In the history of North America from 1763 to 1783, most, but not all, of the scholarly works covering the period from the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to the Treaty of Paris focus on the revolutionaries who fought against the British Crown and Parliament. Though the people who became the founding fathers of the new nation are undeniably important, no study of this period is complete without a study of the colonists that opposed the movement toward separation from the mother country. Unfortunately, few people from either side of the fight have attempted to discover who these anti-revolutionaries, or loyalists, were or to tell their story.

Perhaps the main reason for a lack of study of such an important group is the problem of developing a definition that tells us who these people were or what they believed.[1] For the purpose of this work, the term "loyalist" refers to "those colonists who sooner or later opposed independence and favored reconciliation with Great Britain."[2] Even this definition does not take into account the various nuances of exactly what a loyalist thought or practiced during this period of American history. For example; should the definition include those who converted to the Tory cause at the last minute in the same class as those who remained loyal to Great Britain from the time of the Molasses Act all the way through the outbreak and conclusion of armed hostilities? What about the colonists that wavered from side to side, courting the side in power at any particular moment?[3] Both of these questions are quite valid and hold the possibility of greatly increasing or decreasing the ranks of this overlooked group of American colonists.

Another reason for the great lack of study of this group is the all-prevailing view in the United States that the colonists of this period were all the same concerning the rebellion. The false belief that all colonists in North America fought on the side of the

rebels and founding fathers hampers public knowledge and the investigation of this portentous period. Despite the fact that John Adams stated that the loyalists of the colonies generally consisted of one-third of the total population, many people either ignore or minimize the importance of the anti-revolutionaries.[4]

In comparison to the lack of work on the loyalists, the colony of British West Florida is just as overlooked, if not more so. Like the loyalists, many writers and readers ignore this colony in their focus on the thirteen Atlantic colonies in rebellion. Because of the fact that this colony neither rebelled nor became one of the first states, despite an invitation from the rebelling colonies, the colony often exists as only a footnote in America's past.[5] Despite its relegation to a low position, the very existence of this province during the era of rebellion proves that not all of the British possessions in North America came under the spell of revolution. The further fact that the rebel army never conquered the province despite is strategic location along the Mississippi River shows that even ordinary citizens in some of the colonies fought for and maintained the British government in their province.

The history of West Florida during this period is a history of loyalists in a struggle against rebels, rebellion, and foreign occupation. Because of its location near the southernmost of the rebelling colonies, West Florida and its sister colony, East Florida, experienced an influx of loyalists from the rebelling colonies. As early as 1775, refugees from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia made their way into the loyal province.[6] When war broke out, West Florida became a haven for the loyalists that poured out of the rebellious states. During the Revolution, West Florida became a vital source of supplies for the British islands in the West Indies.[7] This dual nature as a haven

for British refugees and as a supply point for the islands of the Caribbean made West Florida important as a strategic location despite its short lifespan.

The history of West Florida as a loyal British province began at the same time as the older colonies began to rebel. The act that created the province also served as one of the first causes of alarm for the people of the older colonies. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 caused alarm in the older colonies because it prohibited further westward expansion for the older areas, but this was not the case for the lands of Spanish Florida that Britain acquired because of its victory in the French and Indian War. By dividing the new territory into two new provinces, the British government created West Florida as the only substantial area of British influence that existed west of the Appalachian Mountains.[8]

Though the extent of the hatred that the colonists put forth toward the Stamp Act, Townsend Acts, and other British orders during the pre-revolutionary period can never be accurately fixed, West Florida's response to these acts was nothing like the response of the older colonies. Because of its youth and distance from the older colonies, the province did not have men like Samuel Adams of James Otis to inflame popular opinion. Scholarly opinion remains divided over the extent of the knowledge that the colonists had about the events occurring in the original thirteen colonies. Barton Starr's assertion that "there is little evidence that the inhabitants of West Florida were particularly aware of the events . . . traditionally considered as the causes of the American Revolution in the original thirteen colonies," is hard to support considering that the western portion of the province was near New Orleans with its sources of information. West Florida lacked its own newspaper, but information from New Orleans, Boston, and Charleston found its way into the hands of some of the province's population. At least one resident of

Pensacola expressed a knowledge of the events on the Atlantic coast. This West Floridian's condemnation of "the submission of a people, governed by laws, to which they never gave their concurrence" shows that some of the inhabitants of the young province made use of the presses of the surrounding colonies.[9] From this letter, we learn that West Florida had no active chapter of the Sons of Liberty, but knowledge of their existence and activities reached all regions of Britain's American colonies.

