are

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- Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992); Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*; Saunt, *A New Order of Things*; Richard White, *The Middleground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991); and J. Leitch Wright, *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscogulge People* (Lincoln, Nb., 1986). Frank Owsley and Gene Smith, *Filibusters and Expansionists: Jeffersonian Manifest Destiny, 1800-1821* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1977); Rembert Patrick, *Florida Fiasco* (Athens, Ga., 1954); and James Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Florida* (Gainesville, Fla., 2003) discuss various American attempts, especially in the form of the Patriot War, to acquire Spanish Florida. Over the course of the Early Republic, various Americans obsessively attempted to acquire parts or all of Florida through violence, coercion, trickery or manipulation with little regard for law or other formalities. Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 2003); Francis Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army in the Frontier, 1783-1846* (London, 1969); and Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Volume I The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (Baltimore, 1977) all consider Andrew Jackson's attitudes and actions towards Spanish Florida during this period.
4. Frank Cassell, "Slaves in the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812," *Journal of Negro History* 57 (April 1972): 144-155 is a brief, but definitive treatment of American slaves in the Chesapeake during the War of 1812. Mary Bullard, *Black Emancipation at Cumberland Island in 1815* (Delean Springs, Fla., 1983) is a case study of Britain's effects on the slave population of Cumberland Island. Gerad Altoff, *Amongst my Best Men: African-Americans and the War of 1812* (Put-in-Bay, Oh., 1966) is the largest and most general treatment of African Americans and the War of 1812. Britain's relationship with American slaves during the War of Independence is the subject of Sylvia Frey's *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J., 1991).

willing to act as guides [or] cheerfully take up arms against the Americans.⁵

The flow of slaves seeking protection and freedom among British troops really began in earnest with the spring 1813 arrival in the Chesapeake of a small fleet under Admiral John Borlasse Warren and Colonel Thomas Sydney Beckwith who were charged with distracting American forces from the Canadian frontier. The British employed fleeing slaves in monotonous chores or as guides. Ultimately, many would be transported abroad. However, relatively few former slaves had been overtly encouraged to flee their masters and few were employed as soldiers.

This changed with Britain's most concerted effort to recruit slaves in the form of a widely circulated proclamation issued by Cochrane in April 1814.⁶ Cochrane offered to receive as soldiers or "Free Settlers," American slaves in only the most thinly veiled language fooling nobody and provoking President James Madison to respond that "the proclamation of Cochrane addressed to the Blacks they administer of us to be prepared for the worst, the Enemy may be able to effect against us [and] the Southern States, and which must be expected to show itself against every object within reach of [this] vindictive enterprise."⁷ Britain had begun an official policy of recruiting American slaves and with the British Navy active along the Atlantic coast, it was not long before the results became tangible. In April, black laborers built a fort on Tangier Island at the mouth of the Potomac River to act as a British base to receive slaves. In May, Cockburn reported from the

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5. Robert Barrie to Warren, 17 November 1813, H.M Ship *Dragon*, Admiralty Office (ADM), Public Records Office, London, 1/505, p. 67. Original spelling and punctuation have been retained in quotations throughout this work.
 6. ADM 1/508, p. 579. The bulk of the widely circulated Proclamation read "Whereas it has been represented to me, that many Persons now resident in the United States, have expressed a desire to withdraw there from, with a view of entering into His Majesty's Service, or of being received as Free Settlers into some of His Majesty's Colonies . . . [shall be along with their families] received on board of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War, or at the Military Posts that may be established, upon or near the Coast of the United States when they will have their choice of either entering into His Majesty's Sea or Land Forces, or of being sent as FREE [in original] Settlers to the British Possessions in North America or the West Indies, where they will meet with all due encouragement."
 7. James Madison to Secretary of War, 20 May 1814, Washington, D.C., *James Madison Papers* (Washington, D.C., 1964), reel 16.

base that he was going to organize a company of black Colonial Marines and soon had over two hundred former slaves organized under Sergeant William Hammond. At the end of May, the black unit, in conjunction with the Royal Marines, laid siege to the American battery at Pungoteague, Virginia, and won great praise.⁸ Former American slaves would be involved in the sieges of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., as well.

Britain also recruited former slave soldiers farther south on the Atlantic coast. When the British blockaded the Lowcountry coast between Cape Hattaras and New Providence in April 1814, Captain Hayes of the *Majestic* circulated numerous copies of Cochrane's Proclamation to "facilitate the desertion of the Negroes."⁹ Farther south at Cumberland Island, Cockburn began to circulate Cochrane's Proclamation by the end of 1814; the result was a flood of Georgian and East Floridian slaves.¹⁰

The British effort to recruit and organize American slaves had practical and psychological advantages, but the ultimate realization of their goals fell somewhat short of the vision. The war ended as Britain began to make major inroads with the American slave population, despite the fact that the Upper South and the Lowcountry (those areas in which Britain was most active) were very stable slave societies in which Native Americans and external forces had long since ceased to be major threats, and where there was a minimum of open and uncontrolled frontier. While Britain had undoubtedly gained a great deal from black allies across the South, fear of revulsion at home and the dangerous message that such encouragement would send to their own slaves in the Caribbean restrained British commanders from encouraging the American slave population to rise in open rebellion. Just the threat of recruiting and arming American slaves sent a very frightening and stark message to the southern white populations who were unaware of calls for restraint from London. However, despite the psychological advantages of allying with slaves, Britain's relationship with American and Spanish slaves on the

8. Cassell, "Slaves in the Chesapeake," 150-151.

9. Cochrane to Captain Hayes, 10 April 1814, Bermuda, Cochrane Papers, MS 2,450, p.5, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History (PKY), University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla.

10. Mary Bullard's *Black Liberation* is the definitive account of Cockburn's mission to Cumberland Island.

southeastern frontier would prove to be a very different undertaking. Unlike the stability of the Upper South and Lowcountry, the borderlands were unstable, marked by African American and Native American flight.¹¹ A number of American interests had sought to acquire various parts of Florida in the years prior to the war and had met stiff resistance from a combination of Spaniards, blacks and Indians. The highly destructive Red Stick War was being waged on both sides of the Florida border as well.¹² Britain's goals in the Southeast were the same as those in the Chesapeake: to use American slaves to compliment their own forces and to act as a distraction to the Americans. However, regardless of common aims, Britain's dealings with blacks and Native Americans in the Southeast (while much smaller in scale due to the size of the region's population) would take on a strong regional variation as highlighted by their experience in Pensacola.

