Louis XVI Before the Revolution

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I would like to thank Professor James Collins for advising this thesis. A distinguished scholar with a rare ability to communicate with undergraduates. I went to his office in September to discuss ideas and left with some of his passion for early modern France. Without his encyclopedic knowledge of the Ancien Régime, extraordinary ability to find primary sources, and generous efforts to work around my limited knowledge, I would not have known where to begin. I admire most of all his ability to make connections between history and our own times, intellectual matters and his diverse life experience. Working with Professor Collins has been the most enriching of academic experiences and I must thank him for volunteering to take on this project and for the many hours he poured into it. It seems blatant to write that all remaining errors are my own.

I also owe a great debt to Professor Elizabeth Cross, whose teaching alongside Professor Collins in the autumn of 2020 introduced me French Revolution and the period that immediately preceded it. Her kind comments about a paper that I wrote on Marie Antoinette led me naturally onto this study of that famous queen's relatively forgotten husband, Louis XVI. I thank her for generously sharing her work and ideas on the late-Ancien Régime. Having completed this research, I feel better qualified to conclude that her writings are among the most excellent of any scholar working on this period.

I must also thank Professor Tommaso Astarita and John McNeill for their tireless work reading drafts and advising the thesis writing process. Without their patience and kind support, this project would have been impossible.

Finally, it seems only right that I should acknowledge Professor Aviel Roshwald. His courses on the world wars reignited my interest in history after many years of neglect. I learned a great deal from him in lectures and hours spent discussing history in his office. I consider myself most fortunate to have studied with these outstanding professors.
A Note on Translations:

Nearly all of the written primary sources consulted by this thesis, except those written by Englishmen or men newly able to call themselves Americans (in no small measure thanks to Louis XVI), were originally written in French. Where reliable translations of those sources from trusted scholars have been available, I have provided citations in English. In all other cases, I have cited the French in the body text and provided my own translations in footnotes. Given my poor French skills and preference to let the reader decide what the speaker meant, I have attempted to provide the most literal translations possible within reason. I leave archaic spellings in French and English (i.e., Anglois vs. Anglais) and local variations as originally written.

A Note on Citations and Formatting:

This thesis uses Chicago-style citations. For visual sources, I have used two methods. Well-known paintings housed in museum collections are cited directly beneath the image. These works receive no caption because their titles offer the best succinct description possible. Other visual sources including maps, prints, or drawings are described beneath the image and have a footnote citing the source's origin. All italics placed in words within quotations are the scholar's own. I have attempted to reproduce citations as exactly as possible, adding bracketed interjections in places when needed for clarity.

Dedicated to a man who will never read it, but whose ideas, and the setting in which they were mentioned, inspired this work.
"Le bien est difficile à faire, nous en acquérons chaque jour la triste expérience, mais nous ne laisserons jamais de le vouloir & de le chercher." (Louis XVI, Declaration of the King Ordering the Estates-General, 1788)

**Introduction**

At a defining moment in the Revolution, Louis XVI left Paris under the cover of darkness fleeing toward the extreme east of his kingdom. The king left behind a fateful document on his desk at the Tuileries Palace "Addressed to all Frenchmen." This insight into Louis XVI's thinking does more than merely attempt to explain the king's reasons for leaving Paris. Moreover, it is not a defense of the Ancien Régime in and of itself. Rather in this text, Louis XVI, not unlike a modern politician, works to defend his reign in the context of a revolution he sees spinning out of control. One passage, in the declaration's final paragraph, makes this appeal perhaps more dramatically than any other:

François, et vous surtout Parisiens, vous habitants d'une ville que les ancêtres de sa majesté se plaisoient à appeler la bonne ville de Paris, méfiez-vous des suggestions et des mensonges de vos faux amis ; revenez à votre roi ; il sera toujours votre père, votre meilleur ami : quel plaisir n'aura-t-il pas à oublier toutes ses injures personnelle.¹

The image of the King as "the father" and "best friend" of the people is a logical aspiration for Louis XVI to hold, grounded in French royal history. The task of this thesis, more than anything else, will be to study how Louis XVI attempted to fashion himself as a good king and to what extent his subjects believed it.

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¹ Louis XVI, “Déclaration Du Roi Adressée à Tous Les Français, à Sa Sortie de Paris” (Paris, 1791).
The Historiography of Louis XVI

Louis XVI has largely been neglected by historians of eighteenth-century France. Particularly compared to the copious writings on his great-great-great-grandfather, Louis XIV, wife, Marie Antoinette, and the era in which he lived, scholarship on the Ancien Régime's last monarch appears quite thin. Although Louis XVI is properly placed by recent American historians including Robert Blackman and Timothy Tackett as an important agent during the Revolution, influential twentieth-century French scholars like Georges Lefebvre and François Furet discuss Louis XVI sparsely and with little nuance. Lefebvre's *The Coming of the French Revolution* offers its most detailed characterization of Louis within the bounds of a single paragraph: "honest and well-intentioned, he was far from being a great mind... Addicted to hunting and to manual hobbies, a great eater and drinker, having no fondness for society, amusements or balls, he was the laughingstock of his courtiers... Among the immediate causes of the Revolution the character of the king and queen must be included." Lefebvre's vague assertion tells us little about Louis XVI and in so doing points to a shortfall in the historiography. Lefebvre and Furet are standard bearers of the classical and revisionist views of the revolution respectively, yet neither devotes any significant attention to Louis XVI, finding it more convenient to use him as an abstract piece of the pre-revolutionary puzzle. This is a remarkable statement about the lack of historical inquiry into Louis XVI.

While endless biographies and scholarly articles have analyzed seemingly every moment of Marie Antoinette's brief life—often competing to emphasize evidence of connections between

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4 In communication with Professor James Collins. The classical view sees as the product of socioeconomic inequity while Furet's revisionist interpretation casts ideology as a driving force.
the queen's will and state policy—her husband, perceived as a dull and helpless character, has received little attention as a man in his own right. John Padover's prewar biography of Louis XVI is an exception but only in that it purports to offer a "full-length portrait" of "a little man... ignored by generations of historians." In fact, Padover's *The Life and Death of Louis XVI* focuses heavily on the revolution and immediate pre-revolution period, with only scant discussion of crucial moments in Louis' early reign like the American War of Independence. *The Life and Death of Louis XVI* is full of imprecise lines including the observation "this fat and learned king was rapidly losing his usefulness." As a contemporary reviewer noticed, the weaknesses of Padover's book extends beyond the vagueness of some of his analysis into the more historically troubling realm of making unknowable assertions and anachronistic characterizations. *The Life and Death of Louis XVI* makes scant use of footnotes, for one, because it was intended for a popular audience but also because many of its anecdotes were simply invented including quotations that have no provenance. Padover's characterization of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Louis' first Controller-General of Finances (1774-76), as an "eighteenth century New Dealer, so to speak" borders on the level of Great Depression hindsight found in W.S. Van Dyke's 1938 film *Marie Antoinette*. Padover claims in his preface to have written the "first full biography of Louis XVI in any language," redressing the neglect of past historians who "lacked the imagination to see that the figure of Louis XVI was at the core of the French Revolution." For that, and his brilliant characterization of certain moments, this thesis consults Padover's book sparingly.

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Moving nearly 80 years forward, John Hardman published in 2016 what should now be regarded as the standard-bearer of biographies on Louis XVI for its relatively even attention to his subject's lifespan and excellent scholarship. Building on his shorter 1993 biography of Louis, Hardman's *The Life of Louis XVI* certainly has great merit as an academic text chronicling the failures of the king's myriad governments to solve the financial crisis which defined his reign. Through his detailed primary source analysis of internal correspondence between Louis and his ministers, Hardman disproves the simplistic perception of Louis XVI as an indolent or indifferent monarch. Primarily because Hardman writes with such disregard for conventional myths about Louis XVI's reign, his biography is the most important secondary source informing this thesis. Yet, for a historian curious about Louis XVI as an individual, it has major shortcomings. Hardman's real focus is the royal political environment in France from 1774 to 1792, in which Louis XVI was a key player. Large swaths of the narrative on crucial issues of pre-revolutionary France including conflicts between Versailles and the Parlements, financial reform, and the Assembly of Notables (1787-88), are less biography of Louis XVI and more the detailed history of the royal system struggling to avert catastrophe. The reader walks away from Hardman's often challenging-to grasp recent book with a better sense of why conventional narratives about Louis XVI are false but little understanding of how he was viewed in his own time. While Hardman's earlier biography, *Louis XVI: The Silent King*, is, as the title implies, a more readable and personality-driven story, it too focuses on ministers and court politics at the expense of discussing Louis XVI. To put it simply, both of Hardman's books focus on actions in

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the context of politics whereas this thesis pays greater attention to values. Of the three major events to be explored in this thesis, Hardman only writes extensively on the American War of Independence—a particular interest of his as evidenced by his work alongside Munro Price translating and analyzing correspondence between Louis XVI and his longtime Foreign Minister, Charles Gravier, Comte de Vergennes.\textsuperscript{10} For Hardman, the transformation of a French royal financial problem into political upheaval—a reasonable focus for a historian thinking in the context of revolution—is the key narrative of Louis XVI's time.

This thesis takes a step back from the revolution and attempts to study Louis XVI as a monarch. The Cambridge historian Peter Burke wrote an excellent book that seeks to explain the image Versailles attempted to craft of Louis XIV during his 72-year reign.\textsuperscript{11} Although historians like Lefebvre have casually asserted that Louis XVI's "character" should be seen as a cause of the revolution, almost nothing has been written seriously studying his character and how it was perceived by the French people pre-1789. Gilbert Shapiro and John Markoff wrote an excellent short chapter in their book\textit{Revolutionary Demands} which analyzes praise for the king in the tens of thousands of cahiers de doléances that preceded the Estates General of 1789. They find that acclaim for the monarch in many cases transcended the formulaic. The king is described as "juste" by 26% and "paternel" by 37% of Third Estate cahiers. While older understandings of the king at the top of feudal hierarchy and "as God's lieutenant" were hardly applied to Louis XVI, Shapiro and Markoff argue convincingly that the cahiers express the French people's will to preserve the monarchy under Louis XVI.\textsuperscript{12} It would be anachronistic to project backward the

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qualities extolled by the cahiers to Louis' earlier reign; these valuable documents merely prove that the king's image was not in shambles by 1789.

Connected to the monarch's image, however, as Burke recognizes is necessarily the question of values. Louis XIV, for example, went to great lengths by commissioning painters and poets to commemorate his personal leadership on the battlefields of the Low Countries for the consumption of multiple audiences: other European monarchs, the French Nobility, the French people, and even, as he says in his *Memoir for the Instruction of the Dauphin*, for posterity. The image of Louis XIV as a monarch leading from the front bore some relation to the truth and so made an enduring impact on public perception. To put it simply, in constructing an image the truth matters. An effort to better understand Louis XVI's values, priorities as king, and personal interests—all of which have been largely neglected in the historiography—is the bedrock of this thesis.

**Findings**

Three little-studied but consequential 'projects' which preoccupied the king and his ministers are particularly revealing of Louis XVI's character: the decision to intervene in the American War of Independence; the king’s 1786 visit to the port of Cherbourg, aside from his coronation, his only pre-1791 travel outside the Paris-Versailles region; and Louis’ sponsorship of Jean-François de Gallup de La Pérouse’s voyage to the Pacific Ocean, the first specifically “scientific” expedition sponsored by the French monarchy.

The first chapter examines the king's reluctant intervention in the American War of Independence (1776-1783). Louis XVI was first presented with the prospect of intervening in the fledgling American Revolution in late-1775 through reports from London sent by the French

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intellectual Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais and mediated through the soon-to-be pro-
war Comte de Vergennes. Just a year after assuming the throne at nineteen, Louis XVI had to
decide how his kingdom should respond to the uncertain prospect of a revolution against
France's British rivals on the other side of the Atlantic. His tentative decision to gradually
commit French finances and later forces to the American War brought victory to his allies and
disastrous consequences for royal finances.

The second section, split into two chapters, deals with Louis XVI's only visit to
Normandy in June 1786. In 1776, Versailles launched an ambitious infrastructure project to build
the largest artificial harbor in the world in the Norman town of Cherbourg. A decade later, Louis
XVI traveled to Cherbourg to witness the sinking of the ninth of ninety massive cones designed
to fortify Cherbourg against the prospect of a British attack, thereby creating a valuable base of
operations for the navy (often called "La Royale"). The first part of the chapter examines primary
source accounts of the voyage, observing that—contrary to the conventional view of Louis XVI
as lazy and unpopular—he passed through Normandy to great acclaim and undertook his sight-
seeing duties with tremendous alacrity. The second part makes a narrower argument that the
Norman people's positive reception of Louis XVI should be seen not merely as a reflection of his
kingship on the whole but as evidence of enthusiasm for France's recent triumph in the American
War. Normandy had particular concerns about naval security and international commerce
because their highly trade-dependent coastal province sat directly opposite the formidable power
of the British Royal Navy. In 1758, the British had sacked Cherbourg and razed its fortifications,
so many Normans in 1786 had personal memories of the need for improved coastal defense.15

15 Richard Middleton, “THE BRITISH COASTAL EXPEDITIONS TO FRANCE, 1757-1758,” Journal of the
The final chapter examines another voyage that remained on the king's mind from before Cherbourg until the end of his life: La Pérouse's voyage of exploration in the Pacific Ocean. La Pérouse's expedition, which ended in disaster in the South Pacific on its return voyage to France in 1788, was the first major knowledge-seeking voyage sponsored by the French state. This chapter focuses more on the theory of the voyage, rather than surviving accounts of La Pérouse's three years at sea because the expedition's plan is a better indication than happenings on the high seas of Louis XVI and his ministers' will.

The available primary sources demonstrate a great deal of commonality among Louis' actions with respect to the American War, the Normandy visit, and La Pérouse's expedition. First, they all relate to the sea and navy. For all of the Marquis de Lafayette's self-promotion, France's contribution to the American War was primarily naval. No explanation of the decisive 1781 victory at Yorktown is complete without reference to Admiral de Grasse's blockade in the Chesapeake. The chapters explore specifically how the king's obsession with the sea and navy influenced the actions he took. Louis XVI's fascination with nautical matters stretches back to his copious reading during childhood, in Hardman's view, and was closely tied to his fascination with geography and cartography—the advancement of which he charged La Pérouse in his instructions for the voyage. A prince ill-at-ease under the oppressive royal court system allowed his mind to wander beyond the network of palaces surrounding Paris. As king, he had the power to action his intellectual interests on a grand scale and made the most of these opportunities—

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16 Historians have repeated that Louis XVI asked in his final moments "Is there any news of La Pérouse?" Whether or not this quote is apocryphal, we know that in April 1791 Louis XVI signed a law authorizing an expedition to search for La Pérouse's ships. John Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons: The Life of Jean-François de La Pérouse, Lives of Great Explorers Series, no. 2 (Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Press, 2007), 252.  
17 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 166.
closely studying the war's naval battles, admiring the sea and naval installments with great attention in Normandy, and plunging his thoughts into crafting La Pérouse's plans.\(^{18}\)

Secondly, commerce and free trade, are factors underpinning these three royal projects. By intervening in the American War, Louis came to the aid (at enormous expense) of an American nation rebelling against mercantilism while defining the British assault on French commerce and navigation as causes of its intervention in royal propaganda.\(^{19}\) Scholars including Paul Cheney and T. Lawrence Larkin have demonstrated that the French government attempted to secure a special trade relationship with the United States as a reward for its financial and military assistance.\(^{20}\) Franco-American trade did increase during the war with the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce which set out a framework for trade. Yet as the new American nation began to stand on its own, the Congress gently avoided the issue of installing a permanent trade franchise with France; instead, American Federalists won the day and the nation turned back to England as its main commercial partner.\(^{21}\) When the war ended and the Americans declined to conclude a trade agreement with their benefactors, Louis XVI and his government looked to other means of advancing trade interests. Like the Americans, Louis XVI's government pivoted to Britain with the naval minister Charles-Eugène-Gabriel, maréchal de Castries leading negotiations in 1786-87 to strike a cross-Channel trade agreement.\(^{22}\)

The second chapter on the Normandy visit argues that trade concerns affected the people's reception of the king. Louis was praised for attaining victory in America and fortifying

\(^{18}\) Hardman, *The Life of Louis XVI*, 27.

\(^{19}\) *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre*, 1-2.


\(^{21}\) Cheney, “A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism?”, 485-86.

Normandy's coast: moves perceived to secure access to the Atlantic and so French global trade. The Controller-General of Finance, Charles Alexandre de Calonne's preparative memorandum for the king as he traveled to Normandy both stressed the importance of trade for the region and acknowledged the risks of a free trade agreement for certain industries. In the linen-producing city of Rouen, city officials gently requested the king to maintain protection for the textile industry in the ongoing Eden Agreement negotiations. Marie Donaghay notes, without reference to Normandy, that just after the king's voyage, the French delegation negotiated a controversial article of the treaty maintaining reciprocal duties on textiles (normal goods were to be traded on most favored nation terms). Beyond the Atlantic, this thesis explores how Louis XVI allowed opening new trade routes to Asia to be a secondary objective of La Pérouse's voyage of exploration. Although not studied here, we note in passing that Louis XVI also sent diplomatic missions to Siam and China and in 1785 reconstituted the French East India Company. Revitalizing foreign trade, often through imaginative projects, was a priority of Louis XVI's reign.

**The Financial Problem and International Trade**

Why was trade such a priority of Louis XVI's governments? Enlightenment philosophy, of course, should not be dismissed as a cause. Louis XVI's reign was also the era of the Wealth of Nations (first published in 1776), capping the eighteenth-century move from "economic Machiavellianism" to "doux commerce," to borrow the terms employed by Paul Cheney. Louis XVI, by all indications, was sympathetic to free trade and Turgot, his first Controller-General of Finance, was certainly a proponent of trade liberalization. Yet, ideology was likely not the driving force of Louis XVI's efforts to advance French trade interests—not least because his

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efforts to promote were rarely consistent with pure free trade. Rather, the desperate state of royal finances should be seen as the primary motivating factor.

The Seven Years' War (1756-63) was more than a geopolitical route for France; it was an economic calamity. Due to the complex nature of the financial system and comparing annuities to loans that require the repayment of principal, estimating the royal debt is tricky. James C. Riley's figures show that the war increased French government debt by 2.7 times to the massive total of over 2,300 million livres. The financial problem when Louis XVI came to power was critical. This is not to say that it was anything new. J.F. Bosher writes that the history of the Valois (1328-1589) and Bourbon (1589-1792; 1814-1830) dynasties is replete with endless financial difficulties. Louis XVI came to power in 1774 in the midst of efforts to reform royal finances. Whatever one takes to be the cause of late-Ancien Régime France's failure to get the debt under control—James Riley's emphasis on the government overpaying on interest and use of costly perpetual and later life annuities rather than fixed loans, Joël Félix's discussion of the monarchy's lack of fiscal transparency and democratic governance leading to higher interest charges compared to the British and Dutch, or Bosher's emphasis on the lack of fiscal centralization—despite exercising personal economy and useful reforms from Turgot and Calonne during their tenures as Controller-General, the debt incurred in fighting the Seven Years' War and American War proved unsustainable.

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Disregarding, for the time being, the underlying source of France's financial difficulties relative to their English rivals (who borrowed a similar amount of principal in fighting the wars), the basic problem remained that revenues fell well short of expenditures. Louis XVI was committed to avoiding default, a fate Louis XV's government had succumbed to in 1759 and 1770. In Vergennes' words, "Your majesty, out of delicacy and equity, having proscribed the word [bankruptcy] from the very day of his ascension." Nor were Louis, Turgot, or Necker keen to raise new taxes, understanding that doing so risked political conflict at a delicate moment for the Ancien Régime. One way of raising revenue without increasing the burden on an already highly taxed working population or recalcitrant nobles was to increase foreign trade revenues. The French state relied heavily on indirect taxation, which naturally depended on the trade of colonial and foreign products. Given this growing, politically favorable revenue base, it made sense for Louis' government to attempt to increase foreign trade as a partial solution to the financial problem. Beyond the benefits to state finances, Louis XVI, both an enlightenment thinker and an avid reader of English political literature, likely understood the wider economic benefits of international trade.

**Louis XVI as an Enlightened Monarch**

Understanding Louis XVI as an enlightened monarch might be difficult to grasp but it is central to this thesis' conception of his pre-revolutionary reign. Contrary to the conventional image of Louis as backward, John Hardman writes in synthesizing accounts of his formative years, that from a young age he excelled in his studies of sciences, mathematics, cartography,

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These instincts were prescient given Calonne's push to raise tax revenue (albeit necessarily if default was no longer an option) led to the Assembly of Notables in 1788-88.
and history. Louis XVI, coming of age during the 1760s and 70s, was the first French king to be educated during the prime of the Enlightenment. Although significant state investment in scientific institutions dates to Louis XIV, Louis XVI was certainly the most intellectually passionate royal patron of knowledge. He installed laboratory equipment within the rooms of his private apartments, stocked his library with books on physics, chemistry, and mechanics (Louis is famous for his unusual love of locksmithing), and watched as the first hot air balloon took to the skies above the courtyard in Versailles in September 1783. This thesis argues that the La Pérouse expedition reflects Louis' genuine commitment to science and not merely an effort to formulate the royal image. Policy reflects priories. Louis, who generally eschewed the arts and court performances that preoccupied his predecessors (and wife) in favor of reading, mechanics, and scientific experiments not surprisingly genuinely valued enlightenment exploration. Royal investment in the La Pérouse expedition, an event that was not particularly seized upon for propaganda purposes, was a product of Louis XVI's intellectual priorities.

Nevertheless, Versailles did at times seize on the king's commitment to enlightenment ideals in building the royal image. Images and writings celebrating royal intervention in the American War depict the king as a friend to the American nation. Contemporary viewers would have understood American independence as not merely a rebellion against British mercantilism but an experiment in Enlightenment ideology. The Exposé des Motifs, for example, explains that Louis' forces stand against England—"un empire tyrannique en Pleine mer; à prescrire des loix arbitraires, inconnues & inadmissibles." These claims, of course, echo the Declaration of

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32 Louis was also an avid hunter, a royal hobby that does not relate to the Enlightenment.
33 Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre, 5. "a tyrannical empire on the high seas; prescriber of arbitrary, unknown, and inadmissible laws."
Independence. Pejorative characterizations of rival European powers in wartime, moreover, were nothing new. England and France had traded the accusation of exercising "tyrannical empire" for centuries. Yet the Enlightenment push towards rational thought and governance offered extra credibility to rather tenuous claims of British tyranny. There could be no enemy of the Enlightenment greater than a "tyrannical empire" of "arbitrary" laws. If Louis has chosen to commit himself to a fight against an English nation intent on imposing its unenlightened rule on America, by contrast, he must be a friend to reason. Rather than attempting to force a narrative, Exposé asks its reader to decide for himself: "juger lequel des deux sovereigns [Louis XVI or George III] est le véritable auteur de la guerre qui afflige leurs États." Immanuel Kant wrote in "What is Enlightenment?" that "the disposition of a sovereign ruler who favors [...] knows that there is no danger in permitting his subjects to make public use of their reason." If one accepts Kant's characterization, Louis XVI certainly exemplified evidence of enlightened rule in both choosing to aid the United States and asking his people to judge his actions.

Yet, despite the importance of the intellectual historical moment as an explanation of the king's priorities and his ensuing popularity in France, one must be careful to not assume all allusions to Louis' goodness and negative depictions of England are reflections of Louis' allegiance to the enlightenment. The most common qualities attributed to Louis XVI by his ministers, royal propaganda, and observers of his voyage in Normandy, are the terms "juste," "honnête," "bonté," and "bienfaisant." While actions partially motivated by enlightenment ideals gave occasion to praise Louis XVI in these terms, the qualities themselves stretch back into the

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34 In communication with Professor James Collins.
35 Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre, 14.
"judge which of the two sovereigns [Louis XVI or George III] is the true author of the war that affects their states."
annals of French royal history. Louis XVI attempted to fashion a likeness to Henri IV.\textsuperscript{37} Despite the relative poverty of the royal arts under Louis XVI, there exist innumerable of Louis XVI enjoying comparisons to Henri IV. Consider, for example, lines from a song included in a November 1774 court play about Henri IV, cited by Aurore Chéry in his excellent study of Louis XVI and Henri IV: "Comment a fait, Louis? / Tout comme Henri, ma foi ; c'est tout de même // Vive Louis, vive, vive Antoinette !"\textsuperscript{38} Comparisons between the current monarch and his distinguished predecessor, the founder of the Bourbon dynasty, also appear in innumerable written sources discussing the king's wartime conduct and days in Normandy. The most significant image of Louis' involvement in planning the La Pérouse expedition, an early Restoration-era painting reviewed at the beginning of the third chapter, depicts the king acting under the watchful eye of a bust of Henri IV.\textsuperscript{39} Pro-monarchy printers of Louis' early reign also pursued this comparison as evidenced by a series of prints depicting the new king "following in the footsteps" of his esteemed predecessor.

\textsuperscript{38} Cited in Aurore Chéry, “Louis XVI Ou Le Nouel Henri IV”, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{39} One should be careful to not assume all French kings sought to model their image on Henri IV. Chéry argues that public interest in Henri IV was revived beginning the in 1760s, yet Louis XV was "even sometimes hostile" to comparisons to 'Henri le Grand.'
\textsuperscript{39} Nicolas André Monsiau, \textit{Louis XVI Giving His Instructions to La Pérouse on 29 June 1785}, 1817, Oil on canvas, 1817, Château de Versailles.
A print in which Henri IV declares Louis XVI worthy to "follow in my footsteps."  

What qualities might a 1770s comparison to Henri IV imply beyond obvious references to royal power and Bourbon tradition? Henri IV was known as "le grand" or "le bon roi Henri." These simple qualities were naturally applied to Louis XVI (and his predecessors at times) through terms like "bonté" or, in the words of a Norman mother who received the king's charity, 

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40 Charles-Nicolas Cochin and Noël Le Mire. *Allez, Vous Étes Maintenant Digne de Marcher Sur Ses Pas*. Print. c. 1775
"je vois un bon roi." Yet, Henri IV was more than merely a "good" or "great" monarch: he was remembered to have been honest, just, and respectful of the laws of French kingship. The introduction to a 1664 history of Henri IV life written by one of Louis XIV's tutors remembers Henri IV as "Roy & Souverain, sans reconnaître d'autre superieur que Dieu, la Justice & la Raison." The monarch's pursuit of "justice" and even "reason" were hardly inventions of the Enlightenment. Justice, the moral imperative most discussed by Louis and his ministers in the debate over entering the American War and attribute most praised by wartime propaganda, was a goal of nearly all French kings stretching back into the Middle Ages. For Louis and his predecessors, to be just and have the support of one's people was not only a mark of good kingship but of strength. Or, as Louis XVI wrote in a text prepared during his education, "A king of France, provided he is always just, will always be the leading and the most powerful of the sovereigns of Europe."

The image of Henri IV is also helpful in dispelling the notion that honesty and the need to do right by one's subjects was a new ideal. Hadouin also wrote of Henri, "jamais Prince ne fut plus religieux observateur de sa foy & de sa parole." Leaving aside Hadouin's invocation of faith—Henri IV was the first and only Protestant French king while Louis XVI restored an example of Catholic piety to the throne following the many affairs of Louis XV—we notice his praise for Henri as the most honest of kings. The ideal of a king acting in the best interests of his subjects, mistrustful of the self-interested demands of ministers, and honest in his promises to the

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"Never was a prince a more religious observer of his faith and his word."
people remained in Louis XVI's time. Connected to the idea of the king acting honestly, for the "bonheur" of his subject, is the quality "beneficence." This noun, or its older form "bienfaits," appears continually in the dialogue surrounding the American War and Normandy. Less fundamental in the history of French kingship, yet perhaps the single most common description of Louis XVI before the revolution, "bienfaisance" has its origins in the eighteenth century and means doing good without expecting reciprocation.

**Louis XVI: the Anglophilic King**

Louis XVI may have carried on the French tradition of striving to be a king of justice but one characteristic in which he differed from any of his predecessors was a fascination with England. Abord a naval ship of the line in Normandy during his June 1785 voyage, Louis asked the direction of the wind. The captain indicated that it was coming from England. "Oh! I'd happily go there," he is said to have replied, "the English would not receive me badly and in that country people do not deceive kings." This story, although most likely a post-revolutionary invention, reflects a relatively contemporary understanding of Louis' Anglophilia. John Hardman notices deftly that Louis' intellectual interest in England follows quite logically from his fascination with the sea. For a young man coming of age in the 1760s obsessed with naval operations, maritime exploration, and history, what other country should occupy his mind? Naturally, the Royal Navy, Captain James Cook, David Hume, and Edward Gibbon became his heroes. Louis-Auguste took to learning England's history, Parliamentary politics, and language—of which his knowledge became considerable enough, despite his mother's objections to studying English, that he undertook the translation of complex texts like *Decline and Fall of the Roman*  

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47 In communication with Professor James Collins.  
Empire into French as a hobby. Hardman notes that in his library of 7,833 books, 586 were English; Voltaire, "a great Anglophile," had only 287 English books in a collection of a similar magnitude.49

Louis, perhaps because he was broadly knowledgeable about England, understood the strength of Britain's geopolitical position when he came to power in 1774. Louis described his feelings toward France's rival as a "fascination" and "also a revulsion."50 He studied the English constitution with alacrity, but there is little evidence that he wanted to apply a similar model to France (although he surely would have preferred it to the French Constitution of 1791). Louis famously rebuked Turgot in 1776—who was then proposing reforms to redress the balance of power between the king, ministers, and provincial assemblies—in characteristically blunt terms: "M Turgot wants to be me and I do not want him to be me."51 Louis was hardly an enemy of political reform, particularly as the financial problem reached a crisis level in 1787. At the Assembly of Notables, he came to support the idea of delegating authority to provincial assemblies. Yet, the king rejected a national institution modeled along the lines of the English Parliament that would have control over finances.52

A fair amount of literature has been written on the politics and intentions of Versailles during the American War, much of which is incorporated into the subsequent chapter. Scholars have gone to great lengths to analyze the ministerial politics and personal interests of ministers like Vergennes, Castries, and the Abbé de Véri that went into the retrospectively fatal error of going to war. Yet one basic point about Louis's decision to send forces to America should be

49 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 16-20.
50 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 18.
acknowledged now because it applies to all three topics studied in this thesis. Ultimately, unlike the Seven Years' War, France's intervention in the American War was a choice. Louis understood that France had few a priori interests at stake in the conflict between England and its American colonies and, as Turgot warned, much to lose financially. Louis—looking at the geopolitical scoreboard after the disaster of the Seven Years' War, the bankruptcy of the Compagnie des Indes in 1769, and lagging domestic morale—determined that intervening was not only just, but that the potential benefits of victory outweighed certain costs. In short, Louis XVI's France would compete against England at its own game: naval warfare in North America, cross-ocean commerce, and, if Castries was to have his way in the later years of the war, perhaps a revanche in India as well. As the early-twentieth-century American historian Edward S. Corwin wrote, Vergennes, the architect of France's war effort, believed "the essential base of English power was English commerce and English naval strength." Louis XVI and Vergennes, confronted British dominance in these fields. Louis XVI's government did not merely assist the Americans with beneficent military and financial support, but also aimed to usurp Britain's role as the new United States' paternalistic, European trading partner. Nor was France's war effort an ideologically anti-imperial struggle—or even, as is claimed in Exposé des Motifs, a mere defense of existing French colonies and the right to freely move around the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic. French forces recaptured losses from the Seven Years' War and existing British

colonies including Grenada, St. Vincent, Dominica, St. Kitts, Nevis, Monserrat, and Tobago (the only island they kept after the 1783 Peace of Paris), while assisting the Spanish in their efforts to reconquer Gibraltar (even going so far as to plan an invasion of Jamaica to capture and trade for it) and negotiating the return of Florida and Minorca.\footnote{Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 170-173.} As the first section argues, one should see Louis not merely as some puppet of hawkish ministers like Vergennes and Castries, but as a contributor to the victory through his knowledge of naval strategy, English politics, success in rebuilding a French fleet that was hopelessly weak in 1774, and deploying it to the Caribbean from 1776 onwards to defend against the prospect of a British attack.\footnote{Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 117-121.}

Simultaneously, as mentioned above and argued in the second chapter, Louis began to invest in the Cherbourg coastal project which was designed to defend against British attack (and the sort of devastating naval losses of the Battle of La Hogue), protect French trade routes, and even, in Hardman's estimation, serve as a base for a potential future invasion of England.\footnote{Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 117; 227.} During Louis' appearances in Normandy and in the writing that followed it, he was lavished with credit for the victory in America and praised for his defensive investment at Cherbourg. Many Normans were concerned about English commercial and military might and implored the king to remain vigilant in protecting French industry and security.

Lastly, this thesis sees the La Pérouse expedition as an act of friendly, (primarily) intellectual competition in response to British triumph in the realm of exploration. Louis' fascination with Captain James Cook can only be understood within the framework of his love of

After reading the available primary sources on Louis' visit to Normandy, I disagree with Hardman's assessment that "he was creating a harbour whose only function could eb as a base for the invasion of England." Yet, given the project was first approved in 1776 and out of deference to Hardman's exceptional understanding of Versailles' military policy leading up to the American War, I consider his assertion worth considering. We might consider his comment somewhat rhetorical given he is attempting to contrast Louis' love of England with the harbor defense project as an anti-English act.
the sea and appreciation for British heroes. Just as Captain Cook’s first expedition followed a British victory, the La Pérouse expedition was modeled—both intellectually and technically—on Cook's successful example and followed naturally in the wake of the American War. Louis believed that France could best respond to English dominance in the realm of exploration by making its own contribution following the example of Britain’s greatest explorer. La Pérouse's expedition advanced European knowledge of the Pacific through the journals and artifacts returned to Europe and would have yielded much more if not for the bad chance of hitting a reef on its return voyage in 1788, just as the royal system was beginning to fall apart at home.

Louis' interest in Britain afforded him an unusually deft understanding of Britain as the great strategic challenge of his time. France would oppose Britain when strategically favorable and collaborate with it on trade and exploration when it perceived it to be in the common interest. British global ascendency was evident to a king more interested in the seas than the European continent. Scholars so far have failed to understand how important combating the prospect of British domination was in Louis XVI's pre-revolutionary reign.
Chapter One: Louis XVI and The American War of Independence

Intervening in the American War constituted the single most important foreign policy act of Louis XVI's pre-revolutionary reign. Although the nature and purpose of the French war effort is a relatively understudied element in the historiography of the American Revolution, enough quality historical work has already been written on the politics underpinning the French government’s decision to commit significant (perhaps decisive) resources and forces to the war. This chapter, therefore, will not chronicle the history of the war or attempt to compete with the works of historians like John Hardman and Munro Price who have produced excellent accounts of the political discussions that launched France into "a war it might have easily avoided," to quote Edward Corwin, an early twentieth-century American political scientist whose account of French objectives in the war is among the most compelling. Rather, this study of France and the American War will concentrate on representations of the French war aims. Although hardly comparable to the massive propaganda campaign launched under Louis XIV to glorify his various military adventures, during the American War, both Versailles and private artists sympathetic to the monarchy created prints, political texts, poems, and state portraits designed to glorify the king and the purpose of his war effort. The coming pages analyze the political messages embedded in these works and how they relate to the French royal image and wartime interests. True to this thesis' purpose, this chapter looks beyond the creation of an image to values. How did depictions of Louis XVI's war aims square with the goals of the king and ministers as expressed in their private correspondence? In short, what relation does the propaganda have to the truth?

French War Aims

Although this chapter's analysis of internal correspondence comes at the end, it is worth now reviewing scholarly explanations of French war aims before analyzing the propaganda. Like any important decision, Versailles' intervention in the American War—which began quietly through "secret subsidies" in 1776 but was formalized into a military alliance with the Franco-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1778—is multifactorial.\(^{62}\) Recent work from the distinguished American historian Paul Cheney has argued that an enlightenment concern for the plight of Americans suffering under "tyranny" and a desire to open a vibrant, transatlantic "doux commerce" trading relationship motivated Versailles to make the retrospectively financially devastating decision to fight on the United States' behalf.\(^{63}\) There is unquestionably credibility to this argument for, as the propagandistic sources show, Versailles attempted to fashion itself as a protector of American liberty: a concern reiterated by Louis in his letters to ministers. Moreover, the French government certainly sought a favorable trading relationship with the United States as a reasonable reward for its sacrifice as the war wound down. The Americans would, to make a long story short, politely decline the prospect of a special trading relationship with Louis XVI's kingdom.\(^{64}\)

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\(^{63}\) Cheney, “A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism?”
\(^{64}\) Cheney, “A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism?”, 485.
Munro Price and John Hardman, on the other hand, present Louis XVI's decision to join the war as a series of missteps. Louis XVI's interest in the war began through the unsolicited letters of a French intellectual then living in London, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. When these letters found favor with the Comte de Vergennes, Louis' foreign minister, although both men ridiculed Beaumarchais' character, Louis gradually found the idea of destabilizing Westminster politics through quietly supporting the Americans appealing.\textsuperscript{66} Yet, this tentative interest gradually snowballed into other fallacies. Vergennes, in his obsession with reasserting French power, persuaded Louis (who relayed this message to the Spanish court), that joining the American War was imperative to prevent a British attack against the Bourbon powers in the Caribbean or Europe. Better for France to choose the nature of the conflict rather than allowing the English to attack. Price and Hardman cast doubt on the idea that Vergennes and Louis' ever accepted this premise, suggesting that France and Spain could surely have negotiated a British guarantee on its territory in exchange for neutrality.\textsuperscript{67} Yet, there is little evidence that Louis and Vergennes ever discussed such a strategy. Moreover, the American triumph at Saratoga (September and October 1777) likely increased Louis' willingness to fight. In short, "France waited until England was already losing to come in for the kill"—a thesis that accounts for the timing of France's decision to commit its own forces to the war although Hardman and Price also suggest that 1778 was a convenient year to go to war because it marked the completion of Louis XVI's naval rebuild.\textsuperscript{68} On this point, the historians find textual evidence suggesting that Louis XVI may have fallen victim to a sunk-cost fallacy believing that once considerable funds had been spent rebuilding the navy it might as well be used for war against France's natural enemy.

\textsuperscript{67} Hardman and Price, “France and the American War of Independence”, 58.
\textsuperscript{68} Hardman and Price, “France and the American War of Independence”, 57.
The Comte de Maurepas, Louis' principal ministre (note not premier ministre), advanced this view, failing, or perhaps not caring, to understand that naval expenditures would increase threefold in war years as compared to the rebuilding phase of 1776-1778.69 Lastly, Louis XVI may have gone to war in America due to continental political considerations. Unlike his predecessors, Louis XVI was, throughout his reign, more intellectually interested in Britain and overseas politics than the European continent. Hardman and Price assert that the decision to plunge into the American war in 1778 may have been influenced by a desire to avoid any obligation to support its new Austrian ally as Maria Theresa, Marie Antoinette's mother, sought to usurp territory in Bavaria during a political vacuum following the death of Maximillian Joseph, Elector of Bavaria, at the very end of 1777. By all indications, Louis' and his cabinet had little appetite to support Austria, a former rival and recent ally, in its unjust and unenlightened mission. If France was suddenly preoccupied with a war of its own, a conflict Austria would be unable to contribute to, Louis XVI could renounce any obligation to aid the Hapsburgs.70 Continental political considerations, in Hardman and Price's narrative, however, do not fully disappear once France committed itself to fight Britain in February 1778. They argue, with strong textual support, some of which will be cited later in this chapter, that Louis XVI felt an obligation to uphold the spirit of the Pacte de Famille and achieve Spanish War aims, including the return of Gibraltar. For this reason of honor, Louis' government extended the war in 1782, after victory at Yorktown, when pursuing peace with Britain might have been a better course for France. French forces

participated in an attempted siege of Gibraltar and, in negotiations ensured that the British compensated Spain by securing the return of Florida and Minorca to Charles III.\textsuperscript{71}

Hardman and Price's arguments, compelling as they are, reflect a careful reading of internal correspondence and therefore explain precise stages in Versailles' thinking on the American War. To make sense of propaganda, one needs to consider the throughlines of Louis XVI's war aims. What were the big picture concerns underpinning France's intervention? The strongest work on French objectives in the war, and the one that is best corroborated by wartime propaganda, is Edward Corwin's article, originally published in \textit{The American Historical Review} in 1915. Corwin reviews popular macro arguments for French intervention in the war. One influential explanation, he notes, deals with the need to protect France's possessions in the Caribbean (rendered relatively meager in the Peace of 1763) and navigation across the seas. As mentioned in the introduction, in 1776, Louis sent naval forces to the Caribbean on defensive maneuvers and the invaluable 1779 piece of royal propaganda, \textit{Exposé des motifs de la conduite du Roi relativement à l'Angleterre}, places British threats to French freedom of navigation at the center of Louis' express purpose for fighting. Yet, although we should see threats to French commerce and colonies as a part of the puzzle, there are issues with emphasizing it as the primary motivation for joining the war. For one, as Price and Hardman argue, there was most likely the possibility of securing a British guarantee of colonial territory in exchange for neutrality. Secondly, if protecting the Caribbean and sea lanes was France's objective, why did

\textsuperscript{71} Hardman and Price, “France and the American War of Independence”, 80-85. Remarkably, the French even planned a naval attack, to be led by the great D'Estaing, against Jamaica which they believed could be traded for Gibraltar. When this was called off, the French offered the British the valuable islands of Dominica and Guadeloupe for the return of the 'rock' to Spain. This deal did was counters by the English offer to give the two Floridas and Minorca back to Spain, which Charles III's government unexpectedly accepted. Louis XVI, in short, was willing to second his own kingdom's interests in peace negotiations to allow his allies, who only joined the war in 1779 and made nowhere near as significant of a contribution in defeating Britain, achieved their war aims.
Louis not order this mission rather than choosing to fight the British in the Thirteen Colonies? This thesis argues that reasserting French naval power was an objective of Louis XVI's reign and certainly, pre-war rearmament and participation in the American War are outstanding examples of this priority. Yet, we must account for the nature of Louis XVI's use of naval power in America. As Corwin puts it best,

while the argument that England designed to attack her [French] Caribbean possessions assisted materially in bringing France into the [American] Revolution, it does not follow that the defense of these possessions furnished the principal purpose of French action.

The central core of Vergennes's programme from the first was aid to the Americans in the achievement of their independence.72

Corwin similarly dismisses the argument that France fought for territorial gain. This thesis, which is hardly corroborated by either French wartime propaganda or internal writings, suggests that France sought to avenge the territorial losses of the past war. Perhaps the Spanish adopted this position. Louis wrote, for example, in an October 1776 letter to Vergennes that "l'axiom de M de Grimaldi [the Spanish Prime Minister] qui dit qu'on ne faire la guerre que pour s'agrandir."73 In summarizing Grimaldi’s sentiment, the king was in fact disavowing it. Evidence that France sought to claim new territorial possessions during the war is hard to come by and certainly does not square with its priorities during the peace negotiations in 1782.

A more compelling theory reviewed by Corwin is a predecessor to Cheney's argument that French intervention was motivated by a desire to replace Britain as America's main

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73 “93. Louis XVI to Vergennes”, October 18, 1776, in Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes, 237. "the axiom of Monsieur Grimaldi (the Spanish Prime Minister) which says that one should make war only to expand."
commercial partner.\textsuperscript{74} Perhaps Louis XVI, so the thinking goes, contrary to his enlightened sentiments, wanted to subject the United States to a new sort of mercantilism, or what a twenty-first-century scholar might call neocolonialism. Corwin dismantles this argument with insightful ease. The French never sought a true mercantile relationship with the United States, as Cheney recognizes, only a boost in \textit{doux commerce}.\textsuperscript{75} The preamble of the 1778 \textit{Treaty of Amity and Commerce} declares that trade privileges should be "mutual" and sets as its goal, in Corwin's words, "the achievement of American independence not only in matters of government but of commerce also."\textsuperscript{76} The treaty leaves open the possibility for the United States to use its sovereignty without offering economic preference to France—a right the new nation would, in hindsight, exercise to the dismay of Versailles. Moreover, if American commerce were opened to the world without preference for France, Louis' ministers understood that France would get a small share of the benefits. As even the French war effort's architect Vergennes predicted, "but American trade, thrown open as it is to be henceforth to the avidity of all nations, will be for France a very petty consideration."\textsuperscript{77} If a trade benefit for the French economy, however, was not the key motivating factor, this hardly suggests that commerce was unimportant. Corwin recognizes that there is another side to the coin, a point that leads to his thesis. Breaking down the British monopoly on American trade bring offer little economic gain to France but deliver a great blow to Britain. In short, if Britain lost hold of its colonies, France would receive a small slice of a new pie but theoretically deprive its rival of the whole thing it then possessed. In zero-sum thinking, this would deliver a great victory to France. We know, moreover, that European estimation of the economic value of the Thirteen Colonies for Britain had increased over the

\textsuperscript{74} Corwin, “The French Objective in the American Revolution”, 40.
\textsuperscript{75} Cheney, “A False Dawn for Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism?”
\textsuperscript{76} Corwin, “The French Objective in the American Revolution”, 42.
\textsuperscript{77} Cited in Corwin, “The French Objective in the American Revolution”, 40.
eighteenth century. As Louis XV's foreign minister Étienne-François de Choiseul wrote in his Mémoire to the king of 1765, "We must not deceive ourselves. The true balance of power really resides in commerce and in America."78 Before Choiseul, the Marquis D'Argenson had written with great foresight in his mémoires of 1733 that "Les Anglois ont dans L'Amérique septentrionale des domaines vastes, riche, bien policés... Je dis qu'un beau matin vous verrez ces dominations se séparer de L'Angleterre, se soulever et s'ériger en république indépendant."79 The opportunity to deprive England of its valuable colonies fell to Louis XVI. For him, the American War was not so much about the value victory would bring to France but what it could cost the British.

According to Corwin, the true purpose of the French war effort is far simpler than future scholars like Cheney or Hardman have suggested: abasing British power. He argues persuasively that the 1763 Peace of Paris was derided in France not merely for the territory lost but the hit to its prestige. The conclusion of the Seven Years' War was the moment France was forced to face the reality that it was no longer Europe's great power. Its continental army might be Europe's greatest. Yet, as Choiseul recognized in 1765, the nature of warfare had changed. "The war in Germany," Choiseul wrote, "even though it should be waged with better success than at present, will not prevent the evils that are to be feared from the great superiority of the English on the sea."80 Naval power and foreign trade, in turn, "the essential root of naval strength," mattered more than the war on the continent. As the Abbé Raynal wrote in his Historie des Indes of 1780, "the marine is a new kind of power which has given, in some sort, the universe to Europe."81 For

"The English have in North America vast domains, rich, well-controlled... I say that one fine morning you will see these dominations separate from England, rise up and set themselves up as an independent republic."
the 1750s French *haute noblesse* the army remained more popular than the navy.\textsuperscript{82} Working with inferior naval power, the most damaging losses France suffered during the Seven Years' War were in India, the Caribbean (where most French possessions were maintained at the expense of losing Canada), and the great ignominy (and constraint on future sea power) of having to accept an English commissioner in Dunkirk, with the authority to prevent the harbor's fortification.\textsuperscript{83}

Louis XVI, as good fortune would have it, was not one to continue neglecting the French navy. He understood naval affairs and agreed with Choiseul "that before France could hope to regain her station in Europe, English power must be diminished."\textsuperscript{84} We need not deny the importance of protecting the Caribbean, expanding commerce, or Saratoga, to recognize that all may have been motivating factors that fit into Louis' greater desire to seize a favorable opportunity to redress British ascendancy. Louis XVI, as the propaganda and internal correspondence will show, was profoundly concerned with the "justice" of his war aims. Despite his intellectual appreciation for England, he understood that it was within his remit as King of France and the nation's interests to humble the British wherever possible. As Choiseul wrote to Louis XV, "England is the declared enemy of your power and of your state, and she will be so always... Only the revolution which will occur some day in America, though we shall probably not see it, will put England back to that state of weakness in which Europe will have no more to fear of her."\textsuperscript{85} Vergennes, whose diplomatic formation took place before the defeat of 1763, in turn, took up Choiseul's desire to reassert French power in European affairs.\textsuperscript{86} As he wrote to his sovereign in April 1777, "La France, placée au centre de l'Europe, a droit s'influer sur les grandes

\textsuperscript{82} Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution", 47.
\textsuperscript{83} Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution", 51-52. Louis XVI would instead fortify Cherbourg, as the next chapter discusses at length.
\textsuperscript{84} Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution", 52.
\textsuperscript{85} Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution", 53.
Louis XVI balanced the concerns of state finances with Vergennes' powerful appeals to French greatness, the prospect of English dominance, and the king's sense of justice. Gradually, Louis' chose the role of "roi bienfaisant," to echo Vergennes' characterization, and a prime opportunity to compete against England on the high seas over parsimony. This understanding sheds new light on wartime depictions of the king and his objective in America.

**Versailles' Appeal to France: The Exposé des Motifs**

Central to Louis' image during the American war is the idea that the king did not desire conflict but, for the good of the Americans and to abase the English, it has been thrust upon him. Naturally, it is a written text, which explains this idea in the clearest terms. *Exposé des Motifs de la Conduite du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre* is a manifesto of French war aims attributed to the king, published by the royal printer in 1779. Versailles' narrative begins by explaining the reasons France joined the war effort in the year prior by comparing British and French conduct with a bias in favor of Versailles' theory that British power must be checked. The authors cast the British as a tyrannical world force: "un empire tyrannique en pleine mer; à prescrire des loix arbitraires, inconnues & inadmissibles; à insulter, en plus d'une occasion, le Pavillon de Sa Majesté." This statement contradicts the American-centric thesis that Louis committed to the war purely in support of American independence. The royal printers, therefore, defended the war on the grounds of relations between European kingdoms and maintaining the honor of the King of France. The British are said to be "tyrannical" on the seas and "prescribe arbitrary laws,"

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87 "109. Vergennes to Louis XVI", April 12, 1777, in *Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes*, 250. "France, placed in the center of Europe, has the right to influence its great affairs."

88 *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre*, 5. "A tyrannical empire on the open seas; a prescriber of arbitrary laws, unknown and inadmissible; insulting, on more than one occasion, his majesty's flag."
contrary to the enlightened philosophy of the French king. The last segment references British insults to the king's naval flag, a decidedly antiquated *casus belli*.

*Exposé des Motifs* concludes with a simple question, furthering its argument that the war is a just French check on Britain: "juger lequel des deux Souverains [Louis XVI or George III] est la véritable auteur de la guerre qui afflige leurs États." The authors, therefore, refuse to force a conclusion on their readers. We may judge if Louis XVI or George III is the cause of the war. Yet this invitation comes at the end of a text blaming England for a series of crimes. Beyond reminding the reader of British challenges to French navigation, the English have "troubler, sous les prétextes les plus frivoles & absurdes, le Commerce & la Navigation des Sujets du Roi." In an episode which might be comparable in hindsight to the Lusitania, Louis XVI's authors decry British aggression against one of the king's ships which was chased when returning from America in 1777: "tout le monde sait de quelle manière la frégate de Sa Majesté, la *Belle-Poule* fut attaquée par une frégate angloise, à la vue même des côtes de France." The text claims that pre-war French naval maneuvers in the Caribbean were by nature defensive. The British responded with provocations. Notwithstanding "des dispositions pacifiques du roi," Louis is unable to ignore the provocations of the British: Si le Roi eût moins respecté les droits de l'humanité, s'il eût été moins avare du sang de ses Sujets, enfin, si au lieu de suivre l'impulsion de son propre caractère, il n'eût pris conseil que de sa dignité blessée.... If Louis XVI is anything,

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89 *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre*, 14. "judge which of the two Sovereigns [Louis XVI or George III] is the real perpetuator of the war that is affecting their states."

90 *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre*, 5. "troubled, under the most frivolous and absurd pretexts, the commerce and navigation of the king's subjects."

91 *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre*, 10. "Everyone knows how His Majesty's frigate, the *Belle-Poule* was attacked by an English frigate, even within sight of the French coast."

92 *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l’Angleterre*, 1; 5. "The king's peaceful dispositions."
he is a man who cares for the "rights of humanity," "blood of his subjects" and follows "the impulse of his character." Therefore, the choice that Exposé leaves its reader between Louis XVI and George III is a false one. Louis XVI was, in this text's argument, forced to fight a war against British "tyranny" and in defense of his just and enlightened values.

Countering British "tyranny," however, is not the only war objective reiterated by *Exposé des Motifs*. The pamphlet casts Louis XVI as a peace-loving and rights-loving king, who thinks rationally and acts in the best interests of his people with an understanding of the costs of war. Naturally, therefore, he is a supporter of American independence. *Exposé* deals less with the justice of America's fight against Britain than one might expect—a point reaffirming the argument that Louis' war was primarily motivated by a desire to check British power rather than assist the Americans. The authors, however, still make specific references to the king's beneficent act of fighting for American freedom. Justifying the alliance between France and Spain, *Exposé* demonstrates the concern Louis XVI has for the United States even while bargaining in the realm of European politics by demanding that any peace would ensure American sovereignty: "Ce plan fut agréé par Sa Majesté, à condition que ces États-unis y seroient compris & qu'ils seroient traités, durant le trève, comme Indépendans de fait."*93* Moreover, although not the pamphlet's focus, the narrative strongly implies that the cause of American independence is justified. If Britain is a tyrannical empire menacing even the great Kingdom of France, surely the Americans have suffered tremendously under its yoke. The authors trust the reader to understand that the causes of French intervention are multifactorial:

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"If the King had less respect for the rights of humanity, if he had been less cautious with the blood of his subjects, finally, if instead of following the impulse of his character, he had taken counsel, from his wounded dignity...." *Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre*, 12-13.

"This plan was agreed by His Majesty, on the condition that the United States would be included in it and that they would be treated, during the truce, as independent in fact."
British misdeeds against France and supporting America's just claim to independence. *Exposé des Motifs* may have focused so heavily on Anglo-French affairs because, as the artistic representations of the war indicate, the public was already sold on the justice of supporting the United States.

**Artistic Representations of Louis XVI's War**

Many of the surviving celebrations of Louis XVI's war effort were published in the final year of the war, or the years immediately following it. This is hardly to say that the war was unpopular in France between 1778 and 1782. Rather, it appears that in the tradition of Louis XIV's reign, victory was celebrated with an outpouring of artistic content. These works generally further Versailles' narrative of a just war effort but have a stronger focus on the glory of assisting the Americans. Consider the words of a little-known poet writing in 1784:

Ah ! Que l’Américain  
Chante avec nous sans fin  
L’Auguste Souverain,  
Qui fixe son destin  
Ce Peuple, sans la France,  
Seroit encor soumis.  
Oui, malgré sa vaillance,  
Qu’eut-il fait sans Louis?  

The thesis that America might not have attained its independence without French intervention is plausible enough. We find in Bezassier's words, however, the alignment of Louis' just will with that of France and the idea that Louis personally brought liberty to the deserving people of America. The king, "L'Auguste Souverain," never saw the battlefield. Yet, he still is responsible

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94 Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, "The Years of Victory."
95 BEZASSIER, M.J.D in *Couplets sur la paix de 1783*. (Noyon: 1784). "Ah! that the American/ Sings with us without end/ The august Sovereign,/ Who fixes his destiny/ This people [Americans], without France,/ Would be still subdued./ Who, despite their bravery,/ What would they have done without Louis?"
for a magnanimous victory because of the decisions he made at Versailles. Louis is a selfless king, acting not for personal glory but for what is right, bringing him in return just glory. The Americans understand that their independence would have been impossible without Louis and France. He, therefore, joins in the song of rejoicing. Moreover, the lines express a sense of French confidence following the war. Not only does Bezassier suggest that his nation was on the right side of the war morally but extolls the power of his sovereign who can "fix" the "destiny" of another valiant people. Depictions of Louis' justice and power are common in visual works as well.

Prints are a revealing visual source to examine because, unlike portraits, they can be cheaply reproduced and widely distributed. Following the peace of 1783, a wealth of prints extolling the victory were produced in Paris. Unlike the reign of Louis XIV when the government commissioned a great deal of commemorative art, the apparent popularity of victory in America with Paris' artistic community allowed Versailles to win the narrative in peacetime at little expense.96

Perhaps the single most compelling print was a work entitled *Vive la Paix à Jamais*, produced by a Parisian shop called Chez Basset on Rue St. Jacques. In one of the many ironies of late Ancien Régime art, the British Museum notes that this printer, "very active during the revolutionary period."97 *Vive la Paix à Jamais*, nevertheless, glorifies Louis XVI as a giver of freedom. The king sits on a throne beneath a palm tree, clad in a vague illusion to the magnificent coronation robes rendered iconic by Hyacinthe Rigaud's 1701 portrait of Louis XIV.98 The palm tree marks a tropical scene symbolizing the Americas. The inscription beneath

96 Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, "The Years of Glory."
the print indicates that the palm tree also symbolizes victory while Louis, a beneficent victor, hands the olive branch of peace to a knelling allegorical representation of England. Obscuring the delicate Anglo-French peace negotiations, the print depicts Louis giving peace on his terms. The king's face is stern and his back is rigid; he sits at the center of the portrait as the leader of the victorious war effort. This depiction obscures the difficulties of striking peace with the English and presents Louis as an omnipotent victor. In fact, we know that Versailles struggled to come to terms with their Spanish allies and the English after suffering a naval defeat at The Straits in 1782 and failing to obtain Gibraltar (or a British territory tradeable for Gibraltar) to satisfy Spanish war aims. A glorified image of the war's conclusion, however, requires imagining the French king exerting complete control over affairs. Louis sits on the throne, having granted America its independence and commanding the attention of European powers, both friendly and hostile. In the background, trident in hand, Neptune hails Louis.

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Louis XVI depicted as the arbiter of European affairs after achieving victory in America.\(^{100}\)

Notwithstanding Louis' claim to enlightened ideals, power was an important element of the king's image. As Vergennes wrote to Louis, pushing him to commit French forces to the war in 1777,

La gloire des rois conquérants est le fléau de l'humanité, celle des rois bienfaisants en est la bénéédiction. C'est celle-ci, sire, qui doit être le privilège d'un roi de France et plus particulièrement celui de Votre Majesté, qui ne respire que pour le bonheur du genre humain. La France, placée au centre de l'Europe, a droit s'influer sur les grandes affaires, son roi semblable à un juge suprême peut considérer son trône comme un

\(^{100}\) Vive la Paix à Jamais. 1783. Print. Bibliothèque nationale de France.
tribunal institué par la Providence pour faire respecter les droits et les propriétés des souverains.101

In *Vive la Paix à Jamais*, Louis is depicted as a 'roi bienfaisant', influencing world affairs, and situated as the arbiter of European powers, as Vergennes suggests he should be. England kneels before him while even France's allies, Spain and Holland, stand beneath Louis' throne and watch his moves attentively. An Amerindian, symbolizing the emerging American nation, stands tall and proud behind Louis, holding "the standard of liberty." The king, although 'bienfaisant,' is powerful, having humbled the English and returned France to its rightful place as the supreme arbiter of European affairs. *Vive la Paix à Jamais* furthers Vergennes' conception of Louis' rightful role as king "qui ne respire que pour le bonheur du genre humain." Louis XVI, therefore, has fulfilled both the ancient mission of the French king—pursuing justice, aggrandizing France—and the particular mission of his war by bringing Britannia to her knees and giving America the strength to stand on its own, and, as Neptune symbolizes, ruling the sea.

Other prints emphasize less the king's strength in favor of extolling Louis's sense of justice. The print pictured below is attributed to Charles Monnet, who is known best known for his depictions of the French Revolution, but in the 1780s held the position of *peintre du roi*.102

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101 "109. Vergennes to Louis XVI", April 12, 1777, in *Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes*, 250. "The glory of conquering Kings is the scourge of humanity, that of beneficial ones is its benediction. It is this, sir, which must the privilege of the King of France and more particularly that of your majesty, who does not breathe but for the happiness of humankind. France, placed in the center of Europe, has the right to influence its great affairs, its king like a supreme judge can consider his throne like a tribunal instituted by providence to respect the rights and properties of sovereigns."

Americans assembled at Boston Harbor praise the king's ship which delivers their independence.\(^{103}\)

*L'Indépendance de L'Amérique* depicts an imaginary scene designed to demonstrate Louis' beneficent, paternalistic relationship with the American rebels. The work shows "a frigate of the king" in Boston Harbor, the birthplace of the revolution, carrying "le traité qui assure leur [the Americans] indépendance." This is, of course, a distortion of history. Reneging on their 1778 commitment to not conclude a separate peace, a precondition of French military intervention, American representatives obtained independence in the Treaty of Paris signed with the British in 1783. The French and Spanish were left to negotiate a separate peace treaty with the British at

Versailles in the same year. Monnet's message, as is true of art generally, stands independent of historical accuracy: Louis has made a considerable effort to deliver American independence. The imagined scene shows a French naval ship that has taken the trouble to sail to Boston, bringing peace and victory to colonists who courageously rebelled against the British Empire. The barefoot Bostonians assembled at the dock, referred to absurdly in the inscription as "les peuples de l'Amérique rassemblés sur le rivage," as if the United States is populated by only a few dozen inhabitants, stretch their arms out to Louis' vessel and bow. The king thus appears like a paternalistic savior.

Like *Vive la paix à jamais*, Monnet's design chooses to celebrate Louis as king of peace than a victor in war. Both works, naturally imply that French participation in the war was just for they depict the fruits of peace: American independence, and in *Vive la paix à jamais*, French dominance in Europe and on the seas. We can say with greater confidence of Monnet's design that it reflects Versailles' propaganda because of the royal position he held. Yet, his works were also likely distributed to a mass audience once turned into a print. The date mark on this engraving, 1786, should not be taken as proof that the design originated three years after the peace for a 1783 drawing, owned by the Louvre, features the same design. Nor was Monnet's work originally intended to be used as a print. Instead, Monnet's work appears to have been originally commissioned as the basis of an engraving completed by Charles de Wailly, a royal architect. In sculpting *L'Amériqué Indépendante*, he used Charles Monnet's design as the model for a bas-relief in an obelisk built to commemorate the war in the southern coastal town of Port-Vendres. The statue survived the revolution and still stands today. The obelisk naturally has four sides, and it is useful to consider Monnet's design in light of the three other carvings.

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One side of the relief, following Charles Monnet's design: *L'Amérique Indépendante*.  

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Le Commerce Protégé.\textsuperscript{107}

La Servitude En France Abolie.\textsuperscript{108}

A contemporary drawing of the obelisk in Port-Vendres.\textsuperscript{109}

The first three designs depict Louis XVI's war aims: delivering independence to America; reasserting French naval strength; protecting oceanic commerce. Naturally, there is a universalist message to these sculptures. France, using the king's ship, brings confirmation of freedom to the Americans. The inscription beneath \textit{La Marine Relevée} claims the "glory of the King" but also depicts the gods of the two seas. As the war demonstrated, the French fleet is a beneficent force,

\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Obélisque à la gloire de Louis XVI sur la place de Port-Vendres}. Charles de Wailly. 1783. Drawing. Musée du Louvre, Paris
patrolling the oceans. *Le Commerce Protégé*, an important war objective as *Exposé des Motifs* showed, claims to be offering this right to "all the nations of the world." The last relief, *La Servitude En France Abolie*, adds a domestic component to the obelisk by making the ahistorical claim that Louis XVI abolished serfdom around 1783. The image shows Louis personally granting liberty to serfs who bend over, like many of the Bostonians, in supplication. Serfdom hardly existed in Louis XVI's time and the last vestiges of it, like the corvée, were abolished in 1789. Yet, De Wailly apparently felt that depicting Louis XVI bringing justice to the people of France would augment the message of a just triumph abroad. The flattering depiction of the king in *La Servitude En France Abolie* bears a striking resemblance to the man holding the treaty on board the king's ship, although the inscription beneath *L'Amériqué Indépendante* does not imply that the king himself sailed to Boston (Louis XVI, in reality, never left his own kingdom). Although the king's image is not depicted in all of the reliefs, a 1780s viewer would have understood the message as a celebration of the king's just victory. In historicizing Louis XVI and the American War, it is important to understand that while the "justice" and "goodness" of the king were long-held aspirations for the French monarchy, they did not always form the basis of the king's image in wartime.

**Louis XIV as a Comparison**

Distorted representations of the king triumphant in war are nothing new. In his renowned analysis of the image of Louis XIV, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, Peter Burke analyzes the myriad artistic celebrations of Louis XIV in war and notes the "discrepancies between the official rhetoric of triumph and the reality of French reverses."110 *Vive la Paix à Jamais* differs from the distortions discussed by Burke in two important ways. Firstly, the representation of

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Louis XVI in this scene is entirely imagined given he never left France. Although images of Louis XIV in battle are generally dramatized beyond measure, the Sun King visited many of the Low Country battlefields onto which he sent French soldiers. The scenes imagined in works like van der Meulen's *Louis Crossing the Rhine* and Pierre Mignard's *Louis at Maastricht* depict, however mediated, Louis' presence at the front during the early French advances of The Dutch War (1672-78).¹¹¹


¹¹¹ Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV,* 75-83.

Van der Meulen and Mignard's works offer glimpses of a king courageously leading his forces to glory. Louis XIV, however, claims glory for its own sake. In *Louis XIV Crossing the Rhine*, the viewers' gaze is directed towards the king, clad in magnificent armor, pointing the way across the river. Mignard offers an uncomplicated scene of the king triumphant in victory, riding past the captured Dutch fortress, receiving a crown from the goddess of victory.\(^{112}\) As magnificent as

\(^{112}\) Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 78.
these works are, they reflect a seventeenth-century understanding of the purpose of warfare applicable to Louis XIV but not Louis XVI. Louis XIV wrote in his 1661 *Mémoires For the Instruction of the Dauphin*, "I was almost equally pressed and restrained in my aspirations by the same desire for glory." By Louis XVI's ascension to the throne in 1774, such base "desire[s] for glory" were derided. Vergennes wrote to the king, as quoted above, "La gloire des rois conquérants est le fléau de l'humanité." In part, this sentiment reflects a greater societal shift, seemingly a response to enlightenment philosophy. L'Abbé de Véri writes in journal entries dated from 1776 (likely edited post-1789) that "La royauté ne doit pas ignorer que l'esprit militaire des temps précédents a disparu et ne reviendra pas." In this conception, changing views on war at Versailles are partially a response to the public's shift away from "the military spirit" which once predominated in France. This evolution is also a reflection of Louis' character and the aims of the war in America. Prints commemorating the American War celebrate Louis XVI as a king triumphant for a cause nobler than his mere glorification. The question to be examined now is if this enlightened image of Louis XVI bore any relation to the truth.

**Internal Correspondence**

The internal correspondence between Louis XVI and his advisers reflects a profound concern to act with justice while choosing a course that will secure the king's interests. When Beaumarchais, began writing to Vergennes in 1775, the king initially dismissed this unsolicited advisor's opinions as unjust for Beaumarchais was advocating "underhand subsidies" to the Americans as a means of destabilizing British politics. Louis believed that covertly subsidizing a

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113 Louis XIV, *Mémoires For the Instruction of the Dauphin*, 1661, 24. Burke suggests that these *Mémoires* were drafted by secretaries and looked over by the king. In any case, he takes them to represent the reflections of Louis XIV.

fellow nation's opponents "n'est pas juste." Yet Beaumarchais persisted in writing to Versailles. A December 1775 letter addressed to the king offers perhaps the best example of his arguments and rhetorical flourish: "Mais, sire, il n'en est point de la politique des États comme de la morale des citoyens." If the French government is willing to accept the gravest injustices—slavery, "la conquête de pays appartenans en propre á des pauvres indiens, africains sauvages ou caribés," or the partition of Poland—why is Louis so averse to the relatively minor moral discretion involved in secretly subsidizing the fledgling American revolt against France's British rival? These remarks reveal several important elements underpinning Versailles' decision to intervene in the 'American War.' Louis is identified by Beaumarchais as the ultimate decision-maker and arbiter of state policy. Louis XVI did not inhabit the role of King with the confidence or domineering presence of his predecessors, most famously Louis XIV. Yet, despite his mild critiques of the king's priorities, Beaumarchais does not challenge the idea that ultimately the King's will and French state policy converge. He lays this assumption bare pronouncing "c'est à nous de proposer; à vous, Sire, de juger... et vous répondés à Dieu, Sire, à vous mesme [sic] et à tout un grand peuple qui vous est confié du bien ou du mal résultant du parti que vous préférés." Louis answers only to God, himself, and to the French people for whom he bears responsibility. No force can trump Louis' God-given responsibility to govern. Therefore, Beaumarchais addressed much of his correspondence directly to the king, even though his letters were filtered through Vergennes. Similarly, in his writings, Beaumarchais switches fluidly

"But, sire, the policy of states is not like the morality of citizens."
"The [European] conquest of countries properly belonging to the poor Indians, savage Africans, or Caribbean people."
118 328. Au Roi", December 7, 1775, Beaumarchais Correspondance, 151.
"It is for us to propose; for you, sir, to judge... and you respond to God, sir, to yourself as well and to the whole of a great people who are entrusted to you for good or bad from the party [choice] you prefer."
between dictums of the state and the king. In one quote, Beaumarchais theorizes that national political considerations must be separated from standards of personal morality. Yet, he also asks "si la justice du roi de France est réellement [sic] intéressée à ne pas adopter un pareil expédient [intervening in the American War]." The justice of the nation and king are one and the same.

The second crucial assumption illuminated by Beaumarchais' writing might seem obvious to a modern reader, familiar with the platitudes of democratic politics, but is consequential and corroborates the message of the wartime propaganda: that Louis is deeply concerned with the justness of his foreign policy. Beaumarchais, recognizing Louis' sincere allegiance to an ideal of justice, goes on to argue that a king must break personal conventions of justice to deliver the highest justice: the well-being of his kingdom. "Car la justice et la protection qu'un Roi doit à ses sujets est de devoir étroit et rigoureux," Beaumarchais argues, "au lieu que celle qu'il peut accorder aux États voisins n'est jamais que de convenance." True royal justice requires acting in French interests; just conduct in international affairs must be a secondary consideration, applicable only when convenient. Beaumarchais' non-universal moral philosophy appeared to be sufficient for Vergennes' taste given he endorsed Beaumarchais' vague plan to disturb English politics in a January 1776 letter to the king. Seemingly no written record survives of Louis' immediate reaction to Beaumarchais' lengthy late-1775 letters, yet he approved the provision of

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119 "328. Au Roi", December 7, 1775, in Beaumarchais Correspondance, 153. "Sire, que la politique qui maintenant les nations diffère presque en tout de la morale qui gouverne les particuliers."
120 "328. Au Roi", December 7, 1775, in Beaumarchais Correspondance, 151.
one million livres in secret subsidies for the Americans in May 1776 (apparently laid out by Beaumarchais personally). Louis' initial understanding of "just" conduct was not unmalleable in the face of circumstance.

Nevertheless, Louis remained concerned with conducting the war effort in line with his flexible understanding of honor and justice in the subsequent years. Through 1776 and 1777 Louis and Vergennes followed developments in the war with special attention to American successes like the victory at Saratoga. In October 1776, Louis wrote to Vergennes reflections on what the purpose of any war against England should be:

Si nous sommes forcés de faire la guerre à l'Angleterre, il faut que cela soit pour la défense de nos possessions et l'abaissement de sa puissance, non dans aucune idée d'agrandissement territoriale pour nous, mais seulement en tachant de ruiner leur commerce et de miner leur forces en soutenant la révolte et la séparation des colonies, malgré l'axiom de M de Grimaldi qui dit qu'on ne faire la guerre que pour s'agrandir.

This statement, not intended for public distribution, indicates quite directly that Louis XVI's outward belief in just conduct in war was deeply held. We notice here a newfound acceptance of Beaumarchais' argument that the English posed a threat to French colonies in the New World and a danger to maritime trade. Louis classifies these concerns as legitimate grounds to act, indicating the impact of Beaumarchais and Vergennes' repeated appeals. Louis echoes, however, ideals from the later Exposé des Motifs in this letter: a king should not go to war for personal aggrandizement or the state's territorial expansion, the principal motives of Louis XIV. Rather, "if we are forced to go to war against England" it should be for noble purposes, including securing the independence of America. French interests are the driving force for action in this

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124 Letters 92, 93 101, 118 in Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes.
125 “93. Louis XVI to Vergennes”, October 18, 1776, in Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes, 237.

"If we are forced to make war on England, it must be for the defense of our possessions and the abasement of its [England's] power, not for any idea of our territorial aggrandizement, but only in trying to ruin their trade and to undermine their [English] forces in support of the revolt and the separation of the colonies, despite the claim of Monsieur Grimaldi which says that one should make war only to expand."
outlook while Louis' sees base desires for national aggrandizement as incompatible with his honor.

Louis XVI's rigorous attention to and ultimate involvement in the American War of Independence demonstrates that he sought to project a belief in honesty and justice as important qualities of the king's conduct. By all indications, this was a message well received in France and abroad. Scottish-American naval hero John Paul Jones dedicates his 1786 memoirs to Louis XVI with the message, "Your Majesty has as much Reputation for Knowledge and the desire of information, as you have for wisdom and justice." Even George III, ostensibly Louis' enemy, is believed to have commended the king's "justice," "candeur," and "droiture."

**Conclusion**

In his June 1791 *Déclaration du Roi Adressé à tous les Français*, Louis discusses the new constitution's provision for making war:

> Le droit de faire la guerre ne serait qu'un droit illusoire... Le Roi, qui ne fait qu'un avec la nation, qui ne peut avoir d'autre intérêt que le sien, connaît ses besoins et ses ressources, et ne craint pas alors de prendre les engagements qui lui paraissent propres à assurer son bonheur et sa tranquillité.

On a grander scale, Louis' is defending the right of the King of France, past, present, and future, to make war against a constitution encroaching on royal power. He also, however, seems to be defending his own record. Little wonder considering the rhetoric surrounding Louis XVI's war effort in America. Although hardly all objectives were met—France failed to secure a

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127 Cited in Louis and Vergennes, *Louis XVI and the Comte de Vergennes*. Historians including Hardman have assumed the authenticity of these comments.
128 Louis XVI, “Déclaration Du Roi Adressée à Tous Les Français, à Sa Sortie de Paris”; Tackett, *When the King Took Flight*.

"The right to make war will not be anything but an illusionary right... The king, who is one with the nation, who can have no interest other than its own, knows its needs and resources, and does not fear to make the engagements that seem proper to insure its happiness and peace."

Ironically, scholars like Tackett believe that the act of leaving the kingdom itself ignited a civil war.
meaningful trade relationship with the United States and the blows it dealt to the Royal Navy and British Empire were far from decisive—Louis could credibly claim in 1791 to have understood the need for war and acted decisively in the national interest. Louis XVI was hailed after the war in America because the stated purposes of his war effort, redressing the balance of power following a seismic defeat in 1763, ending British maleficence at sea, granting America its independence, and checking British ascendancy, were popular with the French people. Artists, both court-sponsored and independent, understood these war aims and celebrated them when victory was delivered. Louis' triumph in America was admired because it was motivated, and depicted to the people, as a war for the good of the nation and humanity. Although this chapter hardly pretends to tell the history of French kings in battle, if we look to Louis XIV as an example, the purpose of Louis XVI's war in America appears decidedly enlightened. Moreover, a brief survey of correspondence between advisers and Louis suggests that these values were deeply held by the king. Building French naval power as a check against British aggression, however, did not end at Yorktown or with the 1783 Treaty of Versailles. As the subsequent chapter explores, when Louis XVI traveled to Normandy in the summer of 1786 to view progress on a coastal defense project begun in 1776, he continued to receive acclaim for his victory in America and attention to French naval power. Still, one point in Louis's passage on the power to make war appears ridiculous—that "the king... knows its [the nation's] needs and resources."

Louis may very well have understood France's needs and aspirations in 1778 but, although his hesitations suggest that he believed war to be costly, he failed to grasp how much of the nation's resources the war would take up. Fighting in America cost the treasury approximately 1.3 billion livres.\textsuperscript{129} Louis' victory may have been just, but it was certainly expensive.

\textsuperscript{129} Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 182.
Chapter Two: Louis XVI Voyage to Normandy

Louis XVI has conventionally been characterized as an apprehensive man, ill-suited to the position he unenthusiastically inherited, irresolute in his leadership on the throne. Stefan Zweig's widely read biography of Marie Antoinette describes his subject's husband as a man of "constitutional inertia, "timid and shy," "a king [un]worthy of the name," even "a king's figure in a puppet show."\(^{130}\) John Hardman's decidedly more favorable recent biography still describes Louis as a "timid," blundering, unconfident king, tortured during a rigid royal childhood, ill-constituted to face an era of revolutionary upheaval.\(^{131}\) A great many films, both French and American, including Jean Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (1938), *Marie Antoinette* (1938), *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982), Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* (2006), even the HBO miniseries *John Adams* (2008), have depicted the Ancien Régime’s last monarch as weak, idiotic, gluttonous, haughty, or indifferent.\(^{132}\) It is a diverse, yet overwhelmingly negative, image of Louis XVI which has stuck in the Franco-Anglophone public consciousness: a human explanation for the coming of revolution and the regicide.

Nevertheless, a careful study of Louis' 38-year life reveals a brief episode in which the king apparently demonstrated nothing but courage, vigor, compassion for the people, and enthusiasm for his role as King of France. Louis XVI's week-long visit to Normandy in June 1786 marks a special moment in his life: an excursion which separated him spatially from the court life in Versailles he distrusted, and from his state's recent failure to convict Cardinal Rohan for his (unwitting) role in the Diamond Necklace Affair, and brought him for the first and only

\(^{130}\) Stefan Zweig, *Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman* (London: Pushkin Press, 2010), 109; 110; 139; 156.
time in his life to the sea. Indeed, contemporary observers and later historians alike remark about Louis' obsession with the sea and naval matters, nurtured from the land-locked royal palaces dotting the Île-de-France in which he never felt quite comfortable. No explanation for Louis' decision to intervene in the American War is complete without recognizing this passion, as the introduction discusses.

The official purpose of Louis XVI's visit to Normandy was to witness the sinking of the ninth of ninety massive cones fortifying the harbor of Cherbourg, a town some fifty miles across the Channel from Dorset. Louis had ordered the project in 1776, just as he was beginning his broader rebuild of the French navy The king traveled to Cherbourg following the earlier visits of Castries, his naval minister, and the king's own brother, the Comte d'Artois. In a sense, therefore, the visit to Cherbourg (and the costly construction project itself) represented a continuation of royal priorities expressed by France's intervention in the prior war: the renaissance of French naval power, defense against English aggression, and expenditure on works ostensibly designed to benefit France rather than ostentatiously glorify the king's person. These themes were recognized by a poem extolling the king's visit to Cherbourg, published in Le Journal de Normandie on the penultimate day of his trip:

C'est peu : ton Auguste Monarque,  
Aussi bon père que grand Roi...  
Tu n'éprouveras plus d'outrages ...  
Un insulaire audacieux  
N'osera plus de tes rivages  
Tremble, tremble, fière ennemie , ...  
Louis parle : à sa voix suprême ...  
Rein ne l'arrête, il vient lui-même  
Donner des fers à l'Océan ...  
Mordre le frein de l'esclavage , ...  
Sous les yeux d'un peuple innombrable,  
Poursuis tes immenses projets ;

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133 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 224-229.  
134 Hardman The Life of Louis XVI, 224.
Dieux !... je vois l'Angleterre en larmes.\textsuperscript{135}

Beyond this poem's important references to the fortification of Cherbourg as an immense project protecting the shores from a pernicious English enemy, de la Moriniere's words alert the modern reader to the realization that contemporary Norman observers viewed Louis' visit to Cherbourg as a moment of glorious kingship. Indeed, in the surviving accounts of Louis' visit, we find recurring references to his strength, kindness, tireless work ethic, and deeply held desire to better understand and improve the lives of his people. Whether expressed in the abstract terms of the above poem or the specific stories of a local mayor's robust account of the visit, Louis is consistently portrayed as a great king and friend to the common man.

Before elaborating on the above observations and introducing further textual support, it is important to recognize the nature of the evidence underpinning this thesis. Many surviving accounts of the voyage were composed by nobles or public servants—observers with an incentive to praise the king. In a kingdom with censorship, no regional journal or public official would be well served by lambasting the king's appearance and behavior pre-1791. This problem exists not only in studying Louis' voyage to Cherbourg but his leadership at the start of the Revolution and any other pre-revolutionary event. Members of the elite had the best ability and greatest incentive to write about the king. And yet, there is enough consistency and common language between these accounts to suggest a degree of truth. Louis XVI surrounded by normal people in the place of courtiers, by the sea rather than the walls of Versailles, appearing on a ship of the line and not at "le grand lever," might have helped to transcend his normal comportment

\textsuperscript{135} M. N. de la Moriniere, “Poésie: Ode Sue Le Voyage de Sa Majesté à Cherbourg,” \textit{Journal de Rouen}, June 28, 1786.

"It is little: you August Monarch, / As good of a father as great king.../ You will not take any more insults [...] / An audacious islander [Englishman] / Will no longer threaten your shores / tremble, tremble proud enemy [...] / Louis speaks: his voice supreme [...] / Nothing stops him, he comes himself / Giving irons to the ocean [...] / Biting the grip of slavery [...] / Under the eyes of an innumerable people, / Pursue your immense plans; / God!... I see England in tears."
and assume the mantle of leadership. Indeed, the singularity of this moment was not lost on contemporary observers. Marie Antoinette later remarked to Campan, as reported in the latter's influential memoirs, "que la démarche la plus marquante qu’il ait faite, pendant son règne, a été d’aller visiter le port de Cherbourg."\(^{136}\)

For a king who traveled thousands of miles around France over decades in power like Louis XIV, a visit to Normandy would not have constituted an extraordinary occasion. For Louis XVI, the voyage was a rare moment in which he enjoyed being king in a maritime province that appealed to his fascination with the sea and navy. The king was proud to be exceptionally well received in Normandy, leading Castries to observe that "il était emu de se sentir aimé."\(^{137}\) Castries' comment might appear to be a truism, but it reflects the perspective of a minister working under a king who typically showed indifference to the exceptional court grandeur surrounding the King of France in Versailles. We might hypothesize that the warmth of the people fed into the confidence of the king in a sort of positive feedback loop. As one historian concluded, "d'ordinaire timide, se défiant de lui-même, il semble avoir prise une notion plus juste de sa personnalité au contact de cette race normande si forte, si maîtresse d'elle-même."\(^{138}\) Jean-Christian Petitfils, the leading French historian of Louis XVI, explains the success of Louis' visit in similar terms without the unquantifiable reference to Norman strength:

Un extraordinaire contact s'établit tout de suite entre le monarque et les populations locales. Lui si emprunté, si mal à l'aise à la Cour, trouva d'emblée son public au milieu des braves gens de la campagne, jouant le rôle du roi simple et débonnaire, à l'embonpoint bienveillant, répondant à leur attente admiration, distribuant les aumônes et les exemptions d'impôt.\(^{139}\)

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\(^{136}\) Campan Jeanne Louise Henriette, Mémoires Sur La Vie Privée de Marie-Antoinette, vol. 2, 8 vols. (Paris: Baudouin frères, 1823), 191. "That the boldest step he took, during his reign, was to visit the port of Cherbourg."

\(^{137}\) Quoted in Emmanuel de Waresquiel, Sept jours: 17-23 juin 1789 la France entre en révolution, 2020. "He was touched to feel loved."


This idea of a connection between a good-natured king and his people far from the pressures of the court is certainly compelling. Historians including Petitfils and Hadman, however, in building this narrative have relied on a few sources. By far the most influential account reproduced in the works of modern historians is the fullest narrative of the king's visit, Le Tellier's *Voyage de Louis XVI dans sa Province de Normandie*.

Le Tellier's *Voyage de Louis XVI dans sa Province de Normandie*.

In a brief, royalist dedication an 1824 edition of Le Tellier's book, a Marais publisher wrote that "La France, en lisant cette relation, saura quelle perte elle a faite." Indeed, if one intended to make a succinct case that the death of Louis XVI constituted a terrible loss to the French nation, there are few books to point to before Le Tellier's for it is a glowing portrayal of the king and his vigorous commitment to a people. Little information exists about Le Tellier, but we know that he had previously served as mayor of the small Norman town of Harfleur because his published writings refer to him as 'M. Le Tellier, ancien Maire d'Hafleur.' Le Tellier also wrote a history of his hometown: a short text which gives arguably disproportionate attention to the role of French monarchs in Normandy's history. One edition of this text introduces Le Tellier as a chevalier of the prestigious royal Order of Saint Louis and échevin of the town. While historians like Padover and Hardman have relied on Le Tellier's book as the core of their short

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"An extraordinary contact was established right away between the monarch and the local populations. He, so awkward, so uncomfortable at court, found immediately his audience in the honest country people, playing the role of a simple and good-natured king, with a benevolent portliness, responding to their admiring attention, distributing alms and tax exemptions."


"France, in reading this account, will know what loss it has suffered."


Le Tellier (or the publisher) may very well have made up that he was a recipient of the Order of Saint Louis. There is no indication that Le Tellier served as an officer in the French military; indeed, he is not referred to by any title. If Le Tellier falsely claimed this honor, it might be a further indication of his unusual preoccupation with the French Monarchy.
sections on Louis' visit to Normandy, they fail to explain the author's particular connection to the voyage. Nevertheless, Le Tellier's interest in Normandy and the monarchy appears plain. Given the number of locations mentioned in the account and the striking similarity between it and other primary sources from first-hand observers, Jeanne Marie Gaudillot, the leading French historian of the voyage, suggests that Le Tellier reconstructed his narrative through the municipal writings and newspaper articles of others rather than having personally followed the procession.\textsuperscript{142} Therefore, we should consider \textit{Voyage de Louis XVI} an amalgamation of other primary sources, some of which will be discussed later.

Le Tellier begins and ends his story by quoting a letter from Louis XIV to his grandson, Philip V of Spain, extolling the importance of visiting the people of a kingdom:

Les peuples souhaitent ardemment de voir leurs Souverains... Écoutez leurs plaintes, rendez justice et communiquez-vous avez bonté... Vous connaitre bientôt l'utilité de votre voyage, et le bon effet qu'aura produit votre présence.\textsuperscript{143}

This reference is well-chosen by Le Tellier for it communicates many of the benefits he ascribes to Louis XVI's voyage: offering the people a chance to see their king; viewing the conditions in which they live and hearing their problems first-hand; giving justice personally. In Normandy, Le Tellier repeatedly uses the terms "sagesse," "justice," "affabilité" "popularité," "l'amour de son peuple," and, even as Louis XIV writes, "bonté" to describe Louis' interactions with the Norman people.\textsuperscript{144} These are of course not qualities commonly associated with Louis XVI, in no

\textsuperscript{142} Jeanne-Marie Gaudillot, \textit{Le Voyage de Louis XVI En Normandie: 21-29 Juin 1786} (Caen: Société nationale académique de Cherbourg, 1967), XVII. Gaudillot, in her introduction, dismisses the idea that Le Tellier followed the king writing, "ce Letellier qui n'a sans doute pas suivi le roi dans ses déplacements, s'est contenté de rassembler tous les renseignements qu'il avait pu recueillir auprès des témoins et dans les gazettes."

\textsuperscript{143} Le Tellier, \textit{Voyage de Louis XVI}, 163-64. "The people ardently wish to see their Sovereigns... listen to their complaints, render justice and communicate with kindness... You will soon see understand the utility of your voyage, and the good effect your presence will have produced."

\textsuperscript{144} Le Tellier, \textit{Voyage de Louis XVI}, 2-3.
small measure due to the loud voices and prolific pens of radical revolutionaries. A deterministic view of history might lead the reader of Le Tellier's words to a state of cognitive dissonance; how might a king who fell into such disgrace a few years later have been so lauded in 1786? Yet, Le Tellier repeats these glowing adjectives continuously, using plenty of anecdotes and [constructed] dialogue to substantiate his message.

In praising Louis XVI whether in the context of the American War or the Normandy visit, the issue of French royal precedent often comes up. Although Le Tellier implies that Louis XVI's voyage rose to the lofty expectations for kingship expressed in Louis XIV's letter to Phillip V, he does not invite a comparison between Louis XVI and the Sun King. Rather, like certain documents praising the king as a leader in the American War including *Exposé des Motifs*, Le Tellier extolls Louis XVI's conduct as a higher form of kingship than Louis XIV's struggle for glory. He makes this point subtly writing, "[Louis XVI], dans sa trente-deuxième année, a exécuté déjà, par inclination, ce que Louis XIV, après tant de gloire et des malheurs, recommandait a son petit-fils Phillip V..."145 The key phrase here is "après tant de gloire et des malheurs." A pattern of glory and misfortune may have suited Louis XIV, an esteemed king at least worthy of mention. Yet, Louis XVI's enlightened style has surpassed his great-grandfather's legacy: a point Le Tellier's description of events in Normandy reaffirms. Rather, Le Tellier prefers to compare his sovereign to Louis XII and, most auspiciously, to Henri IV.146

Another implicit reason why a comparison between Louis XIV and Louis XVI would not make sense is that, in Le Tellier's conception, Louis XVI exemplifies both the goodness of

145 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 4; 27. "who [Louis XVI], in his thirty-second year, has already executed, by inclination, what Louis XIV, after so many glories and misfortunes, recommended to his grandson, Phillip V..."
146 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 4; 27. A poet characterizes Louis as having "La clémence de Henri quatre" (Gaudillot, 206). "The clemency [or forgivingness] of Henri IV."
kingship and the honorable habits of an average man. A king ill at ease in the regimented system of Versailles took comfort in his first sustained period of contact with average Frenchmen. This image of Louis XVI is developed consistently in Le Tellier's book. Food is a particularly revealing element of material culture and dining was a ritualized element of life at Versailles. In Le Tellier's account, it marks Louis as a king admirably close in his ways to the average man. On the way to Cherbourg, he describes the king stopping in a small village outside of Caen where the villagers were so intimidated by the royal presence that they supposedly attempted to hide. Immediately, "Il les eut bientôt rassurés." Louis, far from a typical king, merely asked for fresh eggs and butter to satiate his appetite. He even ate "sur le table des voyageurs... et le savoure avec délices." Louis evidently enjoyed the basic cuisine of common Norman villagers. Another story from Le Tellier places the king very much in comfort dining among naval officers aboard a ship of the line, the Patriote. After demonstrating his precise knowledge of naval affairs in the past war, Louis inquired about a dish left untouched on the table. Told that it was a fish pâté, a staple of sailors, the king tried it and remarked "Je le préfère à tous ceux de Versailles." Herein lies an important element of Le Tellier's argument: that Louis XVI's extraordinary knowledge and dedication, combined with the sensibilities of a common man, place him among the greatest of French kings. In the words of one poet writing on the Normandy visit, reflecting a view of the king's good nature but atypical royal disposition, "il voulait être Roi, sans porter la couronne."
Beyond describing Louis XVI as a king in touch with the habits of common Frenchmen, Le Tellier also portrays him as a bold and active leader. These are not qualities often associated with Louis for most historians agree that he was plagued by indecision when attempting to address the financial and political challenges of his reign. Some, including Stefan Zweig, dubiously accuse Louis XVI of "lethargy," a characteristic inconsistent with his intellectual studies of physics, languages, English politics, and prolific correspondence with ministers, examined previously in the context of the American war. Yet, Le Tellier writes of a king determined to see for himself the construction of the harbor, to experience the life of a sailor, and to meet as many of his subjects as possible. He describes the garment Louis wore to witness the sinking of the cone: a scarlet "habit" with a fleur-de-lis pattern and the embroidery of a naval lieutenant-general; merging symbols of the Bourbon dynasty and naval tradition. As the king entered the canoe to sail out, the majestic garment was dirtied which caused an aid to suggest the king change. "Non, dit-il, non ; il m'en plait davantage." Le Tellier's anecdote highlights a distinguished combination of the king's majestic appearance alongside an unfussy demeanor. Louis is less interested in projecting a pristine royal image than in observing important naval developments. He took great interest in the sinking of the cone and spent many hours aboard the Patriote examining defenses, listening "avec autant de sagacité que d'attention." Louis, in his infinite naval curiosity, discussed matters with the sailors. Informed by the ship's commander that the Patriote could not fire cannon shots with the king on board as a matter of etiquette, Louis instructed him to disregard procedure so that he might experience something

150 Zweig, Marie Antoinette, 109; Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI.
151 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 53-54. "No, he said, no; I like it more."
152 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 55; 64-65. "With as much wisdom as attention."
approximating a ship at war.\textsuperscript{153} Far from a creature of Versailles' useless protocol, Louis is depicted in these poems as a king leading from the front. Louis worked with tireless resolve, content with sleeping for only three hours before supervising the submersion of a new cone in Cherbourg, buoyed by his love for the people and infatuation with the sea.\textsuperscript{154}

Beyond describing Louis XVI as an active and interested king, Le Tellier also ascribes to him many of the usual qualities flattering the king including "justice," "bonté," "bienfaisance," "amour de peuple," "sagacité," "magnificence royale." Indeed, Le Tellier's portrayal of the king's exceptional curiosity might be unusual but hailing the sovereign's commitment to justice, good deeds, and love of the people has a long tradition in early modern France. The mayor perhaps most fully encapsulates the thrust of his message in describing "admiration pour un monarque dont la sagesse, la justice, la sensibilité se manifestent si naturellement dans les circonstances où son cœur s'agit, sans l'impulsion des conseils."\textsuperscript{155} The claim of spontaneity is an important one and will be evaluated later. The image of a king as naturally dutiful, curious, generous, and just is, of course, more powerful than that of a calculating king, attempting to falsely project these qualities.

Statements praising Louis' virtue like the above recur throughout Le Tellier's book. Yet again, it is in the anecdotes Le Tellier includes rather that the most impactful testaments to Louis' character lie: stories of Louis donating thousands of livres to hospitals, pardoning repentant deserters from the American War, offering money to the needy and rewards for valiant naval officers. Le Tellier writes of a worker in Cherbourg who died in an accident while positioning

\textsuperscript{153} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 76-77.  
\textsuperscript{154} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 52.  
\textsuperscript{155} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 2-3.  
"Admiration for a monarch whose wisdom, justice, sensibility so naturally manifested in the cases convening matters of the heart, without the impulse of advice."
the cone for the sinking ceremony. His summary, predictably, has less to do with the horror of
the death than the nobility of Louis' response.

Le Roi se couvrit le visage de ses mains en voyant le danger qui coururent alors quelques
malheureux travailleurs... il dit à son chirurgien d'aller secourir ces braves gens, dut
prouver combien son cœur magnanime gémit à la vue de ces déplorables boucheries
d'hommes... il assura sur-le-champ une pension à la veuve, et fit donner aux autres des
consolations non moins paternelles.156

The king, in this description, reacts naturally and with tremendous compassion. He does not look
away from the suffering of his people but rather bravely and generously does all he can to help
the injured workers. Offering the pension, moreover, is a sign of his just and generous nature.
Louis XVI cares deeply for the well-being of all those he rules. These qualities are underscored
by another, of many magnanimous stories told by Le Tellier. In a village early on in his trip, a
young, crying woman explained to the king that she was pregnant with the child of a man her
mother would not allow her to marry. Louis apparently responded, in words that appear
farfetched: "Votre état est blâmable; mais votre demande est légitime : je veux que vous soyez
mariée pour mon retour."157 Louis, therefore, was both the most Christian of kings and a friend
even to a sinner. This moral anecdote also accords the king a certain enlightened modernity:
offering justice and a resolution to the poor woman's problems rather than holding to the strict
teachings of the church. Her past deeds may be "blameworthy," but Louis is a modern king of
mercy and kindness.

Out of this picture, we get a sense of a remarkable relationship between king and people;
a veritable mutual admiration seldom perceived in the reign of Louis XVI. Never before had the

156 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 58-60.
"The king covered his face with his hands in seeing the danger incurred by a few unfortunate workers... he told his
surgeon to go help these good people, proving how much his magnanimous heart suffered in seeing the terrible
butchering of these men... he right away assured the widow a pension, and gave to the others consolations no less
paternal."

157 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 40.
"Your state is blameworthy; but your request is legitimate: I want you to be married by my return."
king enjoyed such an extended period of contact with regular subjects—a point recognized subtly by Le Tellier's description of Versailles' preparations for the voyage.\textsuperscript{158} Visiting Normandy was a new experience for the king. Yet, through the combination of strength and magnanimity discussed above, we are told that the king won over the hearts of all those who laid eyes on him. A poor mother of twelve, falling to her knees to beg the king for relief, expressed her gratitude when Louis calmly and naturally acceded to her request: "Je vois un \textit{bon roi}, dit-elle; je ne désire plus rien en ce monde."\textsuperscript{159} Louis, in his ability to connect with the people, earned their admiration; in turn their love made him grow emotional.\textsuperscript{160} The people of Caen saw the king "as a father" while more than 20,000 supposedly waited with joy to lay their eyes on him.\textsuperscript{161} Louis met cries of "Vive Louis XVI! vive ce \textit{bon Roi}" with an equally generous reply, "Vive mon \textit{peuple}!... Vive mon \textit{bon peuple}!"\textsuperscript{162} Le Tellier's story is one of genuine love between a king and his subjects; it expresses the connection between a virtuous people and a king who deserves to rule not only by birthright but for his unsurpassable conduct and love for the people. True to the good king and husband character constructed by Le Tellier, Louis concluded his trip glad to return to his family in Versailles yet determined to visit the rest of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{163}

\textbf{Supporting Primary Source Accounts of the Voyage}

We must now evaluate Le Tellier's glowing narrative in light of other primary sources. A look at the primary sources (many of which include details indicating that they were read by Le Tellier in formulating his own story) reveals that we have cause to doubt Le Tellier's narrative of

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 11-12.
\item \textsuperscript{159} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 13-14.
\item "I see a \textit{good king}, she said; I desire nothing more in the world."
\item \textsuperscript{160} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{161} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 28-29.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 80.
\item "Long live Louis XVI! Long live this \textit{good king}." "Long live my \textit{people}!... Long live my \textit{good people}!"
\item \textsuperscript{163} Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, 161-62.
\end{itemize}
a spontaneous connection between king and people. This is not to say that the emotions were
disingenuous. Contemporary accounts from observers of the trip suggest, on the other hand, that
the people showed great affection for Louis XVI. The idea that Louis' public triumphs were
somehow uncalculated, however, does not stand up. Surviving primary sources from town
officials, housed in the archives of the various Norman towns he visited, reveal the depth of work
that went into planning the king’s route, lodging, itinerary, and organizing the town officials and
people expected to encounter the king across the region.164 In the words of Jeanne Marie
Gaudillot, the historian responsible for compiling the diverse primary sources about Louis' trip as
the town archivist of Cherbourg, "Or l'étude des archives révèle que malgré le désir de
simplicité exprimé par Louis XVI, ce voyage a coûté fort cher et a donné lieu à une préparation
minutieuse."165 Predictably, the spectacle which Louis found across Normandy was not
spontaneous; rather it was a costly and carefully considered voyage, as de Calonne's
memorandum will show. Just as detailed preparation goes into the planning of a trip by any
modern head of state, so too did Versailles labor to ensure the success of the king's visit to
Normandy.

Beyond the fact that the trip was "meticulously prepared,” there arises the question of
how genuine the interactions between the king and his people were. Revolutionary propaganda
put forth the idea of Louis XVI as a two-faced king: kind and popular, when necessary;
indifferent and even cruel, in reality.166 It is a theory that hardly squares with an uncynical look
at Louis' writings and yet one cannot dismiss the idea that his success in Normandy might have

The second section of Gaudillot's primary source collection deals primarily with preparations for the trip.
165 Gaudillot, "In Memoriam"; XVIII.
"Yet, the study of archives reveals that despite the desire for simplicity expressed by Louis XVI, this trip was very
expensive and required meticulous preparation."
166 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 25.
been a cynical performance. Perhaps the most disillusioning source is a long memorandum from Charles Alexandre de Calonne, the Controller of Finances, to Louis entitled "Memoires et Plans Pour Servir Au Voyage du Roi a Cherbourg." Calonne well understood Louis' appetite for study; his letter offers detailed historical, geographic, and economic reports on the Norman towns Louis was due to visit. Beyond merely delivering information to the king, however, Calonne made a great many suggestions for the conduct of the king which were in fact followed. Many of the charitable donations that appear to be spontaneous acts of generosity in Le Tellier's story were proposed by Calonne. Le Tellier presents Louis XVI's donation of 8,000 livres to the hospital in Caen (one of many such donations) as a product of the king's experience in the town. In fact, Calonne had written before the trip of the hospital’s financial deficit, concluding "Si Votre Majesté avait la bonté d'y envoyer dans le moment un secours d'une dizaine de mille livres, ce serait un soulagement fort utile." Reviewing Calonne's pre-departure words in light of accounts of the trip reveals many instances in which apparently spontaneous actions were actually planned. Calonne wrote that these recommendations were for Louis' "bienfaisance," a quality both ministers and Norman observers repeatedly attributed to Louis. Recalling the story about Louis asking modestly for butter and eggs in a small rural village, a mark of his simple desires, it is remarkable to read Calonne's words characterizing Isigny as a town "connu par la bonté de son cidre et par le commerce considérable de beurre et d'œufs qui s'y faire pour la capitale." Such a direction calls into question whether the ideas supposedly attributed to Louis

168 Gaudillot, Le Voyage de Louis XVI En Normandie : 21-29 Juin 1786, 11. "If Your Majesty had the kindness in the moment to send there a subsidy of about 10,000 livres, it would be a very useful relief."
169 Gaudillot, 1.
170 Gaudillot, 14. "Known for the excellence of its cider and for the considerable commerce of butter and eggs made there for the capital."
by Le Tellier really were his own. To what extent was Louis' engagement with the region genuine? Calonne even suggested, in concluding his work, that he hopes the king will be satisfied by Normandy—"Puisse Votre Majesté éprouver en parcourant cette belle province autant de satisfaction..."\(^\text{171}\) This is hardly to say that Louis XVI did not appreciate Normandy and its people. Indeed, the overwhelming body of primary source evidence suggests his pleasure in meeting the people was genuine. There is no reason to doubt the approximate authenticity of a quoted attributed to Louis as, in Petitfils words, the acclamations grew lesser at the end of his return voyage: "Je m'aperçois que j'approche de Versailles, mais j'en sortirai plus souvent et j'irai plus loin que Fontainebleau."\(^\text{172}\) The existence of Calonne's instructions merely raises the point that one should not assume that Louis' moments of triumph in Normandy reflect brilliant, spontaneous leadership or generosity.

If the evidence for the theory that Louis' affection for Normandy was affected appears thin, the idea that the people merely put on a show for him is even less compelling. In examining primary sources from people across Normandy who witnessed the king's numerous public appearances, one finds only a few subtle messages of discontent. One account, from the minutes of a town hall meeting in Honfleur, makes the favorable critique that the king passed through that town too quickly, leading to the "general consternation" of the multitude of people who came out to see him.\(^\text{173}\) Another remark from an observer in Caen makes a mildly biting remark about a ceremony offering the king the keys to the city: "Ce qui me paraît ridicule en cette cérémonie, c’est de voir, en temps d'une profonde paix, offrir au souverain les clefs d'une ville

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\(^{171}\) Gaudillot, 31. 
"May Your Majesty experience in seeing this beautiful province as much satisfaction..."

\(^{172}\) Petitfils, *Louis XVI*, 603. 
"I perceive that I am approaching Versailles, but I will leave more often and go further than Fontainebleau." The implication of Louis' phrase is that he enjoyed far less popularity in the region around Versailles in 1786 than in Normandy.

\(^{173}\) Gaudillot, 87-89.
qui lui a toujours été soumis et qui d'ailleurs, n'a plus ni portes, ni serrures." It is unclear to what extent this comment is designed to critique local or royal governance. The statement can be read as mainly a criticism of the ceremony rather than of the authorities carrying it out. Although the characterization of "une ville qui lui a toujours été soumis" appears to be an affront to the monarch himself, the writer seems otherwise rather favorable to the king in his passage. Other examples of accounts diverging from Le Tellier's narrative merely mention the often intrusive preparatory work that took place on the ground in anticipation of the king's visit—reaffirming the careful preparation that went into the visit. Asking locals to stand in front of their homes or officials to come to the center of town to meet the king, however, does not prove that their interactions with Louis XVI were disingenuous. As Louis' comment cited above about approaching Versailles suggests, even before the revolution, French subjects did not feel universally obliged to acclaim the king. Louis's popularity most likely varied significantly by region.

Finally, the primary source accounts demonstrate that Le Tellier's basic narrative of a remarkable string of encounters between the king and people in Normandy is accurate. To analyze each instance of a local writer praising the king would require a lengthy book. Yet, despite the diversity of encounters recalled, we find a great deal of commonality. Of the many adjectives used to describe the king "bonté"—a term reflecting the material and spiritual generosity of Louis—is nearly ubiquitous. Furthermore, authors often conveyed their appreciation for the king by relaying his pleasure in visiting Normandy. Admirers of Louis frequently portrayed a special bond between people and monarch, akin to the frequent examples

174 Gaudillot, 62.
"What appears ridiculous to me in this ceremony is to see, at a time of profound peace, [officials] giving the sovereign the keys of a city, which has always been obedient to him and which anyway no longer has gates or locks."
of "vive le roi"—"vive mon peuple" interchanges described by Le Tellier and others. An account of Louis' days in Cherbourg praises "la bonté de sa coeur" by quoting a remark expressive of the king's tremendous satisfaction: "Je n'ai jamais mieux goûté le bonheur d'être Roi, que le jour de mon sacre, et depuis que je suis à Cherbourg." These words, apparently written down by a town official, reflect but one example of the fulfillment inhabitants of Norman towns received from observing the king's enjoyment. Just as the king's uncharacteristic self-confidence might be thought of as a result of the people's encouragement, so too might the peoples' love be an outcome of the king's "bonheur," to use another term often attributed to Louis by Norman writers. Perhaps, therefore, this cycle gives context to the Vicomte de Marigny's description of a thousand people on the shore cheering "Vive le Roi" as Louis sailed out to the cone in Cherbourg's harbor. It is a scene that appears dramatized in Louis-Phillippe Crépin's post-Restoration painting. The image of well-wishers on the shore appears more logical when considering de Marigny's characterization of "le désir qu'on avait de lui plaire." The king's presence pleased the people, and the pleasure of the people pleased the king.

175 Gaudillot, 72. "I have never better tasted the happiness of being king more than on the day of my coronation, and since I have been in Cherbourg.
176 Gaudillot, 73. "The desire we had to please him."
Part Two: Trade and Anglophobia Underpinning Louis XVI's Reception in Normandy


Reading Crépin's painting allegorically, we find Louis XVI casting off to sea with the support of thousands of his subjects behind him. French ships dominate the harbor as a feat of naval engineering is achieved. Seated beneath the royal standard, the king looks to the turbulent sea with wonder, as if inspired by its majesty and committed to his nation's mastery of it. Crépin painted this scene as an official artist for the navy under the Restoration government of Louis
XVIII, Louis XVI's younger brother. Louis XVI Visitant Le Port de Cherbourg might be considered the outcome of the early Restoration need to reassert the royal prerogative and Crépin's genre of naval painting.

The work also reaffirms that "the sea itself," to use Hardman's words, attracted Louis to Normandy. Louis' love of the sea has been stated many times in this text and was recognized by his biographers including Padover, Hardman, and Petitfils. We might be wise to doubt the veracity, but not the spirit, of Le Tellier's claim that looking out at the sea in Le Havre, Louis exclaimed twenty times "Rien n'est plus beau!" Unquestionably, the ocean and navy constituted much of the attraction pulling Louis to visit Normandy before any other province (except for his coronation in Reims). His love of Normandy, to the extent that we accept the prevailing narrative of his voyage, was certainly connected to the wonderous ocean depicted rhetorically by Le Tellier and visually by Crépin. Neither were visits to the Channel coast broadly, and naval fortification projects specifically, the invention of Louis XVI. In Gaudillot's view, "Dunkerque avait été l'objet des soins de Louis XIV, Le Havre ceux de Louis XV venu visiter cette ville en 1749 et c'est Louis XVI qui réalisa les projets de ses prédécesseurs à Cherbourg." Increasing British naval dominance, reflected in the discourse of Louis' ministers before entering the American War, led directly to the enormously costly Cherbourg project even in an era of necessary royal parsimony. Calonne explained to the king in detailed terms the importance of strengthening naval defense and the advantages of Cherbourg's location, insights Louis almost certainly already knew himself. Louis' investment in the construction project

177 Crépin, Louis Philippe" (Oxford University Press, October 31, 2011).
178 Le Tellier, Voyage de Louis XVI, Voyage de Louis XVI, 143-44. "Nothing is more beautiful!"
179 Gaudillot, Le Voyage de Louis XVI En Normandie: 21-29 Juin 1786, XV. "Dunkirk had been the subject of Louis XIV's efforts, Le Havre those of Louis XV who visited the city in 1749 and Louis XVI who completed the projects of his predecessors in Cherbourg."
180 Gaudillot, 18-19.
surrounding Cherbourg should be seen as part of his ongoing commitment to French naval strength.

**Naval Security as an Imperative**

In the Treaty of Paris (1763), Louis XV's government humiliatedly surrendered the right to fortify Dunkirk.\(^{181}\) This right would be restored in the peace of 1783 but Louis selected Cherbourg in 1776 as part of his greater naval rearmament program, in no small measure, because it was well suited to protect access to the Atlantic. Cherbourg was also an intelligent choice in the realm of local public opinion. The town was sacked by the British during the Seven Years' War and had been the site of a major naval defeat at the hands of an Anglo-Dutch fleet in the Battle of La Hougue during the Nine Years' War. The journal of an English traveler, published in October 1789 in *The Edinburgh Magazine*, explains that while it was reasonably understood that Cherbourg was chosen as the site of the harbor fortification "in consequence of the destruction of part of their [French] fleet off that place after the Battle of La Hougue, in the glorious 1692." The writer, however, implores his readers to not forget that other moments in Anglo-French history have played out in Cherbourg including battles during the Hundred Years' War. He quotes the Medieval French historian, Jean Froissart, who (incorrectly, in the author's estimation) claimed that Cherbourg had been founded by Julius Caesar as he traveled through Gaul to conquer Britain.\(^{182}\) Winston Churchill, for his part, would write in his history of

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This traveler expressed his skepticism about the design of Louis XVI's fortification project (with the benefit of hindsight because the cones were failing structurally by the time he wrote). He notes that Louis XIV had partially fortified the harbor before ordering the installations to be "dismantled" in 1688. In the 1692 battle, the British then fully "destroyed" the towns fortifications alongside many "first-rate" French ships. After the completion of the Nine Years' War, the Comte de Vauban, working under Louis XIV, drew up a plant to refortify Cherbourg which was not actioned.
Marlborough that the Battle of Cape La Hougue "was the Trafalgar of the Seventeenth Century."183

This history illuminates the realization that the Norman people's interest in maritime security influenced their enthusiastic reception of Louis XVI—a king taking bold action to fortify Cherbourg from attack and create a base to protect the wider Channel coast. Viewing Crépin's painting, we notice a multitude of Normans fervently hailing their king upon seeing him for the first time. Understanding the historical context, however, one might claim that Crépin is depicting the reaction of a coastal population highly economically dependent on trade, following a victorious naval war, to their king making a grand investment in maritime defense. After a century of nearly continuous naval struggle against the English, Louis XVI's harbor fortification must have appeared as a blessing to the locals. Indeed, these practical elements of the people's reaction to Louis likely occurred to Crépin as an official artist for the naval ministry. They also factor into written accounts of the king's visit, some of which Crépin surely read. In his letter to the king, Calonne identifies Normandy's dependence on trade, proposing, for example, enhancements to Cherbourg's "advantageously situated" merchant port and endorsing Honfleur's desire to gain a trade "franchise" with the United States.184 Although Calonne mentions merchant uses for Cherbourg's port, the main purpose of fortifying the harbor was to drastically improve Normandy's naval security. Cherbourg lacks the river connections that made cities like Rouen manufacturing and trading powerhouses. If, however, Cherbourg could serve as a reliable port on the Channel coast, the French Navy would be better able to protect vital commercial interests like the entrance to the Seine at Le Havre and approaches to the Atlantic.

184 Gaudillot, 1; 18-19 22-23.
Commercial and military security considerations were, therefore, central to the intention and planning of Louis' voyage. The route chosen, the time allocated to sailing aboard Patriote, his trip down the Seine, all correspond to his interest in the sea and the court's desire to portray the image of a good king concerned about the trade interests and maritime security of Normandy. These intentions had an impact on the people. Accounts of the voyage, both fact-based and allegorical poetry, praise the king and closely associate him with the sea.

