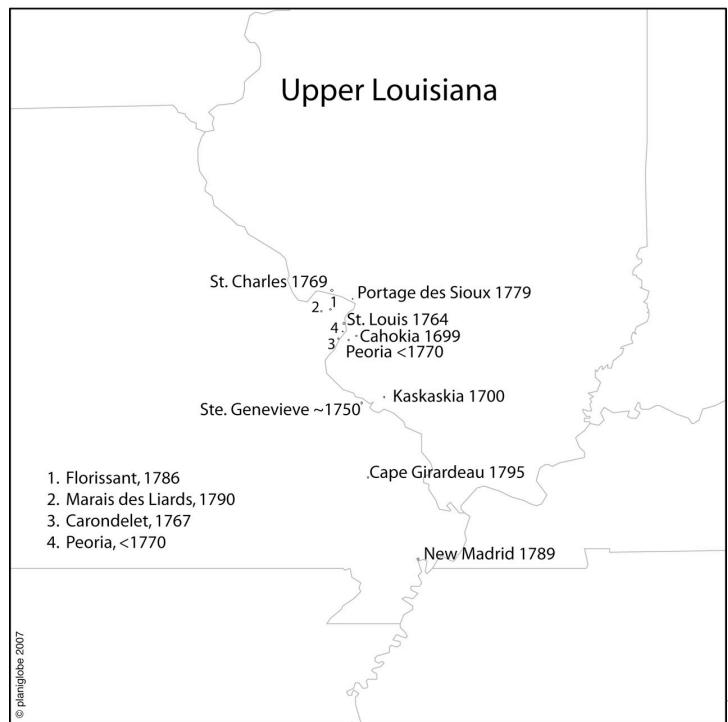


Upper Louisiana, Agriculture and the American Nation  
by  
Jennifer Turner  
(draft - please do not cite)

*Hoping to write the most relevant paper possible for this group, I attempted to isolate the agricultural strand running through three territorial-period chapters of my thesis. The argument I attempt to distill here about Creole manipulation of American agricultural and racial prejudices to establish their own worthiness for citizenship and land ownership is preceded in the thesis by a colonial section that considers Creoles' agriculture and relationships with Indians (and outsiders' opinions thereof), and is brought to resolution with a chapter on the statehood crisis, wherein Missourians used their fifteen years' practice at racial rhetoric to define themselves as white American citizens in a new, non-agricultural context, in which a national obsession with Missouri as unacceptable suddenly changed grounds, from agricultural savagery to slavery. I found when I tried to tug the agricultural strand free of its context in those three chapters, it came trailing far too many threads to sew up tidily in thirty-five pages. My struggle to encapsulate how Americans thought about agriculture and Creoles manipulated those beliefs has convinced me all the more that ideas about agricultural practice are inescapably tied to a developing American racial identity.*



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1. Drawn using a base map found on <http://www.planiglobe.com>, using information found in maps in Sara Jones Tucker, and Wayne Calhoun Temple, *Indian Villages of the Illinois Country: Atlas and Supplement*, Repr. 1974 ed. (Springfield, Ill: Illinois State Museum, 1975); Helen Hornbeck Tanner, ed. *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986). Plotted using Google Earth.

The future destinies of the Missouri country are of vast importance to the United States, it being perhaps the only large tract of country, and certainly the *first* which, lying out of the boundaries of the Union, will be settled by the people of the United States. — Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury<sup>2</sup>

Amongst intelligent Americans, the question of— whether it can or cannot be peopled by civilized man? has often been agitated... the belief in America is, that the prairie cannot be inhabited by the whites. — John Bradbury<sup>3</sup>

as long as we keep ourselves busy in tilling the earth, there is no fear of any of us becoming wild. — Crèvecoeur<sup>4</sup>

The people of Upper Louisiana and its capital city St. Louis underwent a series of remarkable transitions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> They endured repeated regime changes, from France to Spain, back to France, and then, after the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, into the hands of the young United States. Finally, in 1821, the region examined by this study became the state of Missouri, a member of the young Union. Throughout this process, the Creole inhabitants of Upper Louisiana/Missouri had to represent themselves and their interests to the powerful groups with whom they found themselves in dialogue— Indian peoples, the Spanish crown, the representatives of the American state. Initially, close Creole relationships with and knowledge of specific native groups were critical to Upper Louisiana's

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2. Gallatin to Jefferson, April 13, 1803, in Albert Gallatin, and Henry Adams, *Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 1:120.

3. John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811*, Bison book ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 266-67. Originally published in 1817.

4. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur et al., *Letters From an American Farmer*, 305, 316.

5. Terminology can be tough in this region. In the colonial period, it was known as Illinois, or Upper Louisiana. In the territorial period, it became the district and then the territory of Louisiana, while the state we now know as Louisiana was known instead as the territory of Orleans. After Louisiana became a state in 1812, the territory of Louisiana lost its name and became the territory of Missouri, then, at last, in 1821, the state of Missouri.

survival; this dynamic changed with the transfer to the United States. Elite Americans in Congress, which had the power to set government and laws for Upper Louisiana, did not value Creoles' connections with Indians. These Americans tended to lump the tribal groups together and to characterize or— caricaturize— Indian groups as savage. Americans, from congressmen and President Jefferson to youthful travelers and immigrants, also mapped 'savage' onto Creoles, particularly with respect to a supposed Creole and Indian inability to farm the land as it should be farmed. This rhetorical linkage affected Upper Louisiana's governance under the United States, as well as the policies and attitudes toward Creoles' Spanish-era land grants. Creole elites worked throughout the territorial period to undo this rhetorical linkage, until with the Missouri statehood crisis, the United States' perception of Missouri as a place defined by its relationship to Indian country was replaced by one defined by similarity to the slaveholding south. Missouri would still be considered savage, but for new reasons in a different racial calculus.

When the United States bought Louisiana from France, it was an unexpected Purchase. As Peter Kastor says in his study of Lower Louisiana's admission to the union, "the United States did not buy Louisiana so much as France sold it."<sup>6</sup> Louisiana did not come to be part of the United States because they sought it; in fact, its acquisition raised constitutional questions over Jefferson's authority to purchase lands and whether the Constitution could be extended over these new lands and peoples by the President or Congress.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Peter J Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 41.

7. The Louisiana Purchase also handed the United States a host of new diplomatic concerns, including friction with France; fears of war with Spain, who contested Louisiana's boundaries; fears of offending Great Britain; and concerns over angering eastern states, who might lose

A new republic, not much larger than their purchase, the United States quite reasonably had doubts about how to integrate this new land, and doubts as to whether the territorial system of statehood could do the job. In March of 1804, New Orleans became a county of its own in the Territory of Orleans, while Upper Louisiana was relegated to district status, governed by Indiana Territory. When New Orleans later gained local elective franchise, St. Louis was left without it. Adding insult to injury, while New Orleans' governor headed its militia, St. Louis got a military man separately appointed by the President, charged with employing the militia in cases of ‘sudden invasion or insurrection.’<sup>8</sup> Jefferson himself saw a constitutional difference between Upper and Lower Louisiana. He thought white Lower Louisianans could be admitted immediately as citizens, while those of Upper Louisiana would require a Constitutional amendment.<sup>9</sup> Clearly Congress and the President found the residents of Upper Louisiana less trustworthy, less worthy of admission and citizenship, than those of Lower Louisiana—because, I argue, of their perceived similarity to Indians.<sup>10</sup> Creoles in Upper Louisiana, with their long familial and economic ties to Indians, faced a different American preconception than did those in Lower Louisiana. Americans had long thought that Indians did not farm, primarily out of

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population to the new western lands.

8. *An Act erecting Louisiana into two territories, and providing for the temporary government thereof, March 26, 1804*, in *The Public Statutes At Large of the United States of America*, vol. 2 (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845), 8th Cong., 1st. Sess., Ch. 38, p. 287.

