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The Origin of Citizen Genet's Projected Attack on Spanish Louisiana: A Case Study in Girondin Politics

Wesley J. Campbell

Abstract *In 1792 the Girondin ministry decided to send Edmond Genet to the United States with plans to recruit western frontiersmen and invade Spanish Louisiana. The episode is well known in American history, but the literature on its French origin is sparse and overemphasizes the contribution of revolutionary leader Jacques-Pierre Brissot. This essay contextualizes the French decision within the debate between Brissot, Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Lebrun, and General Charles-François Dumouriez over whether France should send troops against Spanish colonies in South America. The essay argues that Lebrun promoted the western scheme in order to attack Spanish interests without straining French resources. Rather than merely embodying a spirit of universal freedom, Lebrun's plan was grounded in the geopolitical advantages the mission might afford France in its European wars.*

Sailing from the French coast in February 1793 as the newly appointed minister to the United States, Edmond-Charles-Edouard Genet carried instructions to recruit American frontiersmen for an attack on Spanish Louisiana. Genet was to send French agents to Kentucky where they would organize an expedition to descend the Mississippi River and invade Spanish territory. This furtive mission, French leaders hoped, would “open to the people of Kentucky the navigation of the Mississippi [and] deliver our ancient brothers of Louisiana from the tyrannical yoke of Spain.”¹ Along with Genet's commissioning of privateers out of American ports and his attempts to undermine public support for President Washington, the French scheme succeeded only in generating an American outcry against France's audacious interventionism.

Genet's expedition and its effects in the United States have been well recorded, but study of the plan's French origin has remained

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¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, “Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791–1797,” in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1903*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1904), 2:204.

scant.² In an article published at the close of the nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner argues that the malfeasances of Genet's mission to the United States resulted from ideologically motivated French policies—not merely Genet's own ambitious personality. The French scheme to recruit American frontiersmen for an invasion of Louisiana, according to Turner, was “part of the same enthusiastic crusade for liberty that carried the French armies across the European frontiers in the early days of the Revolution.”³ Turner cites the writings of Jacques-Pierre Brissot,⁴ one of the leaders of the loosely affiliated Girondin (or Brissotin) faction in the French National Convention,⁵ to show French familiarity with and interest in Spanish Louisiana. Brissot's proclamations in support of worldwide liberation are offered as evidence of the Girondins' revolutionary intentions. Turner also lists several prominent Americans in Paris, some of whom had connections with the French government, and argues they might have had a role in promoting the French designs. Turner's article continues to be cited as the principal authority on the origin of Genet's western intrigues.⁶ His primary thesis, however, is limited to showing that Genet's schemes were sanctioned by the French government.

Since the publication of Turner's seminal article, scholars have almost unanimously accepted that French plans for a frontier revolt were the product of Brissot's ideological commitment to spreading the Revolution abroad. Maude Howlett Woodfin states, “Brissot, with his flaming zeal for liberty that would plant its banner over all mankind and free them wherever they were in chains, was at the height of his power in this autumn of 1792.”⁷ Harry Ammon writes that “Girondin American policy was formulated at a moment when French leaders were

² For histories of the Genet affair and its political effects, see Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York, 1973); Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788–1800* (Oxford, 1993), 330–73; Harry Ammon, “The Genet Mission and the Development of American Political Parties,” *Journal of American History* 52 (1966): 725–41; and Eugene R. Sheridan, “The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet: A Study in Transatlantic Politics and Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 18 (1994): 463–88.

³ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Origin of Genet's Projected Attack on Louisiana and the Floridas,” *American Historical Review* 3 (1898): 650.

⁴ Before the French Revolution, he called himself Brissot de Warville. See Frederick A. de Luna, “The Dean Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, *Jeune Philosophie*,” *French Historical Studies* 17 (1991): 162.

⁵ Contemporaries—primarily the Montagnard opposition—used the term *Girondins* to refer to Brissot and his allies, many of whom represented the Gironde department in southwestern France. It is used here with some hesitation and with recognition that the Girondins were not a homogeneous group. See Frederick A. de Luna, “The ‘Girondins’ Were Girondins, After All,” *French Historical Studies* 15 (1988): 506–18.

⁶ See, e.g., François Furstenberg, “The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History,” *American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 667. Ammon states that Turner's “masterly article has not been supplanted” (*Genet Mission*, 184).

⁷ Maude Howlett Woodfin, “Citizen Genet and His Mission” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1928), 65. Though heavily cited by later historians, Woodfin's paper includes numerous errors and should be treated with caution.

entranced by an ecstatic vision of the approaching worldwide revolution which would establish republican governments for all nations.”⁸ Linda Frey and Marsha Frey assert that “the French revolutionaries indeed saw themselves as soldiers fighting for a cause and thought they were not bound by the constraints of traditional diplomacy.”⁹

On the surface, evidence for Brissot’s orchestration of an ideologically driven foreign policy is quite appealing. Brissot’s rhetorical proclamations fit nicely with the plan to free Louisiana from Spanish tyranny. His relative expertise in American affairs and ostensible leadership of the Girondins add further reason to assume his direction of the Genet mission. The Executive Council even notified Genet of his appointment on November 19—the same day the National Convention famously pledged French support for oppressed persons everywhere. Nevertheless, historians should be skeptical that Brissot’s ideas accurately represent French thinking.

Primary evidence suggests that Genet’s western schemes were coordinated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Pierre Lebrun—not Brissot.¹⁰ Though guided in part by the ideological aims of the Revolution, Lebrun’s planning reflects pragmatism, a keen interest in European power politics, and a detailed knowledge of American affairs. Documents in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the correspondence of Girondin leaders also suggest that political conditions—including not only the growing rift between the Girondins and Montagnards but also disagreements among the Girondins—are crucial to understanding French policy making in the closing months of 1792. Particularly, French general Charles-François Dumouriez consistently opposed Brissot’s plans for an expansive attack on all the Spanish American colonies. Based on the sometimes competing goals and perspectives of Lebrun, Brissot, and Dumouriez, the origin of the Genet mission sheds light not only on a significant episode of American history but also on the dynamics of French decision making at the outset of the National Convention.

Girondin executive power began in March 1792, when King Louis XVI, under pressure from the National Assembly, appointed several of Bris-

⁸ Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 19.

⁹ Linda Frey and Marsha Frey, “‘The Reign of the Charlatans Is Over’: The French Revolutionary Attack on Diplomatic Practice,” *Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 707. Frey and Frey even misidentify Brissot as minister of foreign affairs. See also Richard K. Murdoch, “The Genesis of the Genêt Schemes,” *French American Review* 2 (1949): 81–97; William F. Keller, “The Frontier Intrigues of Citizen Genet,” *Americana* 34 (1940): 575–77; and Frederick A. Schminke, *Genet: The Origins of His Mission to America* (Toulouse, 1939).

¹⁰ His full name was Pierre-Henri-Hélène-Marie Lebrun-Tondu, though he dropped Tondu. See Patricia Chastain Howe, *Foreign Policy and the French Revolution: Charles François Dumouriez, Pierre LeBrun, and the Belgian Plan, 1789–1793* (New York, 2008), 191n1.

sot's allies as ministers in the Executive Council. For months, Brissot and other Girondin legislators had been asserting more control over foreign affairs and pushing for action against French émigrés who were allegedly inciting counterrevolutionary hostility abroad, particularly from within Austrian territory. Political pressure for war escalated as Brissot and his colleagues increasingly saw Austria as the primary threat to the safety of the Revolution. After the National Assembly impeached Foreign Minister Antoine de Valdec de Lessart in March, the king named Dumouriez as his successor. Dumouriez and his newly appointed deputy, Lebrun, also were fervent advocates of war against Austria. With their support and Brissot's efforts in the National Assembly, France declared war on April 20, 1792.¹¹

Brissot's bellicose declarations espousing the need for a Franco-Austrian war have incited substantial scholarly discussion, which is a good starting point for understanding both the context and the significance of the Genet affair. Although Brissot couched his support for war in revolutionary language, most historians agree that Girondin leaders used the Austrian threat to advance their own domestic political agenda.¹² Indeed, at times Brissot was frank about the self-serving role of counterrevolutionary threats. "I have only one fear," Brissot wrote in December 1791, "it is that we won't be betrayed. We need great treasons; our salvation lies there, because there are still strong doses of poison in France and strong emetics are needed to expel them."¹³ Clearly, Brissot was ready to exploit the threat of counterrevolution to advance his revolutionary goals and his own career.

Nevertheless, calls for war were not entirely based on domestic political advancement. Dumouriez and Lebrun were advocates of Belgian liberation long before 1792.¹⁴ And Brissot's professed belief in the

¹¹ Howe, *Foreign Policy*, 49–61. A lengthier version of Howe's argument with more complete citations is presented in Patricia Chastain Howe, "French Revolutionary Policy and the Belgian Project, 1789–1793" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1982).

¹² T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (New York, 1986), 99–113; Thomas E. Kaiser, "From the Austrian Committee to the Foreign Plot: Marie-Antoinette, Austrophobia, and the Terror," *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003): 587–88; Thomas E. Kaiser, "La fin du renversement des alliances: La France, l'Autriche et la déclaration de guerre du 20 avril 1792," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 351 (2008): 77–98. In this latter article Kaiser accepts that the Brissotins used war propaganda for their own political purposes, but he says that the effectiveness of this propaganda depended on underlying French Austrophobia and threatening actions by the Hapsburgs. See also Frank L. Kidner, "The Girondists and the 'Propaganda War' of 1792: A Reevaluation of French Revolutionary Foreign Policy from 1791–1793" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1971). Kidner's unpublished dissertation contains a section (pp. 264–76) on the Genet affair that, although not nearly as comprehensive, bears the closest resemblance to this essay.

¹³ Quoted in John Hardman, "The Real and Imagined Conspiracies of Louis XVI," in *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, ed. Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton (Manchester, 2007), 76.

¹⁴ Howe, *Foreign Policy*, 9–40; Gary Savage, "Favier's Heirs: The French Revolution and the *Secret du Roi*," *Historical Journal* 41 (1998): 249–50.

