

British, Spanish, and Native Relations in Colonial Florida (1763-1783)

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Introduction

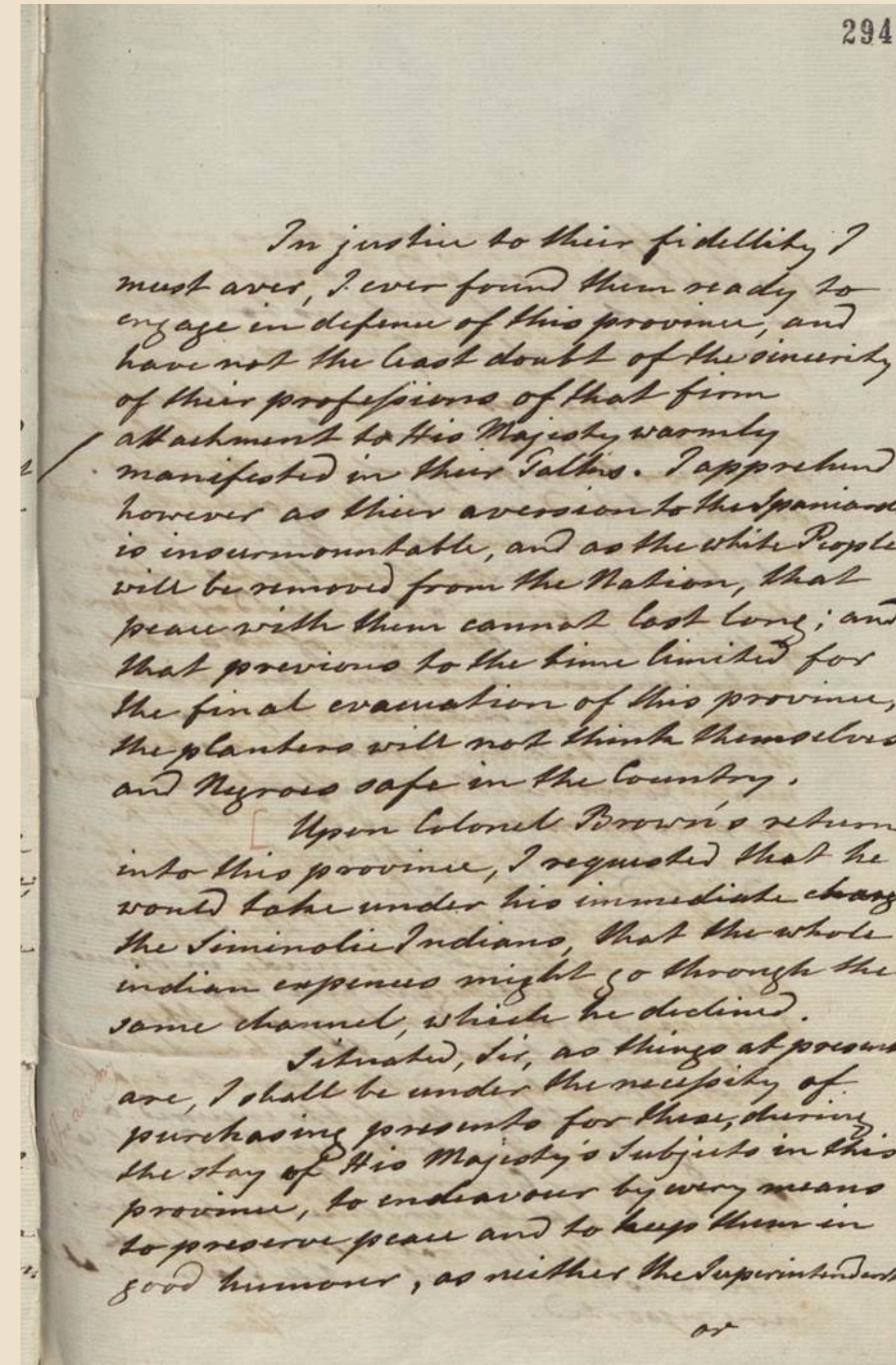
- From 1763 to 1783, the British controlled West and East Florida as two provinces, taking over from the Spanish. (Wright 1)
- During the American Revolution, East Florida could be thought of as a Loyalist fourteenth British colony. (Kotlik 3)
- Florida during the Revolutionary War was what some might consider a “lawless” land, where the authority of colonial institutions did not extend throughout the territory. (Frank II-13)
- Making Florida unique were intricate Native American alliances and treaties formed between the Muscogee, Seminole, British, and Spanish.
- Utilizing two letters from British and Spanish colonial governors transcribed with the aid of Google Gemini, we analyzed Native and European interactions occurring during the critical transition from Florida as a British to Florida as a Spanish colony. We contextualized the letters using secondary sources.
- To ensure the survival of the colony, alliances with Native groups kept the Florida provinces in a state of relative peace. There seems to have been a recognition of periods when Native ethics and customs affected how European law was enforced. How did the Spanish and British approach interactions and negotiations with Native groups?

