

Mississippi Under British Rule During the American Revolution

Objectives

By reading excerpts from five letters in Governor Chester's correspondence, students will explore the strategic importance of British West Florida to English plans for retaining their North American colonies. They will also discover the British strategy toward their Native American allies and discuss both its ethical standards and its effective weaknesses.

The Mississippi Under British Rule lesson and handouts are adaptable for grade 8-12.

Mississippi Department of Education 2011 Curricular Connections		
Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12	Grades 6-8	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
	Grades 9-10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
	Grades 11-12	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
Social Studies	Eighth Grade, US History from Exploration through Reconstruction	2a, 2c, 3a, 3b, 4d, 5a, 6a, 6c
	Mississippi Studies	1a, 1b, 1f, 3a
	World History from the Age of Enlightenment to the Present	3a, 4b, 6a, 8b
	Local Resources	1a, 2, 3c
	Minority Studies	2d, 2e
	Local Culture	1a, 1b, 1c, 3a, 3b, 3d

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Materials: *Historical Overview Handout*; Governor Chester's letters; *Letter Evaluation Handout*; *Teacher's Discussion Guide*; 1793 map of *British Dominions in America*.

Procedures:

Activity One: Reading the Letters

1. Read *Historical Overview* with class.
2. Break students into five groups and distribute each group one of Governor Chester's letters.
3. Using the *Letter Evaluation Handout*, have student groups read the sample letter, analyze, and discuss their letter.
4. Have students read their letter aloud and present their findings to the class.

Activity Two: Discussing the Letters

1. Using the *Teacher's Discussion Guide*, facilitate a class discussion that includes content from the series of letters as a whole.
2. Use the 1793 historical map of *British Dominions in America* to help conduct a discussion on the geography of the area and the specific challenges it presented to those who lived in, passed through, or fought for it.

Extension Activity:

- Have students use their social studies textbook (or any other resource of your choice) to locate modern maps detailing the climate, geography, and/or soil of the region shown in the 1793 map. Use this new information to better illustrate some of the discussion questions within the *Teacher's Discussion Guide*. Have students verbalize specific reasons related to the natural terrain and resources that would have made this particular area of land a valuable commodity for whatever nation controlled it.

Historical Overview Handout

At the end of the French and Indian War in 1763, Spain and Britain took possession of all French lands in North America. The Spanish obtained Louisiana and its capital, New Orleans, from the French while the British took control of former Spanish holdings east of the Mississippi River, including the colonies of East and West Florida. West Florida stretched from the capital in Pensacola all the way to the prosperous settlements along the Mississippi River and included the southern part of the present state of Mississippi.

On February 18, 1778, James Willing and a band of American marauders fell upon Walnut Hill and began pillaging the British side of the Mississippi River from Natchez to Manchac. Though Willing claimed to have a military commission from the Continental Congress, he seemed motivated by little more than a thirst for wealth and power.

While the Natchez District was the most prosperous portion of the British colony of West Florida, it was also the least protected. Left with little recourse and with military aid entrenched hundreds of miles away in Pensacola, the wealthy citizens of Natchez were forced to abandon their farms and retreat to the Spanish holdings in New Orleans. British courts in Pensacola continued to receive reports that the Spanish were aiding and abetting the American brigands and actively seeking to alienate the English from their Native American allies.

With the Revolutionary War raging to the northeast, British Territorial Governor Peter Chester was under strict orders not to antagonize the Spanish. While he used every diplomatic turn-of-phrase to redress England's grievances against Spanish Governor Bernardo de Galvez, Chester was ultimately unable to slow the turn of Spanish sympathies to the American side.

On November 15, 1779, Chester was informed that Spanish troops had marched into British territory and taken control of Natchez. By 1781, the entire colony would be in Spanish hands.

The correspondence of the territorial governor of British West Florida was transcribed from original documents found in the British National Archives and bound into five volumes organized by date. These bound volumes are preserved in three separate boxes in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The letters were penned by many different authors and cover a variety of topics, but much of the correspondence of historical interest is between Peter Chester and his superior, George Germain, the British Secretary of State in London.