Woodbine had set sail for Florida in April of 1814, the same month that Cochrane's Proclamation had been issued and a fair amount of time after the British military had begun to utilize American slaves. He was to gain the allegiance and begin training as many "Indians and *others*, as may be friendly to and willing to fight under the standard of His Majesty."¹³ While "*others*" meant primarily American slaves, it requires a bit of clarification. American slaves were not the only blacks that Britain hoped to recruit. Other blacks included individuals living with the Red Sticks and Seminoles and others living independently in maroon communities. Any attempt to recruit slaves and Indians would automatically result in the surfacing of a very complex web of interrelations. The history of flight, freedom and interrelationships gave the process of

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11. Landers, *Black Society*; Porter, *Negro on the Frontier*; Paul Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington, In., 2002); and David Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, Ct., 1992).
 12. Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels*; Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance*; Martin, *Sacred Revolt*; and Saunt, *A New Order* examine the Red Stick War.
 13. Cochrane's Promotion of Woodbine to Captain of the Colonial Marines, 3 June 1814, Bermuda, Cochrane Papers, MS 2326, PKY. Author's emphasis.
 14. On the history of flight and sanctuary across Florida, see Landers, *Black Society*; Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, Ct., 1979); Daniel Littlefield, *Africans and Seminoles* (Westport, Ct., 1977); Kevin Mulroy, *Freedom and the Border* (Lubbock, Tx., 1993); Porter, *Negro on the Frontier*; and Peter Wood, *Black Majority* (New York, 1974). For the

recruitment, and indeed race relations, a very different dynamic than was the case in the Chesapeake and Lowcountry.¹⁴

Just before embarking for the Apalachicola River, Hugh Pigot, the Captain of the *Orpheus*, was given a number of the earliest copies of Cochrane's Proclamation that were to "be promulgated on that part of the United States that you are about to go to."¹⁵ Woodbine had wasted no time in taking steps to insure the circulation of the Proclamation. Even as he was employed in building the fort he forwarded the Proclamation to "Georgia, Tennessee and New Orleans [presumably meaning Louisiana and probably Mississippi] by trusty Indians who have been appointed at a general meeting of the Chiefs, for such purposes, and I have no doubt of several hundred American slaves joining our standard."¹⁶ Native Americans, with their excellent knowledge of the area's terrain and ability to blend into their surroundings, were the ideal choice for the initial distribution of Cochrane's Proclamation allowing Britain to recruit American slaves from their earliest arrival while putting off, by as long as possible, their detection by the Americans. Few images would have been more apocalyptic to nineteenth-century white southerners than Native Americans, at the instigation of the British, attempting to stir slaves to rebellion. The proclamation was also widely circulated in Fernandina, a settlement at the mouth of the St. Mary's River on the Georgia-Florida border.¹⁷

Even before Woodbine began to circulate the proclamation, the first large group of blacks was headed towards the fort at Prospect Bluff. In May, Woodbine recorded that "there is also a party of negroes, upwards of 200 men, who have run away from the States, and are on their march for this, in company with Cappachimico's tribe that I look for in very few days."¹⁸ Eventually, these blacks joined the Red Sticks in their struggle against the United States. Red Stick and black relations flourished with Fort

dynamics of Indian-Black relations, see Jack Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans: Color, Race and Caste in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Oxford, U.K., 1988).

15. Cochrane to Pigot, 27 March 1814, Bermuda, Cochrane Papers, MS 2450, p.5, PKY.

16. Woodbine to Cochrane, 25 May 1814, Prospect Bluff, Cochrane Papers, MS 2328, PKY.

17. Bullard, *Black Liberation*, 55.

18. *Ibid.*

Mims and continued through the Seminole War.¹⁹ West Florida became a sanctuary where Native Americans and former slaves fled and then stood together to protect their freedom. This would continue very conspicuously with British help.

In late May 1814 Woodbine recorded that “negroes are flocking in from the United States and make no doubt that I shall have occasion for a considerable supply more of musquets.”²⁰ Since the proclamation had not yet fully circulated, the majority of arriving blacks were probably either with the Red Sticks, had been enticed to flee by other Native Americans, or had previously lived in maroon communities. Britain’s mere presence on a frontier where word spread like wildfire would also have been an inducement to flee from the very beginning. A stream of former slaves made its way towards the British in Florida, an encouraging sign for the British who would not really begin recruiting in earnest until Nicolls’s arrival in August.²¹

On August 13, Nicolls led a large detachment of officers and soldiers to supply and train a corps of five hundred (and more if possible) Native Americans and blacks organized as the Third Battalion of Royal Colonial Marines. One of the most important items that Nicolls brought to the Apalachicola River were copies of Cochrane’s Proclamation “which you [Nicolls] will distribute among the Black Population; and further assure them that those who emigrate from America shall have Lands given them in the British Colonies on which to settle, and that at any future period when there may be Peace with America they shall not be returned to their former masters.”²² Official correspondences frequently referred to Nicolls’s mission as designed to raise “a Regiment of

19. Saunt, *A New Order*, 270. The massacre at Fort Mims in August of 1813 had a profound effect on the psychology of the white population of the Deep South, made the specter of Indian-black cooperation all the more terrifying and convinced many Americans, including Andrew Jackson, that a war of destruction against the Red Sticks and their allies was entirely justified. For the newest assessment of Fort Mims, see Karl Davis, “Remember Fort Mims: Reinterpreting the Origins of the Creek War,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Winter 2002), 611-636.

20. Woodbine to Cochrane, 28 May 1814, Cochrane Papers, MS 2328, PKY.

21. On slave flight, see John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York, 1999) and for the movement of information among slaves during this period, see Julius Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution” (diss., Duke University, 1996).

22. Cochrane to Nicolls, 23 July 1814, Bermuda ADM 1/506, p.14.

Colonial Marines from the American Blacks” with no mention of the Indians,²³ a vivid confirmation of Britain’s regional designs. Possibly the most important part of Nicolls’s final orders regarded the manner by which he was to recruit “such Negroes as may be induced to desert from the territory of the United States, to whom you are to hold out *every* encouragement” [italics added].²⁴ Nicolls, and indeed Woodbine, would follow this order to the letter and very far beyond, often much to the annoyance of their superiors.