9. Jefferson to Gallatin, Aug. 31, 1803, in Albert Gallatin, and Henry Adams, *Writings of Albert Gallatin*, 1:145.

10. In the dissertation, I discussed a variety of reasons for an admissions bias against Upper Louisiana. Their inclusion here would make a long paper much more so. In sum, I considered objections to the people and to the lands themselves. Objections to the people, as Catholic, monarchist, non-English-speaking insurrectionists applied as much or more to Lower Louisiana as Upper. Early American objections to the health of the lands ought to have made Upper Louisiana the more attractive region, situated as it was far from the miasmal delta of the Mississippi.

laziness.<sup>11</sup> Farming was an activity for black and whites. In the United States, people associated New Orleans with Creoles, yes, but with blacks as well, and because of the black population, with agricultural production.<sup>12</sup> Although Jefferson's administration briefly considered using Upper Louisiana as a place to which to remove eastern Indians, once Upper Louisiana's suitability as a place for whites to live had been established, Americans in large part hoped or believed that Upper Louisiana Creoles, like Indians, would vanish before the superior industry of Americans. This created a dynamic with which Creoles would have to contend for the next twenty years, as they sought to assert their whiteness, their agricultural abilities, and, therefore, their meriting of citizenship. This process both influenced and casts into relief an early and under-appreciated chapter in the development of American ideas of race.

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11. Early American writer Benjamin Rush, not a knee-jerk Indian-hater, noted, "Indian men despise labor, particularly Agriculture and Horticulture. They have no objection to that work which they can do in sitting still." Rush considered Indians to share with French people an aversion to labor. Benjamin Rush, and George Washington Corner, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush; His "Travels Through Life" Together With His Commonplace Book for 1789-1813*, vol. Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, v. 25 ([Princeton]: Pub. for the American Philosophical Society by Princeton Univ. Press, 1948), 303,73.

12. Jennifer Spear discusses Indians' relative invisibility in the New Orleans region in her dissertation, wherein she attributes relaxation of racial hierarchies, in part, to Indian weakness in the region. Jennifer Spear, "Whiteness and the Purity of Blood." Americans believed whites and blacks were suited to different climates and labor, a belief that came to the fore in the congressional debate over the Louisiana Purchase lands. Senators argued over whether the Louisiana lands, being swampy and dewy with burning sun, were so unhealthy as to require black men rather than white men to cultivate them. If a senator felt white men could endure the fatigue of working Louisiana lands, he referred to the swamps as a dangerous place that might allow rebelling slaves refuge. If a senator felt that white men were unable to withstand the climate and farm, he pointed to the swamps as suited only for black agriculture. Some senators claimed that Louisiana could not be cultivated without slaves, as white men were unable to bear the labor, causing some debate over whether, if this claim about cultivation were true, Louisiana was a blessing or a curse. Senator Hillhouse of Connecticut posed the problem of cultivation of Louisiana Purchase lands thus: "If that country cannot be cultivated without slaves, let slaves hold it—or let it remain a wilderness forever." Senator Hillhouse of Connecticut, Jan. 25, 1804, in William Plumer, and Everett Somerville Brown, *Proceedings in the United States Senate*, 113-17.

The United States understood the two halves of Louisiana to differ quite a bit racially. And of the two Louisianas, Americans viewed Upper Louisiana, with its predominantly Creole and Indian population, as a less promising region. Lower Louisiana was much more redeemable than Upper Louisiana—in good part due to its black population. “They [Upper Louisiana settlements] contain but few negroes compared with the number of the whites; and it may be taken for a general rule, that, in proportion to the distance from the capital [New Orleans], the number of blacks diminishes below that of the whites; the former abounding most on the rich plantations in its vicinity.”<sup>13</sup> Here, Jefferson’s description drew an implicit comparison between the agriculture of Upper Louisiana, which lacked blacks and successful cultivation (in the eyes of the United States), and that of Lower Louisiana, with its large black population and ‘rich plantations.’<sup>14</sup> In contrast, in Upper Louisiana the inhabitants “content themselves with trading with the Indians and working a few lead mines”—a slanted description of the region that exported grain to New Orleans for decades, if not quite as much as New Orleans might have wished.<sup>15</sup> St. Louis had a very small black population and a history of interaction with and orientation toward the local and not-so-local Indian populations. Elite Americans observed this history, economy and culture, and imagined a society not so very different from wandering, non-

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13. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:346.

14. The view of New Orleans as the place blacks belonged persisted. In his study of the roots of the Civil War, William Freehling opened with a portrait of St. Louis in the mid-1850s, in which few slaves existed in St. Louis and local papers thought slavery hurt immigration to Missouri and argued that “Missouri nonslaveholders must pressure slaveholders to sell all slaves down river, where blacks belonged.” William W Freehling, *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1:19-20, 35.

15. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:345-46.

agricultural Indians, undeserving of their lands. This paper examines the sources and effects of this American belief alongside Creole responses to it.

*~ Louisiana as wild and empty ~*

When the U.S. acquired Louisiana from France, Americans envisioned it as mostly wild, unexplored, unpopulated land.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Jefferson researched and communicated the first substantial information on the new lands to Americans in November of 1803, in his *Description of Louisiana*. From the very beginning of the document, Louisiana's position as an empty place, requiring little in the way of adjustment to American ways, is clear. It is, in the second sentence, 'imperfectly explored.' Its precise boundaries were 'involved in some obscurity,' but ran at least as far as the river Perdido, which translates as 'lost' or 'wasted.'<sup>17</sup> The slanted description of Louisiana continued, "many of the present establishments are separated from each other by immense and trackless deserts, having no communication with each other by land, except now and then a solitary instance of its being attempted by hunters, who have to swim rivers, expose themselves to the inclemency of the weather, and carry their provisions on their backs for a time."<sup>18</sup> You might as well say, "there be dragons here."

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16. President Jefferson — and anyone else who had doubts about the Constitutionality of the Louisiana Purchase yet wanted to keep the land — had a strong vested interest in seeing it as unpopulated, for, as Jefferson feared, the Constitution "had made no provision for our holding foreign territory, still less for incorporating foreign nations into our union." Thomas Jefferson to John Breckinridge, 1803, quoted in Jay Larry Gitlin, "Negotiating the Course of Empire," 52. If no people lived in the new lands, that objection vanished.

17. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress on the 14th of November 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1834), 1:344. This information came from a compilation made by direction of President Jefferson from information furnished by Dr. John Sibley, of Natchitoches, La., and others. The river Perdido was said to run into the bay of Mexico, east of the Mobile River. While Perdido is clearly not a name originating in the new United States, the choice of this river as a boundary, when even the author admitted the true boundary was likely farther on, suggests the pull of ideas of waste and unexplored wilderness on the American imagination.

18. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress on the 14th of November 1803, in

In the Senate, reactions to Jefferson's report were mixed. A few senators knew Jefferson's report to be not entirely accurate, and despite being in his party, were not afraid to say it. Senator Smith objected, "I know of three large settlements in that country [Upper Louisiana] that are not even named in these papers."<sup>19</sup> And Senator Cocke of Tennessee defended Upper Louisianans from aspersions on their intelligence and suitability for republican citizenship: "coming from the westward, I have frequently been urged to tell my opinion— no arbitrary — no military government will do— we must give them a free government. We talk too much of the ignorance of that people they know more than what you think they do— they are not so plagy ignorant."<sup>20</sup> Tennessee's other senator argued that the people of Upper Louisiana weren't, in fact, so Creole: "There is now about 8000 inhabitants in Upper Louisiana— more than two-thirds of them are Americans— most of them have emigrated from Virginia— they understand and will demand their rights."<sup>21</sup> But Jonathan Dayton, a federalist of New Jersey, agreed that Upper Louisiana was a void, and hoped it would remain that way:

I hope we shall prevent the settlement of Upper Louisiana, not only for the present, but forever— If that country is settled\_ the people will seperate from us— they will form a new empire— & become our enemies. I beleive we may induce the Indians on this side to remove to the other side of the Mississippi— & this will be a great & useful thing to us.<sup>22</sup>

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*American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:345.

19. Senator John Smith of either Ohio or New York, but a democratic republican in either case, Feb. 2, 1804, in William Plumer, and Everett Somerville Brown, *Proceedings in the United States Senate*, 135.

20. Senator William Cocke of Tennessee, Feb. 2, 1804, in William Plumer, and Everett Somerville Brown, *Proceedings in the United States Senate*, 135.