Letter #1 (EXCERPT)

His Excellency Governor Chester to Lord Germain

From Pensacola, 14th April 1778

My Lord,

Since my last Dispatch of the 26th of March, I have received very little farther [sic] intelligence of the proceedings of the Revels [sic] (rebels). The Greatest Body of them are still in New Orleans, where they have been well received by the Spanish Governor, and have been suffered [allowed] to sell most of the Negroes, and other plunder taken from the Inhabitants of this Colony – notwithstanding their Owners were present and claimed their properties, such Effects as were taken by the Rebels upon the Spanish Territories, adjoining to this Province, where many of the Inhabitants fled for an asylum.

Mr. McGillivray of Mobile, who, I mentioned in my Letter of the 25th of last Month, has accepted of [sic] the Command of a Provincial Corps, of five Companies, and his Officers are appointed. Mr. McGillivray has my Orders to Embody all the Men that he can raise about Mobile, and in that part of the country, and to proceed immediately thro' the Indian Nation with every white man he can find there, and such of the Savages as he can prevail upon to accompany him, and march to the Natches [sic] – where it is supposed that [the] Inhabitants will assist him. I fear that Mr. McGillivray will not be able for some time to compleat [sic] his regiment, but from his great influence with the Indian Traders, and Savages, I trust that he with the assistance of Mr. Stuart's Commissaries and such Indians as I hear have already set out with them, will when joined, be able to dispossess all the Rebels in the Natchez District, and if he succeeds, he has orders, after leaving a sufficient detachment at Natches [sic] – to come down the Mississippi, and take Post at Manchac where I hope he will find one of His Majesty's Sloops of War. Mr. McGillivray has already set out for the Indian Country and I expect shortly to receive favourable accounts of his proceedings which I shall transmit to Your Lordship by the Earliest Opportunity.

These Provincial Troops are intended for the Protection of the Mississippi and western parts of the Province or for such duty as His Majesty's Service may require. Their pay no doubt is high, but their Establishment is the same with that of Colonel Stuart's New Raised Corps and it will be impossible to raise the men on less Encouragement at present;

These troops will, however, be still cheaper to Government than the Expence [sic] of Recruiting & sending us new Levies – besides they are Enured [sic] to the Climate, well acquainted with the Woods, and are better qualified for the Service they will be employed in than an new Troops sent out from England.

I hope in the present situation of the Province, when the Number of Our Garrison here will not admit of making any detachments to the Mississippi and when it is too plain that the Savages cannot be depended upon or brought to take an active part, without being led on, or joined with, white Men, that Your Lordship will approve of my raising these Provincials – who would soon be made good Troops, if continued for any length of Time, which I hope may be at least, during the Continuance of the present Rebellion – and should Your Lordship think proper to Establish Posts at Natches [sic] & Manchac, as the River Mississippi is the frontier of the Province, & the only way – I think practicable for the Rebels to penetrate into the Colony[.] They would not only be a protection to the Inhabitants of that Country in case of a Rupture with Spain, but also against any detachments the

Rebels will probably send against Us; and should they come in great force, the Provincials at Natches [sic] might make a Retreat to the Indian County, and those at Manchac, thro' the River Iberville to any of His Majesty's Vessels stationed in the Lakes Maurepas or PontChartain [sic].

I have the honor to be with the greatest Respect, My Lord

Your Lordship's

Most Obedient
& humble Servant
Per Chester

Letter #2 (UNABRIDGED)

Right Honorable Lord George Germain

Endorsed. Philpot Lane, 19th January 1779, Mr. Hannay

To the Right Honorable Lord George Germain, one of His Majesty's principal Secretary's [sic] of State.

The Memorial of the proprietors and settlers of the land in the province of West Florida, and of the merchants trading thereto, and of the other connected with, and interested in the prosperity of the said province, whose names are thereto subscribed most humbly.