Methods

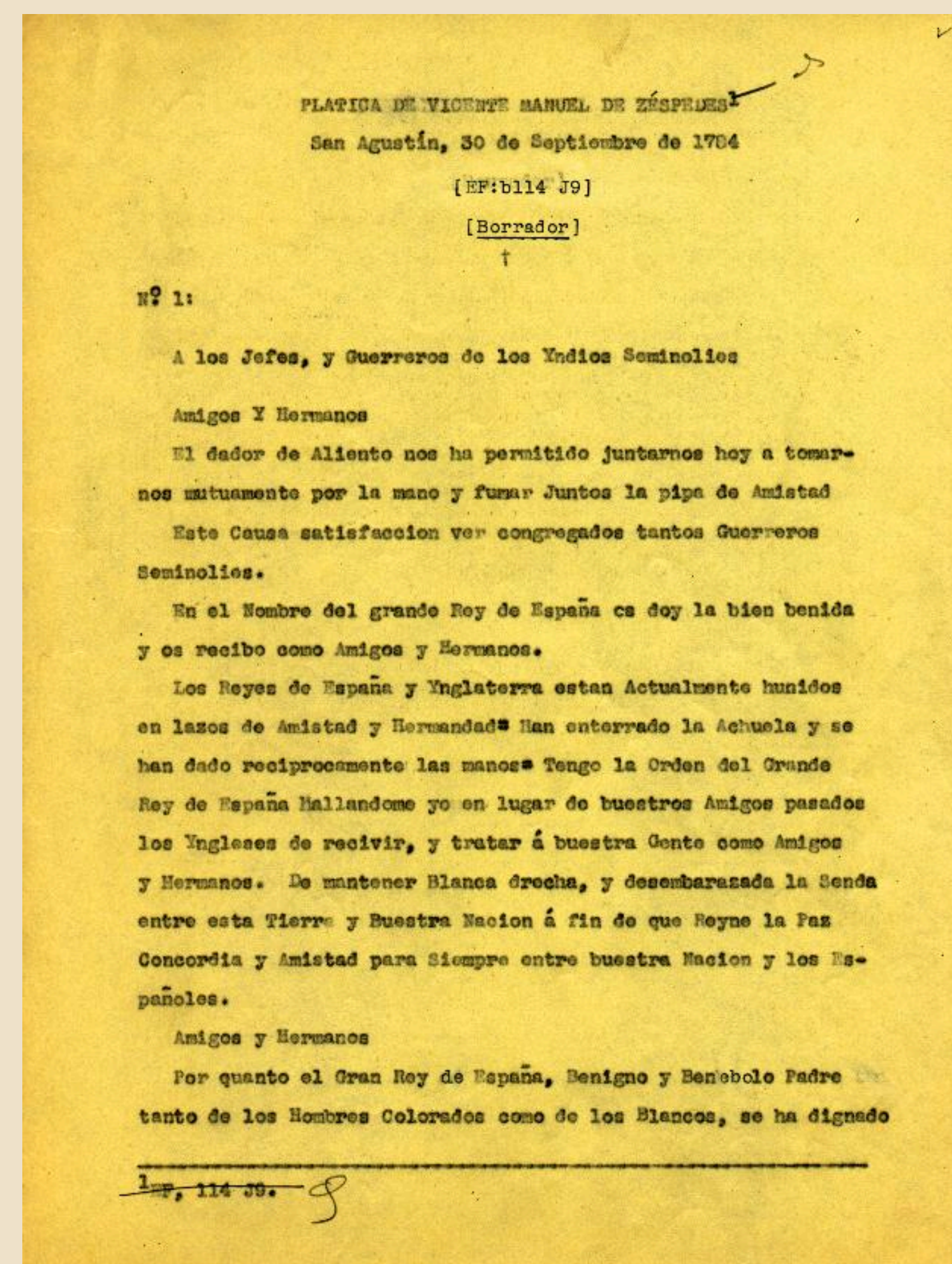
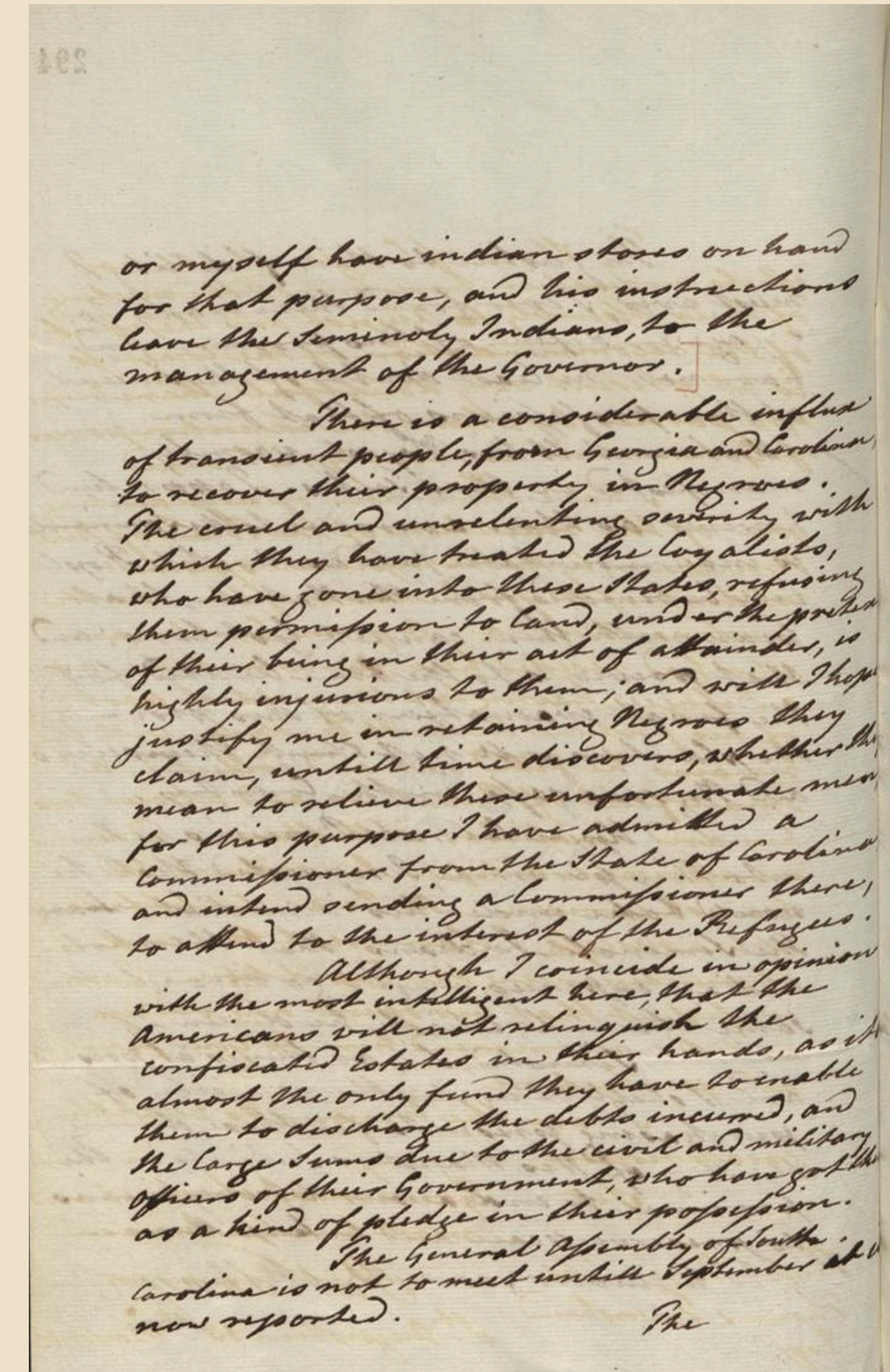
- Our mentor assigned each member of our research groups a literary review of scholarly secondary sources. We met every week to discuss our findings through our notes.
- We utilized the literary reviews and further findings from the footnotes of the secondary sources to build a big idea of what Florida was like during the Revolutionary War, and what the viewpoints and interpersonal relationships of the people at the time were.
- From this big idea, each member of the group delved deeper into a niche they found interesting, and the question of Native Americans in Florida and how they interacted with Europeans arose as my topic of study. I explored archives such as Colonial America and the Lockey Collection to find primary sources that could connect to the secondary source review.
- With the assistance of Google Gemini, I transcribed two letters sourced from these archives. I used them to establish an interpretation of European viewpoints on Native Americans and their relevance to the colonial apparatus.



