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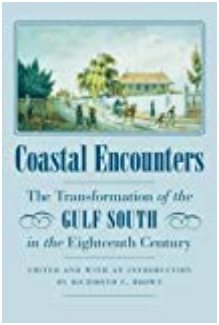
Richmond F. Brown, ed.. *Coastal Encounters: The Transformation of the Gulf South in the Eighteenth Century.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. Illustrations, maps, figures, tables. xiii + 313 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8032-6267-6.



Reviewed by Douglas Chambers

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Commissioned by W. Douglas Catterall (Cameron University of Oklahoma)

By the latter eighteenth century, one may imagine a great arcing east-west trade-road, El Camino Real Nuevo (the New Royal Road), which served to define the Gulf South as a region and marked the historical limits of Spanish dominion in eastern North America in the century before Anglo-American expansionism. El Camino Real Nuevo, however, actually ran east-west rather than north-south. It served to link Spanish East Florida centered at St. Augustine, through Seminole and Creek Indian country to Spanish West Florida (Pensacola, Mobile, Biloxi, and thence to Baton Rouge, Natchez, and Natchitoches), which skirted the vast Choctaw and Chickasaw country north of the 31st parallel. From the 1750s, the western leg of this New Royal Road, El Camino Real de los Tejas, connected the French outpost of Natchitoches on the Red River in northwestern Louisiana with the Spanish municipality of Nacogdoches, and then through the eventual Anglo-American settlements of the Trinity and Brazos rivers to old San Marcos and San Antonio. At San Antonio, this Camino Real turned due south through La Colonia del Nuevo Santander and the half-dozen new bustling trading towns (founded 1749-74) of the lower Rio Grande and finally through Matamoros (1774) and Brownsville, just twenty-five miles from where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf of Mexico. At a foot-travel rate of twenty-five miles per day, walking six days a week (Sundays excepted as a Catholic day of rest), one may figure that it took a minimum of ten solid weeks (or two and a half months) to journey from one end to the other of this eighteenth-century El Camino Real Nuevo.

The historical eighteenth-century Gulf South traced by our semi-imaginary El Camino Real Nuevo is the subject of ***Coastal Encounters***, a fascinating and illuminating collection of essays, ably edited by Richmond F. Brown. As Brown notes in his preface, the eighteenth-century Gulf South remains “a significant but heretofore relatively neglected subject” (p. ix). At the other end of the volume, in her afterword, Ida Altman muses that these chapters “both remind us how relatively little we yet know about these societies and

how complex and particular their histories were" (pp. 232-233). My initial conclusion is that this collected work demonstrates how much more we know than we ever thought we did, and that a truly regional and multidisciplinary approach to studying the Gulf South is indeed possible. In the hands of Brown and his contributors, the larger historical significance of the Gulf South in the eighteenth century is not simply a prolegomenon to the region's incorporation in the nineteenth century into the United States, but rather a region unto itself of dynamic, multinational, and multiethnic societies strewn across a vast swath of what became the U.S. South's ***other*** coast, where people constantly reinvented themselves and renegotiated changing political, economic, and cultural circumstances.

The Gulf South had its own long eighteenth century. For about half of that era, however, from the 1760s through the 1810s, and from La Florida to La Louisiana to los Tejas, the one regional constant was its Spanish dominion. As Altman concludes in the volume's ultimate sentence, "the pluralistic model of accommodation and balance that Spain fostered in the Gulf South is one that is well worth considering and that resonates for us today as society in the United States becomes ever more diverse" (p. 240). In other words, the newfound significance for the Gulf South lies less in studying how the region Americanized and more in how its historical Hispanization can inform regional and indeed national understandings.

