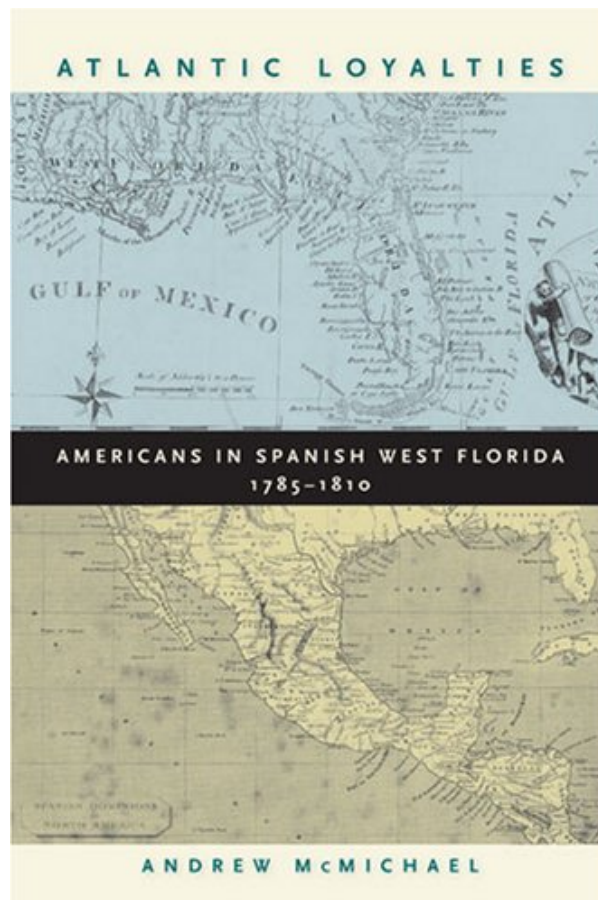
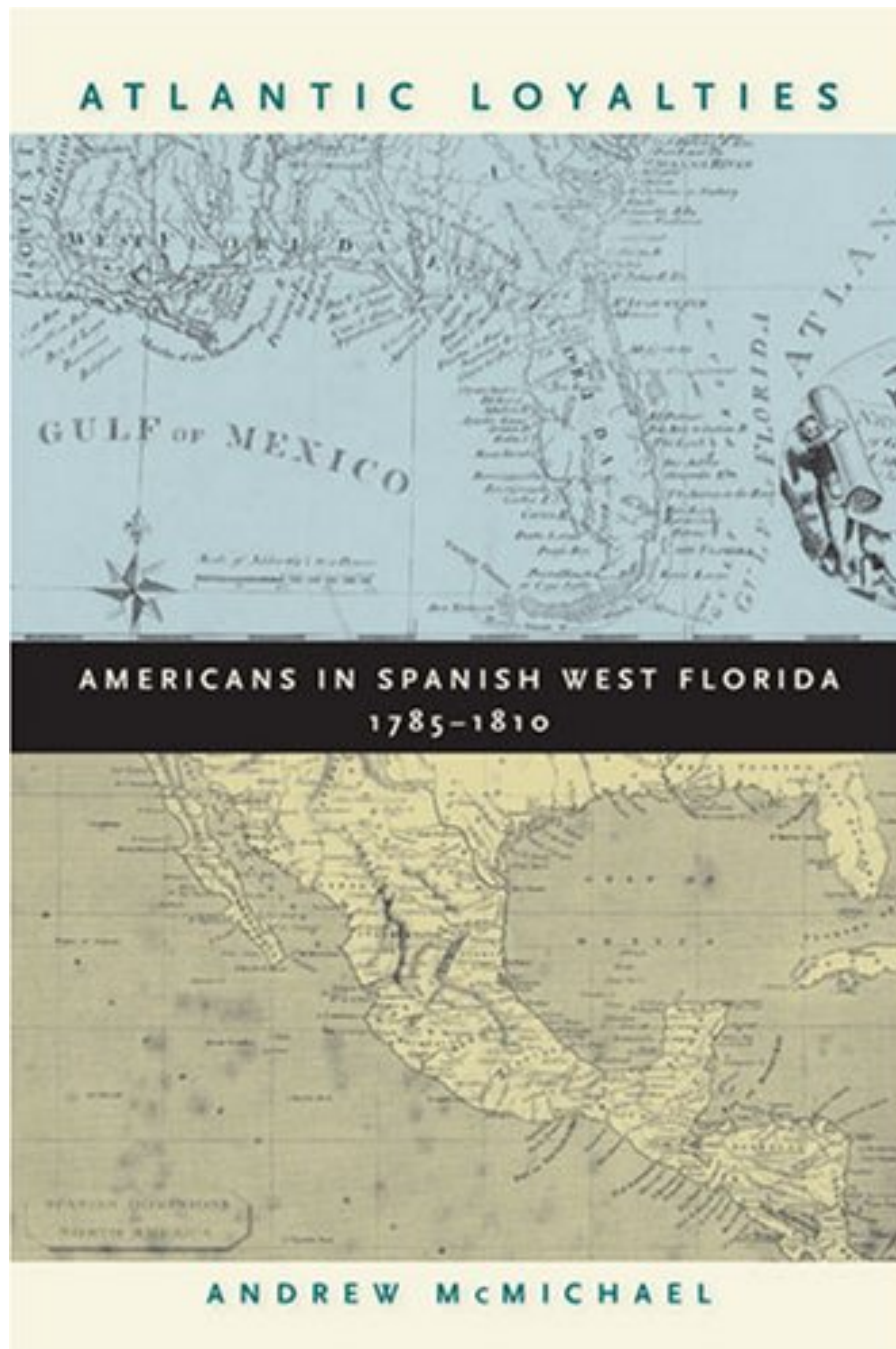


