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David Narrett. *Adventurism and Empire: The Struggle for Mastery in the Louisiana-Florida Borderlands, 1762-1803.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 392 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-1833-3.

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During the last half of the eighteenth century, the Atlantic world's greatest imperial powers—Britain, France, Spain, and ultimately the United States—jostled for control of the North American Gulf Coast. Yet none of them achieved more than tenuous control of the Louisiana-Florida borderlands where an inhospitable climate and powerful Native American groups made European mastery of the region onerous if not impossible. David Narrett's *Adventurism and Empire: The Struggle for Mastery in the Louisiana-Florida Borderlands, 1762-1803* examines how a handful of colonial officers, magnates, and lone adventurers managed to turn such conditions to their advantage, and helped shape the outcome of imperial rivalry in the region. Building off of Andrew McMichael's *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (2008) and Kathleen Duvall's more recent *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution* (2014), Narrett's is the first book to treat both Louisiana and Florida together—a singular "borderland" that, although ruled by competing powers, was governed by a ubiquitous tendency that he terms "intrigue" (p. 7).

Unlike previous borderlands scholarship, such as Andrés Reséndez's *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (2007), which focuses more on fexible nationalities or fluid boundaries, Narrett's book argues that the course of politics and nation building in the late eighteenth-century Florida-Louisiana borderlands was largely dictated by a cast of characters who took advantage of various imperial weaknesses and rivalries to further their own interests or pursue alternate diplomatic arrangements. Examples include George Johnston, an ambitious British naval captain who attempted to funnel contraband from West Florida to Spanish-controlled Louisiana, extend his colony's border northward by absorbing Spanish colonials, and thereby legitimate "geopolitical linkages" between the Mississippi Valley and the Gulf Coast (p. 27). There is also Bernardo de Gálvez, who facilitated an American assault on Pensacola by permitting the Americans access to the Mississippi River and

supplying them with vessels and cannon at New Orleans under the agreement that the Spanish would take control of Pensacola once it was captured, while simultaneously employing his "guise of impartiality" to allow British Loyalists to seek refuge in Spanish Louisiana (p. 82). And there is George Morgan, who sold Gálvez's plan to Congress by proposing that the United States would keep Pensacola, so that he might get rich off of the proceeds of Spanish weaponry sales to the United States.

Adventurism and Empire not only illustrates the weaknesses and limitations of imperial power but also contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the contingency surrounding the United States' rise to continental dominance. As Narrett rightly observes, "Manifest Destiny was barely in view during the 1790s when private adventurers vied for mastery in shaping colonization" (p. 3). Indeed, one of the book's most important contributions is its explanation of how close Spain came to preventing or at least slowing US westward expansion. Instead, those two powers went from tacit allies to primary rivals once the Americans achieved independence, and in failing to follow the suggestion of Pedro Aranda to enter into an alliance with American revolutionaries, the Spanish missed an opportunity to restrain Anglo-American expansion. Instead, immediately following US independence, the Spanish were faced with an even more territorially aggressive neighbor.

Yet, as Narrett shows, the United States was no better at preserving its territorial integrity than its European rivals. Here, a new set of adventurers and schemers acted as informants to Spanish officials hoping to resist and weaken the United States by encouraging secessionist impulses in the West. Again, stopping short of aligning itself with rebels directly, Spain attempted to placate frontier "power bokers" in its efforts "to steer western districts in a pro-Spanish direction" (p. 170). This culminated in Spain's promise that Kentucky might gain access to New Orleans if it separated from the United States. Although the arrangement never came to pass, the fact that it was discussed at all supports Narrett's claim that "cultural biases" did not constitute "the root of international conflict" (p. 7). Anglo-Americans demonstrated a willingness to turn their backs on the United States and align themselves with a very different power if it served their economic interests.

This brings us to Narrett's final point, that "commerce and immigration" were as determinative in shaping geopolitical power relations as "warfare and violence" (p. 3). Indeed, colonization, perhaps more than any other force, seemed the most determinative of imperial success in a region that proved, frustratingly, both inhospitable and lucrative. As much as weapons, resources, or land, these empires competed for people. The British may have sincerely wished to avoid conflict with native groups, but they also recognized that Florida's value rested in its settlement and development. The demand for colonists compelled British officials to attempt to absorb rather than displace Spanish colonials. When Spain deported many of them to Cuba, British governors attempted to convince French Louisianans to colonize the Mississippi East Bank under British auspices, while pleading with London to allow them to populate newly acquired West Florida with French and American settlers. Meanwhile, the Spanish representative in New Orleans, Antonio de Ulloa, attempted to lure Acadian refugees to Louisiana, in his attempt to fortify the region against the British, and Gálvez helped to weaken the British hold on Pensacola by luring British colonials into Louisiana, thereby reversing "the direction of colonial migration that Pensacola magistrates had worked so hard to establish" (p. 82). After United States' independence, the Spanish invited US immigrants to settle in Louisiana and West Florida in the hopes that they would become loyal subjects and defend the Spanish presence there. Here we see perhaps the best evidence of a borderlands society in which

national identity was fluid and changing. Yet it might also suggest that borderlands residents themselves were as much the agents of geopolitical realignment as individual schemers, whose success often depended on their ability to coax the former into resettlement, immigration, or secession.

Indeed, one might wonder how much a handful of self-interested men ultimately shaped the course of imperial politics in this time and place. More often than not, their schemes failed to pan out or simply never took off. Without imperial support, Johnstone was unable to placate local Indians, and his colonization scheme failed. A similar "gamesmanship" by another British official, Montfort Browne, to take advantage of a French rebellion in New Orleans to capture that city for the British, also "prove[d] idle adventurism in the absence of imperial support" (p. 57). And the Gálvez-Morgan affair similarly fell by the wayside when Congress vetoed the proposal. Nonetheless, *Adventurism and Empire* is one of the most deeply researched and detailed accounts of late eighteenth-century Florida and Louisiana to date, and Narrett demonstrates a masterful understanding of the complicated and unpredictable course of events that contributed to the United States' ultimate acquisition of this region. His obviously painstaking research, drawn from Spanish, French, British, and US archives, effectively demonstrates the contingency and unpredictability of these events and certainly makes the case that Manifest Destiny was hardly destined at all.