The first two chapters, Brown's introduction and Daniel Usner's self-described "progress report on recent scholarship," establish the region as a vast contested zone at the intersection of three colonial empires (Spanish, French, and British) and, after the 1780s, of the United States, but that is just the beginning (p. 14). The major themes of eighteenth-century Gulf South historiography are familiar ones for Atlanticists: ethnohistory, imperial rivalries, transatlantic networks, chattel slavery, social and cultural change, an age of revolutions, and American expansionism. But the real stories are in understanding these constantly changing local native and colonial societies, and not necessarily as ***the*** borderland or even simply as the borderlands. As the social-history turn of the 1970s-90s has shown so well, the Gulf South was part and parcel of a larger Spanish world, with Catholic missions, ranching and mining, monarchism, and a mestizo population, and it inhered in places and times that had until recently been largely forgotten, such as mid seventeenth-century La Florida with its nearly forty missions and some twenty-five thousand resident Indian ***conversos***, mostly Timucuan and Apalachee, which were abandoned in the early eighteenth century and recovered initially by historical archaeological research. The concurrent renewed interest in Spanish areas, applying what Usner aptly terms "maritime frameworks of analysis," reminds us that one need look no further than colonial North America's southern coast for correctives to a tendency among some Atlanticists to see the British or North Atlantic as normative and to relegate the French and Spanish (and Portuguese) to another, so-called South Atlantic (p. 26).

The importance of ethnohistory, of a native turn, for a region in which the first facts are those of extraordinary demographic collapse and dislocation, cannot be overstated. How did people regroup and respond to their changing histories, local, regional, and imperial? These questions are also necessarily transnational and comparative, and offer insights into interior worlds still largely unimagined; networks of trade, cultural exchange, and diplomatic maneuvering; and the many ways that Amerindians and others, such as enslaved Africans and their descendants, attempted to resist, and to live within, these catastrophic changes. Usner concludes with the sense that the significance of the Gulf South is in its example of the centrality of the margins in evermore inclusive histories of Early America.

The next four chapters move generally from east to west and focus on Native Americans and, when taken together, do so on a comprehensive chronological and regional scale. Amy Turner Bushnell rescues the 1696 journal of a shipwrecked Jamaican Quaker and his party of two dozen castaways on the so-called wild coast of Florida some seventy miles south of St. Augustine, where the Indians were hunter-gatherers who had learned to hate the Europeans whom they called "Nickaleers" (pp. 57-58).[1] She uses these enthralling stories to show how, by the 1690s, these native peoples on the margins of Spanish Florida had learned to hate the English "Nickaleers" (Angleterres/Inglaterras) for good reasons: their wicked man-stealing/kidnapping ways. At the same time, these petite-nations merely tolerated the Spanish whose authority over them was quite limited, and yet in the end their Spanish protection would soon fail them. The ancient coastal Indians, such as the five small nations traversed by Dickinson's party, by 1705 had "been reduced to a handful of Costa refugees living in faux missions under the guns of the fort" (p. 58).

Greg O'Brien shifts the volume's focus to the powerful interior nations of the Choctaw and Chickasaw and their diplomacy with the British in the era of Anglo-American expansionism, on the eve of the American Revolution. The chiefs had much to complain about on account of the British failure to regulate the fur trade properly, and O'Brien gives voice to particular chiefs and their speeches and diplomatic rituals at a month-long congress held at Mobile in the winter of 1771-72. Following Bushnell, in this chapter O'Brien also emphasizes the individual experiences and the voices of particular historical personages, in this case of Paya Mattaha, Mingo Ouma, and Fannimingo, so that one sees individual Indian leaders as well as particular British officials. One senses the rise among the still-powerful and resilient Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek Nations of West Florida of an emergent "Great Game" of self-interested diplomacy and trade with whomever among the Europeans was ascendant (the French before 1763, British afterward, Spanish in the 1770s, and the United States from the 1780s), with the Creeks eventually seeking alliance with the Spanish to counter the expansionism of the United States.

This last point is precisely the thrust of Karl Davis's particularly interesting ethnohistory of a Creek community newly established in the mid-1780s on the northern border of Spanish West Florida. Like O'Brien and the Choctaw, Davis begins with geopolitics. As the eastern wing of Creek external trade with the British declined dramatically after the American Revolution, they turned to develop a southwestern wing by creating alliances with the Spanish, who then encouraged the formation of new settlements, such as the one at Tensaw, north of Mobile.