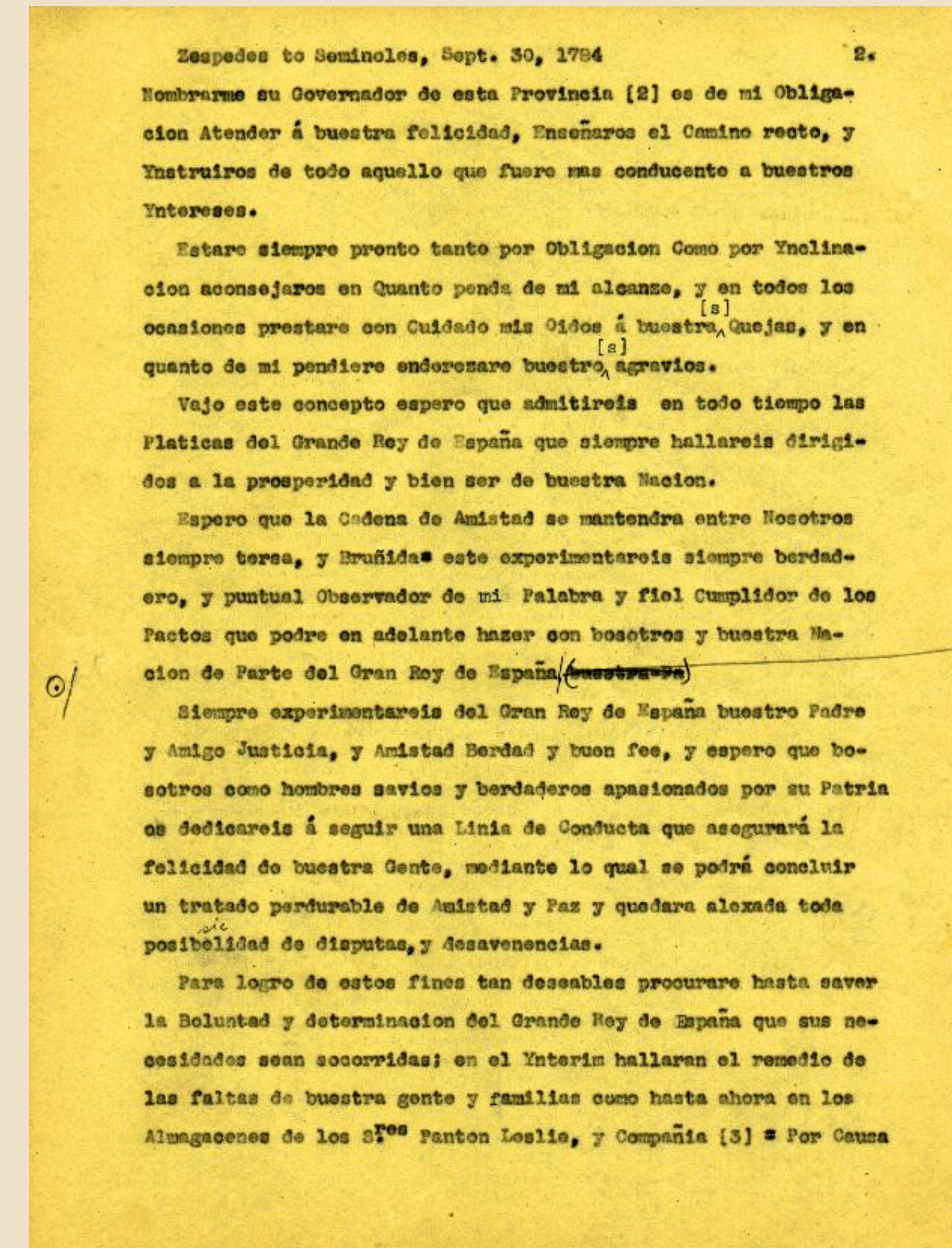
1776 Map of Florida (General Map)