Austrian threat may have been genuine, even if self-serving.¹⁵ Assessing such rhetoric requires sensitivity not only to the ulterior motives of propaganda but also to pervasive uncertainty and the potential danger posed if a conspiracy went undetected.¹⁶ The point here is not to distinguish whether the French war hawks were motivated by ideological goals of spreading the Revolution or personal goals of advancing their careers. Rather, these objectives were so inextricably intertwined in the Austrian campaign that untying the knot is practically, if not theoretically, impossible. The difficulty of disaggregating Girondin motivations, however, tends to mask genuine differences in their political views and goals. Although the declaration of war on Austria was indisputably more important, the planning of Genet's mission provides a clearer picture of the heterogeneous foreign policy outlooks of Lebrun, Brissot, and Dumouriez.¹⁷

After war was declared, the relationship between Dumouriez and Brissot's closest allies in the ministry became increasingly strained. A significant body of literature has examined the strength and cohesiveness of the Girondin party within the National Convention.¹⁸ Much of this literature, however, excludes the first months of the Convention and ignores the Executive Council.¹⁹ Nonetheless, early divisions

¹⁵ Savage argues that domestic political incentives probably were a necessary but not sufficient reason for Brissot's warmongering ("Favier's Heirs," 247–56, esp. 252n132). Timothy Tackett states that "Brissot was not above demagoguery, and in the previous months he had proposed several different and sometimes contradictory conspiracy theories. But whatever the reality of the 'grand conspiracy' set out by Brissot and Gensonné, it is clear that a large number of their fellow deputies believed it was real" ("Conspiracy Obsession in a Time of Revolution: French Elites and the Origins of the Terror, 1789–1792," *American Historical Review* 105 [2000]: 691–92).

¹⁶ This point is made nicely in Kaiser, "La fin du renversement des alliances," 98; and Marisa Linton, "'Do You Believe That We're Conspirators?' Conspiracies Real and Imagined in Jacobin Politics, 1793–94," in Campbell, Kaiser, and Linton, *Conspiracy in the French Revolution*, 128.

¹⁷ Looking at an earlier period, Jeremy Whiteman finds that some French radicals "wished France to have no truck whatsoever with the supposedly corrupt practices of the past, such as secret dealings and alliance diplomacy, or with notions such as the international balance of power. . . . The majority of Patriot deputies, however, in particular those who would emerge as the 'Feuillants,' had a more flexible and pragmatic view." He views the increasing marginalization of the "language" of pragmatism as a key element in the declaration of war on Austria (*Reform, Revolution, and French Global Policy, 1787–1791* [Aldershot, 2003], 254). This article tries to show how the interplay of competing views continued to shape French foreign policy even after the king was deposed.

¹⁸ Michael J. Sydenham, *The Girondins* (London, 1961), argues that the Girondins did not really exist as a distinct entity in the National Convention. This point is contested in several subsequent works. See Alison Patrick, "Political Divisions in the French National Convention, 1792–93," *Journal of Modern History* 41 (1969): 421–74; Patrick, *The Men of the First French Republic: Political Alignments in the National Convention of 1792* (Baltimore, MD, 1972); Theodore A. DiPadova, "The Girondins and the Question of Revolutionary Government," *French Historical Studies* 9 (1976): 432–50. Two more recent studies show weaknesses in the idea of a distinct Girondin faction but again refer only to activity in the Convention. See Michael S. Lewis-Beck, Anne Hildreth, and Alan B. Spitzer, "Was There a Girondist Faction in the National Convention, 1792–1793?" *French Historical Studies* 15 (1988): 519–36; and Benjamin Reilly, "Polling the Opinions: A Reexamination of Mountain, Plain, and Gironde in the National Convention," *Social Science History* 28 (2004): 53–73.

¹⁹ This point is made, for instance, in Gary Kates, "Commentary to Lewis-Beck et al.," *French Historical Studies* 15 (1988): 543–46.

within the Girondin faction are well known.²⁰ In the middle of 1792, a split occurred between Dumouriez and Brissot's closest allies in the Executive Council—Jean-Marie Roland, Joseph Servan, and Etienne Clavière. The conflict stemmed from Dumouriez's opposition to a legislative decree that abolished the king's Constitutional Guard; it escalated to the point where Dumouriez and Servan drew swords.²¹ In June the king forced the Girondin ministers out of the government and appointed Dumouriez to replace Servan as minister of war. This early conflict is especially important because Lebrun was a top deputy—and one of Dumouriez's allies—in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although historians frequently group Lebrun and Dumouriez together with the Girondins, it should be remembered that even domestically their differences were sometimes significant.

Months later Dumouriez and the Girondins reached a fragile détente.²² On August 10, 1792, the National Assembly deposed the king and convened a provisional Executive Council.²³ Brissot's allies resumed their posts in what was to be the height of Girondin power. The National Assembly also elected Lebrun as minister of foreign affairs and gave Dumouriez command of the army. Lebrun quickly pledged his full support to Dumouriez.²⁴ With domestic stability weak and the Allied armies threatening French security, the Girondins depended on Dumouriez to control the military.²⁵

In early October, however, an exchange between Dumouriez and Lebrun highlighted persistent tensions. Lebrun wrote on behalf of the Executive Council requesting Dumouriez's cooperation in settling a conflict within the command of the army.²⁶ Days later, Dumouriez replied with a blistering letter: "I confess to you, my friend, that I am unhappy with these two letters; they do not carry the true, concise, forthright character that suits six ministers of a great Republic. I see in them the mismanagement, the banality, and the flattery of the old regime. You seem to fear your generals; you seem to not have enough

²⁰ Sydenham, *Girondins*, presents a more narrative-based study of these differences, including those in the Executive Council.

²¹ Howe, *Foreign Policy*, 81–82; Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothaus, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789–1799*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT, 1985), 2:900.

²² After Dumouriez's defection, Brissot denied his past connection with the general. Though some historians have accepted Brissot's word, it is disproved by the evidence. See H. A. Goetz-Bernstein, *La diplomatie de la Gironde: Jacques-Pierre Brissot* (Paris, 1912), 329–30.

²³ Although only a few Girondins played a role in the insurrection—primarily led by the Montagnards and the Paris mob—Brissot and his associates were, in the short term, its principal beneficiaries. See Leigh Whaley, "Political Factions and the Second Revolution: The Insurrection of 10 August 1792," *French History* 7 (1993): 205–24.

²⁴ Howe, *Foreign Policy*, 93.

²⁵ For a discussion of this mutual dependence, see Richard M. Brace, "General Dumouriez and the Girondins, 1792–1793," *American Historical Review* 56 (1951): 493–509.

²⁶ Lebrun to Dumouriez, Oct. 7, 1792, in Charles Nauroy, ed., *Révolutionnaires* (Paris, 1891), 176–78.

trust in their frankness and in their patriotism.”²⁷ The letters, although replete with pleasantries expressing Dumouriez’s and Lebrun’s mutual regard, illustrate the delicate balance Lebrun had to maintain between his Girondin colleagues and the ambitious Dumouriez.

While trying to placate Dumouriez, Lebrun also had to manage his responsibilities as minister of foreign affairs.²⁸ A month after the August 10 coup, Lebrun wrote to the unofficial French emissary to Great Britain, Bernard-François de Chauvelin. “We are informed . . . that the people of Louisiana want to shake the yoke of Spanish tyranny,” Lebrun stated. “England would have an even better opportunity for this conquest now that Spain is left on her own and without hope of assistance from us.”²⁹ Lebrun’s letter provides several important insights. It reveals an interest in Louisiana and indicates his satisfaction at the idea of Spain losing its territory. More significantly, however, the letter shows Lebrun’s acquaintance with the discontent of Louisiana’s inhabitants but reveals no concern for their general freedom. Instead of promoting Louisiana’s liberation, Lebrun was suggesting that Britain overtake Spanish territory. His motives toward Louisiana, at least in September 1792, seem to have been concerned mainly with the balance of European power.³⁰

Several weeks later, talk of the Spanish colonies resurfaced. Francisco de Miranda, a Venezuelan expatriate who had recently assumed a post in the French military, had developed plans with Brissot for a French-led expedition against Spanish possessions in Central and South America. The design included using the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) as a base of operations and recruiting soldiers in the United States to join the conquest.³¹ On October 13, 1792, Bris-

²⁷ Dumouriez to Lebrun, Oct. 9, 1792, in Nauroy, *Révolutionnaires*, 179.

²⁸ Between Servan’s resignation and Jean-Nicholas Pache’s appointment, Lebrun also served as acting minister of war.

²⁹ Lebrun to Chauvelin, Sept. 14, 1792, in Albert Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution française*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1885–1904), 3:20. Britain had withdrawn Chauvelin’s status as minister plenipotentiary after the king was deposed. See Howe, *Foreign Policy*, 132.

³⁰ Franco-British relations remained relatively peaceful until the French incursion into Belgium in early November. See William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (New York, 1989), 200.

³¹ An informative article on this proposal is Marcel Dorigny, “Brissot et Miranda en 1792, ou comment révolutionner l’Amérique espagnole?” in *La France et les Amériques au temps de Jefferson et de Miranda*, ed. Marcel Dorigny and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol (Paris, 2001), 93–105. This article gives some discussion of what Brissot may have wished to do with the conquered territory. Further literature on Miranda’s South American designs while in France can be found in Carmen L. Bohórquez-Morán, *Francisco de Miranda, précurseur des indépendances de l’Amérique latine* (Montreal, 1998), 151–60; Tomás Polanco Alcántara, *Francisco de Miranda: Bosquejo de una biografía; ¿Don Juan o Don Quijote?* (Caracas, 1996), 283–305; and Karen Racine, *Francisco de Miranda: A Transatlantic Life in the Age of Revolution* (Wilmington, DE, 2003), 117–18. Miranda’s papers have been published in *Archivo del General Miranda*, 24 vols. (Caracas, 1929–50). For a Spanish translation, see Josefina Rodríguez de Alonso, ed., *Colombia*, 18 vols. to date (Caracas, 1978–). Less comprehensive collections of Miranda’s French revolutionary papers appear in Edgardo Mondolfi, ed., *Francisco de Miranda en Francia* (Caracas, 1992); and J[osé] M[aría] Antepara, ed., *South American Emancipation:*

sot wrote to Miranda in glowing language: "Only you appear capable of leading the expedition. Your name and your talents would guarantee success." Brissot stated that he had revealed his views to all the ministers and that "they have sensed the advantages." Nevertheless, Dumouriez, who had recently returned to Paris as a hero after his victory at Valmy, apparently opposed the scheme and had not replied to Brissot's inquiries. Brissot therefore entreated Miranda: "The success of this undertaking depends on you and Dumouriez: that he consents and you leave; therefore, speak with or write to him. The moment is right; if we let it pass, it may not return again."³²

Such a grand scheme of revolutionary conquest was not uncommon for Brissot. He later stated in a letter to former minister of war Servan: "I hold that our liberty will never again be peaceful as long as there is a Bourbon on the throne."³³ He then explained his logic for striking at the Spanish colonies. "Well convinced that it was necessary to hit Spain in all its sensitive parts, I believed that it was necessary to reflect on making Spanish America rise up, and what better man for this job than Miranda!"³⁴

In addition to his fiery views on international relations, Brissot had visited the United States and was passionate about American affairs. "Westerners are convinced that navigation on the Mississippi cannot remain closed for long," Brissot wrote in 1791. "They are determined to get it, either amicably or by force; they will succeed, even if they have to preach a crusade to do so. Even Congress will not be able to check their will. . . . A small quarrel will be enough to inflame men's minds, and if ever the Americans march on New Orleans, it will fall before them."³⁵ These comments are only a small part of Brissot's large treatise on the United States, but they show his acute interest in the American West and his unchecked confidence in the revolutionary potential of its inhabitants.³⁶

Documents, Historical and Explanatory, Shewing the Designs Which Have Been in Progress, and the Exertions Made by General Miranda, for the South American Emancipation during the Last Twenty-five Years (London, 1810).