Of the Amerindian-focused essays, Davis's is the most explicitly (or perhaps just the most successfully) ethnohistorical. It seeks to understand Creek strategies for realigning trade and diplomacy in terms of ethnohistorical Creek cultural norms and practices, including matrilineal kinship, female exogamy, and assimilative ethnicity, or what Davis sensibly calls "Native American social rules" (p. 98). Since the key to Creek trade and diplomacy was the creation of kinship connections, with matrilineal clans marrying in male outsiders to their women, this essay specifically introduces the important role that women played in these larger cultural-political strategies. But there is an even more subtle implication to Davis's superb analysis. For the Creek Nation in particular, and perhaps for many other Native American peoples, one surmises that the Anglo-American racialist concept of "half-breeds" or "mixed-bloods" made no sense. Whereas whites discounted the authenticity of Euro-Indians (such as the key Creek leader Alexander McGillivray), or of the lineages of new towns (such as at Tensaw), which were founded by women with Euro-American surnames (such as Polly Francis Moniac, Levi-

tia Cornells McGirt, Peggy Bailey, Mary Randon Tate, and Susan Marlow Moniac), for the Creek none of that mattered so long as the mother was Creek. Perhaps this is the major interpretive significance of a new Creek town like Tensaw. Rather than the town's geostrategic value as a site of Creek-Spanish alliance on the borders of the United States, the more profound significance is that though many of its founders and residents were Indians of mixed parentage, the people of the Tensaw community were as authentically Creek as those of older settlements.

Jane G. Landers directly addresses this question of authenticity in the volume's only explicitly political essay. Her paper is a timely and thoughtful as well as generous intervention, the offer of a usable past, because today the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma "is bitterly divided over its membership, with the so-called blood Seminoles attempting to expel the so-called black Seminoles" (p. 99). In 1991, the federal Indian Claims Commission ordered that the United States pay fifty-six million dollars to the Seminole Nation "'as it existed in Florida'" in compensation for when the United States seized Seminole lands in 1823; in 2000, the Seminole Nation amended its constitution to require "one-eighth Seminole Indian blood for full tribal membership" (pp. 99-100). Black Seminole descendants of slaves then sued, subsequent tribal elections resulted in rival opposing chiefs, and later lobbying for compensation of ninety-five million dollars for improperly seized oil and gas leases escalated these intra-tribal divisions between blood and black Seminoles. For Landers, the point of this essay is to show that historically "the bloods and the blacks once stood together" (p. 100). She admirably accomplishes her goal by summarizing the military history of Seminole resistance to violent U.S. expansionism, and the direct participation of black Seminoles in the fighting, from the Muskogee War (1800-1803), to the 1812-13 Georgian "Patriots" war, to the 1816 Negro Fort battle, to the First Seminole War (1818) and Second Seminole War (1835), to the privations suffered in the eventual dispersal to Cuba and the Bahamas, andto the final forced removal from Florida. She uses these historical experiences to make the case for a shared history that trumps modern racial demagoguery.

What does this account tell us about Gulf South history? It is another reminder that the eighteenth century also produced ethnogenesis, or the remaking of new nations, such as the Seminole Nation, that benefited from assimilating runaway African-descended slaves, and that then collectively created a shared history that transcended race in mutual resistance to violent military U.S. expansionism in the early nineteenth century. Given Davis's account of Creek assimilative cultural principles, and the fact that the Seminoles originated from a band of Creek, the supposed distinction between "blood" and "black" Seminoles may be a current or modern social fiction and a reversal of authentic southern Amerindian cultural values (Davis's "Native American social rules" [p. 98]). Landers's essay also serves as a reminder that in the ethnohistory of native peoples in the Gulf South, Africans and African Americans were also part of the social landscape in the eighteenth century as well as later and they were more than "just" slaves, a theme also developed, for example, for the Cherokee in Tiya Miles's recent book, ***The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story*** (2010).[2]