21. Senator Joseph Anderson of Tennessee, Feb. 2, 1804, in William Plumer, and Everett Somerville Brown, *Proceedings in the United States Senate*, 136.

22. Senator Dayton of New Jersey, Feb. 2, 1804, in William Plumer, and Everett Somerville Brown, *Proceedings in the United States Senate*, 137.

An empty Upper Louisiana kept free of white settlement might be an excellent place to which to move Eastern Indians, making the eastern United States a less mixed society.

A year later, the theme of emptiness still resonated in the halls of Congress. When reporting on the Lewis and Clark expedition, Congressman Samuel Mitchill of New York, like Jefferson, a democratic republican, could still speak of ‘pathless forests’ and “obscure and undefined” limits. The only inhabitants mentioned were “bison, bears, tigers, wolves, deer, and several other species of untamed beasts,” as well as turkey, geese, swans, ducks, alligators and fishes. Mitchill, a natural historian who had been the U.S. commissioner to purchase Iroquois lands in western New York in 1788, referred to this state of affairs in ‘pathless’ Louisiana as “common to most other parts of the American wilderness when first visited by civilized men.”<sup>23</sup> In this Congressman’s report, Louisiana was presented as a wilderness only now being visited by civilized men, and inhabited primarily by untamed beasts — despite Congress debating, in that very month, the governance of Louisiana and the suitability, or lack thereof, of its inhabitants for the duties and privileges of citizenship.

#### *~ Upper Louisiana Indians as Exceptionally Dangerous ~*

If all of Louisiana was considered wild and empty, Upper Louisiana was thought the most dangerous part of it. When discussing the people in these wild, empty lands, Jefferson’s report to Congress portrayed Upper Louisianans as dangerous and inferior to Lower Louisianans primarily due to the comparative strength of the regional Indian peoples. Indians below the Arkansas were described as “dispersed,” “rapidly decreasing,” “destroyed by the Osage,” and

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23. Exploration of Louisiana, March 8, 1804, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:391. Biographical information on Mitchill found in the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000831>, accessed February 13, 2007.

“almost extinct.”<sup>24</sup> In the Arkansas area, which had a great deal of Indian contact, the Indian trade’s existence was merely mentioned in passing, while the region’s Indian inhabitants were “brave, yet peaceable and well disposed,” increasing through marriage with westward-emigrating Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chicasaws who “seem inclined to make a permanent settlement.”<sup>25</sup> Upper Louisiana Indians, however, were said to be troublesome to boats descending the river; plundering, even murderous; attached to liquor, and seldom remaining long in any place — this even though the Indians in question, Delaware and Shawnee emigrants who had been recruited by the Spanish to act as a peaceable buffer against the more war-like Osage, and Cherokees and Chickasaws who in Arkansas had been labeled ready for permanent settlement, were relatively peaceful and had farmed in the region for years.<sup>26</sup> At Ste. Genevieve, the situation was worse—*in the settlement, among the whites, lived “about thirty Piorias, Kaskaskias, and Illinois, who seldom hunt for fear of the other Indians.”* Not only was Upper Louisiana so dangerous that

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24. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:349-50.

25. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:350.

26. A later letter to the Secretary of War recommending paying Indians to exchange farming lands between the U.S. and Indians living near Cape Girardeau in what is now southern Missouri shows how intermingled the longstanding Indian and Creole farming communities and their livestock were. “The Land which those Indians now inhabit is Very Valuable— the Soil is excellent— it is in the middle of the Settlements and fronting on the Mississippi— Those Indians have their Houses, Towns, and farms thereon— Their Animals are domesticated to the place... There has been & will be constant encroachments made by the Whites on their Lands— disturbances take place as regards the intermingling of the stock.” Delegate Scott to the Secretary of War Jno. C. Calhoun, Sept. 21, 1820, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1815 - 1821*, 645-46. Though the treaties with the Sac and Fox, Osage, and others in the 1810s were thought to have cleared the Missouri region of Indians, clearly in truth Indians were living in towns and villages fronting the Mississippi into Missouri’s statehood, their farming so well established as to have their animals’ acquaintance with the area a point for Congress to consider when discussing indemnities to Indians who might relocate.

people huddled in towns unable to hunt, but Indians and whites were living ‘among’ each other.<sup>27</sup>

To the north, the situation only worsened. The Osage were “of a gigantic stature and well proportioned; are enemies of the whites and of all other Indian nations, and commit depredations from the Illinois to the Arkansas...they are a cruel and ferocious race, and are hated and feared by all the other Indians.”<sup>28</sup> The Kansas “are as fierce and cruel as the Osage,” “molest and ill-treat;” the Panis “often make war on the Spanish;” the Poncas and Mahas possessed “ferocity and vices,” and their trade, “never of much value,” consisted of “pillage and ill treatment.” While the Aricaras and Mandans were “well disposed to the whites,” they found themselves “victims of the Sioux or Nadowessies, who, being themselves well provided with fire-arms, have taken advantage of the defenceless situation of the others, and have on all occasions murdered them without mercy.”<sup>29</sup> Truly Upper Louisiana, as presented to Congress, was a lawless, dangerous place compared to Lower Louisiana.<sup>30</sup>

#### ~ *Creoles and Indians poor farmers* ~

Given how dangerous Upper Louisiana Indians were perceived to be, Creole connections

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27. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:350.

28. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:350.

29. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:350.

30. Decades later, Upper Louisiana’s reputation for wildness remained strong enough that the Duke of Württemberg, whose 1822-24 travels through the region gave him an interest in its history, blamed “exaggerated reports of the fierceness of wild and war-like tribes, and perhaps the overstated tales, fabulously augmented, of earlier adventurers in Illinois,” for causing the French to decide “not to waste their forces” in colonizing interior Louisiana. Wilhelm Paul, *Travels in North America, 1822-1824*, 1st ed., vol. 63, The American Exploration and Travel Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 186. The Duke of Württemberg traveled through St. Louis in 1822; his text, based on his diary, was written sometime between then and 1828, when it was first published in German.

with them loomed large in the American imagination, the more so as the nation had just come through a bloody decade of Indian wars in the Ohio valley.<sup>31</sup> To be perfectly blunt, were the people of Upper Louisiana too Indian to be American? Jefferson linked Creoles and Indians explicitly: “The settlements about the Illinois were first made by the Canadians, and their inhabitants still resemble [Indians] in their aversion to labor, and love of a wandering life.”<sup>32</sup> Here Jefferson employed the time-honored concern used to separate Indians from their lands—that Creoles did not cultivate or settle but rather were a wandering people. This was no neutral statement from the man who declared “those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God,” nor in a culture which saw citizenship itself as rooted in the cultivation of soil.<sup>33</sup> Jefferson’s statement lumped all the land of the Louisiana Purchase into the category of empty land, essentially devoid of people putting it to its highest use — American-style agriculture. In this calculus, French Creole equaled Indian.<sup>34</sup> That French Creole relations with Indians were rationally based in mutually beneficial economic and diplomatic relations does not seem to have occurred to the men debating the Creole place in the new American world; of the opinions that

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31. Creole/Indian connections were established and explored in the first two, colonial, chapters of my dissertation.

32. Description of Louisiana, communicated to Congress, on the 14th of November, 1803, in *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 1:346.

33. Thomas Jefferson, and Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson: Writings : Autobiography / Notes on the State of Virginia / Public and Private Papers / Addresses / Letters (Library of America)* (Library of America, 1984), 290. As Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur put it in his romanticized vision of American farming, “this formerly rude soil has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return it has established all our rights; on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens.” J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur et al., *Letters From an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & company, 1904), 27.