³² Claude Perroud, ed., *J.-P. Brissot: Correspondance et papiers* (Paris, 1912), 304. Miranda's commission into the French army specifically stated that "in the moment the occasion presents itself" he had permission to begin his Latin American conquest (*Archivo del General Miranda*, 8:7-8). Miranda also wrote of his plans to the Girondin mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion, affirming his devotion both to the French republic and to his homeland of Venezuela. See Miranda to Pétion, Oct. 26, 1792, in Rodríguez de Alonso, *Colombeia*, 10:273-74.

³³ France had deposed its Bourbon monarch in August, but Spain remained under the rule of a Bourbon king.

³⁴ Brissot to Servan, Nov. 26, 1792, in Perroud, *J.-P. Brissot*, 312.

³⁵ Jacques-Pierre Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America, 1788*, trans. Mara Soceanu Vamos and Durand Echeverria (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 421-22.

³⁶ Brissot also was involved in American land speculation, which probably influenced his views. See nn. 95-96 below.

Most historians have cited Brissot's idealism and interest in American affairs as the key factors in the French decision to send Genet to the United States. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick argue that "Brissot's zeal was such that he saw no reason why the Revolution's principles should not be spread across the world, if necessary by force. . . . And it was the mentality represented by Brissot that gave the tone to the Genet mission, and that shaped Genet's instructions."³⁷ Ammon, the most recent and comprehensive historian of the Genet mission, states that "Brissot, as a member of the Diplomatic Committee of the Convention, became the responsible architect of French policy towards the United States."³⁸ French scholars similarly place Brissot at the heart of the Genet mission's origin.³⁹

Primary evidence, however, shows that Girondin leaders were not in agreement on how or why France should attack Spanish colonies. The path Lebrun eventually chose differed significantly from Brissot's plan for South American conquest. Although the extent of discord should not be overstated, the decision to send Genet reflects the more pragmatic impulses of the foreign ministry—not an outright triumph of Brissot's revolutionary zeal.

Sending an emissary to the western United States to stir up discontent and raise an army against Spanish Louisiana may seem revolutionary and idealistic, but, in fact, similar plots were hatched by various European powers throughout the Federalist era.⁴⁰ In 1793 Spain conspired with slaves in Saint-Domingue (promising them freedom and land) in order to destabilize French colonial rule.⁴¹ In 1797 the U.S. Senate impeached one of its own members, William Blount, for having made overtures to Britain regarding a plan to raise disaffected Ameri-

³⁷ Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 331–32.

³⁸ Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 17.

³⁹ For example, Marcel Dorigny states: "Si Brissot n'y figurait pas [dans le ministère jacobin], il en était l'âme et le guide officieux. Il ne faut pas non plus perdre de vue sa position stratégique au sein du Comité diplomatique de l'Assemblée législative: aucune décision importante n'échappait alors à son regard et ses amis politiques furent promu à des postes importants. Dans deux secteurs qui lui tenaient particulièrement à cœur, les affaires coloniales et les relations franco-américaines, il infléchit très directement les décisions du ministère. Pour orienter la politique des Etats-Unis en faveur de la France nouvelle, Brissot fit nommer ministre de France à Philadelphie un de ses proches, le fameux 'citoyen Genet,' comme les Américains le désignèrent toujours" ("Sonthonax et Brissot: Le cheminement d'une filiation politique assumée," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre mer* 84 [1997]: 35–36). See also Claude Moisy, *Le citoyen Genet: La Révolution française à l'assaut de l'Amérique* (Toulouse, 2007). A good review of earlier French literature supporting the orthodox thesis appears in Kidner, "Girondists," 7–53.

⁴⁰ For an excellent article on the American impetus for these intrigues, see Andrew R. L. Cayton, "'When Shall We Cease to Have Judases?' The Blount Conspiracy and the Limits of the 'Extended Republic,'" in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville, VA, 1996), 156–89.

⁴¹ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 152–53.

can frontiersmen against Spanish Louisiana.⁴² Few would argue that these Spanish and British plots were revolutionary, in the sense that their inspiration was a desire to extend freedom and republicanism. Rather, the schemes were opportunistic and motivated by contemporary geopolitics. Similar concerns were also central to French decision making in 1792. Lebrun wanted to spread the gains of the Revolution abroad, but he was adeptly aware of the European balance of power and the limits of French resources. He showed pragmatism in using the Genet affair not merely to spread freedom but also to attack Spanish interests with efficiency.

Although Brissot claimed to have the Executive Council's support for the proposed Miranda expedition, Dumouriez clearly opposed the idea, and thus it probably lacked the support of Lebrun. Some scholars have argued that Lebrun—not Brissot—was dominant in foreign affairs.⁴³ Frank Kidner, making extensive use of files in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, concludes that although colleagues in the ministry counseled and pressured him, Lebrun “managed generally to keep the initiative in foreign policy because the regular business of his office was automatically left to him and thus he alone made the final decisions or selected problems for presentations to the Council at large.”⁴⁴ Patricia Howe agrees, arguing that Lebrun and Dumouriez dominated the making of foreign policy.⁴⁵ Indeed, Brissot plainly acknowledged his own helplessness in a letter to Servan in November: “My friend, I do not find in the other ministers, except Clavière, the activity that is in my head. . . . Lebrun appeared to me opposed to the system of attacking Spain.”⁴⁶ Though many historians have assumed that Brissot managed foreign policy and that his views were in harmony with those of the Executive Council, the evidence suggests otherwise.

In the midst of this internal debate over how to proceed in its conduct toward the New World, the French government received a provocative proposal from an American frontiersman named James Cole Mountflorencia. Serving as a business agent for Southwest Territorial Governor William Blount, Mountflorencia had arrived in Paris in May 1792 and was well acquainted with several leading members of the

⁴² Buckner F. Melton Jr., *The First Impeachment: The Constitution's Framers and the Case of Senator William Blount* (Macon, GA, 1998).

⁴³ Turner twice states that Lebrun was made minister of foreign affairs due to the influence of Brissot. Although this is possible, Turner offers no evidence to support his claim. See Turner, “Origin of Genet's Projected Attack,” 654; and Frederick Jackson Turner, “Documents on the Relations of France to Louisiana, 1792–1795,” *American Historical Review* 3 (1898): 503.

⁴⁴ Kidner, “Girondists,” 246.

⁴⁵ Howe, “French Revolutionary Policy,” 538. The scholarship of both Kidner and Howe is distinguished by extensive use of primary-source material pertaining to French foreign affairs.

⁴⁶ Brissot to Servan, Nov. 26, 1792, in Perroud, *J.-P. Brissot*, 312. Interestingly, Brissot's statement indicates that other ministers—not just Lebrun—were opposed to the plan.

National Convention.⁴⁷ His letter to Lebrun is not mentioned in any of the existing secondary literature, apparently having been overlooked by the copyist assisting Frederick Jackson Turner.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, certain aspects of the letter indicate that Mountfloreance's proposal might have influenced Lebrun's thinking in the direction of what eventually became the Genet mission. Writing on October 26, 1792, Mountfloreance opened in language meant to capture the Girondin imagination:

It is in the universal interest of the people as well as the French republic to annihilate the despotism of the crowned tyrants, and especially those of the house of Bourbon who will always find most lethal displeasure in the abolition of royalty in France. In case there is a rupture with Spain, there is an easy and inexpensive way to restore liberty to the inhabitants of Louisiana and Florida, which would be more than a small contribution to the general emancipation of all southern America from Castille's tyrannical yoke.⁴⁹

Mountfloreance continued by describing the discontent of the western frontiersmen with their Spanish occupiers. He then not so humbly proposed to raise a legion of disaffected frontiersmen, under French commissions, that he would lead against Spanish Louisiana.⁵⁰ Mountfloreance emphasized the ease of the mission and its minimal costs to the French government:

I do not want an enlistment, a uniform, or a salary. I only want to reserve the right to nominate the officers, to ensure that each has public spiritedness and courage and is trusted by the legion. I propose that this legion not exceed ten thousand men. . . . The only expense to France would be some field artillery . . . [and] we would also need gunpowder, lead and cannonballs; and it would be neces-

⁴⁷ William Blount to James Cole Mountfloreance, Nov. 1, 1791, Dreer Collection, Letters of Members of the Federal Convention, Pennsylvania Historical Society; Alice B. Keith, "Letters from Major James Cole Mountfloreance to Members of the Blount Family (William, John Gray, and Thomas) from on Shipboard, Spain, France, Switzerland, England, and America, January 22, 1792–July 21, 1796," *North Carolina Historical Review* 14 (1937): 251–87; Wesley J. Campbell, "James Cole Mountfloreance and the Politics of Diplomacy," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 66 (2007): 210–35; Mountfloreance, *Short Sketch of the Public Life of J. C. Mountfloreance* (Paris, 1804), 7. William Blount was governor of the federal territory known as the Territory South of the River Ohio, or the Southwest Territory, which in 1796 became the state of Tennessee.

⁴⁸ Frederick Jackson Turner, ed., "Selections from the Draper Collection in the Possession of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, to Elucidate the Proposed French Expedition under George Rogers Clark against Louisiana, in the Years 1793–94," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1896*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1897), 2:968. An exhaustive search of English and French secondary sources found no mention of the letter.

⁴⁹ James Cole Mountfloreance to [Lebrun], Oct. 26, 1792, Correspondance Politique, Espagne, vol. 634, fol. 93, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris. For a full translation of the proposal and discussion of Mountfloreance's motivations, see Wesley J. Campbell, "The French Intrigue of James Cole Mountfloreance," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 65 (2008): 779–96.