David Wheat's paper extends this theme of ethnohistory and race with an exploratory essay on Amerindian and African interactions in Mobile. In effect Wheat is curious about how we might understand why one free black man, Nicolas Mongoula (1720-98), appropriated a semantically relevant phrase from the local Amerindian lingua franca called Mobilian Jargon as his surname. Wheat mines existing census, sacramental, baptismal, and notarial records for any mention of the man and in the end suggests that someone like him represents the cultural fluidity of eighteenth-century Mobile with its mix of French and

Spanish whites, Africans of several nations, Creoles of various racial admixture, Amerindians with their Mobilian Jargon lingua franca, slave and free status, ***brut*** or ***sauvage*** and Catholic, and so forth. Mobile was a polyglot urbanized little society in which one free black man chose as his surname a semantically suggestive Mobilian Jargon phrase meaning "my friend" (p. 117). Why? Perhaps because he was, to appropriate a useful category, an Amerindian-influenced, African-descended free black Atlantic Creole in Spanish Mobile.

The next three chapters shift geographically and thematically westward, to Louisiana and to French and Afro-Creole societies. Shannon Lee Dawdy reports on some sixty-one civil suits for insult or slander (public verbal attacks) in the Superior Council Records from 1722 to 1753, which she interprets largely as the result of interpersonal struggles for status and respect among French immigrants, some of whom "had a past to escape" (p. 137). It is interesting that aggrieved parties were quick to sue over breaches of honor though apparently they were not so quick to duel. Virginia M. Gould's essay focuses on the Spanish era in New Orleans (1769-1803) and a demographic analysis of various censuses, especially in 1795 when some 60 percent of the city's residents were of African descent (of whom one-third were free). Afro-Creole women gained freedom and property at a time when the "structure of the population in New Orleans was more like that in the Caribbean than colonial North America" (p. 155).

H. Sophie Burton shows how Natchitoches was transformed in the Spanish era from a frontier exchange outpost to a center of tobacco plantation agriculture. Bourbon Spanish policies encouraged the importation of African slaves and investment in tobacco farms. By the late eighteenth century, tobacco had become a rich man's crop and Natchitoches became a town "dominated by planters and slaves" (p. 186). By 1787, the 734 slaves in the town were 53 percent of the district's population, and the 175 households in 1790 produced some 714,000 pounds of tobacco (or one-quarter of the Louisiana crop); the enslaved Africans and their descendants remained a majority through 1803 even as the population grew and tobacco production stagnated.

Though Natchitoches's example is an interesting one, it begs comparison with its sister city Natchez (founded 1716), especially during 1781-98 when the town on the bluffs above the Mississippi was a seat of Spanish government following the insurrection there in 1781. In 1790, for example, as Burton notes, Natchez tobacco planters (or rather, their enslaved laborers) produced over 1.5 million pounds of tobacco or double that of the Natchitoches district. As Burton closes her study with the stage set for a shift to cotton plantation agriculture under American dominion, one is reminded that the nineteenth-century cotton boom hit bigger nowhere but at Natchez.

The last two chapters continue the theme of economic histories with political import. Armando C. Alonzo takes us deep into Texas and its ranching heartland of Nuevo Santander between the San Antonio River and the Rio Grande, the Villas del Norte. By the 1750s, this area was the wealthiest district in Nuevo Santander with 25 percent of the 85,000 large livestock (***ganado mayor***) and 40 percent of the 300,000 head of sheep and goats (***ganado menor***) in the entire region. As well, ranchers from central New Spain would seasonally pasture as migratory herds a further 914,000 sheep on the plains north of the Rio Grande. By 1795, there were nearly 800,000 head of livestock (horses, cattle, sheep, and goats), not including seasonal migratory herds, and this extensive ranching economy continued to expand until the violence of the wars of Mexican independence after 1811. After Mexico's independence in 1821, the northern ranching system boomed, with a shift toward trade with Texas and New Orleans, and by 1835 the Villas del Norte contained some 3

million head of livestock in a society dominated by rancheros and settlers.