Nicolls cared for Britain’s black and Indian allies, a sentiment vividly driven home in his orders to the First Battalion of Royal Colonial Marines:

In Europe they [swords] are not drawn for Country alone but for all those who lingered in oppressions bonds, in America they will shine forth in the same cause—the People you are about to aid have had robberies and cruel murders committed on them by the Americans, these atrocities will I know excite honor in the breast of a British soldier, they will urge you to avenge them and you will do so with the British Soldiers valor and humanity. Towards the Indians you will show the most exact discipline, you will be an example to those sons of nature, you will have to drill and instruct them, in doing so which you must be patient with and watch their likes and dislikes and be careful to offend them in nothing. Above all things sobriety must be your constant care, one example of drunkenness may ruin this. When the men of colour who are expected to join us arrive you will be strictly careful in your language and manners to them if they do not take your instructions as readily as you wish, or have a right to expect you will make allowances for them., remember they have been oppressed by cruel taskmasters and under slavery man’s best faculties are kept dormant, what a glorious prospect for British soldiers to set them free how grateful will they be to you, how ready to mix their Blood with yours in so good a cause, additional luster will beam on

23. This example is taken from Cochrane to ?, Bermuda, 4 July 1814, Colonial Office (CO), Public Records Office, London, 23/61.

24. Cochrane to Nicolls, 23 July 1814, ADM 1/506, p. 4.

that standard and whose waft no slave can combat, your ranks must be crowded with such auspices.²⁵

Nicolls's order and their tone were exceptional on a number of levels. The introduction, in which a comparison was made between Britain's struggle to "liberate" or "defend" the continent of Europe against Napoleon and Britain's aid of Native Americans and slaves was entirely without precedent. Using the most colorful and timely language that would not have been lost on any of his contemporaries to state the case of Native Americans and blacks,²⁶ Nicolls was playing to the triumphalist spirit of Britain as the guarantor of the universal liberties of the citizens of the world. The major difference was that Nicolls called for protection of blacks' and Indians' liberties by using the same rhetoric. He clearly viewed Native Americans in the classic "noble savage" role as the glorious "sons of nature," as he put it, who were making honorable attempts to survive the constant threat of extermination by the United States. He similarly conceptualized blacks as fully human and potentially equal to whites. They had suffered so horribly under slavery as to have much of their most basic humanity compromised or nearly destroyed, but this condition was artificially imposed, was no way inherent, or innate, and through patience and diligent instruction, could be rectified. Nicolls regarded Indians and blacks as more than potential allies or pawns; they were human beings who required aid in the defense of their liberties.²⁷

25. Edward Nicolls "Orders for the First Battalion of Royal Colonial Marines" 1814, Lockey Collection, PKY.

26. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, Ct., 1992) and Gerard Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York, 1997) make clear the significance and context of Nicolls's language.

27. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* and Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London, 1988) provide information on the growing abolitionist movement. The fact that Nicolls regarded his black and Indian allies as more than mere pawns is supported by a number of sources. Well after the peace had been concluded Nicolls remained in West Florida earnestly attempting to help the Red Sticks regain their land which had been ceded to the United States in the Treaty of Fort Jackson. See Wright, *Anglo-Spanish*, 182. Even though Nicolls would go as far as to present the Red Stick Chief Hillis Hadjo to the Prince Regent in London during the autumn of 1815, he would be forced to leave his allies behind, but not before he provided them with an immense amount of military and civilian supplies and a very sturdy fort on the Apalachicola. See Malcolm to Nicolls, 5 March 1815, *Royal Oak* off Mobile Bay, Mal/106, p. 169, Putney Malcolm Papers, National

In his proclamation to the First Battalion of Royal Marines Nicolls included a large section addressed to the former slaves whom he hoped to recruit:

To you Men of Colour, I now address myself, you are truly [heroes?] for you have dared to be free/exert yourselves to the utmost to become disciplined without Zeal and Bravery will avail you little [for?] you will unrivet the Chains of Thousands of your Colour now lingering in Bonds, you may think (it will be but for a little time) that military life is a hard one, remember good follows evil and [?] labour, that your Services will be required but for a short time and that a peace taking place you will have the comforts of enjoying rational liberty, solid property with the rights of a British Man, for lands will be given to you in the British Colonies, the ground you will then cultivate will be yours and your childrens for ever, never again will you have to undergo the heartrending misery of seeing the partner of your love or the children of your affection cruelly dragged from your [?] sold to a foreign oppression and carried beyond your reach for ever. Men of Colour as you have suffered persecutions from them[?] to your Enemies you will teach them and the world to respect you show yourselves to be Christians by your deeds—mercy will cause the British men to love you, it will be a chief motive for their acknowledging you as brothers, wriedeep these words on the Tablets of your memory and look at them with serious and charitable resolution, when we in the possessions of your former taskmasters do them no other harm or violence than is necessary to put it out of their

Maritime Museum. In July of 1816, when Nicolls's black and Indian allies faced imminent destruction by the United States Military at their fort on the Apalachicola River, one of their initial responses was to raise the Union Jack above the fort in a show of solidarity with their British allies. See Campbell, *Historical Sketches*, 202. And finally, as late as the autumn of 1816, Nicolls petitioned the British government to allow him to return and help his black and Indian allies that would assuredly number "1,000 strong [because Nicolls had instructed the Indian to] faithfully protect the black soldiers that were with me and to permit all black men to join them at the Bluff." Nicolls to Gordon, 24 September 1816, Kent, Lockey Collection, PKY. All of these facts point to the existence of a strong mutual respect and concern shared between Nicolls and his black and Indian allies that would not have existed if he simply viewed them as pawns.

power to harm us, [?] inflict an unnecessary wound, when they ask you for quarter, freely give it and bring them as prisoners to me, it is only the coward that will take revenge on a fallen enemy, none such will be tolerated in his ranks, but as long as they resist you fight them valiantly rush on with the Bayonet it is the brave mans weapon, aided by the [?] use of it they must fall before you—pay strict attention to those officers I shall appoint to and command you, they have left their homes and their comforts and have traveled far to aid you, but above all-things/ and riveted to your duty to your God, be loyal and true to your King and Country, if you observe these orders you cannot fail of succeeding in, and doing honor to our good cause, that benevolent Providence which has aided the disinterested exertions of our King and Country in Europe will not fail to support us here, and if we arrive at the haven of Peace, may Industry, Plenty and Happiness surround your fire-side and amply reward your hardships, your sufferings and your wanderings.²⁸