⁵⁰ Mountfloreance stated, "This legion would be comprised of American hunters, Canadians and inhabitants of Illinois, all sworn enemies of Spanish despotism" (*ibid.*, 795).

sary to provide for the subsistence of the troops from the moment they assemble. The seizures that would be made would amply compensate the Republic for her small advance.

Mountflorencia concluded his proposal by mentioning the necessity of maintaining secrecy from Spain and from the United States to spare the latter “the inconvenience of having to oppose this plan of operations.” He also noted that, although he would lead the expedition, the French minister to the United States should know of the plan and could attempt to negotiate a new peace treaty.

Lebrun undoubtedly ignored Mountflorencia’s aspirations to lead a French regiment against Spanish Louisiana. The October 26 proposal, however, might have spurred his thinking toward a compromise solution that could allow for the modest realization of Brissot’s revolutionary ambitions in the New World while limiting the diversion of French military resources and the possibility of Spanish (and potentially English) backlash. Whatever its effect, Mountflorencia’s letter—which probably crossed Lebrun’s desk around the turn of the month—was followed days later by steps toward a remarkably similar plan. On November 5, 1792, Lebrun inquired at the Bureau of the Colonies for documents on Louisiana.⁵¹ The next day, he wrote to Dumouriez and apparently described his plan to send Genet to the United States to foment rebellion in the west.⁵² On November 19 the Executive Council officially informed Genet of his selection.⁵³

Having relatively little evidence, scholars have disputed who selected Genet as minister to the United States. Most sources, citing the

⁵¹ Lebrun to Monge, Nov. 5, 1792, *Correspondance Politique, Espagne*, vol. 634, fol. 65, Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères; Mildred Stahl Fletcher, “Louisiana as a Factor in French Diplomacy from 1763 to 1800,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17 (1930): 369–70n16. Miranda, who was in Paris, seems to have been apprised of these developments, although apparently he was confused as to their exact form. In a letter to Alexander Hamilton, Miranda wrote, “The official communications from the new appointed Minister of France, & the Information our friend Col. [William Stephens] Smith shall give to you, will shew how things are grown ripe & into maturity for the Execution of those grand & beneficial projects we had in Contemplation.” He sent a similar letter to U.S. Secretary of War Henry Knox. See Miranda to Hamilton, Nov. 4, 1792, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York, 1961–87), 13:16; and Miranda to Knox, Nov. 4, 1792, in William S. Robertson, *The Life of Miranda*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1929), 1:126–27. Miranda had previously met with Hamilton and Knox during a visit to the United States in 1784, when they had discussed Miranda’s dreams of Spanish American conquest. Jefferson’s notes record a conversation with Smith on Feb. 9, 1793, stating that Smith had departed from Paris on Nov. 9, that the French were sending Genet, and that “they propose to emancipate S. America, and will send 45. ships of the line there in the spring, and Mirande [*sic*] at the head of the expedition” (*The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd et al., 35 vols. to date [Princeton, NJ, 1950–], 25:243).

⁵² Sorel, *L’Europe et la Révolution française*, 3:157. This letter has not been found after several searches and inquiries in Paris. Sorel is the only known source of its contents, which he summarizes: “Lebrun arranged the means of occupying Spain elsewhere. Miranda came to confer with him about the grand project of revolution in the Spanish colonies. He decided to send Genet to the United States with the secret mission of fomenting that revolution.”

⁵³ Lebrun to Genet, Nov. 19, 1792, Genet Papers, Library of Congress.

writings of Louis-Guillaume Otto and Madame Roland, attribute the selection to Brissot.⁵⁴ In 1797 Otto stated that “Brissot then enjoyed an influence without bounds in the diplomatic committee and in the Ministry. He proposed Genet to fill the post of minister plenipotentiary in the United States.”⁵⁵ Roland’s memoirs agree: “The choice of an envoy to the United States was more wisely handled. Brissot is blamed for the part he took in it, but in fact it was greatly to his credit. . . . He suggested Genet.”⁵⁶ Though possible, neither Roland’s nor Otto’s account has much credibility. It is doubtful that Madame Roland was in a position to know firsthand who appointed Genet, and her diaries remain an unreliable source of information.⁵⁷ Although Otto might have been in a position to know, his status as a government official and his desire to distance himself from what was widely considered a misconceived and failed mission seem to have influenced his statements.⁵⁸ Another account comes from an article by Eugene Sheridan, stating that “the chief architects of Genet’s mission [were] Brissot, Lebrun, and Clavière.”⁵⁹ There is no evidence that Minister of Finance Etienne Clavière had any role in the Genet appointment.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Eloise Ellery, *Brissot de Warville: A Study in the History of the French Revolution* (Boston, 1915), 315. Ammon, citing Ellery, states that Genet’s instructions “were drafted by Brissot and his colleagues on the Diplomatic Committee after a thorough review of the files in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs” (*Genet Mission*, 22). Ellery’s book, however, never makes this claim. There is no known evidence that Brissot and the Diplomatic Committee handled the writing of Genet’s instructions, which were dated Dec. 1792 and probably written by or under the close guidance of Lebrun. The Committee of General Defense mentioned by Ellery came into being in 1793; thus Ammon’s inference cannot be correct. Madame Roland’s name in full was Marie-Jeanne Roland de la Platière. She was married to Minister of the Interior Jean-Marie Roland de la Platière.

⁵⁵ Correspondance Politique, Etats-Unis Supplément, vol. 2, fol. 2, Archives du Département des Affaires Etrangères, published, with minor changes, in Louis-Guillaume Otto, *Considérations sur la conduite du gouvernement américain envers la France, depuis le commencement de la Révolution jusqu’en 1797*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Princeton, NJ, 1945).

⁵⁶ Evelyn Shuckburgh, ed. and trans., *The Memoirs of Madame Roland* (London, 1989), 102–3. The spelling *Genest* was frequent in newspapers, but Genet and those who knew him consistently spelled his name *Genet*.

⁵⁷ Madame Roland had a strong distaste for Lebrun, which might have influenced her account; see Shuckburgh, *Memoirs of Madame Roland*, 100. For Roland’s unreliability on such matters, see Howe, “French Revolutionary Policy,” 507.

⁵⁸ After the Montagnards gained power, Otto was harsh in his appraisal of the Genet mission, thus ingratiating himself with the new regime. During the Girondin ministry, however, Otto helped direct the mission and seems to have played a pivotal role in its creation. See Sheridan, “Recall of Edmond Charles Genet,” 479–80; and Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 815.

⁵⁹ Sheridan, “Recall of Edmond Charles Genet,” 478. The claim is repeated several times in the article and in the Jefferson papers, published a year later with Sheridan serving as senior associate editor. See Boyd et al., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:685.

⁶⁰ Turner, whom Sheridan cites, merely stated that Clavière had been to the United States and had coauthored books with Brissot (“Origin of Genet’s Projected Attack,” 654). Clavière, as a member of the Executive Council, did take part in the approval of Genet after he was selected. He also authorized Genet to procure payment on the American debt. Although this is possible, there is no evidence to support the involvement implied by Sheridan. See Regina Katharine Crandall, “Genet’s Projected Attack on Louisiana and the Floridas, 1793–94” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1902), 22–23.

Although Brissot and others might have influenced the selection of Genet as minister to the United States, the most convincing evidence suggests that Lebrun made the selection. Through their work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the spring and summer of 1792, Dumouriez and Lebrun had been acquainted with Genet, who was chargé d'affaires in Russia.⁶¹ Shortly after assuming his new post as minister of foreign affairs in August, Lebrun wrote to Genet: "make your preparations to return to Paris as quickly as possible. Your known patriotism and the distinguished talents that you have developed during your residence at [Saint] Petersburg are titles too precious not to require me to present you with new means to serve your country usefully."⁶² When Genet returned to Paris, by all accounts he ingratiated himself with the Girondin leaders, thus making it possible that others supported his appointment as minister to the United States. But within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lebrun held the responsibility of naming emissaries, and he seems to have made most decisions himself.⁶³ Genet stated years later that Lebrun suggested his appointment at a dinner party. This hardly seems likely given that Genet was not in the country at the time of his selection.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Lebrun probably did appoint Genet.⁶⁵

Sometime after Genet's selection had been decided but before his instructions were drawn—that is, sometime in late November or early December—Lebrun received a briefing on the Louisiana territory. The unsigned memorandum, which apparently was accompanied by an older report, went into detail on the prospect of an expedition against Spanish Louisiana. Although rarely cited, this fascinating report gives remarkable detail about western affairs, and it unmistakably helped shape the direction of the Genet mission. The author began with an immediate denunciation of the idea of vast South American conquest: "To embrace all at once the immense country which extends from New Mexico to Chile to create revolutions there, is to wish to lose touch with reality in favor of idle fancies. Without doubt, these immense pos-

⁶¹ For a summary of Genet's tenure in Russia, see William L. Blackwell, "Citizen Genet and the Revolution in Russia, 1789–1792," *French Historical Studies* 3 (1963): 72–92.

⁶² Lebrun to Genet, Aug. 17, 1792, quoted in Crandall, "Genet's Projected Attack," 14. At this point, Lebrun was *not* alluding to Genet's appointment as minister to the United States. Rather, he intended to send Genet to Holland. See Lebrun to Genet, Oct. 10, 1792, Genet Papers.

⁶³ Howe, "French Revolutionary Policy," 506–10; Kidner, "Girondists," 246.

⁶⁴ See Woodfin, "Citizen Genet and His Mission," 68–69. A pass signed by Montesquion suggests that Genet was on the Swiss border on Nov. 8, 1792, thus placing him outside Paris when he was selected as minister. See Genet Papers.

⁶⁵ Robespierre later stated his belief that Lebrun and Brissot selected Genet. See Turner, "Documents," 507. For Robespierre's views on the Genet mission, see Jacques Godechot, "Robespierre et l'Amérique," *Stanford French Review* 2 (1978): 204–8. Lebrun would have been wise to seek out the approval of Brissot, who had blocked the nomination of Guillaume de Bonnacarrère, Lebrun's previous choice for minister to the United States.

sessions will not always stay under the Spanish yoke. But it does not depend on us to deliver them today.”⁶⁶ Instead, the memorandum argued, “Louisiana promises more immediate, more certain, and less costly successes. These successes are not certain, but highly probable.” As in Mountflorencia’s proposal, the unsigned note described restlessness among American frontiersmen and encouraged Lebrun to harness that discontent against the Spanish. The author claimed that the westerners were “adventurers by principle and by habit” and that they could easily be induced to action by the promise of free navigation on the Mississippi River.