Sheweth. [sic]

That the province of West Florida, from its situation as a frontier, has been hitherto consider'd as an object of great importance, and deserving and receiving the attention, and encouragement of Government.

That from the temperature of the Air, and the fertility of the soil, where plants of all kinds grow with luxuriance [sic]; together with the advantage arising from the great river Mississippi, which bounds the province and is navigable for more than eight leagues; few Countries are possess'd of so many natural advantages as West Florida.

That although that province is still in an infant and defenceless [sic] state, its trade is already well worthy of the attention of Government. That the annual imports from West Florida into Great Britain consisting of Peltry, Tobacco, Indigo, Staves & amount at least to 200,000.

That upwards of one hundred sail of Ships are employed in carrying lumber from this province to the West India Islands, which saves a large sum to the national Stock, for should the sugar Colonies be deprived of this resource, they would be under the necessity of supplying themselves from foreign European Countries.

That should due Encouragement and necessary protection be afforded, West Florida would alone, not only supply the West India with a sufficient quantity of lumber but even with an abundance of provisions of all kinds.

That no Country in the British dominion is more peculiarly adapted for the rearing of cattle, and the growing of Corn. That the whole surface of the Earth is, in a manner, cover'd with almost every kind of valuable and useful timber; such as white, red and black oak, live oak so much esteem'd – in – ship building, Pine Cypress, Ash, and Sassafras, with a great variety of other Trees unnecessary to mention.

That it appears that Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, and pot ash can be obtained in any quantity in West Florida – That Wine, Tobacco, Indigo, Madder, Silk, Rice, Cotton, Hemp, and Flax, have been tried, and found to succeed in the utmost perfection. That Tobacco is peculiarly adapted to the nature of the soil, the richness of which is such that this plant has been cut thrice in one year.

That the most valuable part of the province has been hitherto the least supplied with means of defence – That though there is at present a respectable force at Pensacola, the valuable districts on the Mississippi were permit-

ted to be overrun, and plundered by a despicable party of rebel banditti, who came down from the back country – That though application was made by the distressed inhabitants to the Governor, he either treated their request with inattention, or entirely disregarded their complaints, and gave no assistance –

That to protect the most valuable part of the province of West Florida, military Post [sic] should be established in such places in the country, along the Mississippi, as the wisdom of Government shall think fit. – That when care is taken for a sufficient defence against foreign Enemies, provision should be made for facilitating the course of Justice. –

That the defence of the settlements on the Mississippi (at present best settled and the most populous part of the Country) is so great from Pensacola, the seat of Government, that the trouble, and expense of obtaining Justice is intolerable to the inhabitants. – That your Lordship Memorialists, therefore, humble [sic] propose the establishment of a court of Justice at the Natchez, the most central [sic] situation in those districts. –

Your Lordship Memorialists humbly pray, that your Lordship will take the above into consideration, and move His Majesty to grant such relief as to his wisdom shall seem meet. They also pray that a gentleman of talents, spirit, and decision, may be appointed Governor of West Florida, a measure necessary for the present safety of that province as well as to its future prosperity.

And your Memorialists will every pray.

Endorsed. Memorial of the Proprietors of Land in West Florida, and the Merchants trading thither in Mr. Han-
nay's of 19th January 1779

Letter #3 (EXCERPT)

Governor Chester to Lord George Germain
From Pensacola, 15th November 1779

My Lord –

I have now the Honor of acknowledging the receipt of your Lordship's Circular Letter, of the 17th June last and Inclosures [sic], and altho [sic] I am sorry to find that Spain has taken an active part against us and has commenced Hostilities, I still trust that such Vigorous Measures will be adapted and pursued, as will eventually defeat the designs of our Enemy and terminate in the Honor of Great Britain.

I have also received the Warrent [sic] from the Lords of the Admiralty, for issuing out Letters of Marque [sic] and Reprisals against Spanish Ships and Vessels, and shall do all in my power to induce the Merchants and others here to fit out Vessels for that purpose.