Excerpt from “Letter from Governor Patrick Tonyn to Thomas Townshend, St Augustine, May 15, 1783” (Colonial America)



Excerpt from transcription of “SPEECH OF VICENTE MANUEL DE ZÉSPEDES St. Augustine, September 30, 1784” (UF Digital Archives)



(Right) Governor of East Florida Patrick Tonyn

Results

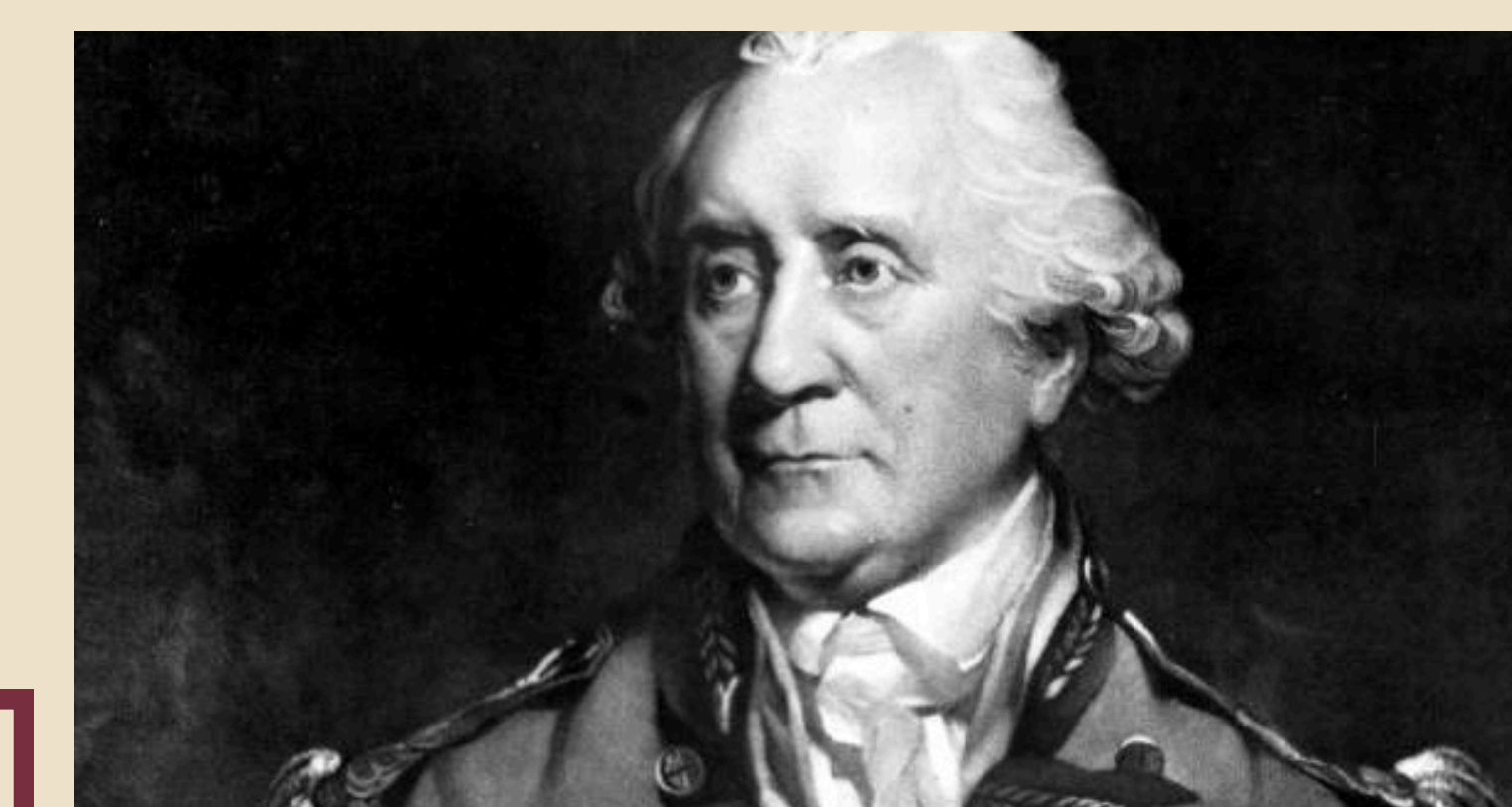
- The Muskogee were not conquered nor subdued. They were in constant odds with the European order. They harbored escaped slaves, deserting soldiers, and criminals.
- Muskogee split into two political entities at the end of the nineteenth century: Seminole and Creek. Emphasized greater village autonomy vs. centralized control, which made European domination difficult. (Frank II)
- One out of ten British soldiers in North America was stationed in the Floridas during the Revolution. (Wright 12)
- After the 1783 Treaty of Paris, Alexander McGillivray, a Creek leader, asserted that Americans had no right to Creek land, as they were allies, not subjects, of the British crown. (DuVal 260)
- A 1783 letter from Patrick Tonyn, Governor of British East Florida, states that Colonel Brown, founder of the East Florida Rangers, should prioritize seeking out the aid of the Seminoles around St. Augustine, and stresses the importance of keeping them on good terms if one wishes to maintain order. (Governor Tonyn)
- A 1784 speech by Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, Spanish Governor of East Florida, issues a diplomatic plea to the Seminoles, insisting that their friendship is mutually beneficial in the face of regional threats. (Lockey Documents)

Excerpts from Letters

- Governor Tonyn:
 - “I shall be under the necessity of purchasing the stay of His Majesty's Subjects in this province, to endeavour by every means to preserve peace and to [keep them] in good humour, as neither the Superintendent nor myself have Indian stores... and his instructions leave the Seminole Indians to the management of the Governor”
- Governor Zéspedes (translated from Spanish):
 - “The Giver of Breath has permitted us to join together today to take each other by the hand and smoke together the pipe of Friendship.” “...to receive and treat your People as Friends and Brothers; to maintain a white [i.e., peaceful] path, and keep clear the way between this Land and your Nation so that Peace, Concord, and Friendship may reign forever between your Nation and the Spanish.

Conclusion

- Natives understood the intricacies of treaties, and they decided among themselves what constituted a valid treaty and an invalid one.
- European governors (British and Spanish) sought alliances with Natives (as shown by diplomatic talks with the Seminole) for strategic purposes. Natives were crucial in the transition from British to Spanish rule in 1783.
- In the future, educational material on Florida's role in the Revolutionary War should not gloss over both the role of the Natives and the perspectives of British and Spanish officials.



References:

