



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

OPPONENT'S REPORT

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., Thesis Opponent

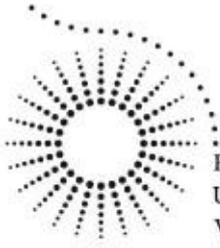
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B.A. thesis evaluation
Louisiana Purchase
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In this thesis, Ms. Keltosova purports to place the purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States from France in 1803 in geopolitical, hemispheric, and continental, as well as national cultural perspective by examining four centuries of imperial, colonial, and diplomatic interactions among the principal European powers and between those powers and the successive political formations extant in North America from the late fifteenth century until the date of the Louisiana Purchase.

It is a sprawling aspiration, and the result is, predictably and unfortunately, a sprawling 40-page production on aspects of European and American diplomatic and colonial history that is part pastiche, part catalogue, and always inadequate (as any imaginable bachelor's thesis would be) to the enormous task at hand.

Ms. Keltosova has clearly tried to rise to the occasion. Her bibliography reflects a real effort, given the materials available to her and the skills she possesses to make use of them, to formulate and answer questions that might furnish some helpful perspective on her Gargantuan topic. Her failure to gain the necessary perspective, however, is evident throughout her attempt.

The fabric of dynasties, alliances, wars, and treaty settlements during the period 1492-1803 is enormously complicated. That Ms. Keltosova has managed as well as she has to grasp it is commendable; but her grasp is spotty, incomplete, and muddled; and all of that is, unfortunately, reflected in the presentation she provides for us. Her narrative is confusing, in many places apparently confused, and in more than a few places (perhaps through misunderstanding or misinterpretation) simply inaccurate. The treatment of the transition from the Hapsburg to the Bourbon dynasty in Spain on pages 14-15 is, for example, inadequate; and this superficiality, which is necessitated by the sheer overall scope of Ms. Keltosova's topic, proves repeatedly problematical in a number of the subject areas which she brushes against. On page 17, we hear that the right freely to navigate the Mississippi River was granted to the British at the Treaty of Paris in 1763, along with British control of the east bank of the river. Five pages later, that right is portrayed as still in question in 1774, along with British control of the Mississippi's eastern shore. On page 34, the United States is described as taking possession of the Louisiana Territory in 1803 and "nine



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years later it became one of the states with its own state constitution." Suffice it to say that the Louisiana Territory and the state of Louisiana are two very different entities. On page 37, the Louisiana Purchase is described as containing 863,072 square miles or 565,080 acres, when in fact an acre is far smaller than a square mile. The citizens of New Orleans are described on page 39 as "reluctant" to adopt Anglo-American institutions after 1803, when on page 35 it has just been stated that they chose to adopt the Anglo-American Common Law at that time; and on page 39, as well, the origin of the Cajun language is conflated with that of another local Louisiana patois, Creole. The half-hearted attempt in the Conclusion to link the Louisiana Purchase to American individualism is abortive and nothing short of bizarre.

Overall, the reader—and the thesis generally—is troubled by what appears, in my opinion, to be a low level of language competence on the part of the author. That lack of linguistic dexterity further confuses and obscures both the analysis and the conclusions, which are often disjointed and/or inaccurate in their own right. On many occasions I was simply unable to determine whether the muddiness of the narrative, or the questionable formulation of some conclusions, was due to failure on the part of the researcher to comprehend the material with sufficient clarity or to incapacity on the writer's part to present the material with sufficient precision.

This thesis is one where the student's reach considerably exceeded her grasp. There is always something laudable in reaching far; but, in this case, that reach went beyond what reasonable judgment might sanction, and the result is a disappointing performance.

Thesis evaluation: "3, dobre"

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at drobbins22@netzero.net.