Even when the colonists in West Florida opposed the Stamp Act, the voice of opposition was low. However, because the passage and enforcement of the act took place during a period of hostilities between Governor Johnstone and other officials, the governor's rapid enforcement of the provisions of the legislation added fuel to the intra-colonial hostilities.

In West Florida, the opposition to the enforcement of the act quickly became personal. The Attorney General of the province, an anti-Johnstone member of the colonial elite, used his position to attempt to stop, or at least hinder, the enforcement of the act. The machination of the anti-Johnstone faction caused the governor to feel that the people in his domain were beginning to lose faith in the British system and "the spirit of what is their called Liberty begun to infuse itself here."[10] Though Attorney General Wegg couched his opposition to the act in the idea that the people of the province did not have to be bound by a law to which they did not consent, the experience of the colonial interference with laws passed in London never amounted to the levels reached in the older colonies.[11]

Even the strongest attacks against the enforcement of the act came through the legal channels, not through mob action as happened in some of the original colonies.

Instead of trying to harm the tax collector or other governmental officials, the opposition in West Florida tried to delay the enforcement of the act by using the fact that the colony did not have an official copy of the resolution at the time it was to go into effect. After the Board of Trade remedied this problem, opposition continued, but it always remained in the legal channels and out of the streets.

The opposition that arose was for a different reason than the opposition in the other provinces. In the older provinces, the inhabitants saw the Stamp Act as an assault on their rights as English citizens. In these colonies, the conflict rested upon the idea that the colonists should not have to submit to laws passed by a body in which they had no representation. In West Florida, the opposition rested primarily on economic concerns, Wegg's Logic notwithstanding. The youth of the colony meant that its economy was not fully developed, and the people did not have an adequate supply of currency or bullion that they could use to pay for the articles carrying the revenue stamps.

After the relatively minor altercations over the Stamp Act and its enforcement, the province experienced no noticeable revolutionary activity until the winter of 1778. That the colony managed to stay out of the revolutionary fire even after the Boston Massacre and the infamous Tea Party shows the extent to which the province's population was loyal, or at least not hostile to the British Crown. Only when a detachment of rebel soldiers penetrated the western portion of the province was there any sort of revolutionary fervor, and a handful of loyalists managed to reverse the effects of the rebel endeavors.

After the settlement of the Stamp Act debates within West Florida, the province experienced relative peace for the next decade. However, with the coming of the

Revolution in the Atlantic colonies, Governor Chester placed the colony on a higher state of alert. Because the province's western portions were susceptible to invasion down the Mississippi River, rumors from Indian lands concerning masses of rebel troops planning attack on West Florida caused much anxiety among the province's governmental officials and private settlers.[12] This new sense of anxiety caused the governor and council to agree on a flurry of defensive constructions and the creation of corps of loyalists for the defense of the province. In accordance with the desire for the raising of local loyalists, John McGillivray offered to raise two companies of loyal volunteers.[13]

Despite these efforts in 1776, by the beginning of the next year, the British government advised Chester that it was not prudent to become alarmed over the talk of six to seven thousand American troops said to be along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.[14] This rather light concern over the fate of the colony may stem from word reaching London about the successful defense of Quebec, but other information conveyed from West Florida should have alerted the government in London of the possible truths in the rumors of an attack force.[15]

During the height of the concerns over an impending attack on Mobile, the American army sent a party of emissaries to New Orleans via the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Though Chester reported that this party consisted of only "18 Men and a Boy, commanded by One George Gibson," reports that they carried dispatches from the Continental Congress for the Court of Spain clearly worried the royal governor.[16] Further information that the Spanish governor of Louisiana allowed these forces to buy thirty containers of ammunition and then ship them back to the American armies along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers caused concern that Spain may soon take the side of the

rebels. Despite their material support of Gibson's party, Spanish forces in Louisiana maintained peace with their neighboring colony, at least for the moment.

Gibson's expedition in 1776 was rather uneventful except for British concerns over the material help that Spain provided, but the next American expedition in 1778 proved far more dangerous for the province's future. Where Gibson had merely displayed the colors of the American colonies on his way past West Florida's Mississippi settlements, by 28 March 1778 word had reached Pensacola and Mobile that a new party of rebel colonists had "penetrated into the Colony by the Channel of the Mississippi, and laid waste almost the whole western part of the Province."[17] This raid, led by ex-West Floridian James Willing, served as a dual turning point for West Florida. First, armed conflict came to the lower Mississippi Valley. Secondly, due to the open support that the Spanish governor of Louisiana provided for the rebel troops in New Orleans, the intercolonial relations began to break down almost to the point of open hostilities between the British forces in West Florida and the Spanish forces in Louisiana. Scholars debate the effectiveness of Willing's raids of English posts and plantations along the Mississippi before finally arriving in New Orleans, but the importance of the raid is evidenced by the effects it had on both the residents of the province and the relationship problems it caused with Spanish Louisiana.