34. Daniel Richter notices this cultural elision in an aside in Daniel K. Richter, “Believing That Many,” 37. “Like nearly all Anglo-Americans of the period, though, he placed the Creole French and the métis culture they and their wives and children were creating in the same category of doomed non-agricultural hunters in which he classed the Miamis and Potawatomis.”

agriculture was the proper use of this region and that Indians and Creoles did not farm, they were blind to practical reasons for an alliance between Creole and Indian peoples and could see only an economic system of poor agricultural practice bolstered by hunting and wild living.<sup>35</sup>

The accusation that Upper Louisiana Creoles did not farm well had practical implications, for it justified dispossessing them of their lands, whether through grand, continent-wide racial cleansing schemes or by denying their land titles and replacing them gradually with American settlers who would use the land more to American standards. American ideas of what constituted proper cultivation did not mesh well with the Creole cadastral system or crop choices. To Americans, “the only good vegetation was a crop like wheat, and the only attractive landscape was one of rectangular shaped farmsteads.”<sup>36</sup> Creole farmers, like Indian farmers, failed on both counts.<sup>37</sup> The Spanish census of 1800, the last before the Louisiana transfer, showed that Upper Louisiana produced 31,705 minots of wheat, but a much greater 184,020 minots of corn, which is, of course, a crop Europeans borrowed from Indians.<sup>38</sup> And as Carl

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35. This American opinion of Upper Louisiana was so strongly held that the Delaware Indians were able to use it to argue against their own removal. The Delaware argued that if they went to the Missouri, “to settle among strange and warlike tribes,” they would be “cut off, or lose what advances they already made in the arts and manners of the white people.” Congress agreed, and allotted thirteen sections of public land for these Indians who feared contamination by Upper Louisiana’s Indian violence and lack of civilization. Memorial and petition of Montgomery Montour, Dec. 26, 1806, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 1:744.

36. Daniel Usner, "Iroquois Livelihood and Jeffersonian Agrarianism," 210. Usner's article is an excellent discussion of American attitudes toward Indian agriculture in the early republic.

37. For a start on why Americans did not recognize the Indian agriculture right in front of them, see, Daniel K. Richter, "Believing That Many."; Daniel Usner, "Iroquois Livelihood and Jeffersonian Agrarianism."

38. MHS, Census papers, 1800 census. St. Louis and its immediately surrounding villages produced about 85% of the total wheat and 30% of the total corn produced in Upper Louisiana.

Ekberg has documented, Creole settlers organized themselves not on independent square farmsteads like Americans but rather on narrow strips called longlots with the houses lined up along rivers or roads, with physically separate plots of land divided into the socially oriented units of village, common pasture, and commonly fenced plowfields.<sup>39</sup> A Creole agricultural landscape looked almost nothing like an American one, where each settler ideally lived alone in the center of his contiguous land. The Creole system therefore had to be changed before it could be incorporated into the American republic—if it could be incorporated at all.<sup>40</sup>

Commentators repeatedly downplayed Creole agriculture, saying that Upper Louisiana's Creole population lived off fur trading—an occupation that for Americans smacked more of hunting and a lower level of civilization than of the mercantile and agricultural prowess that Creoles perceived. Indeed, while Upper Louisiana had been considered the breadbasket of the colony, it had a parallel, contradictory reputation for starvation. St. Louis had been known as Paincourt, or Short-of-Bread, and one of her satellite villages as Vide Poche, or Empty Pocket. I argue in my thesis that this reputation grew not out of an innate inability of Creole agriculture to feed its population while producing a surplus for export, but rather out of St. Louis's enormous and increasing need for food to feed Indian delegations.<sup>41</sup> French farmers were not inadequate or

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39. Carl J Ekberg, *French Roots*.

40. As indeed it would be. Once Congress, in the mid 1810s, had decided to allow confirmation of a swath of St.-Louis-area land grants, seventy-five to eighty percent of the confirmations had their grants reduced and changed from the French or Spanish parameters to the American homestead ideal of 640 acres.

41. As Indian groups generally required the approval of more than just one representative to validate diplomacy, they came in large family groups to negotiate with other tribes and with the Spanish. The Spanish commandant reported in 1778, before the refugee situation intensified in the 1780s and 90s, that they had been feeding at least fifty and as many as two hundred Indian delegates each day. De Leyba to Galvez, July 21, 1778, in Lawrence Kinnaird, *Revolutionary Period*, 298.

non-existent, just challenged by the demands of Indian diplomacy.<sup>42</sup>

If Creole farmers were not, in fact, inadequate, the American contention that French Creoles could not cultivate the land is revealed as, at best, cultural blindness.<sup>43</sup> This cultural blindness stemmed, in part, from a belief in cultivation as a skill that divided racially. To put it bluntly, at the time of the Louisiana Purchase, elite American men believed that whites and blacks cultivated the land, but not Indians, and therefore, perhaps, not Creoles.

***~ Creoles but not Americans susceptible to Indian influences ~***

Upper Louisiana's Creole citizens also ranked below white Americans on a scale of civilization, in American eyes, for their racial mixing with Indians. According to Presbyterian missionary Timothy Flint, one of the first in the region, the mixed-race people "were of that class, which form the intermediate link between the social and savage state." Wherever the French went, such unions were found, and Indians were a vile race with whom to mix, worse even than Africans. "Indian features were much slower to be amalgamated with those of the whites, than that of the negro."<sup>44</sup> Crucially, to Flint, Americans were as naturally repulsed by Indians as the French were attracted. Although "monstrous exceptions sometimes occur... it is

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42. A historiographic trend toward believing Anglo farming superior to its French counterpart is found in Canadian history as well. Frank Lewis, and Martin McInnes, "Efficiency of the French-Canadian Farmer," investigated this belief by examining Anglo and French agricultural inputs and outputs in Lower Canada and found no significant difference in productivity.

43. Banner points out that a belief in poor Creole agriculture is related to a belief in Creole indolence. Stuart Banner, *Legal Systems in Conflict: Property and Sovereignty in Missouri, 1750-1860*, vol. 7, Legal History of North America (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 92. Also see David Langum, "Californios and the Image of Indolence," *Western Historical Quarterly* 9 (1978): 181-96.

44. From an account of his years in Missouri, 1814 - 1819, written 1824 - 1825, originally published in 1826. Joseph J Kwiat, ed. *Recollections of the Last Ten Years, Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi*, Series in American Studies (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 131, 135-9, 164.

so rare that a permanent connexion is formed between an American and an Indian woman, that even the French themselves regard it as a matter of astonishment.”<sup>45</sup> Racial mixing between Creoles and Indians could provide the surety of cultural safety Americans needed to settle in Louisiana, because Americans, so the argument went, did not, would not mix with Indians, even had they with Africans.<sup>46</sup>

American writers had long warned of a particular danger in cultural mixing with Indians, as so strongly affecting people of European background that they “can never be prevailed on to re-adopt European manners.” St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote of a “thousand instances” of children captured in wars “so perfectly Indianized, that many knew [their parents] no longer, and those whose more advanced ages permitted them to recollect their fathers and mothers, absolutely refused to follow them, and ran to their adopted parents for protection against the effusions of love their unhappy real parents lavished on them!” St. John de Crèvecoeur had a solution for those who feared the Indianization of their American children—keep them busy farming, for, “as long as we keep ourselves busy in tilling the earth, there is no fear of any of us becoming wild.”<sup>47</sup>

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45. Timothy Flint et al., *Recollections of the Last Ten Years in the Valley of the Mississippi* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 163.

46. Kariann Yokota examines this national anxiety about slipping into white degeneration as an organic piece of American life in a time of insecurity about the United States’ relative level of civilization vis-a-vis Britain and Europe. According to Yokota, a belief in racial forms as environmental, based on civilization, and mutable, were extremely threatening to Americans in the early republic, who lived in a rougher climate and definitely closer to savagery than their European role models. Kariann A. Yokota, “Not Written in Black and White: American National Identity and the Curious Color Transformation of Henry Moss,” *Common-Place* 4, no. 2 (2004). In such an insecure new nation, barriers to white integration with Indians would need to be in place before Upper Louisiana could be safely and comfortably settled and integrated to the union.

47. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur et al., *Letters From an American Farmer*, 305, 316.