Nicolls called upon the black recruits fighting primarily with the bayonet to demonstrate honorable behavior and mercy on former masters. He had clearly decided that appealing to former slaves' Christian morality (either real or as a metaphorical tool for driving home ideas of honor, mercy, duty, loyalty and other virtues) was the best method for insuring good behavior. Nicolls's promise that black soldiers would be rewarded with "the comforts of enjoying rational liberty, solid property with the rights of a British Man" embodied key Enlightenment ideals (rationality, liberty, individual rights and property rights). Issuing the promise in such a public manner spoke volumes to both white and black southerners. To slaves, it challenged the daily ironies they endured even as slave owners attempted to reconcile the ideals of the American Revolution with the owning of human property.²⁹ Nicolls boldly situated slaves as heirs to the Revolutionary and

28. Edward Nicolls "Orders for the First Battalion" 1814, Lockey Collection, PKY.

29. Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London, 1990); Eric Hobsbawn, *The Age of Revolution, Europe 1789-1848* (London, 1962); and Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, U.K., 1981); Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Davis, *The Problem of*

Enlightenment inheritance that their masters claimed. To the slave owners and white southerners, this message and the challenge that it posed to slavery would have been as frightening as any development in recent times.³⁰ The British were presenting a physical challenge to slavery as well as an intellectual one; news of both would have quickly passed through the white and black populations of the Deep South.

While Nicolls appealed to the blacks' sense of Christian virtue, morality and humanity, he also appealed to their economic interests and raw emotions. Specifically he assured slaves who joined him that "lands will be given to you in the British Colonies, the ground you will then cultivate will be yours and your childrens for ever, never again will you have to undergo the heartrending misery of seeing the partner of your love or the children of your affection cruelly dragged from your [side?] sold to a foreign oppression and carried beyond your reach forever." Generally regarded, especially by abolitionists, as a more onerous aspect of slavery, the fear of separating families would have been certain to elicit strong emotions among slaves. Rhetorically, Nicolls pulled no punches. He used timely and poignant language to attack American slavery, encourage American slaves to flee, and assert these same slaves' humanity. Ultimately, there was an overarching sense that Nicolls viewed himself as the leader of a just and moral crusade, that pitted a liberated and empowered black army, with Christian virtue and zeal on its side, against the United States. His combination of morality and black liberation in the form of a crusade made Nicolls's vision of a fundamental challenge to racial order in the slaveholding South speak to white and black Americans on many levels. To slaves this was an example and call to resistance that emphasized their humanity. To white pro-slavery southerners,

Slavery; Winthrop Jordan, *White OverBlack: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore, 1969) deal with the legacy of the American Revolution and slavery.

30. While there had been numerous slave revolts across the Hemisphere, from Haiti to Point Coupee, all of which had physical and intellectual implications that were absorbed by whites and blacks across the South, Nicolls was deep in the heart of the southern frontier, recruiting a slave army and boldly proclaiming revolutionary ideas about slavery and race. For contemporary slave resistance in a hemispheric context see Geggus, ed., *A Turbulent Time*; David Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the French Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbus, S.C., 2001); and Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution*.

Nicolls presented not only a physical challenge to slavery but, through his repeated insistence on the humanity and potential Christian virtue of the slaves, a fundamental intellectual challenge to the increasingly racialized defense of slavery that arose from the dehumanization of Africans and their descendants.³¹

Very possibly, Nicolls's most dangerous assault on slavery was his assertion that blacks were, as much as whites, the heirs to the American Revolution in terms of liberty, property rights and individual freedoms. Those who saw themselves as the self-conscious defenders and heirs of the liberal and republican tradition of the American Revolution would have been uneasy at Nicolls's ideas. As historian Francois Furstenburg has recently shown, these people reconciled the existence of slavery in a republican land of liberty through the assertion that freedom was a choice and that the enslaved, through their lack of resistance, acquiesced to their condition.³² This rationalization would have been greatly threatened at the appearance of a well-ordered Christian slave army led by a British officer. If Britain and America were locked in a battle to claim the title of "standard bearers of human liberation in the Age of Revolution," a battle that in many ways turned on slaves, then Nicolls's bold experiment made quite a statement on Britain's behalf.³³ He encouraged slaves to resist while undermining the southern pro-slavery argument (through the assertion of slaves' humanity, spirituality, and enlightened rights) and liberal northerners' efforts to make slavery palatable (by showing that slaves were far from happy in their current condition) all the while enhancing Britain's credentials as the "Universal Liberator." To many Americans such language reinforced Andrew Jackson's opin-

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31. George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, Ct., 1987); Larry Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens, Ga., 1987); Davis, *The Problem with Slavery*; Merton, *Slavery Attacked* help to explain why Nicolls's assertion of the slave's humanity and spirituality was so dangerous.
 32. Francois Furstenberg, "Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History* 89 (March 2003): 1295-1330.
 33. Matthew Mason, "The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, the United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59 (July 2002): 665. Mason argues that both nations saw themselves as the true defenders of the spirit of the Age of Revolution.

ion that one of Britain's major aims in West Florida was "exciting the black population to insurrection and massacre."³⁴

When Woodbine arrived at the Indian encampment towards the end of July 1814, he found nearly two thousand men, women and children, including Hillis Hadjo (Josiah Francis) and Peter McQueen. Almost three hundred Seminoles joined this village, having marched overland from the Apalachicola River.³⁵ The Indians faced famine, disease, and mercilessly hounding attacks by Colonel Joseph Carson and William Weatherford, a mestizo Red Stick who had surrendered to Andrew Jackson and turned against his people.³⁶ Woodbine organized a force of Red Sticks, whites, mulattos, and blacks to ward off a potential attack by Andrew Jackson and to keep white settlers at bay, a tactic he learned as he led a similar³⁷ version from Prospect Bluff to Pensacola: "I assure you the few of my guard that I brought down here have inspired no little proportion of terror in Mobile and New Orleans."³⁸

Nicolls left some supplies and men at Prospect Bluff and headed to Pensacola to join Woodbine, arriving on August 14th. The Governor of Pensacola very much feared an attack by Andrew Jackson and had minimal faith in his own troops. He allowed Nicolls to land his troops and take command of Fort San Miguel and raise both the British and Spanish flags. Orders were sent to Captain Robert Percy to bring the marines left behind at the Apalachicola River.³⁹

While the Spanish were far from pleased with a British presence in Pensacola, Woodbine and Nicolls had fallen upon an ideal

34. Jackson to Governor Holmes, 21 July 1814, Fort Jackson, in Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (Washington, D.C., 1927), 15. In an interesting example of the manipulation of racial realities, Andrew Jackson issued a proclamation to the slaves and free blacks of New Orleans promising freedom and material rewards if they would help to defend the city against the British on September 21, 1814. Jackson's proclamation was unpopular with the white inhabitants of New Orleans, but ultimately successful and provides an excellent example of the increased leverage enjoyed by traditionally "weak" groups in the borderlands. Arsene Lacarreire Latour, *Historical Memoir of the War in West Florida and Louisiana in 1814-15 with an Atlas* ed., Gene Smith (Gainesville, Fla., reprint 1999). I owe a debt to Gene Smith for suggesting this reference.

35. Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 277.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 277-278.

38. Woodbine to Cameron, 9 August 1814, Pensacola, Cochrane Papers, MS 2328, p. 38, PKY.

39. Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*, 105.

situation. British strategy, in relation to New Orleans, favored the occupation of Pensacola and Mobile as bases for an advance on New Orleans. Nicolls and Woodbine were laying the groundwork for larger British landings. Pensacola was now in British hands bloodlessly and with nearly no effort, but Mobile remained under American control. Once both towns were taken, a combined army of regulars, Indians and blacks would launch attacks either directly at New Orleans or farther up the Mississippi River. Diversionary thrusts into the interior of Georgia would distract much of the American armed forces.

Nicolls assumed nearly complete dictatorial control over Pensacola shortly after his arrival. While the Spanish might have been prepared to yield a considerable amount of authority to Nicolls and the British, his governance was heavy-handed and alienated the population. From his headquarters in the middle of the town, Nicolls oversaw the physical abuse and intimidation of many inhabitants, implemented a strict system of passports to control travel and jailed anyone deemed "suspicious." American William Robertson had the misfortune to visit Pensacola during the British occupation, something that he had done frequently in the past. The Spanish Governor labeled him a "suspicious character" and demanded Robertson leave the territory within twenty-four hours. While packing his bags, however, British soldiers seized him and made him prisoner to Woodbine. When asked if he had a warrant from the Spanish governor, Woodbine responded, "damn the governor, my orders are received from Colonel Nicolls, and I must obey them, if I go to hell for it."⁴⁰ Robertson was incarcerated and interrogated for four days before finally being released. Soon the Spanish (military, civilians and politicians) began to suffer.⁴¹ Resentment and hatred of the British grew, turning a fair proportion of the town's population into active American spies.⁴²

British exploits with blacks and Native Americans also caused Spanish resentment to swell. Nicolls's detachment of slightly over one hundred British soldiers was far from adequate if attacked by the Americans. Nicolls continued the work that Woodbine had

40. William Robertson to Willie Blount, 26 October 1814, Fort Stoddart, United States Territorial Papers (Florida), PKY.

41. "Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas," 1815, Cruzat Papers, p. 3, PKY.

42. Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of Empire*, 237

begun in recruiting blacks and Indians to the British standard, raising over five hundred Indians, most of whom were Red Sticks, and one hundred blacks.⁴³ The new soldiers were provided with uniforms and arms, organized into military units, and drilled and instructed by British officers. The black recruits wore distinctive red caps.⁴⁴ Much to the astonishment of even fairly liberal inhabitants of Pensacola, blacks and Indians patrolled the streets and manned the city's defenses.

The British gave the Spanish much to be unhappy about. To the inhabitants of Pensacola, black and Indian troops appeared to be Nicolls's henchmen. One resident explained how Nicolls took military command of the city "not indeed [by assuming] the immediate command of the Spanish troops [instead] he effected by means of a band of about 800 desperate savages that joined his standard, and whom he kept constantly on the scout in every direction."⁴⁵

Spain's grievances with the black portion of the British force concerned the soldiers' origins. Some arrived with the Red Sticks and Seminoles. Others were from maroons. Still others made their way from the United States, potentially inciting white settlers. Still, Woodbine insisted that he and Nicolls "were to rouse a regiment of Blacks and did not care where they came from."⁴⁶

And the "rousing" extended to Spanish residents' slaves. The British used the same process that they had elsewhere in the South: slaves flocked to the British standard because it was there and offered potential freedom. Woodbine made the prospect sweeter by proclaiming that any slave who joined the British forces would serve for a maximum of six months.⁴⁷ Pensacola slaves knew of Cochrane's Proclamation, but Woodbine emphasized the temporariness of military service. Most slaves who escaped from the Spanish did so by sailing to the other side of the bay in stolen boats. One Spanish observer noted that slaves continually escaped because of the "shelter that they find, be it from our [British] assistant or from the Indians."⁴⁸ Britain had

43. Owsley, *Struggle*, 107; Saunt, *A New Order*, 278.

44. James Innerarity to the Governor of West Florida, March 1815, Greenslade Papers, PKY.

45. "Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas," p. 2.

46. "File of Witnesses that may be examined by Commissioners in Pensacola in the Suit of Woodbine-Testimony of Peter Gilchrist," 1815, Cruzat Papers, PKY

47. "File of Witnesses. . . Testimony of Pedro Suares," Cruzat Papers, 1815, PKY.

48. Saunt, *A New Order*, 278.

launched an aggressive and calculated campaign to “entice” as many of the Spanish slaves to join them as possible:

a few American fugitive slaves that from time to time joined them were by no means sufficient to satisfy their eager appetite, their worthy panders aforementioned assiduously visited the negro Cabins in this town, attended their many meetings and by every means that the genius of seduction could invent endeavoured to entice the slaves of the Spanish Citizens to join them—when-ever they succeeded, the evasion of the slave was easy he had but to walk to the fort [San Miguel], at noon day or at night, he was sure of reception—did the Owner complain? He was answered with scurrility—did the weak Government interfere? Its requests, its orders, or its menaces were alike treated with insulting contempt—or if in any instance the least degree of energy was shown, the negro or negroes who were its objects were sent off at night across the bay and thence to the Grand depot at Apalachicola.⁴⁹

If slave owners sought to recover their slaves, they were “frequently treated with the grossest abuse for daring to claim them and dared scarcely utter a murmur from dread of the Indians whom he [Nicolls] held at his back.”⁵⁰ Uniformed and armed Indians and blacks created a sense that racial order had completely broken down.

Woodbine appeared intimately involved in recruitment. He was frequently seen speaking to individual slaves, offering them liberty and protection.⁵¹ Phillis, a house slave of John Innerarity’s, joined Woodbine at Prospect Bluff, but unsure of her decision, she gave up her freedom and voluntarily returned to her master.⁵² Woodbine discovered that bribing slaves worked better. Peter Gilchrist observed him paying Charles, a slave belonging to Madame Eslava. Gilchrist advised her to pay extra close attention to Charles, but the slave was gone that night.⁵³

49. “Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas,” 1815, Cruzat Papers, p. 5, PKY.

50. John Forbes and Co. to Lord Castlereagh, 20 May 1815, Pensacola, Foreign Office (FO), Public Records Office, London, 72/219.

51. William Laurence to Forbes, February 1816, Cruzat Papers, PKY.

52. “File of witnesses . . . Testimony of John Innerarity,” 1815., Cruzat Papers, PKY.

53. “File of witnesses . . . Testimony of Peter Gilchrist,” 1815, Cruzat Papers, PKY.

For a bounty of thirty dollars, Woodbine employed four “renegades”—Sergeant Dogherty, Colonel Wallace, Colonel Perdu, and the American Sergeant McGill to “steal” Spanish blacks by encouraging slaves to leave their masters and facilitate their flight.⁵⁴ According to one witness, “McGill was employed by Woodbine to take away all Negros, that could be got at.”⁵⁵ Woodbine paid a Mr. Caldwell to ferry blacks across the bay. With British backing, Caldwell escaped chastisement by the Spanish governor despite frequently being spotted transporting runaways.⁵⁶ Armed blacks protected the ferry service, instructed by Woodbine to shoot anybody who attempted to interfere.⁵⁷

Complicit in recruiting slaves were the Indians associated with Woodbine. DeLisle was an Indian chief who first met Woodbine at Prospect Bluff in July 1814 and traveled with him to Pensacola. DeLisle was “to enlist Negroes [and] to look after such Negroes as would be suitable for the service” and he was far from the only Indian involved in enlisting blacks to the British cause.⁵⁸ Antonio Collins found a group of Indians stealing his brother’s slave and eventually tracked them to Fort San Miguel. When he attempted to recover her, twelve to fifteen Indians stopped him.⁵⁹ Slaves throughout the Deep South witnessed the close relationship emerging between blacks and Indians, making the decision to join that much easier. At the same time, the Seminoles and the Red Sticks acted as ideal recruiting agents whose active support of the British would have been very frightening to the white population of Pensacola as well.

From his arrival in Pensacola, Woodbine had been seen frequently talking to a slave named Prince who belonged to a Dr.

54. “Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas,” 1815, Cruzat Papers, p. 5, PKY and “File of Witnesses. . . Tetimony of Peter Gilchrist,” Cruzat Papers, 1815, PKY. McGill is the only one of the four named men who was definitely American, but it is highly possible that the others were American as well. One account of Nicolls and Woodbine’s time in Pensacola records them as “collecting Indians, negros and *American deserters*,” William Robertson to Willie Blount, 26 October 1814, Fort Stoddart, United States Territorial Papers (Florida), PKY.

55. William Laurence to Forbes, February 1816, Cruzat papers, PKY.

56. “File of witnesses. . . Testimony of Peter Gilchrist,” Cruzat Papers, 1815, PKY.

57. *Ibid.*

58. William Laurence to Forbes, February 1816, Cruzat Papers, PKY.

59. “File of witnesses. . . Testimony of Francisco Collins,” Cruzat Papers, 1815, PKY.

Sierra.⁶⁰ According to a number of witnesses, Prince had been promised wages and a Lieutenant's or officer's commission if he were to persuade "all sorts of Negroes whether Freemen or Slaves. . . all the smart young fellows" to join the British corps.⁶¹ There were no better agents to spread the word of freedom with the British than slaves like Prince. The British approached freemen as well. Woodbine enlisted the help of a free black man named Bennet.⁶²

The Spanish in Pensacola were not the only inhabitants of the Floridas to watch powerlessly as their slaves joined the British. During the British retreat from the attack on Mobile, they were most aggressive in acquiring slave recruits. Woodbine and Lt. Cassel took a number of slaves belonging to Forbes and Company from Bayou la Lanche on the west side of the Perdido River.⁶³ On another occasion, Woodbine returned with 'betwixt thirty and forty negroes principally men, with bundles on their backs—they made no secret of having come from East Florida [there was] a Black Corporal belonging to the Garrison of St. Augustine who spoke nothing but Spanish who was amongst them."⁶⁴ East Florida suffered so many lost slaves to the British that Governor Sebastian Kindelan ultimately commissioned two men, Fernando Arredando and Juan Huertas, to report the number and attempt to recapture the slaves.⁶⁵ Both British and slaves across Florida became so emboldened by the success of operations at Pensacola that even the governor of relatively secure St. Augustine merely watched as a local slaves joined the British.

60. "File of witnesses. . . Testimony of Peter Gilchrist." Prince must have exhibited exceptional leadership qualities that Woodbine quickly recognized. Not only did he play a prominent role in the recruitment of slaves in Pensacola and enjoy a great deal of Woodbine's confidence, but he would also become one of the leaders of the maroon community at Prospect Bluff.

61. "Indictment of William Augustus Vesey for Perjury," 1816, Cruzat Papers, PKY.

62. William Laurence to Forbes, February 1816, Cruzat Papers, PKY.

63. John Forbes and Company to Lord Castlereagh, 20 May 1815, Pensacola, FO 72/219.

64. "Files of witnesses. . . Testimony of Andres Leno," Cruzat Papers, 1815, PKY.

65. Sebastian Kindelan to Woodbine, 31 December 1814, EFP, reel 84, Section 45, PKY.

The decision by West and, especially, East Florida blacks to join the British provides an excellent example of racial politics in the borderlands. For centuries, both slaves and free blacks had recognized the relative benevolence of Spanish rule and fought fiercely against the encroachments of Anglo-America. To varying degrees, whites, blacks and Indians ensured that Florida remained a haven from the harsh and rigid realities of slaveholding Anglo-America to the north. If life with or near the Spanish seemed to provide an alternative to life under Anglo-American rule, however, then life the British appeared even more appealing. The British promised a greater degree of freedom and autonomy as well as the potential of military service. In a borderland setting, many blacks were able to pick and choose between Europeans in resisting Anglo-America.