It gives me great concern to inform Your Lordship at this critical conjuncture of affairs that there is the strongest reason to believe from the best information we have been able to procure, that the two most Valuable Districts of our province [,] Manchac and the Natchez, has been injudiciously suffered to be taken from us, by the Spaniards. I am sorry to say, that we are by no means in force sufficient here either to retake those districts, or to annoy our Enemy, which make our Situation very precarious, and the More expecially [sic], as we have no more than one Sloop of War of fourteen Guns to protect our Harbour and Coast, and she is so leaky a Condition, as to be unfit to go to sea, Altho' repeated applications have been made to the Admiral at Jamaica for a Reinforcement, and to add to our Misfortunes, we are well assured, that the great part of the Choctaw Indians have joined the Spaniards, and there is too much reason to apprehend, that the remainder will follow their Example, as the Spanish Governor at New Orleans has been giving them presents, and tampering with them for some time past, and has given them assurances, that the Country will be given up to their old Friends the French.

I have the Honor to be with the greatest respect/ My Lord

Your Lordship's

Most obedient and

Most humble servant

Per Chester.

Letter #4 (EXCERPT)

Right Honorable Lord George Germain to Governor Peter Chester
From Whitehall (London), April 5th 1780

Governor Chester.

Sir,

The loss of the Post upon the Mississippi and the Capture of the Garrisons, are very unfortunate Events in the Kings [sic] Affairs, and will, I fear, be attended with very injurious Consequences to the Remainder of His Majesty's Possessions in West Florida and I cannot but lament that General Campbell was prevented from carrying into Execution His Majesty's Intentions of constructing a respectable Fort near Manchac, immediately after his arrival at Pensacola. It is however with much Satisfaction I learn that the Town & Harbour of Pensacola and Mobile have been put into a state of Security against any sudden Attack, and made capable of resisting any Force that can be sent from New Orleans, untill [sic] Succour could arrive; and as I hope you will soon receive Accounts of the Reduction of Carolina by Sir Henry Clinton, I flatter myself even the Chactaw [sic] Indians will not think it for their Interest to desert Our Cause, tho' they may not chuse [sic] to take an active part in our behalf.

I am

Geo. Germain.

Letter #5 (EXCERPT)

Governor Peter Chester to George Germain
From Pensacola, 24th November 1780

By several Captures lately brought into this Port by our small Cruizers [sic] bound from the Havannah [sic] to Mobile and New Orleans, we have received certain Intelligence, that an armament under the Command of Don Solano, and Major General Galvez on the 17th. October last sailed from the Havannah [sic], in order to reduce this place, so that we have been in some time past in hourly expectation of seeing the Fleet make its appearance, and in all probability, we should have had them here long before this time, had not stress of weather or some other casualty, obliged them to put back. Their destination is however certain, and Nothing in all human probability can prevent our downfall, unless Admiral Sir Peter Parker, should luckily send down a Fleet to intercept the Spanish Squadron, or some Ships of force, to defend the Entrance to our Harbour, before they approach it. – The latter is a Measure I have recommended often, and have made repeated application for to the Admiral on the Jamaica Station, ever since the Commencement of Hostilities. The Enemy's largest Ships cannot attempt to cross the Bar at the Mouth of the Harbour and it is exceedingly defenceless against any they can bring over it, had we an Naval Force for that purpose; two or three 40 or 50 Guns ships, with three or four Frigates, would be an Ample defence for us. –

As Your Lordship in your Letter of the 7th June last, has desired me to be upon my Guard, and if alarm or the Safety of the province under my Command, to take such Measure, and apply for such Assistance as the Nature of the Attack, and the force which the Enemy may bring against us should require. I have written in the most pressing terms to his Excellency General Dalling and Vice Admiral Sir Peter Parker, for all the Sea and Land Forces they can possibly send down to our assistance, and I hope, it will be thought a Matter of the utmost importance to his Dominions in America, to save and protect this very valuable province to Great Britain, together with the Garrison & Stores here. I also hope, that Major General Campbell will strengthen my application for Ships and Troops from Jamaica as a Speedy reinforcement, is the only probable Means under God that we can save West Florida.