The author continued by stating the importance of maintaining secrecy, both to preserve American neutrality and to avoid French diplomatic difficulty. He suggested that Genet send commissioners to Kentucky for the ostensible purpose of purchasing land and that these men might even take on an aristocratic air “to better deceive the public’s surveillance.” After recruiting five hundred men along the Ohio, the commissioners should cover their movements as if they were merely assembling a corps of volunteers “against the Natives with whom the Americans are at war.” Additionally, in the interest of maintaining secrecy, Genet should carefully distance himself from the affair and place the blame on French immigrants at Scioto.⁶⁷ He should furthermore persuade the U.S. government to explain the affair in the same manner to Spain and England in order to preserve American neutrality.

Authorship of this detailed memorandum is presently unknown. The author identified himself as a Frenchman who apparently had also prepared a memoir that was the product of research conducted over five years. “I believed it to be possible to engage our former Government to negotiate with Spain the retrocession of Louisiana,” the author noted, “but the circumstances did not permit it to take this up.” The author obviously had spent significant time in the United States. His proposal displayed a relatively sophisticated understanding of western affairs, including the mention of General James Wilkinson—a leading Kentucky politician and infamous western intrigant—as a possible man to lead the expedition. The letter also referred to Robert Breckinridge—the new speaker of the Kentucky assembly—and Barthélemy Tardiveau—a local Frenchman who had exchanged letters with St. John

⁶⁶ Correspondance Politique, Espagne, vol. 634, fol. 456, Archives du Département des Affaires Etrangères. Also printed in Turner, “Selections,” 2:945–53.

⁶⁷ Just years earlier the Scioto Company had sold to French immigrants fraudulent deeds for land near the confluence of the Ohio and Scioto Rivers. See Archer B. Hulbert, “The Methods and Operations of the Scioto Group of Speculators,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 1 (1915): 502–15; and Jocelyne Moreau-Zanelli, *Gallipolis: Histoire d'un mirage américain au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2000).

de Crèvecoeur several years earlier.⁶⁸ Additionally, an examination of the original memorandum in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reveals that it was filled with marginal notes and crossed-out passages. As such, it seems most likely to have been written by someone within the French ministry who was intimately acquainted with American affairs and had probably recently returned from the United States.

Louis-Guillaume Otto fits this description perfectly and seems the probable author of the unsigned memorandum.⁶⁹ Otto had served in the United States for many years as chargé d'affaires and had returned to France by early December 1792.⁷⁰ His reports as chargé revealed information about the disgruntled attitudes of American frontiersmen—information repeated in the unsigned note. Otto wrote in 1785 to French foreign minister Charles Gravier, comte de Vergennes:

Interests equally strong agitate the minds of Americans in regard to Spain, and one must expect that the new settlements on the Mississippi will soon produce a revolution in Louisiana. . . . The Congress opposes in vain enterprises so distant from the center of government, and while protesting these hardly-provoked hostilities, perhaps they would view with a secret satisfaction Spanish losses. . . . This revolution builds up daily and everything contributes to making it break out.⁷¹

On November 18, 1790, Otto wrote to Vergennes's successor, Armand-Marc, comte de Montmorin, "The western country is undoubtedly that which will give the first signal of defection, and the power which shall be in possession of New Orleans will be in a position to enjoy the first fruit or be the first victim of the effervescence of a rising people."⁷² In January 1793, shortly after the unsigned memorandum was written, Lebrun hired Otto to manage the first bureau, which included American affairs in its portfolio.⁷³

⁶⁸ James Ripley Jacobs, *Tarnished Warrior: Major-General James Wilkinson* (New York, 1938); Howard C. Rice, *Barthélemy Tardiveau: A French Trader in the West* (Baltimore, MD, 1938). Otto and Crèvecoeur were both in the French diplomatic corps in New York, and in 1790 Otto married Crèvecoeur's daughter.

⁶⁹ Pierre Lyonnet, who might otherwise have been a source of the note, was mentioned separately in the memorandum, thus implying different authorship. The writer stated, "Among those who presented themselves, Lyonnet is the most skillful and the wisest."

⁷⁰ Otto returned to France with recent diplomatic dispatches from New York that were marked as received in the Foreign Ministry on Dec. 8, 1792. See Turner, "Correspondence," 2:160.

⁷¹ Paul G. Sifton, "Otto's *Mémoire* to Vergennes, 1785," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 22 (1965): 641–42.

⁷² Quoted in Crandall, "Genet's Projected Attack," 6. For biographical information, see Margaret M. O'Dwyer, "A French Diplomat's View of Congress," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 21 (1964): 408–12; and Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Asselineau, *St. John de Crèvecoeur: The Life of an American* (New York, 1987), 159–61, 179–80.

⁷³ Frédéric Masson, *Le Département des Affaires Etrangères pendant la Révolution, 1787–1804* (Paris, 1877), 243–44. Ammon suggests that Otto might have written part of Genet's instructions (*Genet Mission*, 27).

The influence of Mountflorencé's letter and the unsigned memorandum is evident in Genet's instructions. The first set of these instructions was dated December 1792 and covered various aspects of Genet's mission.⁷⁴ Among the objectives listed, France wanted "to open to the people of Kentucky the navigation of the Mississippi, to deliver our ancient brothers of Louisiana from the tyrannical yoke of Spain, and perhaps to reunite with the American Constellation the beautiful star of Canada." To this end, the Executive Council authorized Genet to take measures to germinate revolution in Louisiana. His instructions stated that inhabitants of Kentucky would likely assist his efforts without necessarily compromising Congress. The Council authorized Genet to maintain agents in Louisiana and Kentucky and to make necessary expenditures. In addition to using typical rhetoric about spreading freedom, the instructions also rationalized the mission on nonrevolutionary grounds: "Apart from the advantages that humanity in general will take from the success of this negotiation, we have in this moment a particular interest to prepare ourselves to act efficiently against England and Spain." The author of Genet's instructions was well acquainted with the geopolitical benefits that success of the mission might generate.

A supplement to the instructions, dated December 23, 1792, authorized Genet to grant commissions to American Indians but included no other references to the western intrigues. These supplemental instructions, however, convey an overriding pragmatism to the mission.⁷⁵ Genet was to ask President Washington for rigid enforcement of several articles in the Franco-American treaty of 1778 in order to help French shipping interests in an impending war against Britain. The supplement also instructed Genet to acknowledge the constitutional differences between France and the United States and exercise caution in his diplomacy—warnings that Genet energetically ignored.

As with other aspects of the origin of the mission, the authorship of Genet's instructions is speculative and widely disputed. Ammon states that Brissot and his colleagues on the Diplomatic Committee drafted the instructions, but his source—an old biography of Brissot—says nothing to confirm the claim.⁷⁶ The only known primary evidence comes from Otto and Genet, both of whom stated years later that Genet drew his own instructions.⁷⁷ Neither of the accounts is par-

⁷⁴ The instructions, including the supplement, appear in Turner, "Correspondence," 2:201–12. For a more complete summary of the instructions, see Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 25–29.

⁷⁵ Some have argued that the first set of instructions was meant for publication, but this seems highly doubtful, given the demanded secrecy of their contents. Apparently, only the first part of the first set of instructions was made public. See Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 815n89.

⁷⁶ Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 22; Ellery, *Brissot de Warville*, 314–16.

⁷⁷ Genet wrote to Thomas Jefferson on July 4, 1797: "I hurried the drawing up of my

ticularly credible independent of the other, but their coincidence—particularly concerning the hurried manner in which the instructions were written—makes their claim significantly more believable. Regardless of who actually wrote the instructions, they embodied Lebrun's ideas and were approved in the Executive Council.

Previous scholars have suggested that Americans in Paris played a role in the creation of the French plot toward Spanish Louisiana.⁷⁸ Although possible, there is little evidence that Americans in Paris communicated with Lebrun about the scheme before it had already been formed—with Mountflorencia as the one exception.⁷⁹ Several Americans and Frenchmen contacted Lebrun after Genet's instructions already were drawn. Of these, it seems that Pierre Lyonnet's letter was the only one to have been given serious attention.⁸⁰ Eventually, Genet concerted his plans with a timely proposal from George Rogers Clark, a disgruntled American Revolutionary War hero who was living in Kentucky. Clark's offer, however, did not arrive in Paris until long after the Genet mission had taken shape.⁸¹

In contrast to the public speeches made during the prelude to the war against Austria, discussions of French designs against the Spanish colonies were contained within the Executive Council and military leadership. There is no mention in *Le patriote françois* of any plans against Spanish colonies, and Genet's appointment as minister to the United

instructions which are the faithful result of the decrees of the Convention, of the decisions of the Committees, of the proclamations of the Council and of the opinions of the most influential personages." See Meade Minnigerode, *Jefferson, Friend of France, 1793: The Career of Edmond Charles Genet* (New York, 1928), 416. Otto wrote in 1797 and again in 1801 that Genet hastily had written his own instructions. See Otto, *Considérations*, 11; and Woodfin, "Citizen Genet and His Mission," 74n50.

⁷⁸ Turner particularly viewed Thomas Paine, an Englishman by birth but with obvious ties to America, as an influential voice in the genesis of the Genet affair ("Origin of Genet's Projected Attack," 655–63); see also Woodfin, "Citizen Genet and His Mission," 65–72; and Louis Didier, "Le citoyen Genet," *Revue des questions historiques* 92 (1912): 66.

⁷⁹ A short and undetailed letter from Gilbert Imlay, dated 1792, may have reached the French government before Genet's instructions were drawn. Using biographical details and textual clues in the letter, Imlay's biographer argues that the date was mistakenly added later and that the letter was probably submitted to the French government after Mar. 7, 1793. See Wil Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay: Citizen of the World* (London, 2008), 153. Additionally, Sayre, Pereyrat, and Beau-pois had presented Dumouriez with a proposal during the summer. See Turner, "Selections," 2:953–54. Lebrun was urged to ignore the latter design after it was repeated to the French government in 1793 (*ibid.*, 2:946).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:953–57; Turner, "Documents," 491–510. For a useful summary of many of the proposals submitted to the French government, see Grandall, "Genet's Projected Attack," 30–36. A document in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, possibly written by the author of the unsigned memorandum, mentioned that Lyonnet's memoir was the only one of value. See Turner, "Selections," 2:945–46n3.