**Norman Concerns Over the Future of Trade**

Arriving in the Norman capital of Rouen on his return journey, the king passed through a 66-foot tall, 60-foot-wide temporary arc de triomphe built in anticipation of his visit. On each column were carvings designed to allegorically represent familiar qualities: "la force"; "la prudence"; "la bienfaisance"; "la justice." These terms represent ideals of French royal rule. Inside the arch, however, were a series of carvings more particular to Normandy and the historical moment. Fortunately, an interpretive description of this arch, which must have been only a temporary construction, survives. One carving depicted Normandy as a woman presenting a bust of Louis XVI to the city of Rouen: "Celui-ci semble demander au Roi sa protection pour son commerce dont elle lui présente les attributs... de l'autre côté du bas-relief la Seine se jette dans le sein de l'Océan en lui portant le tribut de ses eaux..." Another engraving celebrates "la sûrete établie dans la Manche" by the construction of the new port in Cherbourg through a depiction of Neptune commanding the French fleet and victory represented by the classical

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185 Gaudillot, 95. "Force"; "Prudence"; "Charity"; "Justice."

186 Gaudillot, 96. "This [relief] seems to ask the king for his protection of its [Rouen's] commerce the attributes of which she [Normandy] presents to the king... on the other side of the relief, the Seine flows into the bosom of the Ocean bringing to it the tribute of its waters..." Gaudillot attributes this description to municipal officers of the town of Rouen.
symbol of palm trees: likely a reference to the American war and future victories ahead.\textsuperscript{187} Another relief represented "la globe de la France avec des attributs militaires et de commerce."\textsuperscript{188}

The artistic message of this arch, therefore, related directly to crucial areas of Norman political interest: naval security and trade prosperity. The fortification of Cherbourg benefited Rouen not only by protecting the security of the region from British attack but also by ensuring the passage of commercial ships from the Atlantic to the important commercial and manufacturing city. Indeed, as explored earlier, the security of French trade in this era of British ascendency was a factor influencing the king's decision to send forces to America. Even after the victory, the fledgling British Empire continued to be perceived as a pernicious threat to French prosperity. The popularity of the Cherbourg project extended beyond the Cotentin Peninsula, onto even an arc in Rouen.

Alongside the popularity of royal efforts to protect Norman commerce are concerns about the future of international trade policy. The arch emphasized Rouen's place in French trade quite directly by depicting the flow of goods from the Seine into the Atlantic. These efforts to demand royal protection of commerce seem to reflect anxiety about ongoing trade negotiations with Britain. Indeed, Calonne estimated that linen production contributed 80 million livres annually to Rouen's economy with trade in other fabrics like cotton and wool bringing in a further 80 million.\textsuperscript{189} It comes as little surprise, therefore, to find a quote from the mayor of Rouen vocalizing the arch's message by praising the king in traditional terms while advocating a cautious trade policy:

\begin{flushleft}
187 Gaudillot, 96. "The security established in the Channel."  
188 Gaudillot, 96. "The globe [map, in this context] of France with the military and trade symbols"  
189 Cited in Gaudillot, 28. Calonne further emphasizes the strength of the linen industry in Rouen noting that 24 factories produced linen in the area and estimating the industry's growth over the last six months of 1784 at 2.7 million livres.
\end{flushleft}
Sire: votre ville de Rouen est livrée toute entière aux plus doux transports de la joie: quel bonheur pour elle de contempler dans Votre Majesté un Roi dont la sagesse et la prévoyance assurent la navigation, protègent son commerce, favorisent son industrie, et de l'extrémité des deux mers nous appellent dans son sein l'abondance.\textsuperscript{190}

In this instance, the king has earned the joy of his people thanks to his familiar qualities of wisdom and foresight, by protecting the interests of Rouen. Securing navigation, an object of the Cherbourg fortification project, is a critical element of the mayor's praise. Implied, however, is a request to maintain current trade protection. By connecting Rouen's joy to the king's wise "protect[ion of] its commerce" and "preference for its industry," the mayor insinuates that good governance is dependent on maintaining current trade policies. We might consider the mayor's complements an attempt to tactically praise the king, hardly dissimilar in intent from the flattery employed by Louis' pro-war ministers leading up to French entry in the American War.

The message embedded in the arch and vocalized by Rouen's mayor comes as little surprise in light not only of Rouen's economic interest but the precise historical moment. In June 1786, negotiations for the Anglo-French free trade treaty, soon to be known as The Eden Agreement, remained ongoing. The completion of an agreement was likely to boost the business of Norman traders on the whole, as Calonne alluded to in his instructions. Cheap English cotton, however, on the other hand, (including those imported from India by the East India Company) posed a serious threat to Normandy's thriving textiles industry. Scholar Prasannan Parthasarathi provides the instructive example of a Norman firm that thrived producing muslins cloths from 1753-1760 under protection but promptly collapsed when the duty was removed. Little wonder

\textsuperscript{190} Gaudillot, 97.
"Sir: your city of Rouen is delivered entirely to the sweetest transports of joy: what happiness for her to contemplate in Your Majesty a king whose wisdom and foresight ensures navigation, protection of its commerce, preference for its industry, and from the farthest reaches of the two seas brings us abundance."
that the people of Rouen lobbied Louis XVI to maintain trade protection. As mentioned in the introduction, ultimately when the Eden Treaty was concluded in September 1786 article VI maintained a 12% protective duty on cotton and woolen products. Marie Donaghay, investigating the course of negotiations, writes with greater specificity that the king, Calonne, and Joseph-Matthias Gérard de Rayvenal, lead French negotiator, worked on article VI with great urgency in July and August 1786. In short, it seems likely that the visit to Normandy had a significant impact on Louis XVI and Calonne's views on trade policy.

**Louis XVI and the Sea**

One should not forget that it was more than a desire to claim credit from the people that brought Louis XVI to Normandy. As argued in the previous chapter, Louis XVI's exceptional performance on this voyage and underlying desire to invest in Norman coastal defense were certainly motivated in part by his obsession with the sea and navy. Royal support for the Cherbourg project should hardly be seen as some cynical performance. Those writing on the voyage understood Louis's love of the sea. Descriptions of the king and ocean imagery are often connected in accounts from the Normandy trip. An observer in Cherbourg wrote, contradicting Crépin's depiction of choppy seas, "la mer était calme, et la côte couverte d'une quantité considérable de personnes, qui faisaient retenir l'air, par des acclamations continuelles de *Vive le Roi.*" Here, the author is placing the king's majestic presence and the sea together. This

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191 Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Parthasarathi writes on the diffusion of Indian cotton into the European market. Not only does he claim that Indian cotton were cheaper than "all-cotton goods that Europeans manufactured in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" but that they preferred by most consumers for their higher quality.


romanticized description contrasts the calm sea with the great force of a king who commands the attention of his people. This is a recurring theme in accounts from Normandy. The liveliest portrayals of the king come in the face of the sea whether it is Le Tellier's "rien n'est plus beau" comment or descriptions of the king aboard Patriote. Naval veteran vicomte Bernard de Marigny wrote, "Le Roi parcourt toutes les parties du vaisseau y vit et examina tout très en détail..."195 Historians understanding Louis' obsession with naval war would be little surprised to read that he examined Patriote attentively. Yet, there is an immediacy to the king's actions at sea rarely attributed to him in other settings.

**Louis XVI's Voyage in Normandy in Verse**

The most high-flown connections between Louis XVI and the ocean come in the many allegorical poems celebrating the king's visit to the coastal province. Jeanne-Marie Gaudillot compiled a series of poems and "odes" commemorating Louis' voyage, most of which were originally published in local or Parisian journals in the weeks following his return to Versailles. The poems tie together many of the key themes of Louis XVI's image in Normandy as expressed in the prose accounts. Louis is revered as a good, just, strong king, credited for having attained victory in America and strengthening the naval defenses at Normandy, which made him (and France) master of the seas. In celebrating newfound French strength, nearly all of the poets continue to emphasize the English threat, and some gently urges caution on trade.

The specific act of fortifying the harbor in Cherbourg is depicted by the poems as a remarkable act of kingship and a continuation of Louis' efforts to, in rhetorical terms, dominate the seas. One might not expect a university student studying philosophy at the University of

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"The sea was calm, and the shore was full of many people, who took hold of the air, with continuous acclamations of Long Live the King."

195 Gaudillot, 73.

"The king browsed all the parts of the ship and examined everything in close detail."
Caen to fixate on the appearance of the king. Indeed, much of the written and artistic propagandistic praising of Louis XVI, whether during the American War or following the Cherbourg visit, was published in Paris. Nonetheless, a 1786 university publication, however, printed some of the most glowing verses written about the king:

Louis est un Dieu tutélaire,
De ses sujets en tendre père //
Grand Roi, le trident de Neptune,
Semble être réuni dans tes mains!
A tes pieds tu vois la fortune
Couronner tes vastes desseins; //
Et contre les flottes rivales,
Cherbourg à nos forces navales
Présente un port sortant des flots.196

Louis is both a father to his subjects and a powerful ruler approximating Neptune's domination of the seas. As a powerful, maritime-focused good king, Louis built Cherbourg to counter enemy navies, namely the English. In this way, praise for the victory in America and for the construction at Cherbourg is connected. Louis Caille, the author of the above verses, implies further that Louis is to his people—a protector and father—what Cherbourg (a safe port) will be to the French navy. Thus, the fortification of Cherbourg's harbor is the work of a good king, intent on mastering the seas. At least three accounts of Louis XVI's appearances in Caen itself exist.197 That a university student in a city some 75 miles away wrote a poem praising Louis and the harbor in Cherbourg demonstrates the perceived impact of the project on the region.

Monsieur Foix, another poet, after praising the king's justice as exemplified by the freeing of

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196 Gaudillot, 205.
"Louis is a tutelary God, / To his subjects, a tender father // Great king, the Neptune's trident, / Seems reunited in your hands! / At your feet, you see Fortune / To crown your vast designs; // And against rival fleets / Cherbourg to our naval forces / Offers a harbor emerging from the waves."

197 See Gaudillot pages 60-63.
America ("A briser par tes mains les frères de l'Amérique / L'univers étonné t'applaudit du succès"), describes the Cherbourg harbor defenses in almost romantic terms:

L'art triomphe à Cherbourg, et t'attends de Versailles //
Franchit de l'Orient l'éclatante barrière //
Cherbourg à ton aspect pavoise ses vaisseaux ;
De ses rayons dorés l'aurore te salue ;
Et Neptune a ta vue,
Se tait pour seconder l'effort de tes travaux //
Tu commandes. Soudain les enfants d'Uranie
Déployant dans Cherbourg leur force et leur génie,
Construisent un rocher [la cône] : il flotte sur les eaux
Tu donnes le signal. On garde le silence,
Et cette masse immense
S'assied au fond des mers, et domine les flots.

As reviewed previously, many authors, Le Tellier foremost among them, dramatized the king's leadership in moments like the sinking of the cone. Foix's image of the king's appearance in the harbor silencing a crown in ready anticipation of his instruction: the stunning, Neptune-like power of a king manipulating nature for the good of his realm. Foix's poem is remarkable because he lauds both the king and the cone itself. The cone is "art," a "dazzling barrier," a work of "strength and genius," and an "immense mass" that "dominates the waves." Seldom is such embellished language used to describe an infrastructure project. Thus, praise for the king in Normandy was likely amplified by the popularity of the Cherbourg project. Although Louis XVI was consistently portrayed in these post-Cherbourg writings as a king of strength committed to protecting Normandy's maritime security and economy, do the references to Cherbourg from as

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"To break with your hands [the chains] of the American brothers / The stunned universe applauds your success."
We notice another example here of a writer portraying the French war effort in America as single handedly the king's work.

199 Gaudillot, 202-03.
"Art triumphs in Cherbourg, and you are waiting for Versailles // Crossing from the Orient the dazzling barrier // Cherbourg flaunts its vessels at your sight; / With its golden rays, the dawn greets you; / And Neptune at your sight, / Is quiet in order to support your work // You command. Suddenly, the children of Uranie / Deploying in Cherbourg their strength and genius / Construct a rock [the cone]: It floats on the water / You give the signal. We remain silent, / And this immense mass / Sits on the floor of the seas and dominates the waves."
far afield as an arch in Rouen and the University of Caen reflect lingering anxiety about naval threats?

Fears of British maritime strength run subtly through many of these poems proclaiming French dominance. Just as the arch in Rouen and the mayor's comments praise the king's commitment to the navy in an apparent attempt to urge further prudence in trade policy, so too do some authors continue to express anxiety about Britain. Through this realization, we can reaffirm the basic conclusion that maritime issues factored into the king's positive reception in Cherbourg. Locals and literary commentators alike praised the king for fulfilled improvements in maritime security, the American War and the Cherbourg project, while discretely urging a renewed commitment to the French maritime interests. One poem, set to the tune of a song popular in Louis XVI's Versailles, "Marlborough s'en va-t-en guerre," warns of English trickery:

C'est sa main souveraine,
Qui rend libres les mers,
Des peuples rompt les fers
Et calme l'univers
L'Anglois, pour sa fredaine,
Mironton, ton, ton, mirontaine.200

Louis XVI is credited by this poet for freeing the seas, liberating the American people, and even calming the universe. The references to Marlborough, the greatest military genius in British history at this point, and English trickery, reveal lingering anti-English sentiment. Indeed, Louis might have delivered freedom to the seas and former English subjects in North America, but the rival threat lurks. In pieces addressed directly to the king, an unknown author at the Collège du Mont in Caen (perhaps the head abbey, Bellanger) lament naval threats to France: "Retunde faitus, ante Britannia"; "Tout conspire contre la France, / Les Dieux, les Flots, les Aquilons";

200 Gaudillot, 193.
"It is the sovereign’s hand, / That sets the seas free, / Peoples break the irons / And calm the universe / The English, for their prank / Mironton, ton, ton, mirontaine."
"Menaçant la riche Batave." The pejorative comments about the English arguably shed light on the nationalist aggression that would overtake France in the coming decade. For the purposes of Louis' visit to Cherbourg, these lines reveal the connection between praising the king's attempts to master the seas and lingering concerns about the English. Indeed, the reference to "la riche Batave," accuses the British of "threatening" the trade interests of Holland: allies of Louis' government during The American War. The British, in short, "conspire" in the military sphere and pose a commercial threat.

Poetic references to trade and negotiations with Britain are less frequent than in the prose but perhaps even more striking given the unusual nature of invoking commerce in verse. The frequent references to "Neptune," the sea, Louis XVI's character, and French triumph in America seem quite logical as material for poetry with a political bent—although the ubiquity of Anglophobia in these 1786 poems is rather surprising. Yet, this study of Louis XVI's visit to Normandy has revealed that references to trade concerns appear in unusual places like a ceremonial arch or the greeting message of a mayor. In the temporary absence of war between France and Britain, trade negotiations were a significant battleground between the rival nations, reigniting for the poets both distrust of the English and the prospect of future bilateral cooperation.

One odd text titled "La France Et L'Angleterre: Dialogue" offers in verse an imagined conversation between France and Britain. Printed in Paris and originally paired by the publisher with other accounts of Louis's visit to Normandy, it summarizes cross Channel relations in 1786 with a French bias. The most significant reference to trade negotiations comes towards the end of

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201 Gaudillot, 187; 188; 190; 191. "Everything conspires against France, / The Gods, the Waves, the Aquilons (English)"); "Threatening the rich Batavia (i.e., The Netherlands)."
the dialogue. After France declares its intention to pursue cooperative friendship, England responds by exclaiming its desire to sign the commercial treaty, declaring it to be a project of "common prosperity." True to the wishes of many in Normandy, France responds in this allegorical story in favor of the basic trade agreement but prudent in its defense of national interests:

Oui ; resserrons tous les nœuds de la plus vive amitié, étendons nos relations, multiplions les échanges de nos arts, de notre industrie, de nos productions territoriales. La sagesse de nos Gouvernements exaucera nos vœux, et bientôt nous applaudirons au traité de Commerce que nous désirons. Renvoyons cet objet à un autre entretien ; dans celui-ci je ne veux qu'épancher les sentiments délicieux dont mon âme est remplie.²⁰²

In comparison to the British push to complete a trade agreement, the unattributed authors of this text express French reluctance to merely accede to London's plan. Indeed, France is for international trade and is certainly open to the exchange of arts and a stronger friendship. Where England pushes for an agreement, the French nation, mildly skeptical, trusts its government to negotiate the treaty "que nous désirons." Indeed, the following line characterizes the issue of trade as something slightly uncomfortable for the French in its dialogue with England. Predictably, following France's invocation to focus on "delightful sentiments,” Britain and France go on to praise Louis XVI's visit to Normandy, invoking Louis XIV's words on the importance of a monarch visiting his people.

The "dialogue" might be thought of as an expression of French national concerns about trade from the capital. From a specifically Norman perspective, Louis Caille, the philosophy student in Caen, makes another direct reference to the trade agreement:

Grand roi, remplis ta destinée!

²⁰² Gaudillot, 211.
"Yes; let us tighten the knots of the liveliest friendship, let us extend our friendship, multiply the exchanges of our arts, our industry, our countries' products. The wisdom of our governments will fulfil our wishes, and soon we will applaud the trade treaty that we desire. Let us leave this subject to another interview; in this one I only want to pour forth the delightful sentiments with which my soul is filled."
Sous les auspices de la paix, /*...
Rouvre les sources du commerce
Que son génie emporte et verse
Sur ton sol de nouveaux trésors
Et les nations étrangères
Deviendront bientôt tributaires
De tes industrieux efforts.203

Caille indeed tacitly endorses the opening of trade, implying dubiously that, because France has a great king, other nations will become dependent on its industry (and enjoy foreign
"treasures").204 Yet, the fact that trade specifically is on his mind in writing a poem addressed to the king reveals a certain degree of anxiety about it. To criticize the king's policy directly might have been bad form. To mention a topic of concern, while praising Louis' triumph in areas of concern for Normandy, presented a plea to continue protecting the region's interest. Whether any of this discourse ever reached the king is difficult to say but it seems unlikely.205 Yet, the poetry served as an outlet for the concerns of Normandy's people.

Conclusion

Few Frenchmen remember the story of Louis's visit to Cherbourg. Were it not for the efforts of Jeanne Marie Gaudillot who compiled into a single volume obscure primary sources on the voyage, studying the subject would be an impossible task. The visit is important, as this section has attempted to argue, not only because it recasts the nature of the relationship between Louis XVI and his people as late as 1786, but because it reveals the concerns of one French region just before the revolution. Louis' visit to Cherbourg was a success in part because it was a

203 Gaudillot, 206.
"Great king, fulfil your destiny! / Under the auspices of peace, // Reopen the sources of trade / That his genius takes and sheds / New treasures on your soil / And the foreign nations/ Will become soon tributaries / Of your industrious efforts."

204 Sitting in the University of Caen, Caille is likely contemplating Normandy's trade and security, rather than that of France as a whole.

205 We know, ironically, that Louis read a great deal of English literature.
show of the king taking action to solve problems facing his people: naval security and trade. The history of the Normandy expedition suggests that a few years before the revolution, the French people were not implacable or hell-bent on chaotic revolt à la Tale of Two Cities. Rather, their opinion of royal governance—always challenging to understand given the lack of sources from common people and layer of etiquette enveloping references to the king—was more or less a reaction to its success in dealing with issues of self-interest. Policy reflects priorities. In Normandy, the interests of the king lead to policies consistent with the concerns of a coastal people. Louis' investment in the Cherbourg project, beginning in 1776, was an element in rebuilding the French Navy. The primary sources cited here reveal that, even after that navy won an impressive victory in America, Normandy's people remained wary of future British attacks and the prospect of free trade with the manufacturing and imperial power on the other side of the channel. Modern research from historians like Charles Walton suggest that, in their concern about the Eden Treaty, Normans had good instincts. He finds that, despite the tariff on certain textiles, the French state moved to low-barrier trade far too quickly and without sufficient support for manufacturing areas like Rouen. Consequently, Walton asserts that "between half and two-thirds of industrial workers became unemployed" after the treaty was concluded in September 1786.206 Affected interest groups like the Rouen chamber of commerce decried the treaty in cahiers submitted before the Estates General and some manufacturers arguing that the failure stemmed from a lack of consultation between industry and government in France, compared to Britain.207 The king may have made an impressive appearance in Normandy and listened to the plight of his people. Yet, his interactions with the people were not enough to

207 Walton, 53.
overcome the shortcomings of the political structure so far as trade protection for Normandy was concerned.

As for the fate of Cherbourg's Harbor, in a fitting ending, the project failed because it was too expensive. Due to the expense of each individual cone, the design was scaled down from ninety to sixty-four cones. This adjustment, as John Hardman explains, increased the hydraulic pressure each cone needed to bear. The massive structures began to collapse, and construction was halted in 1789. Historians, with an eye to the transcendent nature of this moment in Louis XVI's reign, like to mention that when Napoleon's engineers returned to Cherbourg in 1800 to plan a new fortification project, one cone remained unbroken: the ninth.208 The harbor would be reconstructed in many stages over the next decades. Cherbourg was improbably the site of an 1864 Union naval victory during the American Civil War and captured by Anglo-American forces in a bloody episode during the Battle of Normandy.209 One can hardly deny that Louis XVI and his ministers selected a good site to fortify. There is only Rue Louis XVI left in France: a short and undistinguished street one row back from the base of the artificial harbor in the town of Cherbourg.

While the voyage in Normandy is unique in that it constituted a singular moment of glory for Louis XVI, another project also occupied the king in these post-American War Years: La Pérouse's expedition. This massive undertaking, as the following section explores, reflects more clearly than any other in his life interests and priorities that shaped Normandy—his love of the sea, desire to reinvigorate the French navy, establish foreign trade on French terms, and Anglophilic intellectual mindset.