On its way down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, Willing's party augmented its forces with around one hundred men made up of the "Banditti" from the wilderness areas of the rebel colonies.[18] By 19 February, Willing's party arrived at the settlement at Natchez where he continued his plundering and prisoner taking.[19] Due to Willing's depredations, the settlers at Natchez "in this distressed and unprotected state . . . .

Thought it necessary to wait on the said Captain Willing to propose terms of Accomodation."[20] Once Willing agreed to meet with the settlers, they chose four "Gentlemen" to negotiate terms that would spare Natchez further hostilities. In return for light treatment, the people of Natchez agreed "That we will not take up arms against the United States of America or aid, abet, or in any way give Assistance to the Enemies of the said states."[21] The delegates agreed to send a copy of the capitulation to Governor Chester so that he could take measures to prevent future Indian attacks upon the inhabitants of the settlement.[22]

During the negotiations, Willing sent a party of his men down the Mississippi toward New Orleans. This group, led by Thomas McIntyre, contained the prisoner Anthony Hutchins as well as a great deal of confiscated property and slaves.[23] Upon reaching the British settlement at Manchac, the party surprised and captured the English vessel *Rebecca* that they later refitted for use against other British shipping along the Mississippi. Due to the unexpected success at Manchac, McIntyre decided to wait for the main body of Willing's party. Once the main body arrived, the entire flotilla set sail for New Orleans where Oliver Pollock, an American merchant, had begun negotiations with Governor Bernardo de Galvez for the liquidation of the captured property and slaves. When the party reached Spanish New Orleans, Hutchins received a parole, and he was disgusted by the cordial treatment that Galvez afforded to the rebels. The party that had looted its way down from Natchez to New Orleans and had forced many British citizens to take refuge on the Spanish side of the river received such friendly treatment that they governor allowed them the use of the Spanish guard houses and munitions markets. After Governor Chester received news that the party arrived in New Orleans, he

requested the Captain Ferguson take the *Sylph* to New Orleans to inquire about the possible restitution of property to its British owners.[24] Galvez returned some property (especially Governor Chester's slaves) to the rightful owners, but Pollock sold a large part of the property at auction. The proceeds from this sale totaled $62,500 not counting the *Rebecca*.[25]

In mid-March, forces from West Florida began to recapture some of the posts that Willing captured on his way to New Orleans. On 15 March, Indian Agent Col John Stuart and Adam Chrystie surprised and routed Willing's guard at Manchac. Around the same time, Anthony Hutchins began to plot the capture of Willing, Pollock, or other officers in Willing's party. When he was unsuccessful even after offering rewards of $1000 for Oliver Pollock and $500 each for Willing and McIntyre, Hutchins persuaded some of the rebel party to allow a number of his slaves to escape to the *Sylph*.[26] When he heard that Willing and Pollock planned on sending a party back up the Mississippi with supplies for Fort Pitt, Hutchins decided to escape to Natchez to convince some of the inhabitants to break their oat of neutrality on the grounds that Willing had not kept up his end of the bargain when he pillaged and plundered his way down the river. Hutchins won support for actions against the supply bateaux, but a traveler from New Orleans informed the settlers that Willing had kept his word in not visiting further harm on Natchez. The agreement did not cover his depredations after leaving the district surrounding Natchez. Still, Hutchins managed to keep a small number of his force together, and when the bateaux came back up river, the party defeated the rebel force with few casualties of its own. Willing was not among the party returning to Fort Pitt, but Hutchins's actions helped solidify British hold over the western portion of the

province. By May 1778, "The Loyalists at Natchez were strong enough to prevent any ship flying the American colors from proceeding up the Mississippi River."[27] Eventually, the British ended further raids by capturing Wiling while he was on a voyage from New Orleans.[28] The lack of clear migration of West Floridians to the American cause does not mean that open hostilities existed everywhere on Willing's voyage. The people of Natchez readily signed oaths of neutrality that made it hard for British recruiters to form corps of loyalists once a true war came to the province.[29]

If the first few years of the Revolution were quiet in West Florida, from 1779 to 1781, war came to the province with a vengeance. Instead of being a colonial war, the war the came to the province was between Great Britain and her European enemy, Spain. In West Florida, the war lasted from the time of the capture of Manchac, Baton Rouge, and Natchez in 1779 to the fall of Pensacola in 1781. The British period ended in West Florida when Governor Chester signed the truce between the remaining British troops at Pensacola and the army of Governor Bernardo Galvez.