# ATLANTIC LOYALTIES: AMERICANS IN SPANISH WEST FLORIDA, 1785-1810 BY ANDREW MCMICHAEL



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## Review

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(Peter Kastor author of *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America*)

McMichael's book is a powerful argument for writing borderlands history from the ground up, concentrating on what actually happened in a given place and fitting that place into an Atlantic framework. The story of Anglo-American expansion into the Spanish borderlands has traditionally been told as the inevitable triumph of English liberty over Spanish tyranny. In this pathbreaking study, McMichael shows that government in the Baton Rouge district of West Florida was enlightened and mild and that Anglo settlers, whose allegiance was more practical than patriotic, were content to live under Spanish law as long as Spain was able to grant lands and protect property.

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Andrew McMichael is an assistant professor of history at Western Kentucky University. McMichael is also the author of *History on the Web* and an assistant editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. 30.

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Integrating social, cultural, economic, and political history, this is a study of the factors that grounded or swayed the loyalties of non-Spaniards living under Spanish rule on the southern frontier. In particular, Andrew McMichael looks at the colonial Spanish administration's attitude toward resident Americans. The Spanish borderlands systems of slavery and land ownership, McMichael shows, used an efficient system of land distribution and government patronage that engendered loyalty and withstood a series of conflicts that tested, but did not shatter, residents' allegiance. McMichael focuses on the Baton Rouge district of Spanish West Florida from 1785 through 1810, analyzing why resident Anglo-Americans, who had maintained a high degree of loyalty to the Spanish Crown through 1809, rebelled in 1810.

The book contextualizes the 1810 rebellion, and by extension the southern frontier, within the broader Atlantic World, showing how both local factors as well as events in Europe affected lives in the Spanish borderlands. Breaking with traditional scholarship, McMichael examines contests over land and slaves as a determinant of loyalty. He draws on Spanish, French, and Anglo records to challenge scholarship that asserts a particularly "American" loyalty on the frontier whereby Anglo-American residents in West Florida, as disaffected subjects of the Spanish Crown, patiently abided until they could overthrow an alien system. Rather, it was political, social, and cultural conflicts—not nationalist ideology—that disrupted networks by which economic prosperity was gained and thus loyalty retained.

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how the Florida panhandle became a part of the new United States

By Henry Berry

McMichael's "Atlantic Loyalties" makes a good study of how a region became part of the United States differently from how practically all of the rest of the U. S. was formed. The jingoistic settlement of Texas preceding the Mexican War; displacement of Native American tribes; and administrative steps leading to statehood as with California and other Western states are familiar ways regions have been incorporated into the United States. By contrast, the Florida panhandle controlled by Spain became a part of the nation by a long, winding course by which the Anglo-Americans who made up the majority of the population changed loyalties.

Part of the Spanish territory of western Florida almost from the earliest days of its settlement, Anglo-Americans were not essentially dissatisfied with being subject to Spanish rule. The Anglo-Americans were economically successful; they made a community within the territory; the Spanish rule was benign, with some of the governors, notably Charles Louis Boucher de Grand Pre, popular. Neither victory in America's War of Independence nor the Louisiana Purchase turned the west Floridian Anglo-Americans' allegiance from the Spanish to the Americans. However, each of these momentous historical events inevitably contributed to the eventual change in loyalties.

Continuing United States' troubles with Britain leading to the War of 1812 and conflict among the European countries of Britain, Spain, and France with the rise of Napoleon having some global dimension also unsettled the circumstances in west Florida so as to contribute to the change. Outside American agitators trying to bring the area into the United States; Spanish land speculators; and developments in the Caribbean region were localized factors which along with the larger historical events, made the change of loyalty virtually inevitable. It was only a matter of time.

What is remarkable is not that the loyalties of the Anglo-Americans shifted, but that they took so long to do so; that it took such a buildup of historical and local events for them to do so. After victory in the Revolutionary War and the Louisiana Purchase, for example, Americans rowdily and sometimes violently took over some locales.

McMichael, associate professor of history at Western Kentucky University, does not attribute the change in allegiance from Spain to the United States to any single cause; neither to any confluence of a few. He shows how the effects of historical developments and the practicalities and feelings of human lives intermingle in certain veins of history.

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