A belief that Indians and Creoles were too closely tied to survive American presence, but Americans could withstand Creole contact, came to have many adherents. One influential proponent was William Clark, of Lewis and Clark fame, who felt that the Creole population depended on Indians for survival. Clark believed that, without the Indian trade to support them, Creoles would melt away from the U.S. territories, or fall into indolence and despair.<sup>48</sup> The United States originally had considered removing Creoles from Upper Louisiana to make it an Indian reserve and region to place eastern Indians; this evolved into a hope and belief that with Indian removal would also naturally come Creole removal. Former Pennsylvania Congressman, then Missouri judge and land commissioner John Baptiste Charles Lucas believed the critical moment for Creole success had already passed. He thought that a Creole focus on Indian trade rather than American-style landholding had ruined them: “their situation is forlorn, and they are fully sensible of it.”<sup>49</sup>

If Americans were protected from the threat of racial mixing with Indians by a natural disgust, they could be protected culturally by a removal or eradication of Indians and Creoles from surrounding lands. Such a removal would make Missouri a decent, an American, place, safe from the risk of cultural transfer from Indians. And while Indians and Creoles yet remained, Americans could keep themselves safe by keeping their eyes on the plow.

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48. “The Creoles of this Country who have from their earliest Settlements depended on the Indian Trade, and Voyageing for their Subsistence, will be deprived of this means of supporting their families. They are but little acquainted with the culture of the earth, and if deprived of the advantages of the Indian Trade of this Country by a Competition which they have not the Smallest hopes of Contending with, numbers will most probably abandon the Country, go to Canada, the Spanish dominions or fall into indolence and Misery.” William Clark to the Secretary of War General Dearborn, May 18, 1807, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1806 - 1814*, 124.

49. Judge Lucas to General Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, Feb. 9, 1807, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1806 - 1814*, 95.

~ *Causes of American agricultural anxiety* ~

A modern reader might wonder just why Americans cared so much about cultivation. To Americans, proper agricultural use of land had several benefits, many of them cultural rather than economic or biological. Land ownership brought both political rights and the independence to use them well. Historian Steven Stoll explored the connection between land ownership and incorruptible citizenship, stating, “American equality, in some sense, depended on the resources that made every farmer the equal of every other and richer than any European peasant or wageworker.”<sup>50</sup> According to John Faragher, the United States was “a country where independence had been a central value and had been tied to land ownership from the first colonial landings.”<sup>51</sup> Farming was an activity for upstanding independent citizens of the new republic. An influential strand of American thought felt that good farming formed the basis of their new, non-aristocratic society in the New World. Typified by Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur in his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, this line of argument presented agriculture as an equalizing endeavor that prevented the United States from falling into tyrannies of the Old World:

Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth... We are a people of cultivators... if he travels through our rural districts he views not the hostile castle, and the haughty mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabbin, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke, and indigence. A pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout our habitations. The meanest of our log-houses is a dry and comfortable habitation.<sup>52</sup>

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50. Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 36.

51. John Faragher, and Carol Sheriff, "The Expanding Nation: Pioneers Or Planners?," in *Interpretations of American History: Patterns & Perspectives, Volume I, Though Reconstruction*, ed. Francis G. Couvares et al. (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 227.

52. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur et al., *Letters From an American Farmer*, 49-50.

The ability of the ‘meanest’ of the American farmers to dwell in pleasing, decent competence defined the American nation against Europe; the image of the citizen-farmer justified the American break with British authority. In this context, to accept citizens who could not, did not, or would not farm ‘decently’ challenged the underpinnings of American justifications for their own existence as a nation.

But Americans cared about proper farming for more than its political benefits. Apart from the obvious—agriculture made up a much greater sector of the economy then than now—anxieties about their place among nations and their success as a republic gathered around agricultural issues. After the American Revolution, the United States cared deeply about European, especially British, views of their new nation. Wishing to see themselves as leaders in a new, free form of government rather than dishonorable rebels against legitimate authority, their good reputation mattered. But at the turn of the nineteenth century, Americans faced the kind of agricultural contempt from Europe that they would soon unleash on Louisiana. Independent of their image problem, the United States endured rising anxiety about the productivity of their farmlands and what it might mean for their population and their nation.

In 1794, Yorkshireman William Strickland, later Baronet of Boynton, had traveled to America with the express purpose of answering questions about American agriculture for the British Board of Agriculture. Strickland found much to criticize in American agriculture. He preferred the New England states and felt that even in New York agriculture had begun to decline, and continued to do so to the south. In Strickland’s view, the American states had become land speculators, and Indians their victims. Americans rather than Indians seemed barbarous to the future baronet. And indeed, Strickland used the label ‘savage’ to describe backwoods Americans: “the Savage Backwoodsman, who might be of any nation, or the

descendant of many nations, that retrograde animal, from a state of civilization relapsing again into Barbarism.”<sup>53</sup> In Strickland’s eyes, the various ethnic whites—Dutch, German, Irish—might or might not be able to refine and improve themselves, but it seemed on the whole that Americans were descending into savagery.

Strickland condemned settlers’ agriculture from their first efforts to clear land. The “poor, unenlightened inhabitant of the Log-Hut,” “more ignorant and squalid than his predecessor whom he calls a Savage,” rather than being a steward to woods that would have been valuable back in Britain, wrecked woodlands: “thus are the forests of this country destroyed by the hands of ignorance and idleness.” He “tears” rather than plows the lands, “scatters” rather than plants seed, starves rather than feeds his livestock—“the scene is truly savage.”<sup>54</sup>

While Strickland blamed the failure of American agriculture in part on the adoption of Indian crops such as corn and tobacco, he cited the deepest roots of this agricultural failure “in *the present constitutions of the states, and the manners of the people.*”<sup>55</sup> His critique of agricultural savagery had evolved into a critique of the government and character of the entire American people—just as would critiques of Upper Louisiana in a few years. Strickland’s report to the British Board of Agriculture struck a chord in George Washington, who, according to Strickland’s editor, was prompted to write a ‘long and detailed’ response.<sup>56</sup> This response, however, was not the impassioned defense of his countrymen one might imagine of a sitting

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53. Rev. J.E. Strickland, *Journal of a Tour*, 175.

54. Rev. J.E. Strickland, *Journal of a Tour*, 96.

55. William Strickland, “Observations on the Agriculture of the United States of America,” in *Journal of a Tour in the United States of America 1794-1795*, ed. Rev. J.E. Strickland (New York: New York Historical Society, 1971), 52-55. Strickland exempted from this portrait the people of New England, whom he considered closest to Britain and loyal to British ways.

56. Rev. J.E. Strickland, ed. *Journal of a Tour in the United States of America 1794-1795* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1971), xiii.

President.

Washington held Strickland's observations in surprisingly high regard, saying, "your strictures on the Agriculture of this country are but too just, it is indeed wretched."<sup>57</sup> He defended all Americans as suffering not from savagery so much as excessive ambition coupled with habit, "the consequence of which is, that we ruin the lands that are already cleared, and either cut down more wood if we have it, or emigrate into the Western country."<sup>58</sup> Washington even declared himself to be just such a bad farmer, "my system of Agriculture is what you have described, and I am persuaded, was I to farm it on a large scale, would be improved by the alteration you have proposed." He agreed that his system of fencing was 'disgusting,' 'expensive,' and 'wasteful,' and only took issue with small points as to whether certain recommended species grew as well in the United States as they did in England. He thanked Strickland for his rigorous critique of American agriculture, "I feel myself much obliged; and shall at all times be thankful for any suggestions on Agriculture subjects, you may find leisure and inclination to favour me with."<sup>59</sup>

Nor did Washington's apparent agreement with Strickland's critique and gratitude for it restrict itself to a single letter. In 1795 and 1796, he corresponded with Thomas Jefferson about his efforts to follow Strickland's suggestions, at great expense and inconvenience to himself.

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57. LC, George Washington Papers, George Washington to John Sinclair, July 10, 1795. Accessed online November 10, 2007, at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw4&fileName=gwpage107.db&recNum=647>.

58. LC, George Washington Papers, George Washington to William Strickland, July 15, 1797. Accessed online November 10, 2007, at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw2&fileName=gwpage020.db&recNum=192>.

59. LC, George Washington Papers, George Washington to William Strickland, July 15, 1797. Accessed online November 10, 2007, at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw2&fileName=gwpage020.db&recNum=192>.