When Galvez and his force reached Manchac, they found only a small contingent of guards that the local commander left as a delaying force before his withdrawal to defensive positions at Baton Rouge. After a brief siege at the Baton Rouge position, Col. Alexander Dickson and his mixture of regular army and loyalist defenders marched out of their position and signed away not only Manchac and Baton Rouge, but also the defenses at Fort Panmure near Natchez. The British settlers at Natchez did not take the surrender well. Even two years later, during the siege of Pensacola, they petitioned Governor Chester and General Campbell for support of an attack upon the Spanish garrison near the settlement.

In late February 1780, Spanish forces began building entrenchments outside of Mobile. Though he did not believe the Spanish forces at Mobile were the main body of Galvez's army, General Campbell at Pensacola knew the fate of the province depended on a successful defense of Mobile. Once again, Galvez found himself fighting a mixed force of regular army and loyalist troops. According to Barton Starr, only a small portion of the defensive force at fort Charlotte was regular army. The remainder of the three hundred defenders consisted of civilians and Indians.[30] When reinforcements never arrived, the British forces marched out of the fort on 14 March 1780.

More than a year passed between the fall of Mobile and the assault on Pensacola. During this time, the British preparations and an abundance of provisions gave them a sense they could defend the capital against the upcoming Spanish attack. Finally, on 9 March 1781, the Spanish navy arrived off the entrance to Pensacola harbor.[31] Like at Baton Rouge and Mobile, the Spanish army and navy faced troops from both the regular army and loyalist volunteers. Of the troops defending the capital, over one-third was from various loyalist units. Eventually, the superior numbers of the Spanish troops and weapons caused the defenders of Pensacola to sue for peace. One 10 May, after over two months of defending their capital, the British forces marched out of their defenses and signed over the last district of West Florida to the forces under Galvez.

The history of loyalist west in West Florida exists in three distinct phases. During the first stage, the Stamp Act and other legislation occupied the minds of almost every settler in the infant colony. There was a considerable amount of opposition to the enforcement of the acts of Parliament in West Florida, but the opposition never reached

the fury or scale of the opposition in the older colonies. In West Florida, the opposition centered on a supposed inability of the populace to pay the tax.

The second phase of loyalist history in the province was the period surrounding the Willing raids. Though officially chartered to raise support and money for the patriot cause, these raids appear to have caused more harm than good to the patriot cause in the province. Numerous men joined Willing's party before it reached West Florida, but only a handful of men deserted to his cause once he reached the province.

The third phase of the history of the young province was its period of conquest. During this period, the British government lost post after post to the forces of Spain. At each of these posts, they defended with a mixture of regular army and loyalist volunteers. When Pensacola fell, the history of loyalism in the province largely faded, except for an aborted attempt by some settlers at Natchez to recapture Fort Panmure.

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2. Ibid., 29.

3. Wallace Brown, *The King's Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants* (Providence, Brown University Press, 1965), 144.

4. Paul H. Smith, "The American Loyalists: Notes on Their Organization and Numerical Strength," *William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 25* (1968): 260.

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6. Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Dispersion of the American Tories," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 1* (1914): 195.

7. Robin F.A. Fabel, *The Economy of British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988): 204.

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10. C.O. 5/574:560.

11. Ibid.

12. C.O. 5/593:12.

13. Ibid., 31.

14. Ibid., 64.

15. Ibid., 86.

16. Ibid., 113.

17. C.O. 5/594:341.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 353.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 354.

22. Ibid., 355.

23. Ibid., 373.

24. Kathryn Abbey, "The Intrigue of a British Refugee Against the Willing Raid, 1778" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 1 (October 1944): 398.

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26. C.O. 5/594:447

27. Haynes, "Willing", 26.

28. James Willing to George Washington, 23 January 1781, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence, 1697-1799. Available from http://memory.loc.gov/mss/mgw/mgw4/074/0600/0628.jpg; Internet; accessed 3 September 2003.

29. Robertson, "Tories", 446.

30. Starr, *Tories*, 168.

31. Ibid., 196.