Permit me my Lord before I conclude this Letter, to mention to your Lordship, that the possession of West Florida must ever be of infinite consequence to Great Britain, for exclusive of the advantage of a fine commodious Harbour in the Bay of Mexico, and every other Idea of the real and intrinsic value of the Colony (which your Lordship is well apprized of) it is the only place from whence, the numerous Tribes of Western Indians, can be properly supplied with goods and presents; by which means they are kept to our Interest, and it is the only Key, that opens the most important interior communication, (that perhaps any Country ever enjoyed) with the Illinois Country, Canade [sic], and all our Western and Middle Provinces in America, through the Channel of the Mississippi, Ohio, and the great variety of Rivers that fall into them. Should it fall into the hands of the Enemy, the Apostacy [sic] of the Western Indians, Your Lordship may be well assured, will follow as a necessary consequence by which means, the Enemy will then have the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of the communication, through the Channel of those Rivers, with the back and interior parts of the Rebellious Colonies: whereby all kinds of supplies of ammunition and Necessaries, would be abundantly thrown into those, otherwise remote parts, which ever since the commencement of the Rebellion, they have been in the utmost distress for, owing to the numerous Tribes of Indians, settled on the Banks of those Rivers, in our alliance; which hitherto has almost entirely prevented that intercourse. It is with all due deference however, that I take the liberty of giving

Your Lordship my Sentiments on this head, as I am well convinced, that no man can be better informed of these Matters, nor more thouroughly [sic] acquainted with the Importance of this Country to Great Britain , than Your Lordship.

I have the Honor to be with the greatest respect

My Lord, Your Lordship's

Most obedient and
Most humble servant
Per Chester.

Letter Evaluation Handout

Use this worksheet to analyze the letter and the events described in it.

1. Letter Number _____ Is this an **excerpt** or is it **unabridged** (please circle)

Date _____ Addressee _____

Who is its author? _____

2. What is the purpose of this letter?

3. What concerns or issues is the author bringing to the addressee's attention?

4. What is the author asking for?

Teacher's Discussion Guide

Use this worksheet to guide the class in a discussion that integrates the contents of all the letters.

- Discuss the complexities of Governor Chester's predicament. How could he be expected to placate the Spanish while they gave quarter to British enemies and stole from British citizens who had come to them for sanctuary?
Chester was in a difficult position and Germain's demands were unrealistic. The governor could not keep peace with the Spanish and give his subjects justice.
- Note the matter-of-fact tone in which slaves are addressed as property. Discuss how this dehumanizing mindset must have influenced European policy toward the Native Americans and why this would make it difficult for the British to count on their allegiance.
The British treated the natives as inferiors, which not only bred resentment, but kept them from developing real or lasting alliances based upon respect and mutual goals.
- Note how the British lack of manpower forced them to rely upon Native American allies. How was their strategy of maintaining such an alliance flawed and how could it easily be dissolved by the Americans and the Spanish?
This system of bribery could be undermined if the Spanish or Americans were willing to give the natives more for their help.
 - How did the British and other European colonizers arrive in this position? What would have been a better strategy?
Treating the natives as inferior beings that could only be cared for at best and coerced at worst led to an unstable diplomacy based on bribery. Real and lasting alliances must be based on mutual interests and respect.
 - By the time of the Willing Raid, was it too late for the British to change course in their dealings with the natives?
Yes. The system of giving gifts to the Native Americans to buy their loyalty was already too entrenched among the Europeans and the Americans, and the British feared that the natives could easily be swayed by better offers.
- With the help of the historic map, discuss the differences in climate and terrain that a British regular faced when fighting in West Florida.
Primarily the heat and humidity. Britain and Mississippi have very different climate and weather patterns.
- With the help of the historic map, discuss the geographic reasons why it would be easier for the American rebels to infiltrate West Florida via the Mississippi River.
There were few roads cut through the rough terrain of the frontier between the East Coast colonies and British West Florida.
- What strategic importance did West Florida hold for the British and why would it be attractive to the Spanish and the Americans?
The Mississippi River is very long, and access to it would allow the Americans to supply native allies all along the western frontier and outflank British defenders further north.