One of those letters showed that Washington shared some of Strickland's opinions about the farming ability of the non-elite American: "neither my Overseers nor Manager, will attend properly to anything but the crops they have usually cultivated: and in spite of all I can say, if there is the smallest discretionary power allowed them, they will fill the land with Indian Corn; altho' they have demonstrable proof, at every step they take, of its destructive effects."<sup>60</sup> One elite man to another, Washington shared with Jefferson his frustration with his inability to get his workers to stop destroying the land by planting Indian corn where he wanted to follow Strickland's advice and plant chicory, a plant with salad-like leaves and a root that could substitute for coffee. Washington asked Strickland himself for help finding British farmers who might be willing to come to America and be his tenants, as he considered Americans unworthy of renting his land, "nor should I be inclined to do it to the slovenly farmers of this country, if there was a well grounded hope of getting them from any other, where husbandry is better understood, and more skillfully practiced than with us."<sup>61</sup> Though Strickland labeled Americans savages and barbaric while Washington considered them merely slovenly, over-ambitious, and caught in bad habits, Strickland and Washington concurred on the bad agriculture of the common American.

American concerns about agricultural practice would only grow, as British critiques of American farming technique were joined by a growing sense of trouble in the 1800s and 1810s

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60. *LC*, George Washington Papers, George Washington to Thomas Jefferson, October 4, 1795 and July 6, 1796. Accessed online November 10, 2007, at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw2&fileName=gwpage019.db&recNum=359> and <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw2&fileName=gwpage019.db&recNum=198>.

61. *LC*, George Washington Papers, George Washington to William Strickland, February 20, 1796. Accessed online November 10, 2007, at <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw4&fileName=gwpage108.db&recNum=994>, or <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mgw2&fileName=gwpage020.db&recNum=33>.

as land exhaustion became a national concern. The two available solutions to declining agricultural productivity were to concentrate population in the east to farm intensively, applying reforms such as manuring and crop rotation, or to migrate west to still-fertile lands.<sup>62</sup> But calls for labor-intensive reform did not convince everyone. By 1815 many farmers saw western migration as their best choice.<sup>63</sup> And indeed, in a country with much more land available than labor, harvesting fertility from the soil of new farms made sense. Contemporary Federalist and Republican arguments over western expansion were embedded in a national problem with productive cultivation. Would national expansion leave the east coast, where the United States had planted their national institutions, a weedy, abandoned, overgrown tangle? Or would it extend national unity over territories that would bring continued agricultural prosperity to the nation? Expansion clearly won out over intensive, settled cultivation, with results that bothered agricultural reformers. Westward expansion, many worried, would leave the east to wither. Virginia writer James Garnett described worn-out, abandoned lands in the eastern seaboard states as returning to a worse savagery than seen under Indian management—deer more abundant, wolves returning, thickets closing in on once-cleared farms.<sup>64</sup> Americans could not abide a vision of their country as a depopulating land returning to wilderness.

Strickland had called American farmers “the most destructive race that ever disfigured and destroyed a beautiful and luxuriant country.”<sup>65</sup> With foreign criticism contrasting once-

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62. An outstanding study of early American agriculture, its perceptions and problems, and the movement toward reform in the nineteenth century is Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth : Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

63. Paul Wallace Gates, *The Farmer's Age: Agriculture, 1815-1860*, The Economic history of the United States ; v. 3 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), 3.

64. James Mercer Garnett, 1818, quoted in Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 46.

65. Rev. J.E. Strickland, *Journal of a Tour*, xvi.

glorious lands with an undeserving people, and with fertility declining on the eastern seaboard, little wonder that Americans worried about their agricultural success. Defining themselves as agriculturally and morally better than Upper Louisianans bolstered Americans' sense of themselves as, at the very least, being the bearers of civilization to the west rather than the degenerate descendants of European civilization to the east. A national rhetoric criticizing Creoles and Indians in the west as wanderers undeserving of their lands helped balance a rising national concern about American agriculture and Americans' own stewardship of their lands. A early history, therefore, in which the United States favored Lower Louisianans over their northern compatriots, is less surprising. In Lower Louisiana, plantation agriculture spoke of white American control over both other peoples and the wilderness, while Upper Louisianans reminded them instead of their own concerns over backsliding into savagery.

~ *Creole responses to the Transfer, self-governance* ~

Upper Louisianans chose, in their first organized communication with their new government, to assert their rights as slaveholders, underlining their sharing of an American racial hierarchy. This early Creole-American cultural negotiation centered on control of a group of people understood to be inferior and not potential citizens. St. Louis elites formed a “Committee of St. Louis” in August of 1804 to urge Amos Stoddard, the new American commandant, to preserve their “property rights,” as assured by the Louisiana Treaty of Session, Article 3.<sup>66</sup> The Committee asked Stoddard to enact a version of the Code Noir under which slave relations had been governed in Louisiana under Spain and France, to prevent interaction between Whites and Blacks. In this correspondence, the Committee, while stating their respect for Constitutional law and American interest in preventing the “danger” of Black “fermentation,” implicitly informed

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66. *Treaty Between the United States of America and the French Republic*, April 30, 1803, in *Statutes At Large*, Vol. 2, 202. That the Treaty had assured full citizenship did not go unnoticed by the Creole populace.

the American commandant that Creoles had more in common with other whites (Americans) than with peoples considered inferior, referring to “the respect [blacks] owe generally to all Whites.”<sup>67</sup> An astute Creole elite sought to consolidate their position under an American regime by pointing not to their education, experience with local Indians, or wealth, but to their status as black slave owners, a racial system familiar to all but the newest Americans (and one whose prominence in lower Louisiana added to that region’s familiarity in American eyes).

But mere months—and shock at their admission as a district rather than a territory—taught the men who formed the first Assembly at St. Louis that referring to republican principles and asserting control over blacks would not be enough to overturn American concerns about their suitability for full citizenship. In their petitions to Congress, St. Louisans would have to distance themselves from Indians who had long been business partners and neighbors—a tactic that did not appear in Lower Louisiana’s admission. Accordingly, the St. Louis Assembly objected strongly to the act providing for Indian resettlement in the district of Louisiana: “the dictates of a foreign Government! an incalculable accession of savage hordes to be vomited on our borders!... These are the leading features of that political system which you have devised for us.”<sup>68</sup> In a later, intended-to-be-toned-down, no-longer-fire-breathing version, the Assembly exclaimed,

Had the United States bound themselves to exterminate from the face of the earth every inhabitant of Louisiana, [we] do not conceive, that they could have taken a more effectual step... than the measures contemplated... respecting the district of Louisiana... Great God! a colony of Indians to protect us in our liberties and

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67. MHS, Amos Stoddard Papers, Rankin to Stoddard, August 4, 1804, 1-2.

68. Remonstrance and petition of the representatives elected by the freemen of their respective districts in the District of Louisiana, January 4, 1805 (signed at St. Louis Sept. 29, 1804), in U.S. Congress, *Annals of Congress*, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Appendix, 1608.; Anonymous Paper *re* Attitude of French Inhabitants, written from St. Louis, November 4, 1804, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1803 - 1806*, 69-70.

properties!<sup>69</sup>

Here the St. Louis Assembly, made up of people with a long history of engaging in complex diplomatic and economic relationships with these peoples, had learned that ties with Indians that had served them well under the Spanish did rather the opposite under the Americans. They worked to convince Congress of their repugnance at Congress's assumption that the district of Louisiana was basically Indian in nature. Far from the Indian partners Americans perceived them to be, Creoles claimed to be victims of merciless, wasteful savagery:

A week before, we heard of another set... who committed against one of our scattered settlers every sort of depredation; killing his cattle of every description, stripping him and his family entirely naked, and, after glutting themselves with what provisions they found in the house, throwing all the rest into the fire.<sup>70</sup>

Tellingly, the description of property violation highlights Indian waste of Creole resources; cattle were killed, provisions thrown in the fire—even those eaten were eaten gluttonously. Wasted agricultural potential was one of the cores of American distaste for Creole and Indian agriculture and settlement.