At roughly the same time (1783-1807), as Andrew McMichael shows in his contribution, back in the West Florida borderland parishes, Spain used access to land "as an inducement for settlement and loyalty" (p. 213). Spain wanted Anglo-American settlers as a buffer, and they had to swear loyalty oaths to Spain to qualify for land grants limited to 800 arpents (about 640 acres). This Bourbon Spanish land policy succeeded in creating a society of middling landowners with tracts large enough to engage in profitable plantation agriculture but not large enough to create a class of grand estates. The average plot was 644 arpents, "or about 515 acres," and each grantee had to demonstrate cultivation and improvement within four years of the claim to gain title, encouraging smaller landholders, who thus were the "key to understanding Spanish land policy" (pp. 215-216). The 1803 Purchase created a "surrounded borderland" which encouraged speculation about annexation and in land. For example, shortly before the cession in 1803, Anglo-American planter Daniel Clark bought a vast 208,000-acre tract on the Ouachita River in north-central Louisiana (between Natchez and Natchitoches) for speculation, and in the Baton Rouge area he acquired another 9 plots totaling 96,000 arpents. In 1804, the Spanish began limiting Anglo-Americans' access to land titles in West Florida, driving prices down and upsetting the settlers, though only a minority turned to agitating for their independence. McMichael closes with the point that in general Anglo-American settlers were happy to be governed by Spain so long as it brought them land, perhaps the only thing that lasts. With their successful revolution in 1810, as McMichael concludes, "West Floridians underwent their third change of government (the fifth for those with property on the west side of the Mississippi) in a process familiar to any who had lived in the area since 1763" (p. 230).

The collection closes with a return to defining larger themes. Altman recognizes that social memory and cultural hybridity reflect a regional history that was indeed "strikingly diverse" (p. 231). She suggests that "mythologization of the Gulf South past" has not been limited to professional historians, as in her striking example of the Mardi Gras Indians (who patterned their costumes after Plains Indians like the Lakota long before modernism, much less postmodernism!) (p. 232). For the eighteenth century in particular, she reminds us of the salience of constant reinvention and renegotiation, that is, "the notable demographic, economic, and political flux that affected nearly all the peoples and societies of the Gulf South" (p. 236). These fluctuations created a mosaic of "shifting alliances and rivalries" throughout the region, politically and socially: the three European imperial powers (Britain, France, and Spain) and the United States; four major Indian nations (Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole) and a host of petite-nations; and Africans and Afro-Creoles and *gens de couleur*; free and slave (p. 238).

And yet, even though "these fluid, vital societies provide a kaleidoscopic picture of shifting interethnic relations," there were sources of stability and continuity (p. 238). One generalized source of stability was the role of women "in securing and maintaining family survival and success," whether among Amerindians, or in slave communities, or among free women of color in New Orleans, and through *compadrazgo* (godparenthood) throughout these officially Catholic regions (p. 237). Another was the significant regional influence of Spain and Spanish policies (resulting in pragmatic governance, cultural accommodation, open land grant systems, and easy manumission), which were all examples of successful governance of a polyglot society cut short by the crises of the Napoleonic era and consequent American expansionism throughout the Gulf South.

Prologue? Or path not taken? The essays collected in this suggestive volume will encourage others to pursue these and other themes and subjects, and they will inspire scholars to think broadly, research regionally, and pay particular attention to change over time. It was also a smart editorial decision to include excellent maps, tables, figures, and illustrations throughout the volume and, not least, an excellent bibliography of secondary sources that serves as a Gulf South history bookshelf. One certainly can see that a Camino Real runs right through the very heart of these histories.

Notes

[1]. The published source is Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews, eds., ***Jonathan Dickinson's Journal, or, God's Protecting Providence*** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1945).

[2]. Recently the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma has also been roiled by efforts to redefine tribal membership to exclude black descendants from Cherokee citizenship.

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Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

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