In the often upside-down world of borderland race relations, the Spanish lost out to the more appealing British, but so too did a number of Indians, particularly Creeks, who were enemies of the British-allied Red Sticks and Seminoles.⁶⁶ Mestizo Creek Chief Stedham, who lived in Georgia, had slaves stolen by British forces.⁶⁷ The disappearance of Stedham's slaves again emphasized the role that blacks played in recruiting their enslaved brethren. It was reported that "there was one negro March and one of Stedhams runaway and went down, come here stole Hardridges two negro woman and 14 of J. Stedhams negros and went to the British."⁶⁸ An American observer described one of Britain's greatest aids in recruiting blacks to have been "their agents and black spies, [who] corrupted the Negroes of their Indian friends and Spanish allies."⁶⁹ James Perryman, another wealthy mestizo Creek had his slaves stolen.⁷⁰ Interestingly, the Spanish were fairly disgusted by British recruitment of Indians' slaves. Innerarity noted that "it is known that even the Indians have Suffered equal oppres-

66. Kathryn Brand, "The Creek Indians, Blacks, and Slavery," *Journal of Southern History* 57 (November 1991): 601-636 deals with the changing nature of slavery among the Creek Indians.

67. Hawkins to Jackson, 30 August 1814, Creek Agency in Grant, ed, *Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins*, 694.

68. Jackson to Secretary of War, 30 August 1814, Mobile in George Hoeman, David Hoth and Harold Moser, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* (Knoxville, Tn., 1994), 33.

69. Edmund Doyle to [?] 1817, Greenslade Papers, PKY.

70. Hawkins to the Speakers of the Upper and Lower Creeks, August 1814, in Grant, ed., *Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins*, 694.

sions from Capt Woodbine and his other agents, who have despoiled them of their slaves."⁷¹

The former slaves who joined the British were incredibly diverse. They came from both Floridas, the United States, and Indian territories. Their former masters were Iberio-American, Anglo-American, French, and Indian. They had been influenced by all of these cultures, and combinations thereof. Still other slaves had memories of Africa, reflected in elements of an African heritage.⁷² Those who joined the British came from nearly every possible working background, from urban and skilled to plantation and rural. Despite their great diversity, former slaves in Britain's Pensacola force shared a desire for freedom and a belief that the British offered the opportunity to gain it.

The recruitment and organization of a black military force frightened Pensacola's white population. The Spanish population, despite its traditional alliances with blacks and Native Americans and relatively liberal attitude towards race, had been rendered completely powerless.⁷³ Drilled and often uniformed blacks and Indians patrolled the streets and enforced British rule.

Possibly dizzy with his recruiting success, Nicolls decided to assault Mobile in early September 1814. Mobile provided the second piece in the Gulf Coast puzzle and was a location from which

71. James Innerarity to the Governor of West Florida, March 1815, Greenslade Papers, PKY.

72. Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York, 1977); Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia, 1976); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (London, 1998); Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (London, 1998); and Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998) explain the process by which Africans and their descendants maintained various aspects of their traditional cultures while absorbing aspects of European cultures and becoming "Afro-Americans."

73. Landers, *Black Society*. While Florida's attitudes towards blacks were shaped by harsh geopolitical realities, namely the nearly constant threat of Anglo-America and the shortage of Spanish defenders, the territories had a long history of providing official and unofficial sanctuary for fugitive African Americans, frequently had a substantial presence of black soldiers from elsewhere in the Spanish New World, lived and worked in close proximity to free blacks, and was a place where slavery was less severe than it was to the North. In Ira Berlin's terms, Spanish Florida was a "society with slaves" rather than a "slave society" and attitudes towards race reflected this. See Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.

the British could recruit among previously untapped Indian tribes. Andrew Jackson, Commander of the Seventh Military District, anticipated a move against Mobile, however, and rushed his troops there, arriving on August 22. His first decision was to repair and reinforce Fort Bowyer which overlooked Mobile Bay. On September 12, four British ships—the *Hermes*, *Carron*, *Sophie*, and *Childers*—arrived in the bay. On board were Nicolls and between one hundred and fifty and two hundred and fifty Indians; a detachment of marines was marching overland to meet them. The invasion ended as a disaster and survivors limped back to Pensacola. Both morale and Britain's strategy in the Gulf Coast had been defeated.⁷⁴

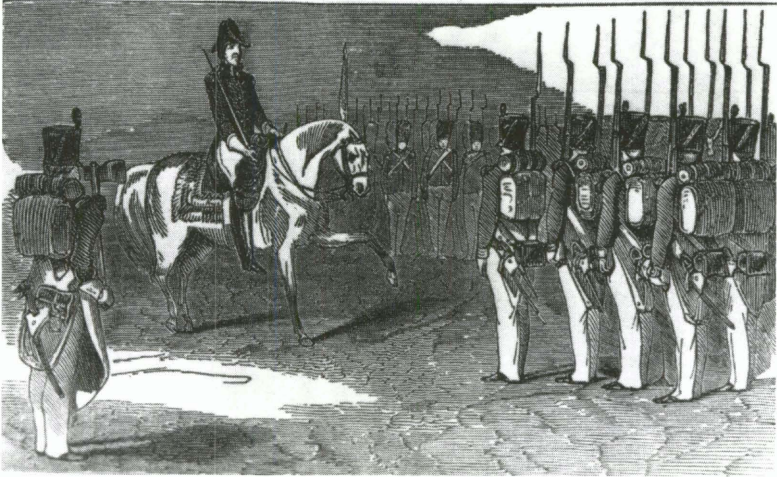
One of the major effects of Jackson's victory at Fort Bowyer was his conviction that Britain's strategy in the South revolved around its conquest of Mobile. For weeks, he passed time at Mobile, sorely neglecting the defenses at New Orleans. On October 10, the Secretary of War, James Monroe informed Jackson about information from the American ministries at Ghent that a British expedition had departed Ireland for New Orleans in September.⁷⁵ Obsessed with the British in Florida, Jackson tenaciously stuck by his earlier observation that "Pensacola is more important to the British than any other point on our South or Southwest," and he prepared for an invasion the city deep in the heart of neutral Spanish territory.⁷⁶ Jackson thought that Pensacola was the real base of British operations and was eager to teach the British and Spanish a lesson for their collective breach of neutrality. He believed that an attack might result in the acquisition of much of Florida.

There was a deeper and much darker concern that weighed heavily on Jackson's thinking, however. For centuries, Spanish Florida's reliance on blacks and Indians for defense and the enhanced role that both groups played in the region's culture and

74. Britain's disastrous attack on Mobile is addressed in Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters*; Owsley, *Struggle for the Gulf Borderlands*; Reilly, *The British at the Gates*; J. Leitch Wright, *Britain and the American Frontier, 1783-1815* (Athens, Ga., 1975); and William Coker, "The Last Battle of the War of 1812: New Orleans, No Fort Bowyer!," *Alabama Historical Quarterly* (Spring 1981): 42-63.