The Assembly claimed Creoles in Upper Louisiana, far from being just like Indians, were “defenseless prey to the bloody rage of the tomahawk,” and that “the nearer [Indians] approach to civilization the more inclined they feel to resume at the first opportunity their naturally cruel and savage disposition.”<sup>71</sup> Having established that Indians murdered and plundered Creoles, the

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69. Remonstrance and petition of the representatives elected by the freemen of their respective districts in the District of Louisiana,” January 4, 1805 (signed at St. Louis Sept. 29, 1804), in U.S. Congress, *Annals of Congress*, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Appendix, 1617.

70. Remonstrance and petition of the representatives elected by the freemen of their respective districts in the District of Louisiana,” January 4, 1805 (signed at St. Louis Sept. 29, 1804), in U.S. Congress, *Annals of Congress*, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Appendix, 1617.

71. Remonstrance and petition of the representatives elected by the freemen of their respective districts in the District of Louisiana,” January 4, 1805 (signed at St. Louis Sept. 29, 1804), in U.S. Congress, *Annals of Congress*, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Appendix, 1618.

Assembly then declared these very attacks proved that they, Creoles, represented besieged civilization, not, as it sometimes seemed in American discourse, savagery.

The Creole argument for territorial rather than District status met with success: they were admitted as a territory of their own July 4, 1805. But the establishment act had provisions guaranteed to upset Upper Louisianans. Despite evoking the committees of correspondence of the American Revolution, despite organizing an elective assembly, Upper Louisiana, now the Territory of Louisiana, was allowed no legislature, while their relatives in the Territory of Orleans (Lower Louisiana) had been granted the right to elections and legislative bodies.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, the act governing the Territory of Louisiana, unlike that governing the Territory of Orleans, referred to the governor's need to establish civil control in border regions as Indian titles were extinguished.<sup>73</sup> The United States, once again, revealed its unique concern over the presence of Indians in Upper Louisiana alongside a series of stipulations giving the Creole citizenry subordinate status to all other citizens. Seeing Upper Louisianans as too Indian, as not capable of sustaining a peaceful, agricultural society, seems to have been an important drag on the admission of these citizens to full status in the Union.

The urgency with which Americans wished to ensure citizenship and land were granted only to those who would best use them can also be seen in American responses to Creole land ownership. Rather than accept land titles as they stood when Louisiana became American, the United States decided that all land titles would have to be reviewed and only confirmed if the land use conformed to American ideals of living on the titled land, improving it, and planting the correct crops (an impossible task with non-contiguous (Creole) landholdings). If the land was

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72. U.S. Congress, *Annals of Congress*, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Appendix, 1617.

73. "An Act further providing for the government of the district of Louisiana," signed into law March 3, 1805, in *Statutes At Large*, Vol. 2, 8th. Cong., 2nd. Sess., Ch. 31, 331-32.

not used correctly, it would revert to federal control and be sold to American settlers. In the context of Upper Louisiana's admission as a district rather than a self-governing territory — and its much slower advancement toward statehood than Lower Louisiana— these land and government provisions aroused Creole ire and political agitation in Upper Louisiana, as elites rushed to defend their agricultural practices, and, in so doing, assert their status as white men worthy of equal citizenship.

~ *Creole responses to Transfer, land policy* ~

The details of land confirmation laws and protests are far beyond the scope of this short paper; arguments over land law began in 1804 and cases were heard in the Supreme Court as late as 1871.<sup>74</sup> For the purposes of examining the importance of racialized conceptions of agriculture to both sides, I can, however, present a sampling of Creole responses to changes in law throughout the territorial period. Creole efforts to present themselves as Indian victims rather than allies when protesting their government spilled over into their protests over American land decisions. In petitions and letters, they used Indian presence to excuse their inability to live up to American standards of cultivation— which, of course, were prerequisites for land ownership.

Creoles first protested against Congress imposing any requirements for land ownership that had not been imposed by Spain and argued that “the inhabitants of Louisiana continually disturbed by the incursions of the Indians nations could not like the peaceable Settlers of the East bank of the Mississippi engage in agricultural pursuits.”<sup>75</sup> In 1806, petitioners carefully explained the Creole system of cultivation, wherein lands were non-adjacent and often communal but owned nonetheless, and once more referred to Indians as the cause of this different agricultural

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74. See *Gibson v. Chouteau*, 80 U.S. 92, (1871).

75. *MHS*, Chouteau collection, portion of MSS. protesting against severe land law passed by Congress, ca. 1804.

system:

the savages induced by the weakness of the settlements and the hope of impunity... have plundered those habitations burnt down the building and took the lives of the settlers; they have in one Instance killed sixty persons living on their plantations, & made the same numbers of prisoners within two or three miles of the town of St Louis, after which instead of retiring they advanced & took a menacing attitude before that village; these disastrous events occurring daily even in latter times spread terror amongst the Colonists too weak to defend and more so to revenge themselves, which have prevented the Cultivation of many Plantations during long intervals of time.<sup>76</sup>

These petitioners, including such elites as the Chouteau brothers; surveyor Antoine Soulard; Charles Sanguinet, who hosted the 1814 territorial legislature in his home; and prominent businessmen Jacques Clamorgan and Manuel Lisa, depicted themselves under the Spanish regime as cowering in their villages, suffering daily massacres and utterly unable to farm, rather than as the politically and economically savvy Indian trade partners many of them actually were, profiting from mercantile pursuits coupled with such agricultural production as needed.<sup>77</sup> “If only those terrifying Indians had not been here,” Creoles seem to argue, “we would

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76. Petition to Congress by Inhabitants of the Territory, February 1, 1806, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1803 - 1806*, 428.

77. This contention got powerful support from land board head J.B.C. Lucas. Lucas, who was sufficiently ill-disposed to Creoles as to argue against their suitability for citizenship during the admission debates in Congress, wrote that “to secure themselves from the attacks of the numerous & Powerfull Indian Tribes that surrounded them they were necessitated to live in villages for mutual protection, thus a Town Lot was appropriated for a mansion house and out house, another Lot was allowed to build a Barn at the edge or Skirt of the village to secure the Better from accidents of fire, and beside these, each inhabitant was allowed... within sight of the village two or three arpents of Land in front upon forty in depth, all running in a paralelle Line— each inhabitant enclosed his proportion of the whole which formed but one field, so that whether the inhabitants were at night in their village, in day time in their field or in the common to attend their Cattle or hawl wood, they were allways within reach of one another for mutual protection.” These lands were granted either to inhabit or to cultivate, but not both, and the American requirements therefore could not be met, making the Creoles, especially the poorer sort, fear losing all their lands. Lucas felt the land conflict risked making Louisianans disloyal, and worse, land law shielded speculators and rich people while punishing the poor. Judge Lucas to Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, Jan. 29, 1807, in Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1806 -*

of course have farmed in the most American manner imaginable.”

An 1810 petition is a clear example of Louisianans, Anglo and Creole, original inhabitants or later immigrants, uniting to blame Indians for their land title troubles and for cultural differences between Upper Louisiana and the United States:

Hard is the fate of the claimant (and the orphan children of those) who traversed a wilderness country to reach Louisiana, for the express purpose of acquiring the means to benefit their families. Who from fear of the *savage tomahawk*, a want of prompt protection from the government, sickness and deaths in their families, and many other causes; were prevented, (though actually settled in the territory) from placing themselves in safety, on the particular tracts allotted to them.<sup>78</sup>

Each of these petitions was followed by a loosening of American requirements for land title confirmation. Anti-Indian rhetoric had evolved from being the distancing mechanism used in 1804 and 1805 to convince the United States that Upper Louisianans deserved to be citizens, into a successful means of manipulating Congress for favorable land claims decisions.

The United States' wholehearted belief in the precarious safety and loyalty of their Indian-menaced western frontier can be seen in the run-up to the War of 1812. After receiving President Madison's war message on June 1, 1812, Congress feared leaving angry residents to be influenced by Indian or British forces. Changing Louisiana's name to Missouri Territory, they raised it to second grade territorial status on June 4th, which gave it a delegate (not a representative) in Congress. Congress then took the time to confirm many village and common lot grants on June 13th, a mere five days before declaring war on Britain. This wartime Congress was so accommodating that Judge Lucas would later protest that Congress had been

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1814, 88-91.