- Evaluate the importance of the Mississippi River to all of the British holdings in North America. Why was transportation easier on rivers rather than across land?
Access to the Mississippi allowed the British to supply their troops and native allies in the northwest and Canada. Rivers offered much faster transportation since there were few roads in the frontier.
- Why was the most populous and prosperous region of the colony also the least secure? What problems would this present given the importance of the Mississippi River?
Chester seems to have been more concerned with defending himself and his capital in Pensacola. This allowed Willing to raid along the River unimpeded and later allowed the Spanish to make a quick push east from New Orleans.
- Given what you know of Mississippi's local natural resources, are the citizens of the Natchez District exaggerating the good qualities of the land to accomplish their goal of obtaining more military aid and the establishment of a local court?
The soil along the River would have been richer and more cultivated after a half century of work by the French. Farms close to the River would have also benefited from close access to trade.
- Given Spanish military might, the precarious alliance with the Choctaws, and the strong will of the Americans, could British West Florida have been saved even if the forts at Manchac and Natchez had been completed as planned?
Perhaps, but the diplomatic model between the Europeans and the Native Americans was unsustainable and would have eventually broken down.
- Once Natchez and Manchac had fallen, was there anything Chester could do to save the colony? Short of receiving the aid he desperately pleaded for, how possible/feasible was Chester's mission to maintain British holdings?
It was probably impossible. Once again, the diplomatic model between the British and the natives made it impossible for them to comfortably rely on the tribes for the manpower the British would have needed to retake the colony.
- Discuss the difficulties of communication in the late eighteenth century.
- Discuss the delay apparent in Chester and Germain's correspondence necessitated by trans-Atlantic travel.
- How accurate was Lord George Germain in thinking the Choctaws would remain neutral in the conflict?
- Discuss the frustration Chester likely felt over taking orders from a superior 3,000 miles away and relate this to the American desire for independence in the northern colonies.



**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY LESSON PLANS
TEACHER EVALUATION**

COMPLETE BOTH SIDES AND PLEASE MAIL OR FAX TO THE ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE. THANK YOU!

TEACHER NAME _____

SCHOOL NAME & ADDRESS _____

EMAIL (OPTIONAL) _____

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS _____ GRADE LEVEL _____

LESSON TITLE _____

1. In your opinion, did this unit elicit better than average student response; if so, how?
2. Which segments of the unit exceeded your students' attention span?
3. Will this unit be of assistance to you in developing future classroom activities; if so, how?
4. How did this unit add to your earlier teaching on the same subject?
5. Would this teaching unit be handier to use as a:
___ multi-day unit ___ multi-week unit ___ other
6. Were the activities and lessons appropriate for your students? How?

Please rate the following lesson materials and activities by circling the appropriate number.

4=excellent, 3=good, 2=average, 1=inadequate

Directions and notes	4	3	2	1	
Curricular Connections	4	3	2	1	
Student worksheets	4	3	2	1	N/A
Interactive activities	4	3	2	1	N/A
Historic images	4	3	2	1	N/A
References and resources	4	3	2	1	N/A
Activity One	4	3	2	1	
Activity Two	4	3	2	1	N/A
Activity Three	4	3	2	1	N/A
Activity Four	4	3	2	1	N/A
Extension Activities	4	3	2	1	N/A
Overall unit	4	3	2	1	

We would appreciate any additional comments on this teaching unit and any suggestions for improvement. Comments may be entered in the space below.

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