⁸¹ Turner ably argues this point ("Origin of Genet's Projected Attack," 650–71). Further evidence appears in Louise P. Kellogg, ed., "Letter of Thomas Paine, 1793," *American Historical Review* 29 (1924): 501–5; John C. Parish, "The Intrigues of Doctor James O'Fallon," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17 (1930): 230–63; and Samuel C. Williams, "French and Other Intrigues in the Southwest Territory, 1790–96," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 13 (1941): 21–35.

States prompted only a one-sentence announcement.⁸² It is no surprise, however, that Genet's selection was not given much notice. Public attention was directed at more pressing issues, such as the European wars and the fate of Louis XVI. Moreover, although Girondin leaders prided themselves on their transparency, Brissot's plans for Miranda and his letters to Dumouriez concerning the prospective expedition were private.⁸³

The lack of wider political interest in Genet's mission presents an opportunity to study the decision making of Brissot, Lebrun, and Dumouriez without having to struggle with disentangling the leaders' domestic political motives. Though political reverberations might eventually have arisen from the mission, such an impact was far removed and uncertain. Girondin leaders did not publicize their efforts as they did in other campaigns, and their private discussions were void of references to public opinion. Therefore, by looking at a relatively insignificant political issue such as the method of attack against Spanish colonies, scholars can gain additional insight into the thought processes and motivations of the Girondin leaders.

The evidence presented thus far suggests that Dumouriez opposed Brissot's plans for wider Spanish American liberation and that Lebrun—not Brissot—was primarily responsible for the formulation of Genet's western intrigues. Understanding each of these figures' motives and thought processes will not only elucidate the origin of the Genet affair but may also give some window into their decision making more generally.

Dumouriez did not articulate his reasons for opposing Brissot's plans. Rather, for over a month he simply ignored Brissot's pleas. Dumouriez's letters in the closing months of 1792 reveal that his focus was elsewhere. Miranda was one of his leading generals, and Dumouriez needed resources and political attention devoted to Belgian affairs

⁸² *Le patriote français*, Nov. 28, 1792, stated, "The patriot Genet comes to receive his due reward for the zeal and courage that he displayed in Russia; he is named minister plenipotentiary to the United States." An article on Nov. 20, 1792, discussed Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicholas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet's views on Spanish liberation, but it said nothing about the Spanish colonies. The only controversy surrounding Genet's appointment seems to have been the product of a misunderstanding. A writer to the *Annales patriotiques* mistakenly identified Genet as the author of a letter that had been sent to the National Convention, and the writer said in passing that "people who have seen [Genet] in Russia have assured us that his civic mindedness was questionable at the least" (*Annales patriotiques et littéraires de la France*, Dec. 14, 1792). Genet responded: "My conduct [while in Russia] was known to the executive council, the Diplomatic Committee, and it was even judged to be honorable by the National Assembly" (*Le patriote français*, Dec. 16, 1792). Nothing more was said of the matter.

⁸³ Marisa Linton, "Fatal Friendships: The Politics of Jacobin Friendship," *French Historical Studies* 31 (2008): 65–66.

to consolidate recent French gains.⁸⁴ When he finally responded to Brissot's repeated requests in late November, Dumouriez expressed only generic support for Spanish American independence: "Once masters of Holland's navy we shall be strong enough to crush England, particularly by interesting the United States in sustaining our colonies and by executing a superb project of General Miranda."⁸⁵ Although several scholars cite this communication to show Dumouriez's support for revolutionary conquest, the letter was hardly a ringing endorsement of Brissot's plans. First, Miranda's participation was contingent on controlling Holland. More importantly, evidence from Miranda's papers reveals that Dumouriez still opposed the mission. Instead of rebuking Brissot directly, however, he sought Miranda's assistance in terminating the project.

In early December 1792, General François-Raymond Duval sent a letter to Miranda clarifying Dumouriez's opposition to an expedition in South America. Writing from Dumouriez's headquarters at Liège, Duval stated: "My dear General and friend, I hope that you remain the commander of our army and that you do not accept the offer to go to America; as advantageous as the position they offer you may be, General Dumouriez does not seem to approve of it and wants to speak with you about this matter."⁸⁶ "Please come here as soon as possible," Dumouriez wrote Miranda several days later. "I need to speak with you, and I have received letters from Paris that concern you."⁸⁷

Miranda was not able to meet with Dumouriez until two weeks later. The substance of their conversation is suggested in a letter Miranda wrote to Brissot within days of his meeting with Dumouriez:

The plan that you write in your letter is truly grand and magnificent, but I do not know if its execution is assured or even probable. With regard to the Spanish American continent and islands, I am well versed and able to form an exact opinion. But in everything concerning the French islands and their situation today, I know almost nothing, and consequently it would be impossible for me to form an exact judgment on the matter. In your plan, the French islands are the foundation of the entire operation, given that the catalyst⁸⁸ for

⁸⁴ Howe, *Foreign Policy*; Malcolm Deas, "Some Reflections on Miranda as Soldier," in *Francisco de Miranda: Exile and Enlightenment*, ed. John Maher (London, 2006), 77–87. Deas argues that Miranda was a soldier of some repute.

⁸⁵ Dumouriez to Brissot, Nov. 30, 1792, quoted in Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 3:175.

⁸⁶ Duval to Miranda, Dec. 3, 1792, in Rodríguez de Alonso, *Colombéia*, 10:283.

⁸⁷ Dumouriez to Miranda, Dec. 7, 1792, *ibid.*, 10:284. For Brissot's correspondence with Dumouriez, see Brissot to Dumouriez, Nov. 28, 1792, in Antepara, *Documents, Historical and Explanatory*, 168–69; Brissot to Dumouriez, Dec. 9, 1792, in Perroud, *J.-P. Brissot*, 319–20; and Dorigny, "Brissot et Miranda en 1792," 93–105.

⁸⁸ I have translated "force agissante" as "catalyst," although Miranda may also have intended a literal reference to the French military.

revolution on the Spanish American continent must emerge from the French colonies, and it is necessary that *we are confident* our intelligence [on affairs in Saint-Domingue] is truthful and accurate. It also seems to me that my appointment and my departure for Saint-Domingue would be an alarm signal for the courts of Madrid and St. James, and that the effects of this would soon be felt in Cadiz [Spain] and Portsmouth [England], which would pose new obstacles to the business—an undertaking that is too large, too noble, and too captivating to be spoiled by a lack of precaution at the beginning.⁸⁹

Though Miranda had spent his life firmly committed to Latin American liberation, even he doubted the efficacy of Brissot's fanciful ideas. Miranda immediately sent Lebrun a copy of his reply to Brissot and asked that Lebrun keep him apprised of Brissot's opinion, not wanting to offend him. Lebrun and Dumouriez seem to have shared Miranda's hesitations about the plan's feasibility and geopolitical consequences, and, given their recent communications, they probably influenced Miranda's thinking.⁹⁰

While Dumouriez opposed Brissot's plans for Miranda, there is no mention of him having any reaction to the announcement of the Genet mission. The planned offensive in Spanish Louisiana was to be covert, inexpensive, and not demanding on French resources. With his attention focused elsewhere, there is little reason to believe that Dumouriez gave Genet's mission much thought. Brissot, however, was intrigued with American affairs.

"What confidence," Brissot once asked rhetorically, "can be placed in those men who, regarding the revolution but as their road to fortune, assume the appearance of virtue but to deceive the people?"⁹¹ Yet some have questioned Brissot's virtue and revolutionary motives. Indeed, Brissot was a shifty historical figure, and any single snapshot of him will certainly be incomplete. Nevertheless, his attitudes toward Spanish America in the fall of 1792 are revealing. Brissot's plans for Miranda suggest a revolutionary leader with high ideals but, at least in the realm of transatlantic intrigues, little grasp of practical limitations.

Much of the scholarly attention on Brissot concerns the sincerity of his motivations and revolutionary idealism. Building on accusations

⁸⁹ Miranda to Brissot, Dec. 19, 1792, in Aristides Rojas, ed., *Miranda dans la Révolution française: Recueil de documents authentiques relatifs à l'histoire du général Francisco de Miranda, pendant son séjour en France de 1792 à 1798* (Caracas, 1889), 5–6. Miranda was in Anvers (Antwerp) at the beginning of the month and wrote Dumouriez a letter from Ruremonde on Dec. 15. Therefore he arrived at Liège between Dec. 15 and Dec. 19 (*Archivo del General Miranda*, 8:22).

⁹⁰ Miranda to Lebrun, Dec. 19, 1792, in Alonso, *Colombeia*, 10:287. Brissot replied two weeks later that it was necessary to suspend the plan. See Brissot to Miranda, Jan. 6, 1793, in Rojas, *Miranda dans la Révolution française*, 10.

⁹¹ J.-P. Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America*, trans. William Fairbank and Jeremiah Waring (London, 1792), xii.

made during Brissot's lifetime, an article by Robert Darnton concludes that during the 1780s Brissot was a police spy and hack writer who wrote revolutionary pamphlets mostly out of intellectual resentment and frustration.⁹² This critique and its underlying evidence have elicited significant debate. Frederick de Luna finds that "there is no good evidence that [Brissot] ever was a spy, and it would have been totally out of character. His whole life refutes the charge."⁹³ More recently, Simon Burrows argues that Brissot worked for the police, but he finds it improbable that Brissot's activities constituted spying. Burrows convincingly writes that Brissot's prerevolutionary career shows a penchant to compromise when necessary to advance his goals.⁹⁴

Brissot's motives and idealism have also been challenged, albeit unconvincingly, with respect to his American activities. In 1787 Brissot and his patron Clavière founded the Gallo-American Society, an organization to promote political and commercial ties between France and the United States. Funded through the auspices of the society, Brissot traveled to the United States in 1788 to study the fledgling democracy and its people, although his instructions from Clavière and other sponsors also requested that he investigate several modes of financial speculation. Upon his arrival, Brissot contemplated investing in William Duer's infamous Scioto land scheme. In the end, however, Brissot decided to speculate with Duer on American wartime currency and debts to France. Duer, a confidant of Alexander Hamilton, became the deputy secretary of the Treasury Department in 1789 and used his position to feed Brissot inside information.⁹⁵ These activities, which seem to have been the brainchild of Clavière, were among Brissot's many flirtations with shady financial deals. After his return to Europe, Brissot advertised his own land venture in the United States, though he explicitly disclaimed any similarity between it and Duer's Scioto fiasco.⁹⁶

Brissot and Clavière's American speculation schemes have led to

⁹² Robert Darnton, "The Grub Street Style of Revolution: J.-P. Brissot, Police Spy," *Journal of Modern History* 40 (1968): 301–27. More recently, see Darnton, "The Brissot Dossier," *French Historical Studies* 17 (1991): 191–205.