208 Hardman, The Life of Louis XVI, 229.
Chapter Three: Louis XVI as Patron of the La Pérouse's Expedition

The most famous image of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse is from an early Restoration painting that still hangs in Versailles today. After decades of Davidesque career turns—training in the 1770s at the Académie Royale, before illustrating the works of Ovid and Rousseau during the Revolution, and accepting a propagandistic commission from Napoleon in 1802—Nicholas-André Monsiau returned to royal patronage under Louis XVIII, producing a large tableau designed to glorify the enlightened leadership of the sovereign’s deceased elder brother.210 Monsiau, a historical painter, evidently studied descriptions of this final encounter between Louis XVI and La Pérouse well for in the words of John Dunmore, the leading English-language historian of his expedition, the painting "perfectly interprets the relationships between the various participants."211

The naval minister Charles-Eugène-Gabriel, maréchal de Castries stands behind Louis, holding a pamphlet from the Académie des Sciences, attentive to the words of his king. On La Pérouse's side stands (most likely) de Fleurieu—the navigator's primary contact within the naval ministry—and an unidentified member of his crew, possibly the commander of his second ship, Paul Fleuriot de Langle.212 At the center of the composition sits a globe: representing the known geography of the world. On the far left, in the shadows, a bust of Henri IV watches over the men. As the French historian Antoine Chéry has argued, Louis XVI and his court welcomed

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210 Simon Lee, “Monsiau [Monsiaux], Nicolas-André,” in Oxford Art Online (Oxford University Press, 2003). Indeed, Monsiau was acquainted with Jacques-Louis David, the two having met in Rome during Monsiau's artistic training.


212 Château de Versailles, Louis XVI Donnant Ses Instructions à La Pérouse, 29 Juin 1785, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzU1hUAdsQ; Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 192.

The curators at Versailles have produced an excellent, succinct video analysis of the painting which I am drawing on here along with Dunmore. The former claims that both figures are sailors parting with La Pérouse while the latter suggests that one of the men is Fleurieu. Dunmore’s interpretation seems valid after comparing portraits of Fleurieu to the man standing in the shadows of Monsiau's scene.
comparisons to Henri IV, remembered as the "good king" and initiator of the Bourbon line. Implicitly, the enlightened motivations behind the expedition correspond to the wisdom demonstrated by Louis' predecessor—Henri witnesses and approves of the actions of Louis XVI. Naturally, as a servant of the king embarking on a perilous voyage, La Pérouse leans forward in deference to his master, listening attentively to his words, following his finger along a map that shows the route he will follow on his return through the Indian Ocean. There is a sense of motion in this work; all the subjects appear to be moving. Monsiau's use of this quality makes sense for he is portraying the final meeting between explorer and sovereign before La Pérouse set off to Brest to oversee the preparation of his ships. The audience was likely one of great urgency: the last word on a journey that represented both remarkable opportunities for scientific progress and great danger.

Perhaps most striking is Monsiau's ability to depict each man in the room hanging on to the words of the king. Louis speaks in this scene as the authoritative voice on the expedition and the geographical region which it will traverse. Above the parquet floors of Versailles, La Pérouse listens not merely to his sovereign but to a man whose expertise is of true value in planning a voyage of exploration. The king speaks for himself, conveying his instructions with precise reference to a map of the world, as his minister supports him, but in the background. Louis XVI appears calm, less emotive than those who surround him, but passionate and engaged. Little wonder Monsiau shines the brightest light on Louis.

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213 Chéry, “Louis XVI Ou Le Nouvel Henri IV.”
214 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons., 191-192.
Oddly enough, La Pérouse's final meeting on the royal estate was not his session with the king but an audience two days later with the queen at the Petit Trianon.

Monsiau's work gives the impression of a sovereign deeply committed to an ambitious voyage of his own design and, by extension, to scientific progress, and the greatness of France. *Louis XVI Giving His Instructions to La Pérouse* is an appropriate title for this sober scene: in a single image, the artist is attempting to tell the narrative of a monarch who has conceived an ambitious voyage, prepared instructions, and personally delivered them to a sailor charged with carrying out his global design. As Dunmore wrote in synthesizing the expedition's conception, it was to be "a great voyage of exploration that Louis would have loved to lead, had he not been
the King of France."\textsuperscript{215} Though it might be simplistic to accept John Hardman's casual assertion that planning La Pérouse's expedition was a substitute for the lack of time Louis spent at sea, one should not disregard—as in the case of the American War or the Normandy Visit—Louis' interest in Britain and the sea in assessing the motivations behind the voyage. Louis' fascination with cartography, hydrography, intellectual exploration, and Captain Cook were well factored into the voyage's design.\textsuperscript{216}

This is hardly to say that Louis XVI initiated the concept of a global French expedition. In an excellent book on eighteenth-century European exploration of the Pacific, John Gascoigne discusses a series of voyages during the reign of Louis XV from Bougainville to Surville and Kerguelen, who failed to reach the Pacific and was promptly imprisoned upon his return to France after his second voyage for corruption and disregard of his instructions.\textsuperscript{217} As a teenage Dauphin, Louis XVI, who deeply admired his grandfather, likely appreciated his hand in these attempts to explore the Pacific.\textsuperscript{218} Yet, although Bougainville's successful circumnavigation of the globe (1766-69) used state funds and was planned in consultation with Versailles, it was not strictly speaking a "state-sponsored" voyage. Rather, Kerguelen's poorly planned attempts were the first efforts to explore the Pacific officially on behalf of a French sovereign. When Louis XVI came to power and achieved victory in America, his kingdom still had not made a significant contribution to European exploration of the Pacific. True to his Anglophilic character, Louis XVI was far more inspired, from an early age, by the writings of Captain Cook than any

\textsuperscript{215} Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 181.
\textsuperscript{216} Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 27.
\textsuperscript{217} Gascoigne, \textit{Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 263-64; Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 84.
\textsuperscript{218} Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 27.
Frenchmen who had sailed in Louis XV's time. As La Pérouse (1741-1788) wrote in a journal documenting his voyage, "more than anyone, the King appreciated the excellence, the talents and the great character of Captain Cook." Indeed, La Perousé's interest in exploration grew during the years he served as a naval officer based in the 'Isle de France' (modern-day Mauritius), sailing in close proximity to Bougainville and Kerguelen. Following the naval consensus, he came to see Kerguelen as a failure. When La Pérouse was selected to command a voyage after his achievements in the American War, he agreed with Versailles to model it on Captain Cook.

If it seems ironic that Louis XVI's appreciation for English politics contributed to his willingness to intervene in the American War and efforts to fortify Cherbourg, the same might be said of planning a French challenge to Captain Cook's example. Yet, great power competition is not the only lens through which we should understand the enormous undertaking of the La Pérouse expedition. The primary source best able to capture Louis XVI's intentions for the voyage, and therefore La Pérouse's task, are the instructions. Monsiau's painting dramatizes the king ostensibly his instructions orally. Both a written proposal for the voyage and specific instructions delivered to La Pérouse laying out a four-year plan for the voyage, including goals and expected conduct, were produced by Versailles. This document offers an excellent insight into Louis' intentions, not least because it was written in close consultation with the king, and a surviving copy bears marginal comments from his pen. In Dunmore's words, as the departure approached, "Louis XVI had commented on the overall programme, interested himself in the

219 Hardman, 18; 68; 227. He also enjoyed Robinson Crusoe, according to Hardman.
Gascoigne explains that parts of La Pérouse's journal, scientific reports, artifacts like plants and seeds, and even furs for Marie Antoinette were sent back to France from various ports like Macao. This explains the survival of writings edited into a journal account of the voyage.
221 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 66-68.
safety of his officers and men, and probably took a major role in drafting the instructions outlining to La Pérouse how he should behave towards native peoples." Although hardly every word of the proposal or instructions was drafted by Louis (he may have drafted large swaths), the document was written in his name and the presence of his comments on the text indicates his approval.

If we take the instructions to be the work of the king, they reflect his goals for the voyage and perhaps larger values of his reign. Firstly, the multitude of references to James Cook's legacy in these instructions stands out. The first words of the text read, "Captain Cook's voyages have made Europeans aware of vast countries, scattered islands and groups of islands, some discovered in olden times by the first navigators who entered the Great South Sea, but forgotten since the time of their first discovery; and others whose existence was not known."

The voyage was defined by its architects as a response to the momentous achievements of Cook. In a time when European powers dominated the Atlantic (barring areas in the South Seas) and were making sizable inroads in the Indian Ocean, the Pacific represented an unknown frontier. It was Cook's extensive voyages along the shores of the west coast of North America, Eastern Siberia, and the extreme south of the Pacific, that Louis XVI and La Pérouse most admired rather than the comparatively sparse efforts of Bougainville and Surville. Cook's *Voyages* were well-read in France, including by La Pérouse who was given a volume of the second voyage and,

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The original text, with handwritten comments, is available at the Bibliothèque Mazarine. In the above volume, Dunmore has reproduced and translated the source, transcribing Louis XVI's marginal notes as footnotes. Dunmore agrees that these instructions were "drawn up for King Louis XVI and approved by him." Except for instances in which the comments correct the instructions, we should take the document as a close reflection of the king's will.
perhaps most avidly, by the king.\footnote{Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 183.} One might suspect that Cook was admired, in addition to his exceptional findings, as a martyr for European progress. Yet, it was neither Cook himself nor his captivating writings that rendered his example enviable to recreate for Versailles and the Naval Ministry. Rather, there are two strands to Cook's legacy that resonated with Louis XVI and La Pérouse: the scientific and the political.

\textbf{The Pursuit of Knowledge Through Pacific Exploration}

The French enjoyed a certain latent advantage at the dawn of what John Gascoigne calls the "classic age of Pacific exploration" between the Seven Years' War and the Revolution of 1789, for, although Louis XV's forces had been defeated on land and the high seas, the strength of Paris' scientific institutions, like the Académie des Sciences, advanced the cause of studying the world's unknown ocean.\footnote{Gascoigne, \textit{Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment}, 181; 262; 272.} Gascoigne argues that "Bougainville's voyage was a response to the French loss of power in North America" while pointing out that Surville's voyage was launched under the auspices of the struggling Compagnie des Indes, and designed to find new trade routes.\footnote{Gascoigne, \textit{Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment}, 148.} There is a certain parallel, of course, between these voyages as responses to British triumph and Louis XVI's efforts to reassert French power in the American War and at Cherbourg. The British once again eclipsed their rivals by launching Captain Cook's three voyages: an enlightened achievement in the European consciousness for, rather than primarily building British hard power, it made an incomparably large leap in advancing the cause of science. Cook was admired not merely for his bravery or because he found new islands, as the opening words of La Pérouse's instructions mention, but because he advanced the pursuit of
knowledge. La Pérouse's voyage, like so many French actions in this era, was a response to a British triumph but, in this case, in the realm of scientific discovery.

French exploration had increasingly moved into the realm of scientific advancement in the two decades before La Pérouse set sail. Bougainville's voyage was noted for the data collected by Philibert Commerson, a botanist on board who had been "instrumental" in planning the route.227 A genus of flowering plants still bears the name Bougainvillea. Another contemporary French explorer, Marion du Fresne, was charged with the semi-scientific mission of finding the Great South Land: a myth based on the idea that a massive continent must exist in the Southern Hemisphere to balance the preponderance of land in the north. This was a mission with both cartographic and geopolitical dimensions. Gascoigne suggests that the race to discover land in the South Seas should be viewed within the context of the Anglo-French rivalry given the imperial and reputational stakes involved. Cook's work, however, became the idol of scientifically minded Europeans like Louis XVI for the incomparable progress it made in collecting specimens, studying the cultures of native peoples, and documenting the geographical features of unknown coasts along the Pacific Northwest and the myriad islands of the South Pacific. The natural specimens returned to Europe by Cook's ships far exceeded the contributions made by any European naturalists who had sailed before; the anthropological and linguistic observations, in the words of a contemporary, "have especially contributed to eradicate former errors, and to establish permanent truths in the history of man."228 The quality of the geographic knowledge obtained is best evidenced by the maps Cook and his men produced of previously

228 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 284-85.
little-known lands, which in some cases diverge little from the tracings produced today by satellite data.

A map of New Zealand produced by Cook and Isaac Smith in 1770, held by the British Library. 

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An extraordinarily accurate 1772 map of the Pacific, created by Sir Joseph Banks and David Solander after sailing on Cook's *Endeavor* voyage. Notice the absence of Hawaii which Cook would only discover in 1778 before being killed on the big island in February 1779.\textsuperscript{230}

Raleigh Ashlin Skelton, a British historian of cartography, noticed in a lecture on Cook for the Hakluyt Society that "his passion for exact information could not be satisfied unless he were able to describe a discovery, in words and charts, precisely enough to serve the needs of future navigators."\textsuperscript{231} La Pérouse would also exhibit an obsession with precision and replicability—central tenets of the scientific method. Cook's geographical findings, although sometimes proudly adjusted by a few leagues here and there by La Pérouse, represent the greatest step forward in understanding the Pacific of all explorers.\textsuperscript{232} In Skelton's words, "any subsequent navigator using his charts had no excuse for failing to find an island which Cook discovered... The element of scientific inquiry and research is greater in Cook's voyages than in any earlier expeditions."\textsuperscript{233}

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\textsuperscript{232} La Pérouse, *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788*.

\textsuperscript{233} Skelton, *Captain James Cook--after Two Hundred Years: A Commemorative Address Delivered before the Hakluyt Society*, 26; 28.
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Louis XVI's instructions for La Pérouse

A close look at La Pérouse's instructions suggests that we should perhaps not look at the voyage's design as an innovative scientific effort in its own right but as a complement to the enormous leaps made by Cook. This hardly means that La Pérouse's effort should be seen as a minor project. By all indications, La Pérouse's expedition was far better provisioned than Bougainville's, and even Cook's. In Gascoigne's words, "when the La Pérouse expedition was mounted [...] no expense was spared in providing an appropriate French response to the voyages of Cook." Where many of Cook's men were expected to both sail and collect scientific data

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235 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 264-65.
(indeed, Cook was likely picked for the *Endeavor* voyage, in part, because of his astrological abilities), La Pérouse's ships were filled with experts including physicists, naturalists, astronomers, biologists, geographers, artists for cartography and visualizing observations, well materially equipped by the king. In reality, as La Pérouse's journal reveals, the scientists were often remarkably bored while cooped up during months of sailing and all too brief visits to land. Nevertheless, scientific discovery was certainly the primary objective of the voyage. John Dunmore writes that Castries initially presented Louis XVI with a proposal to conduct a trading voyage primarily transporting furs from the Northwest coast of America to the hitherto closed-off Chinese market. The king refused categorically; his ships would not sail merely for commercial purposes. Rather, the voyage would advance scientific inquiry, principally Louis' own interests in geography and cartography.

An earlier French campaigner for a Pacific voyage, Bouvet de Lozier, argued in 1767 that "such a quest [...] would confer glory on France and particularly its monarch as a patron of 'the progress of the sciences.'" Much the same might have been said of Louis XVI's patronage of La Pérouse. It was a moment of glory for Versailles, in much the way a land war might have been for Louis XIV.

Captain Cook's influence and the enlightenment ideas are important not merely as impetuses to scientific inquiry but for the nature of the main scientific goal of the voyage: the completion of a map of the globe. On the first page of the instructions, immediately after heralding the achievements of Cook, the drafters introduce this objective while continuing to pay homage to the great leap forward made by that man:

> But although this voyager [Cook], famous for all time, has greatly increased our geographical knowledge; although the globe he travelled through in every direction

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238 Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 262-63. These pages present Gascoigne's synthesis of de Lozier's argument.
where seas of ice did not halt his progress, is known well enough for us to be sure that no
continent exists where Europeans have not landed; we still lack a full knowledge of
the earth and particularly of the Northwest coast of America, of the coast of Asia which
faces it, and of islands that must lie scattered in the seas separating those two continents...
Consequently, a great deal remains to be done by a nation that is prepared to undertake
the completion of the description of the globe.239

Louis XVI's France, through La Pérouse, was "prepared to undertake" that task. Such was the
fundamental glory of the voyage in Versailles' view. The instructions go on to say of the effort to
understand the globe, "until now, they [the French] have only done a small share."240 Louis XVI
would change this. La Pérouse and his team were not tasked with attempting to refute the
scientific progress made by Cook in some Anglo-French zero-sum intellectual game. The
knowledge obtained by Cook was to be celebrated, rather than disputed, for he achieved things
like definitively disproving the existence of the Great South Land which had perturbed Surville,
Bouvet de Lozier, du Fresne, Kerguelen, and other French explorers.241 Interest in "mastering
knowledge of the globe as a whole," as Gascoigne writes, was an "enlightenment-tinged
curiosity" going back at least to the beginning of this "classic age of Pacific exploration" with
Bougainville.242 Yet, it was only Cook by the sheer amount of ocean he traversed across three
daring voyages and with excellent cartographical and astronomical skill, who made the lofty goal
of 'mastering knowledge of the globe' realistic. In practical terms, as the above passage indicates,
Cook was the first to explore and map the Northwest coast of America in sufficient detail to
begin to understand the region (even existing Russian maps were inadequate), and to declare
with certainty that North America and Asia were not connected by land.243 As the above map
depicting the routes of Cook's three voyages shows, however, hardly all points of interest could

240 S.N, Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cxi.
241 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 153-56.
242 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 157.
243 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 140-41.
be reached. In Louis and his naval ministers' conception, therefore, it fell to La Pérouse to fill in the gaps, so to speak. James Cook wrote in the diary of his second voyage as his ships approached the Antarctic ice, "ambition leads me not only farther than any other man has been before me, but as far as I think it possible for man to go." Louis XVI's instructions reflect an ambition to match Cook, exploring the coastlines and areas the three British voyages missed.

Calling for scientific diligence exceeding even Cook's, the instructions repeatedly ask La Pérouse to preside over the collection of data with a bias towards places not reached by his English predecessor. They direct La Pérouse, for instance, to sail along the south and east coast of "Sandwich Land" [one of the South Sandwich Islands] because Cook examined the west coast, and to head for the southern coast of South Georgia for the same reason. On either side of the northern Pacific, "[La Pérouse] will concentrate on exploring areas that were not seen by Captain Cook, and about which the accounts of Russian and Spanish navigators provide no information." Approaching Korea and Japan was similarly important for "Europeans have absolutely no knowledge of any of these coastlines." Moreover, La Pérouse should use his precise instruments to determine the exact coordinates of Pitcairn Island for that piece of information can establish the locations of all islands discovered by Carteret, an English predecessor of Cook.

Beyond the instructions' interest in "perfecting the science of navigation," the document takes a similar tone in describing the conduct of natural science research and other qualitative pursuits. La Pérouse was charged with the duty to ensure that everything from the collection of

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soil, plants, anthropological artifacts like "clothes, weapons, ornaments, furniture, tools, musical instruments," to sketches of coasts and reefs, and observations of cultures and languages should be conducted with the utmost precision and as prolifically as possible. A major objective of the expedition was to maximize the output of the scientists specifically physicists and naturalists on board: "In allocating tasks, he will be careful to avoid duplications, so that each scientist's enthusiasm and knowledge may fully contribute to the overall success of the expedition."

This might seem like a logical goal but it should be recognized that defining the production of knowledge as an indicator of the "overall success of the voyage," rather than merely surviving and discovering new land, represents a dramatic step forward. The act of bringing specimens back to France and making detailed maps indicates a conception of knowledge shrinking the world. That Louis XVI, sitting in a palace in the center of France, could draw up ambitious instructions for an expedition to be undertaken to the far reaches of the globe and expect a reasonable chance of physical objects being returned to his hands says something, not merely about the power of a King of France, but about the optimism of enlightenment thought.

Lastly on matters of science, we should acknowledge the instructions' interest in the health of the expedition's crew. When La Pérouse had expelled English traders from Hudson Bay during the American War in 1782, the harsh conditions claimed the lives of some 85 of his sailors and rendered another 500 ill. Foremost among the dangers was scurvy. Louis XVI, ever the humanitarian, was determined that a voyage undertaken in his name should not lead to avoidable human suffering. Above even the objective of scientific advancement, the voyage's raison d'être, "His Majesty would consider it one of the greatest accomplishments of the

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252 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 158.
expedition if it could be concluded without a single man losing his life." This was an unrealistic expectation in the eighteenth century— in hindsight, we know all crew members except those who departed the voyage early would die—yet this comment reflects an admirable aspiration. Hardly surprisingly, to minimize illness on board La Pérouse looked to Captain Cook's example. The instructions call for La Pérouse to use his knowledge in preventing the outbreak of sickness, but specifically recommend the acquisition of fresh products at every possible stage, the enforcement of rigorous hygiene on board, changing clothing, ventilation, and superficial measures like the diffusion of perfumes under deck. La Pérouse describes heeding these instructions throughout his journal, for example, making the counterintuitive move of leaving behind food when departing Brest to maximize space for goods tradeable for fresh supplies. La Pérouse would later take intelligent steps to avoid scurvy like acquiring 500 oranges and other fresh goods in Brazil. It appears that many of these steps came from the example of Cook and English scientific experts on the disease. Dunmore writes, for example, that an agent of the French naval ministry in London was charged with reporting on "James Cook's efforts to keep scurvy at bay" and, alongside volumes of Cook's writings, delivered two English books on preventing and treating scurvy. Although Gascoigne characterizes Cook's (ultimately successful) efforts to mitigate scurvy as "scattershot" compared to Dr. James Lind's scientific work (one of the volumes delivered to La Pérouse) it seems plain that Cook's attention to the problem inspired La Pérouse.

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256 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 183.
257 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 251.
The Northwest Passage, Trade, and European Relations

Now we must turn from the scientific elements of La Pérouse's voyage, the details of which might fill endless pages thanks to the surviving writings of some of the expedition's researchers, to commerce. Although Louis, as previously mentioned, rejected trade as a primary pursuit for the king's ships, his instructions hardly downplay the potential for the voyage to advance French economic interests. Oftentimes the scientific and commercial were bound together. This is certainly the case in the king's direction to search for the Northwest Passage. Another objective inherited from Cook's third voyage, the Northwest Passage was the idea that the Atlantic and Pacific must be connected through an aquatic Passage across North America. A "chimera" to borrow Gascoigne's term, the Passage was (and continues to be in the 21st century due to melting ice) of interest to Europeans for its potential to dramatically shorten the distance between Europe and Asia—allowing ships to avoid the arduous journey around Cape Horn.\textsuperscript{258} In the French tradition, the search for the Northwest Passage went back at least to Jacques Cartier sailing under the orders of Francis I. Cartier, sailing down the St. Lawrence in search of Asia I in 1534, famously named an impassable stretch of the river just beyond modern-day Montreal the Rapides de Lachine.\textsuperscript{259} At the turn of the seventeenth century, the English explorer Henry Hudson died while also searching for the Passage from the Atlantic side, through the eponymous Hudson Bay.\textsuperscript{260}

La Pérouse's instructions make only subtle references to the Northwest Passage, likely reflecting Cook's belief that it did not exist.\textsuperscript{261} Yet, the writers of the voyage's initial proposal

\textsuperscript{258} Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 140; 300.
"The Rapids of China." Cartier apparently believed that he was nearing Asia.
\textsuperscript{260} Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 133.
\textsuperscript{261} Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 320; 323.
acknowledged that Cook was unable to explore vast swaths of the Northwest coast and held out some hope that their sailor might be able to find a waterway "which might possibly communicate with Hudson Bay through lakes and rivers." La Pérouse, of course, was familiar with the Hudson Bay; Dunmore even suggests that beyond the military dimension, his wartime raid on the bay was designed in part to obtain knowledge that might be used to find the Passage. The king seems to have been greatly enthused by the proposal reference to searching for the Passage, commenting in the margins "This is the area that must be more carefully explored" and, after the directions mention sailing to the Northern Strait, "Or at least up to the tip of the Alaskan peninsula." The king's enthusiasm for the Passage in his marginal comments on the proposal likely inspired the more explicit direction found in the instructions: "He will investigate with the greatest care whether, in parts that are not yet known, there might not exist some river, or some narrow gulf, that communicate with some part of Hudson Bay by way of the interior lakes."