75. Remini, *Andrew Jackson*, 239.

76. Jackson to Secretary Armstrong, Fort Jackson, 30 July 1814 in Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 18.



Territorial Governor Andrew Jackson reviewing troops before the first Seminole War, *Florida State Archives*.

society very much bothered Anglo-America.⁷⁷ Part of Anglo-America's continuing desire to acquire Florida was a desire to permanently stomp out what was regarded as a threat to racial order in the South. Jackson was certainly sympathetic to this notion, seeing in the recent arrival of the British and the Red Sticks a real and urgent call for action.

Much of Jackson's correspondence during these days was racially charged. Benjamin Hawkins informed Jackson that "I have from other sources which I credit corroborative information of a plan to free and prepare for war all of the Blacks in this quarter [by the British]."⁷⁸ Two weeks earlier, Hawkins had reported to John Armstrong that the British at Prospect Bluff and Pensacola had begun to clothe and train "the Indians and some negros for purposes hostile to us the Indian training is to fire a swivel, sound the

77. Jane Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida, 1687-1790," *Florida Historical Quarterly* (January 1984): 296-313 and Patrick Riordan, "Finding Freedom and in Florida: Native Peoples, Africans, and Colonists, 1670-1816," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 75 (July 1996): 24-43 both provide a strong sense of the history of black and Indian flight into Florida and the concerns this caused in Anglo-America.

78. Hawkins to Jackson 30 August 1814, Creek Agency in Grant, ed., *Letters. . . of Benjamin Hawkins*, 694.

war whoop, fire three or four rounds of small arms."⁷⁹ Jackson's identification of Pensacola with racial disorder was evidenced in detail in a September 1814 report from the headquarters of the Seventh Military District to the Secretary of War. Jackson desperately argued that the British must be expelled from Pensacola and replaced by a garrison of American troops which would also be placed at Prospect Bluff and then "all resistance in this quarter would cease." Jackson signed off with the line "I beg you to glance at the situation in Pensacola" and continued with an attachment that recounted the events of the previous night when a party of Indians had come within nine miles of Fort Jackson and attacked a house with one white man and three slaves in it. One of the blacks escaped with the Indians who, Jackson stressed, had come from Pensacola.⁸⁰ Jackson's view was reinforced by field reports, like the November 1814 letter from Butler, who attempted to convince Jackson to invade Pensacola, accusing the Spanish of having:

Formed a league with our declared enemy Great Britain who has invited every pirate, and robbers to their standard, and has endeavored to arm our slaves against us: nay more destroy this infernal combination of monsters, who forgetful of the rules of Christian Warfare has assembled a banditti of Pirates, Robbers, and savage murders in support of their cause—to drive them from our shores is the task assigned to you.⁸¹

The British challenged racial order and had to be stopped before the chaos spread. Jackson even considered the idea of "giv[ing] the Seminoles and refugee Creeks a final blow."⁸² After Pensacola had been conquered. In his mind, the war that had begun at Fort Mims with an Indian-and-black-led massacre of white Americans would end in Pensacola.

79. Hawkins to Armstrong, 16 August 1814, Creek Agency in Grant, ed., *Letters. . . of Benjamin Hawkins*, 693.

80. Jackson to Secretary of War James Monroe, 5 September 1814, Mobile in Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 39.

81. Butler to Jackson, 6 November 1814, Head Quarters Seventh Military District, Record Group 98, "Order Books of the Adjunct General—June 1813-February 1821," NARA.

82. Andrew Jackson's invasion of Pensacola is treated in Hicks, *The War of 1812*; Owsley and Smith, *Filibusters*; Owsley, *Struggle for the Borderlands*; and Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans*. Owsley, *Struggle*, 112.

Jackson left Mobile on October 25th with what eventually grew into a force of more than four thousand whites and Indians. He made no pretense of having government approval for what he was about to do, sending a letter to the Secretary of War that began, "As I act without the orders of the government, I deem it important to state to you my reasons for the measure I am about to adopt."⁸³

Jackson had issued what amounted to an ultimatum to Governor Manrique to expel hostile Indians from Spanish territory and to stop allowing the British to use Pensacola as a base. Having not received a satisfactory response on November 6th, Jackson and his force arrived at Pensacola. The town was overrun; the Americans met little resistance from Spanish residents. The British had taken refuge in Fort Barrancas, located at the mouth of the harbor. As the situation became hopeless, they decided to board the British fleet anchored in the bay, blow up Fort Barrancas, and retreat to the fort on the Apalachicola River. In the ensuing chaos British forces, their Indian allies, nearly the entire slave population of Pensacola, and over two hundred Spanish troops (most of whom were black and from Havana) evacuated the town. The black population that Britain had recruited from Pensacola would form the foundation of Prospect's Bluff's maroon community, which ultimately provided one the greatest examples of slave resistance in North American history.⁸⁴

During the War of 1812, Britain utilized blacks and Indians in its war planning. From the Chesapeake to Georgia, British armed forces recruited black allies, a policy based on precedent set during the American Revolution. In both conflicts, the military objective was neither wanton destruction nor racial war. Rather, the British aspired to exploit southern fears, thereby distracting the southern war effort and inspiring local, able-bodied recruits to join the British.

In the southern borderlands where tradition, geopolitical instability, and the increasingly aggressive encroachments by the United States heightened tensions, British activities in Pensacola took on a strong and unique regional flavor. Only in the Southeast could Nicoll's message seem more radical and threatening than

83. Jackson to Secretary of War, 15 November 1814, Head Quarters of the Seventh Military District in Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 99

84. Millett, "Slave Resistance."

British overtures to American slaves in the Upper South. While the use of an enemy's slave population was an innately controversial undertaking, even when the primary goal was military expediency, Nicolls's essentially revolutionary message had implications that were absorbed across the southern borderlands. Most importantly, the political consequences were fully grasped by Andrew Jackson who saw in Nicolls and his message a viable threat to racial order on the southern frontier. Jackson wiped out the perceived threat of racial disorder emanating from Pensacola, however, he also strengthened the resolve of Florida's black and Indian refugees, who learned a very clear lesson about American intentions. Events that began at Fort Mims would continue with the growth of Negro Fort and the First and Second Seminole wars.