⁹³ Luna, "Dean Street Style," 190. See also H. T. Mason, ed., *The Darnton Debate: Books and Revolutions in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998).

⁹⁴ Simon Burrows concludes that "like most effective calumnies, those against Brissot contained grains of truth, for he made compromises typical of the *ancien régime*" ("The Innocence of Jacques-Pierre Brissot," *Historical Journal* 46 [2003]: 868). For Burrows's wider appraisal of the Grub Street debate and significance of the French *libelles*, see his *Blackmail, Scandal, and Revolution: London's French Libellistes, 1758–1792* (Manchester, 2006). An interesting essay by Patrice Gueniffey on Brissot's republican ideology also touches on this debate ("Brissot," in *La Gironde et les Girondins*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf [Paris, 1991], 443–45).

⁹⁵ Robert Sobel, *Panic on Wall Street: A History of America's Financial Disasters* (New York, 1999), 12–15; Ellery, *Brissot de Warville*, 72–73; Hulbert, "Methods and Operations," 510–13.

⁹⁶ Suzanne Desan, "Transatlantic Spaces of Revolution: The French Revolution, *Sciotomanie*, and American Lands," *Journal of Early Modern History* 12 (2008): 501.

doubts about their revolutionary motives. Samuel Bernstein states that Clavière “was a reckless adventurer, tied with many different personalities and totally lacking in principles. With this type of man Brissot developed close relations.” A recent article by Allan Potofsky speculates that “the Girondins may have adapted the Société Gallo-Américaine as a front for shady real estate dealings.” Although ultimately defending Brissot’s beneficent aims, Eloise Ellery wrote that the appearance of the Gallo-American Society seemed to be “an underhanded attempt to further [Brissot’s] own personal ends under the cloak of a public enterprise for the general good.”⁹⁷

Certainly Brissot took advantage of networking and business opportunities made possible by his leadership in prerevolutionary societies, but it is inappropriate to say without evidence that his attitudes toward the United States were disingenuous. His conception of the United States as bucolic and virtuous was part of a larger Americanophile political culture in France.⁹⁸ It is true that Brissot was willing to profit from insider information from within the American government. But questionable business deals do not disqualify Brissot as a revolutionary, especially during an era in which the lines between business and government interests were not as important or clearly defined, nor do financial incentives adequately explain the depth of Brissot’s political and philosophical ideas on Franco-American relations.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Brissot’s penchant for exploiting ostensibly humanitarian causes for self-serving ends does raise questions about the extent of his idealism. In this respect, his persistent support for both Miranda and Genet may help shore up lingering doubts about Brissot’s willingness to act in accordance with his ideals.

The extent of Brissot’s idealism is illustrated by juxtaposing his

⁹⁷ Samuel Bernstein, *Essays in Political and Intellectual History* (Freeport, NY, 1969), 30; Allan Potofsky, “The Political Economy of the French-American Debt Debate: The Ideological Uses of Atlantic Commerce, 1787 to 1800,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 63 (2006): 498; Ellery, *Brissot de Warville*, 61.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, NJ, 1957), 116–74. See also Desan, “Transatlantic Spaces of Revolution,” 467–505.

⁹⁹ For an excellent discussion of Brissot’s ideas, see Marcel Dorigny, “La libre Amérique selon Brissot et Clavière: Modèle politique, utopie libérale, et réalisme économique,” preface to Etienne Clavière and J.-P. Brissot de Warville, *De la France et des Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1996), 7–29. See also Richard Whatmore and James Livesey, “Etienne Clavière, Jacques-Pierre Brissot et les fondations intellectuelles de la politique des girondins,” *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, no. 321 (2000): 1–26; Whatmore, “Commerce, Constitutions, and the Manners of a Nation: Etienne Clavière’s Revolutionary Political Economy, 1788–93,” *History of European Ideas* 22 (1996): 351–68; Robert Darnton, *George Washington’s False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 2003), 119–55; and Tamara Corriveau, “Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Etienne Clavière et la libre Amérique: Du gallo-américanisme à la mission Genet” (master’s thesis, Université de Montréal, 2008). Although I do not examine the issue in this article, readers should be skeptical that Brissot’s views on commercial republicanism necessarily represent those of his Girondin colleagues.

ideas with those of Lebrun. Several clues indicate Lebrun's reasons for sending Genet to instigate rebellion against Spanish Louisiana. In particular, Lebrun's opposition to Brissot's plans, his apparent reliance on Mountflorencia's letter and the unsigned memorandum—the influence of which is evident in Genet's instructions—and his dealings with England all shed light on his motives. Lebrun's and Brissot's conduct should also be evaluated in view of the domestic and geopolitical context in which they operated.

In the closing months of 1792 Lebrun primarily was concerned with winning the war in Europe and establishing a republic in Belgium. He shared these priorities with Dumouriez, his predecessor and former superior in the Foreign Ministry.¹⁰⁰ France was already at war with Prussia and Austria and faced a possible conflict with Spain and England as well. Lebrun's actions demonstrated the somewhat tactful avoidance of measures that might drain French resources or aggravate neutral powers. For instance, on December 19, 1792, Lebrun declared before the National Convention that France would not take subversive action against neutral countries.¹⁰¹ The declaration was probably intended in part to assuage France's neighbors, and it indicates that Lebrun's approach to foreign policy was significantly more restrained than the international crusade for liberty articulated in the National Convention's declaration of November 19, 1792.¹⁰²

Lebrun showed additional restraint in opposing Brissot's plans for subversive activities in Spain and costly and overt conquest in the Spanish colonies. As Lebrun knew, France could hardly afford to divert precious resources in an attempt to retrace the steps of Cortez and Pizarro. The country was in dire straits economically, and the government was operating under an enormous debt burden and fiscal deficit. In 1787 outstanding government debts totaled about four billion livres (about 80 percent of the gross national product), and the annual deficit was about a hundred million livres. With the beginning of the war against Austria, however, the French deficit in 1792 ballooned to nearly a billion livres. Not surprisingly, yields on French securities increased dramatically, showing weak confidence in the French government and economy. Exports to the United States were falling, French gold reserves were being drained, and the *assignat* money scheme that Clavière had

¹⁰⁰ Patricia Chastain Howe, "Charles-François Dumouriez and the Revolutionizing of French Foreign Affairs in 1792," *French Historical Studies* 14 (1986): 368–82.

¹⁰¹ Kidner, "Girondists," 285–88; Howe, "French Revolutionary Policy," 637.

¹⁰² Kidner disputes that the Nov. 19 declaration was genuinely motivated by support for universal liberty. Rather, he argues, the declaration was a response to particular conditions in the Rhineland, only couched in the rhetoric of universal liberty ("Girondists," 231–37). Interestingly, Brissot opposed the declaration as worded.

championed was foundering. France had already expropriated church lands and, because of poor credit, could not simply issue more debt to sustain spending.¹⁰³

Clavière and other Girondins continued to blame counterrevolutionary émigrés for the failure of the *assignats*. The nature of the fiscal crisis, however, meant that French leaders had to take drastic actions. Compromising republican principles to meet the dire conditions, Clavière's proposed budget in October 1792 included such temporary exigencies as a national lottery and a state monopoly in the arms trade. On December 15, 1792, the National Convention expropriated church lands in the conquered Belgian territory.¹⁰⁴ These were the actions of a government on the verge of insolvency. Brissot's Miranda scheme would have exacerbated France's fiscal problems not only by creating short-term military expenditures; it also would have led to a costly war against Spain and, even more significantly, against Spain's ally Britain.

Further complicating Brissot's plan was the proposed use of French troops stationed in Saint-Domingue, where slaves had been in revolt since August 1791. Conflict among white plantation owners, free blacks, and slaves was rampant, and the French colonial government had lost territorial control in several areas. In reaction, Girondin leaders in the National Assembly passed legislation that recognized full equality between whites and free blacks, and in the summer of 1792 France dispatched six thousand additional troops to quell the violence. Unrest continued, however, and though Lebrun's precise thoughts on the conflict are unknown, he probably did not agree to the idea of diverting French military resources from Saint-Domingue.¹⁰⁵

Despite the impracticality of the prospective Miranda expedition, Lebrun faced continued pressure from Brissot.¹⁰⁶ Although not in control of foreign affairs, Brissot was nonetheless a hugely important political figure, especially in the Diplomatic Committee of the National Convention. By his protests, he had blocked the nomination of Guillaume de Bonnacarrère as minister to the United States—a nomination that Lebrun had supported.¹⁰⁷ And with the new minister of war, Pache, opposing the conduct of the war in Belgium, Lebrun could not

¹⁰³ Eugene Nelson White, "The French Revolution and the Politics of Government Finance, 1770–1815," *Journal of Economic History* 55 (1995): 241–42; Potofsky, "Political Economy," 490–508.

¹⁰⁴ Whatmore, "Commerce," 362–64; White, "French Revolution," 242. Howe argues that the decree "was not as brutally exploitive as often claimed" (*Foreign Policy*, 123).

¹⁰⁵ Frank Moya Pons, "Haiti and Santo Domingo, 1790–c. 1870," in *From Independence to c. 1870*, vol. 3 of *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge, 1984), 238–41; Dubois, *Avengers*, 130–51.

¹⁰⁶ Perroud, *J.-P. Brissot*, 303–20.

¹⁰⁷ Howe, "French Revolutionary Policy," 498–500.

afford politically to ignore Brissot.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the bonds of friendship between Girondin leaders gave Lebrun an additional incentive to appease Brissot.¹⁰⁹

Within this context, Lebrun seems to have been looking to advance France's position in the European balance of power while minimizing French expenditures, especially in light of Brissot's costly and somewhat fanciful plan for Spanish American conquest.¹¹⁰ Mountflorencia's proposal and the unsigned memorandum both presented a feasible alternative: a covert, self-sustaining operation that would neither tax French resources nor implicate France and its allies. Both treatises emphasized the ease with which a French emissary could recruit disaffected western soldiers and capture New Orleans. French participation, at least initially, would be hidden; the affair would be disguised as a local uprising. Any costs to France would be borne out of a renegotiated debt settlement with the United States.¹¹¹ And as the unsigned memorandum pointed out, the filibusters would force Spain to divert resources to protect the remainder of its colonial empire.¹¹² Thus the plan would weaken Spain while minimizing the risk of escalation.