78. 1810 Memorial of Inhabitants of the Territory to the Land Commissioners, Clarence Carter, *Louisiana-Missouri, 1806 - 1814*, 382-97.

manipulated by its western citizens, changing from too strict in its laws to far too loose.<sup>79</sup>

Once out of the shadow of war, however, Congress grew less responsive to land claimants, opening a land office in St. Louis in June of 1816. Congress also returned to the idea of removing eastern Indians to Upper Louisiana in December of 1816. Arguing both the need to defend whites from Indians (many of whom had just fought against the United States in the War of 1812) and the need to protect both whites and Indians from cross-cultural contamination, the Committee on Public Lands thought the old Jeffersonian ideal of dumping Indians west deserved revival. The committee intended Indians to be placed on ‘vacant’ lands unclaimed by anyone, and as far as possible from the white settlements in Missouri, but, nonetheless, in Missouri Territory.<sup>80</sup> Land claimants, faced with a new removal scheme, a ‘final’ February of 1816 land board report that left many claims unconfirmed, and a public land office opening, dusted off their arguments about Indian violence and local cultivation practices. We see the rhetorical strand as late as 1819, when one man wrote the local paper, the Missouri Gazette, to argue,

For many years, and indeed till very lately, the frontier settlements, and indeed almost all the western country, have been the scene of murder and massacre. *the blood of their sons fattened their cornfields—the war whoop woke the sleep of the cradle.* Could it be supposed that at such time the thought of the payment of their debts could enter into the breast of the suffering husband & father? Could he plough in peace his field manured with the blood of his son?<sup>81</sup>

Here, the writer used the same technique for manipulating public opinion developed by Creoles petitioning Congress—he cited Indian violence to counter accusations that these farmers

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79. Lucas to William Crawford, Secretary of the Treasury, November 9, 1820, in John B. C. Lucas, *Letters of Hon. J.B.C. Lucas From 1815 to 1836* (St. Louis: 1905), 33-34.

80. *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, Senate, 14th Cong., 2nd Sess., 2:123-24.

81. A Farmer, “Public Lands, No. II,” *Missouri Gazette and Public Advertiser*, (St. Louis, MO Terr.), Vol XI, no. 552, April 28, 1819.

were not fulfilling their republican duty in improving the land with cultivation. Far from failing to improve the land, this anonymous farmer argued, they were holding the frontier line against barbarity, the blood of their own sons manuring — enriching — the land.

To modern ears, that line may sound merely gory, but it had specific resonances in the early Republic, when agricultural reformers promoted intensive agriculture centered around manuring as a way to regain lost fertility in lands to the east.<sup>82</sup> What greater evidence of patriotic sacrifice for country—a country reeling from market declines in the late 1810s and turning to agriculture as a path out of economic devastation—than to take frontier lands from barbarians and fertilize them, improve them, make them into lands that belong to a civilized landscape in an American republic, with the blood of your sons? No mere gathering of dung and applying it to fallow fields this—Missourians were advanced, above-and-beyond farmers, soldiers of civilization, who certainly deserved the titles to their lands, whatever petty requirements of law or elite ignorance of local agricultural techniques might hold sway back east.

*~ importance to historians ~*

Upper Louisianans' experience of being labeled savage by American policy and opinion-makers bears examination for its potential to revise our understandings of the process and time frame in which the United States developed a racialized identity, a topic that tends to have been studied in the context of later events, such as the Mexican War and the mass European immigration beginning in the 1840s.<sup>83</sup> The admission of Upper Louisiana's lands and peoples, in

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82. See Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, especially “Dunghill Doctrines,” 49-68, for discussion of the meaning and promise of manure in the early Republic.

83. According to Reginald Horsman, the first half of the nineteenth century was spent moving from a Revolution-influenced conception that anyone—theoretically including Indians and blacks—could enjoy the benefits of freedom, to one in which the American Anglo-Saxon race would improve the world, in part through replacing inferior races via expansion, a view similar to Matthew Frye Jacobson’s (discussed below) in time frame but focused on expansion rather

contrast to that of Lower Louisiana, is an under-appreciated chapter in the story of American racial thinking. Racialized ideas about appropriate agriculture were critical to linking of Creoles and Indians in the American mind, and the elite Creole effort to use American anti-Indian prejudice to define Creoles as worthy citizens and landholders constitutes an important and overlooked part of the construction of an American identity in the early republic.

Correctly perceiving the potential ill effects of being defined as Indian-like, elite Creoles argued for their place in American society, repeatedly describing themselves as victims of Indian violence and as a shield for American settlements farther east. In fighting to establish and acquire their full rights as citizens of the United States (rights which had been guaranteed by treaty), Upper Louisiana Creoles have given us a new window into the early-republic construction of American identity, which, as Gary Nash argues, became increasingly and explicitly white in nature. At a time, therefore, when “white racial hostility...threaten[ed] to pulverize the concept of colorblind community,” the United States’ attitudes toward the potential citizenship of Upper Louisianans show us an early conversation between whites as to the nature of whiteness itself.<sup>84</sup>

The elite Creole effort to distance themselves in the eyes of American policy-makers from their Indian neighbors and partners can be seen as an early example of a group working to define itself as white, a term that, at the time, had a great deal to do with suitability for republican citizenship. Matthew Frye Jacobson divided the American history of whiteness into

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than immigration as the catalyst of change. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, particularly 99-115, 298-303; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color : European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998). Horsman argues that the practical experience of people in the South and on the western frontiers ended up being more important to American racial thought than enlightenment ideals promoted by intellectuals on the eastern seaboard.

84. Gary B Nash, *Forgotten Fifth*, 135.

three periods: the first, a time of “republican convergence of race and ‘fitness for self-government,’” was aptly illustrated by the nation’s first naturalization law in 1790, which limited naturalized citizenship to free white persons. This period lasted until the 1840s, when, according to Jacobson, mass immigration from Europe forced a fracturing of white identity that only resolved in the 1920s, after restrictive legislation and black migration changed the sources of white racial anxiety.<sup>85</sup> I accept Jacobson’s characterization of the early republic conversation on whiteness as one focused on citizenship, but focus on a region in which territorial expansion of the nation caused a mass of new potential citizens to need to find a place for themselves within the American identity rather than, as Jacobson does, a period in which individual Europeans’ immigrations brought potential citizens to the country. Consequently, I see ethnic contention over white identity earlier than does Jacobson.

In effect, Creoles were early ‘immigrants’ to the United States, if only because the United States lifted its skirts and dropped them over a stationary population. Creoles then had to fight to distance themselves from Indians and align themselves with whites and as whites in the American mind—a pattern Jacobson attributed to a later America. The addition of Louisiana Creoles to the American nation was the United States’ first major incorporation of a large body of foreign whites. Americans understood race as entwined with suitability for citizenship; they also had uncertainties about the racial category (and therefore the citizenship category) in which Creoles fell. The Louisiana Purchase planted the seeds of the American experience of constructing whiteness that historians have ably demonstrated in other eras.

Upper Louisianans did not openly challenge the United States’ definitions of whiteness. But to affirm themselves as white, they deftly used American racial prejudices against the very

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85. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 7-8.

Indians with whom they were linked and still shared business and family concerns. Elite Creoles based in St. Louis used loathing and fear of Indians to establish themselves as civilized like Americans; they blamed Indian violence for (agri)cultural differences perceived by Americans, a rhetorical technique then taken up by American immigrants to Missouri as well.<sup>86</sup> And when the American national conversation later veered in 1820 from fears of Indians on the frontiers to fears of disunion and black revolt, experienced Missourians, both Creole and eastern American in origin, switched from using anti-Indian rhetoric to establish their whiteness, deserved citizenship, and landowner-hood to an anti-black rhetoric, affirming their right to enslave blacks in defiance of the wishes of half of Congress and to prohibit the entrance of free blacks to their state, to the dismay of all of Congress. Missourians' successful accession to statehood grew out of a colonial history of tight ties with Indians, a territorial history of repeatedly having to defend their worthiness to Congress because of that history, and a keen ear for the changing racial undercurrents in American conceptions of white citizenship.

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86. That the language Creoles developed to reject Indians focused on their violence bolsters works that show terror as a part of the development of white identity. Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*; David Roediger, "Pursuit of Whiteness."