Lebrun's efforts to get British support for France's transatlantic schemes further illustrate his acute interest in the European balance of power. In September, Lebrun had written to Chauvelin asking that he induce the British to attack Louisiana.¹¹³ Then in late November, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, another French agent in London, presented British prime minister William Pitt a report that sought joint French and British action against the Spanish colonies: "Another object of great importance, not only for France and England, but also

¹⁰⁸ For the details of this conflict, see Howard G. Brown, *War, Revolution, and the Bureaucratic State: Politics and Army Administration in France, 1791-1799* (Oxford, 1995), 44-62; and Robert Heron, ed., *Letters Which Passed between General Dumourier, and Pache, Minister at War to the French Republic, during the Campaign in the Netherlands, in 1792* (Perth, 1794).

¹⁰⁹ See Linton, "Fatal Friendships," 60-62. Dumouriez and Brissot were a notable exception, having had a strained relationship since the summer of 1792.

¹¹⁰ Some have argued that America was relatively unimportant to French leaders at the time. See, e.g., Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 332; Alexander DeConde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George Washington* (Durham, NC, 1958), 204; and Paul Mantoux, "Le Comité de Salut public et la mission de Genet aux Etats-Unis," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 13 (1909): 5-6. This article generally agrees with that conclusion. The Genet mission—as rationalized by Lebrun—was more a product of French goals on the European balance of power than of concern about America per se. Nevertheless, Lebrun had experience handling American affairs as the leader of the first bureau while Dumouriez was minister of foreign affairs.

¹¹¹ Crandall, "Genet's Projected Attack," 23.

¹¹² The unsigned memorandum includes a list titled "The Importance of Making a Diversion in Louisiana." The first item on that list is "to alarm Spain on the possession of its western Colonies, and to make use there of a part of their troops to protect new Mexico. Perhaps 10,000 men would not be enough to secure this border, when Louisiana will be free." See Turner, "Selections," 2:946.

¹¹³ Lebrun to Chauvelin, Sept. 14, 1792, in Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 3:20.

for their respective spheres," Talleyrand wrote, "is the independence of the Spanish colonies in Peru, Mexico, etc."¹¹⁴ The proposal, however, was short on details.

Without more information, it is difficult to discern Lebrun's intentions in his dealings with Britain. Spain and England were allied, but Lebrun might have thought that he could get British support for covert attacks on Spanish colonies. This would have fit with his goal of minimizing French expenditures, and it would have eliminated the threat of English retaliation. Lebrun also seems to have believed that Britain was on the precipice of its own revolution, and he may have thought that the mission could be part of broader cooperation between the countries, or that an expedition against the Spanish colonies would break the Spanish alliance and drain British resources.¹¹⁵

Viewed in light of the Genet affair, however, Lebrun's overtures may have been meant, at least in part, to convey that France's actions against Spain's colonies were not intended to be attacks on British interests and therefore should not warrant British retaliation. Talleyrand's letter to Pitt stated that the proposed expedition "cannot be regarded as a violation of law, or rather a usurpation of the Spanish government, in light of Spain's hostility to France, particularly during the unrest in Saint-Domingue, where Spain supported the black insurgents."¹¹⁶ This justification for anti-Spanish intrigues was part of a proposal for British assistance, but it also may have been intended to discourage Britain from intervening on Spain's behalf in the event of a solitary French scheme. While Brissot and Dumouriez were eager for conflict with England, Lebrun's actions toward Britain demonstrated significant restraint and nuanced diplomacy.¹¹⁷

In addition to promoting his geopolitical goals, Lebrun also used the Genet mission to defuse the emerging domestic dispute with Brissot over the prospective Miranda expedition. By acting against Spanish Louisiana, Lebrun undercut much of the need for and urgency of Brissot's more confrontational approach. Although Brissot continued

¹¹⁴ There is probably more to know about this episode, but the best explanation (and the quotation from Talleyrand) appears in Dorigny, "Brissot et Miranda en 1792," 102–3. A proposal by Admiral Armand-Gui-Simon de Coet-Nempren, comte de Kersaint written shortly after the Aug. 10 coup bears some similarity to this plan, although Kersaint proposed even broader international cooperation to overtake Spanish control of its colonies. See William S. Robertson, "Francisco de Miranda and the Revolutionizing of Spanish America," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1907*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1908), 1:289–90.

¹¹⁵ A useful discussion of Lebrun's attitudes toward Britain appears in Howe, *French Foreign Policy*, 131–45.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Dorigny, "Brissot et Miranda en 1792," 103.

¹¹⁷ For a reinterpretation of French motives in the Talleyrand mission, see Alan Sked, "Talleyrand and England, 1792–1838: A Reinterpretation," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17 (2006): 647–64.

to push for broader action against Spain, his protestations lacked the force they had before the announcement of the Genet mission.¹¹⁸

Scholars interpreting the Genet affair as the product of Brissot's revolutionary zeal tend to emphasize Girondin ineptitude in foreign affairs. Elkins and McKittrick state that the Girondins' "guide and counselor in foreign relations was Jacques Pierre Brissot de Warville, whose preeminence seems to have depended largely on their ignorance."¹¹⁹ Ammon describes the Genet mission as characterized by "an air of flightiness." The Girondins, he argues, "were constantly baffled that the reiteration of the platitudes of republicanism failed to solve the complex problems facing the nation."¹²⁰ In the end, of course, Genet's western intrigues failed, and given the circumstances there is probably little chance they would have turned out otherwise. That failure, however, was not primarily the fault of French planning.

Genet's western intrigues faced numerous obstacles, most of which were unforeseeable by the French government. As such, the mission's breakdown does not necessarily reflect ideological blindness or insufficient preparation. Once in Philadelphia, Genet was careless with his orders. In late August 1793 Spanish agents discovered an incendiary pamphlet that Genet had written. Addressed from "French freemen to their brothers in Louisiana," Genet stated that "naval forces of the republicans in the western territory are ready to descend the Mississippi River accompanied by a great number of French republicans who will come to your aid under the banners of France, all of which guarantees you complete success."¹²¹ Spain protested to the Washington administration, which then wrote to Kentucky governor Isaac Shelby demanding that he "take those legal measures which shall be necessary to prevent any such enterprise," reminding him that the affair could hamper American negotiations with Spain to open access to the Mississippi River.¹²²

Further damaging Genet's prospects was the unknown fact that Kentucky leader James Wilkinson was informing the Spanish governor at New Orleans, Baron Francisco Louis Hector de Carondelet, of recent developments in Kentucky. In reaction to Wilkinson's alarms, Spain not

¹¹⁸ There exists a significant body of international relations literature on the interplay between foreign policy and domestic politics. See, e.g., Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42 (1988): 427-60; and Helen V. Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

¹¹⁹ Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 331.

¹²⁰ Ammon, *Genet Mission*, 13.

¹²¹ The pamphlet was included in Josef Ignacio de Viar and Josef de Jaudenes to Thomas Jefferson, Aug. 27, 1793, in Boyd et al., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 26:771-74.

¹²² Thomas Jefferson to Isaac Shelby, Aug. 29, 1793, *ibid.*, 26:785-86.

only applied additional pressure on the U.S. government but also liberalized American portage rights and expanded its efforts to co-opt frontier leaders.¹²³ These moves helped undercut Clark's recruiting. Given Kentuckians' ubiquitous hostility to Spanish closures of the Mississippi River, it is understandable that French leaders overlooked the possibility of Spanish double agents thwarting their plans.

Possibly even more important to the scheme's failure was its lack of funding. Without money to pay for materiel and salaries, Clark's efforts eventually languished.¹²⁴ During the preparations for the mission, French leaders believed they would continue to receive debt payments that they could use in part to fund the mission. When the United States suspended payments in 1793, Genet had insufficient resources to meet even the relatively modest four hundred thousand livres in estimated expenses.¹²⁵ Clark and Genet also had little hope of support from the French government after the arrest of the Girondin ministers in June 1793. Genet himself was recalled shortly thereafter.

Despite Clark and Genet's failure, Lebrun was remarkably well informed in designing such a distant and secretive mission. He had numerous firsthand accounts of discontent on the frontier, and his principal assistant was Otto, whom several scholars have noted was an experienced and astute observer of American affairs.¹²⁶ The unsigned memorandum which Otto likely authored demonstrates detailed knowledge of the frontier leadership and its mercurial political attachments. Without unforeseen obstacles, the outcome of Genet's western intrigues might have been different. And even with the tremendous burdens he faced, Clark claimed that he could organize nearly two thousand soldiers by April 1794.¹²⁷

Frequently oversimplified or even overlooked, decision making during the origin of the Genet affair illustrates the competing goals and outlooks of French leaders. Brissot's support for the Miranda expedition shows a leader with global ambitions but little appreciation for practical limitations. Dumouriez, on the other hand, was focused on his own activities in Europe and had little interest in transatlantic adventurism.

¹²³ Thomas Robson Hay and M. R. Werner, *The Admirable Trumpeter: A Biography of James Wilkinson* (Garden City, NY, 1941), 136–41.

¹²⁴ John Rydjord, "The French Revolution and Mexico," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 9 (1929): 80–81.

¹²⁵ This estimate comes from the unsigned memorandum.

¹²⁶ O'Dwyer, "French Diplomat's View," 410; Sifton, "Otto's *Mémoire*," 626; Drew R. McCoy, "James Madison and Visions of American Nationality in the Confederation Period: A Regional Perspective," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987), 240–41.

¹²⁷ "George Rogers Clark to Genet, 1794," *American Historical Review* 18 (1913): 780–83.

His successful opposition to Brissot's plans also demonstrates his influence within the Executive Council. Lebrun's decision making was the most complex of the three leaders. He showed sustained interest in striking Spanish colonies, both through his representations to England and his development of the Genet mission. He also, however, seems to have used the Genet affair as a means of limiting French involvement in Spanish America. His plans were consistent with Brissot's dreams of spreading the Revolution abroad, but they were much more restrained and pragmatic. Particularly, Lebrun was trying to minimize French expenditures and avert British intervention.

Just before Genet departed France, the National Convention executed Louis XVI and, by the time Genet reached the United States, France was at war with England and Spain. In April 1793 Dumouriez defected to the Allies, and soon thereafter the Montagnards seized power and arrested their Girondin adversaries. The rapid progression of these events and the Girondins' foreign and domestic failures tend to obscure the possibility that history could have turned out differently. At a glance, the Girondins may seem to have been naive revolutionaries, unified by Brissot's idealistic dreams and eager to declare war on tyranny everywhere. But while the origin of the Genet affair lends some credibility to the picture of Brissot as a spirited visionary, it also illustrates that French decision making was neither monolithic nor particularly impractical. At least regarding the American west, the French Foreign Ministry was reasonably well informed, cognizant of its own limitations, and attentive to the European balance of power.