The instructions also mention another kind of transcontinental connection: the prospect of trade and communication links between natives in the center of Canada and the Pacific Northwest coast. In this direction, it becomes evident that the Northwest Passage was both an object of intellectual fascination and commercial interest; an opportunity for geographical discovery and economic exploitation. Finding a Northwest passage would be both a triumph in the enlightenment pursuit to fully understand the globe's geography and of material advantage to a French nation that had lost its massive territorial possessions in Canada through the Treaty of Paris (1763). Louis XVI, either in person or through his annotations to the instructions cited

263 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 133-34; 150.
266 S.N., “Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cxxxviii.
above, effectively stressed the importance of looking for the Northwest Passage for La Pérouse's journal implies that the obligation to do so was often on his mind. Yet, this hardly means that La Pérouse was enthusiastic about the search. Ever the disciple of Cook, the tone of La Pérouse's reflections during his summer 1786 exploration of the Alaskan coast suggests that he considered the mythical Passage a nuisance as he sailed along foggy shores with endless inlet, particularly after 21 of his men, including his young cousin, were drowned after their small boats capsized while exploring a Lituya Bay in Alaska.  

Beyond the Passage, other elements of La Pérouse's visit to the Northwest coast of America sat at the intersection of science and commerce. Like all destinations, the Northwest coast was a place to be explored scientifically; Versailles awaited sketches of the shores, depth readings of the natural harbors, knowledge of the inhabitants, any indication of a Northwest Passage, and much more. Yet, these shores were also of interest for economic reasons. One should never forget the desperate state of royal finances in the years between the victory in America and the Revolution. The voyage's proposal claims that it would hardly be a hit to the deficit: "the cost of this expedition will not exceed 637 thousand livres, spread over three years"—or only 0.13% of the 472 million livres collected by the state in 1785. The instructions also indicate, however, that the establishment of a fur trade from Alaska to China would represent a welcomed source of funding for the voyage, and if promising on a larger scale, for the government. 1785 and 1786 were arguably expansionist years in Versailles' efforts to repair royal finances; In 1785, the Compagnie des Indes was reconstituted and in early 1786  

negotiations for a free trade agreement with Britain began.\textsuperscript{269} La Pérouse's visit to the Northwest coast might be seen as part of this larger effort to expand the crown's foreign revenue base. The instructions outline a scheme for La Pérouse to purchase furs wherever possible in modern-day Canada and Alaska, and to sell them in China and possibly Japan, vibrant markets with little use for most European goods but strong demand for fur. La Pérouse was to test out this business model and determine "what benefits France can expect from this new branch of commerce."\textsuperscript{270} The instructions call for La Pérouse to bring samples of furs back to France but not in commercial quantities; selling to Asian markets rather than in France would presumably have the advantage of not worsening the kingdom's trade balance. Within the proposal is a brief analysis of which parties should take on this new trade if successful: "private individuals, operating under the protection of Your Majesty's ships" or the Compagnie des Indes.\textsuperscript{271} The terms of this new trade would be decided in the best interests of the French economy. Louis XVI, however, in a marginal note at the end of the instructions, makes it clear that he saw the aims of the voyage as divided between trade and exploration. The Pacific Northwest was key to both aims: "As for the exploration part, the main points are the N.W. coast of America, which fits in with the commercial part."\textsuperscript{272} In analyzing the objectives of the voyage, rarely can commerce and science be separated.

Economic pursuits were hardly limited to the relatively desolate corner of Northwest America. Many commercial prospects are raised by the instructions but explained in little detail—suggesting, perhaps, an intention to leave La Pérouse with the freedom to decide which industries might be viable for France in the future. The instructions mention a myriad of

\textsuperscript{270} S.N., “Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cxxxviii.
\textsuperscript{271} S.N., “Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cxii.
\textsuperscript{272} S.N., “Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cl.
prospects from whaling in the Southern Atlantic to purchasing teas, silks, and other goods from the famously impenetrable Japanese market. Some ideas are explained only in the vaguest terms: "opportunities for trade" in Peru; "products associated with countries located in the same latitudes" in New Holland [Australia]; "different products of the various islands of this ocean where he affects a landing." A common refrain of the economic section of the instructions is the task of surveying the commercial activities of rival European settlements, particularly British and Portuguese. Here, the economic and political intersect. Just as the scientific and commercial are often inseparable, commercial and geopolitical considerations coexisted in Versailles' conception of La Pérouse's voyage. The expedition was at once both an imperial exercise and remarkably non-aggressive. Many elements of the planning have imperial undertones. Scientists were instructed, "to send back word of any useful products either for trade or cultivation in the French Empire." On the political side, the instruction to effectively spy on rivals’ settlements has an air of great-power competition to it. A letter from Castries instructing La Pérouse to alter the plan and sail immediately for Botany Bay reached the captain at a Siberian port in 1787. Versailles had received word that the English were constructing a settlement in New South Wales and naturally the king's government wanted a first-hand report. In Dunmore's words, "the political aims of the voyage, never paramount, never obtrusive, were always to be borne in mind." La Pérouse was not to challenge the British in Australia but, as usual, to observe.

273 S.N., “Plan, Instructions, Memoirs”, cxxxv; cxxxix.
275 Gascoigne, Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment, 265.
The approximate course followed by La Pérouse's vessels in the Pacific.  

It is perhaps most accurate to think of the La Pérouse voyage as an example of friendly Franco-British competition. Just as John Hardman begins his discussion of Louis XVI's intervention in the American War with a correspondence between Versailles and a semi-official French agent in London (Beaumarchais), John Dunmore views the origins of the La Pérouse expedition as an idea of William Bolt's: an employee of the French Embassy in London and former agent of the East India Company.  

Although Versailles attempted to limit the flow of information about the voyage to London during the months of planning, the British were soon

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278 Hardman and Price, "France and the American War", 49; Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 180-81.
well-informed about the expedition in no small part because a servant of the naval ministry was
sent to London to collect information and useful materials. The British were, if anything,
cooperative. Sir Joseph Banks, a naturalist on Cook's first voyage, lent the French a dripping
needle that had once been used by La Pérouse's hero. The latter's journal indicates that it was
greatly appreciated. The British respected La Pérouse for his humane treatment of British
prisoners following his triumph on Hudson Bay in the American War and did nothing to hinder
the voyage's preparations. London understood his upcoming mission to be a French expedition
in homage to Captain Cook. It was designed by an Anglophilic king to supplement Cook's work
and to advance the cause of knowledge; in Louis' conception, France was increasing its "share"
of the burden of exploring the Pacific. When the British ambassador to France, Lord Dorset,
erroneously informed the Foreign Secretary, just before the expedition's departure, that La
Pérouse was transporting 60 criminals to New Zealand to colonize the land for France, the
Foreign Office ignored him. George III's government had sufficient respect for La Pérouse, his
mission, and Louis XVI, to disregard Francophobic misinformation.

However friendly, La Pérouse's voyage was still an act of French great-power
competition. On the most basic level, in launching the expedition Versailles was showing the
British that they could undertake a project on the scale of Cook's, create new trade routes, and
keep an eye on fledgling British possessions like Botany Bay. As previously quoted, Gascoigne
views Bougainville's voyage as a response to British triumph in the Seven Years' War. We must
understand La Pérouse's voyage within the context of Louis XVI's long-running effort to reassert
French power on the high seas. Even on the other side of the globe, La Pérouse was instructed to

279 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 183-84.
280 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 184.
282 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 191.
act within the framework of the European alliance structure. Asked to spy on the British and their Dutch and Portuguese allies, his directions require him to uphold the Pacte de Famille:

If, while exploring the Northwest coast of America, he should on points of this coast come upon forts or factories belonging to His Catholic [Spanish] Majesty, he will take good care to avoid anything that might cause umbrage to the commanders or heads of these settlements; but he will stress the links of blood and friendship that unite the two sovereign [sic] so closely, in order to obtain in this manner all the assistance and refreshments he might need and which the country can supply.283

This instruction corresponds closely to Versailles' tone in dealing with Madrid during the earlier American War. While the interests of France and Spain might diverge, neither power should do anything to offend the other; rather the mighty Bourbon kingdoms should work together. In Louis' view, the Pacte de Famille existed to share resources in times of need and act on individual interests. From a modern perspective, it seems absurd that, on an expedition thousands of (i.e. months of sailing) miles from Europe, the careful balance of continental court politics should matter. Indeed, La Pérouse wrote upon encountering the British in Botany Bay that "Europeans are all compatriots at such a great distance."284 Despite this generous sentiment, we should neither lose sight of the fact that La Pérouse was formed as a young man through his experiences in the Seven Years' War and made his name in the navy during the American War, nor the purpose of his stop at Botany Bay. Charles Pierre de Fleurieu, former naval minister during La Pérouse's voyage and a key architect of the expedition, wrote of the English in 1797 while reflecting on his pre-revolutionary service in government: "perfidious Albion... trade is all in all [for Britain]; and this too is the god to which...she will sacrifice everything, even her very friends and allies... and the four quarters of the earth are scarcely adequate to her cupidity and

ambition."\textsuperscript{285} Giving some allowing for the resumption of hostilities between Britain and France in 1792 to have embittered Fleurieu's opinion somewhat, his words echo sentiments perhaps more expected of the American War period than La Pérouse's moment of friendly Anglo-British competition.

**Imperialism and Native Peoples**

Beyond European great-power politics, La Pérouse's expedition also maintained a careful balance between imperial and anti-imperial relations with native peoples. Remarkably, the instructions do not mention the prospect of colonizing foreign lands. Unlike La Pérouse's French Pacific predecessors who theoretically claimed territories by burying bottles declaring the sovereignty of Louis XV, La Pérouse rejected this practice. Arriving on Maui, La Pérouse thought himself to be the first European to have set foot on the island. Nothing was stopping him from claiming the island in the name of his sovereign, but this was not the course he chose:

> I did not take possession of it in the King's name. This European practice is too utterly ridiculous, and philosophers must reflect with some sadness that, because one has muskets and canons [sic], one looks upon 60000 inhabitants as worth nothing, ignoring their rights over a land where for centuries their ancestors have been buried, which they have watered with their sweat, and whose fruits they pick to bring them as offerings to the so-called new landlords. It is fortunate that they have been discovered in an age where religion is no longer a pretext for violence and greed. Modern navigators have no other purpose when they describe the customs of newly discovered people than to complete the story of mankind.\textsuperscript{286}

This statement reflects La Pérouse's belief that some change had taken place in the world rendering exploration a pursuit of knowledge and not new territory. One must bear in mind that in dismissing religion or physical force as a reason to conquer a territory, La Pérouse claims to be speaking for a generation of European explorers when he is really speaking for himself. The enlightened French state La Pérouse represents on Maui presided over a reprehensible system of

\textsuperscript{285} Cited in Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 336.

\textsuperscript{286} *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788*, 88.
plattation slavery, most notably on Saint Domingue. Yet, the implication that La Pérouse expected this explanation to go over well in Versailles demonstrates that he understood Louis XVI's regime to be the embodiment of a new set of enlightened European values. Where navigators of the past engaged in the "ridiculous" practice of claiming territory in the king's name, La Pérouse sails in search of knowledge and therefore for the benefit of mankind. La Pérouse's disposition towards native peoples appears to have been faithful to the king's wishes. The instructions explicitly state that La Pérouse and his men must not use any force unless absolutely necessary: "On every occasion, Mr. de La Pérouse shall behave with the utmost gentleness and humanity towards the various peoples he will visit during his voyage."\(^{287}\) In practice, La Pérouse's journal suggests that he heeded this direction, going above and beyond to diffuse a potentially volatile situation on Easter Island by promising to replace his sailors' hats after they were stolen by indigenous peoples.\(^{288}\) We should remember the audience this anecdote was written for—La Pérouse was certainly keen to demonstrate his paternalistic yet beneficent treatment of native peoples to the king. In so doing, La Pérouse affirmed his respect for a central goal of the expedition. Just as the instructions reflect an aspiration to preserve the life of all Frenchmen, so the same for native peoples: "when the French call, far from it proving to be a misfortune for these [native] people, it should, on the contrary, provide them with advantages they lack."\(^{289}\) This ambition belies the fact that in trying to envision an altruistic policy for La Pérouse's treatment of native peoples, Versailles was (perhaps unwittingly) perpetuating an imperial project.

\(^{288}\) The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788, 60.
At once, Louis XVI and La Pérouse expressed charitable and imperialist views of the natives. Departing Easter Island unannounced in the night, La Pérouse expressed his disappointment in the natives after a series of thefts: "I flattered myself with the thought that when they no longer saw us at dawn they would ascribe our prompt departure to the understandable displeasure we should have felt at their behavior, and that possibly this thought might make them better people." It hardly seems controversial that La Pérouse's passive-aggressive response here reflects a paternalistic attitude towards the natives of Easter Island. Again, that he went to the trouble to explain this anecdote suggests he expected the king to approve of his action. One might infer, therefore, that Louis XVI was a believer in Rousseau's theory of the "Noble Savage." Rousseau's influential concept turned on its head the idea of civilization as human progress. Rather, the trappings and pressures of modern European life suppressed the happiness of man. Thus, the natives encountered by explorers like La Pérouse were at once less advanced and to be envied. La Pérouse firmly rejected this concept, reviling theorists who had never encountered the native peoples they idolized.

The question of Louis XVI's belief in the "Noble Savage" concept and its bearing on his instructions remains to be determined. On the surface, it appears that his directions espouse a Rousseauian conception of indigenous people for, while referring to diverse groups as "savages," they require La Pérouse to leave people in a state of security and tranquility. Yet, if Louis XVI's rhetoric on native peoples is consistent with Rousseau's views, his directions certainly are not. The instructions call for a form of agricultural imperialism to bring to life Louis' aspiration that native peoples will be thankful for the French. Just as the expedition's naturalists were to bring

290 The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 69.
foreign specimens to France, La Pérouse was instructed to leave behind European animals and plants for the betterment of native societies. Not only would European specimens be useful to native peoples, but they might, as the voyage proposal indicates, facilitate future European visits.

A note on a series of islands in the South Pacific tells La Pérouse to "provide these islands with European articles useful to their inhabitants, and sow seed, plant trees, vegetables which could in time offer new resources to European navigators crossing this ocean." In a text which makes a point of avoiding a direct call to claim territory, this direction sticks out as a preemptive measure for future colonizing of foreign lands. True to the voyage's mission, it uses scientific exchange as an inroad to grander French projects in the future.

The Realities of the Voyage

This chapter has privileged the theory of the voyage rather than the practice for the plans are a better representation of the will of the king than what actually happened on an open ocean. Yet a further word must be said about the execution of the voyage not only because La Pérouse's expedition is significant in its own right but because, as he continually wrote in his journal, La Pérouse understood himself to be acting in the king's name. By all indications, La Pérouse's voyage was enormously successful. Rounding Cape Horn "with much greater ease than I would have ever dreamt" in January 1786, La Pérouse had entered the Pacific ahead of schedule and, instead of spending his first summer exploring the South Pacific, decided to accelerate his timetable, making fruitful stops in modern-day Chile, Hawaii, Alaska, and the west coast of Canada and America in that year. La Pérouse explained his route deviation and discussed his summertime Alaskan campaign in a letter to Castries from Monterey, California in September.

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1786: "My lord... as I follow in every particular the King’s orders in respect of the various places I am to visit and survey, I have felt it necessary to make use of the latitude given me of altering the plan of instructions and begin by the northwest coast of America." La Pérouse, therefore, in writing to Versailles felt confident defending his decision to deviate from his exact planned route but not the objectives and values of the mission.

From California, the Astrolabe and Boussole made a course for Macao, stopping at various Pacific Islands on the way including the Mariana Islands and Tahiti. The ships and crew were to enjoy a brief winter break in this relatively worldly port—in reality, La Pérouse and his men seem to have disliked this strange Chinese-Portuguese city and were disappointed to find that no mail had arrived from France. When the crew attempted to sell their furs acquired in the Northwest of America, a Portuguese merchant tried to swindle the crew by dropping the agreed-upon price just as La Pérouse's ships prepared to depart (the French refused to unload the furs). La Pérouse departed for the Philippines on February 5th, 1787.

The information collected on these Asian stops is not so much scientific in focus, and instead reflects the captain’s effort to observe European trading projects in the Indies. La Pérouse wrote about Macao with some French pride of how "every day the Chinese subject them [the Portuguese] to new insults... the Portuguese government has never put up the least resistance." He also cleverly furthers his ridicule of Europeans who romanticize societies that they have never visited. Usually, La Pérouse targets proponents of the "Noble Savage" theory but, in this case, he makes a parallel critique about admirers of the Chinese: "these people whose laws are so much praised in Europe, are perhaps the unhappiest, the most harassed and the most arbitrarily

297 La Pérouse, The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788, 221.
La Pérouse's contempt for these vague intellectual theories would only multiply months later when a dozen of his crew, including the Captain of the Boussole, were massacred by a group of 1000 natives on the island of Tutuila (in modern-day American Samoa) when trying to harvest drinking water. La Pérouse, reflecting the king's wishes, refused to retaliate, and diverted his rage instead against proponents of the "Noble Savage" theory. Writing to Fleurieu from Australia, in a tone naturally less formal than his letter to Castrics, he recounts the tragedy in a letter expressing his exacerbation at this trying moment in the expedition:

I am a hundred times more angry against the philosophers who praise them [the Noble Savages] than against the savages themselves. Lamanon, whom they murdered, was telling me the day before he died, that these men were worth more than us. A rigid follower of the King's instructions, I have always behaved towards them with the utmost moderation; but I would not undertake another campaign of this kind without asking for different orders, and a navigator leaving Europe must consider them enemies... I still have some very interesting things to do, and ill-natured people to visit: I cannot guarantee that I will not fire a few guns at them, because I am quite convinced that only fear can put a stop to their evil intentions."

Despite La Pérouse's manifest anger here, this comment serves as a further example of him scrupulously carrying out his mission of observing and reporting back to Europe. La Pérouse understood that ministers, the king, and future explorers would read this letter. In a sense, he is reporting back to his sovereign and sea-faring successors that, in his educated opinion, Rousseauian conceptions of how to deal with native populations are dangerous. While La Pérouse intends to remain faithful to the king's express wishes even while dealing with volatile
situations (one should not discount his threat to use force if necessary, as his instructions technically allowed) on the other side of the planet, he gently urges Louis—a man ever curious to hear tales of exploration—to adjust his preconceptions about native populations. In fact, gaining a greater understanding of these regions and peoples is exactly what La Pérouse was sent by Louis XVI to do. Despite his admirable aim that no man die during the expedition, Louis XVI surely understood the risks that he was exposing La Pérouse's crew to. Despite the gradual realization in France after 1788 that something must have gone horribly wrong for La Pérouse, the king was likely glad to find that surviving accounts of the voyage contain no evidence that any native peoples were harmed due to his expedition.

An image depicting the massacre of Fleuriot de Langle and 11 others on Tutuila, published in an 1846 history of French navigators.300

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Before meeting disaster in the South Pacific in December 1787—the second tragedy of the voyage following the Lituya Bay drownings in Alaska—La Pérouse visited the Philippines, perused the unwelcoming shores of Japan and Korea, before arriving in Siberia, just across the Bering Strait from the Alaskan coast he and his men had explored the summer prior. The ships surveyed Sakhalin, confirming its status as an island and mapping it.\textsuperscript{301} Arriving in the port of Petropavlovsk, the crew was again disappointed to find no mail from France although admirers of Captain Cook surely took some pleasure in encountering an unfortunate Russian exile named Pieter Matteios who is mentioned in writings from Cook's third voyage. The crew also entertained locals with anecdotes about their town from the account of Cook's third voyage.\textsuperscript{302} With dramatic timing, just as La Pérouse and his officers were enjoying the unusual honor of a Siberian ball, a courier entered the party delivering mail from home.\textsuperscript{303} "We all had happy news, but I more especially, being promoted to commodore, being favored to an extent I dared not hope for," La Pérouse wrote of this unexpected mail.\textsuperscript{304} La Pérouse also received a letter from Castries ordering him to alter plans and sail due south to examine the new British settlement at Botany Bay. Before departing Siberia, La Perouse took the extraordinary step of dispatching the son of a former French ambassador to Saint Petersburg—"Mr. Lesseps, our young Russian interpreter who was no longer of value to our expedition since we were about to sail into the southern hemisphere"—to undertake a perilous voyage as a safe means of delivering his journal and other dispatches to St. Petersburg and then onwards to France. A year and ten days later, Lesseps stood before Louis XVI in Versailles after an arduous journey across the length of the Eurasian

\textsuperscript{301} Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 228.
\textsuperscript{303} La Pérouse, \textit{The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788}, 355-50; Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 233.
\textsuperscript{304} La Pérouse, \textit{The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788}, 357.
landmass at which point, although neither man knew it, the king's expedition had already ended in disaster.\textsuperscript{305}

The journey of the Astrolabe and Boussole across some 87 degrees of latitude from the Kamchatka Peninsula to Botany Bay was naturally an arduous one, aggravated by the massacre in Tutuila and a mild onset of scurvy. The scientists, now two years on from departing Brest, were naturally restless with little to do during months at sea and tired of "their endless card games."\textsuperscript{306} The expedition finally arrived in New South Wales in January 1788. The crew's weeks in Australia are significant for two reasons. Firstly, it was a moment in which La Pérouse and his men, representatives of the King of France, came face-to-face with men charged with expanding the British empire. By all indications, the French generally got along very well with the Britons. "Europeans are all compatriots at such a great distance," La Pérouse wrote, reflecting his desire to meet Englishmen as his ships approached Botany Bay.\textsuperscript{307} La Pérouse thought little of Botany Bay's prospects as a location for settlement and watched as the British moved their convict colony to Port Jackson (the heart of modern-day Sydney)—a harbor fittingly originally sited by Captain Cook.\textsuperscript{308}

La Pérouse was sent to Australia to report on the British development on this new continent. Surviving British accounts, including the last pages of La Pérouse's journal and Commodore's own reports, suggest that Arthur Philip, the governor of New South Wales welcomed La Pérouse.\textsuperscript{309} There were naturally points of tension between the British and French. One issue was how La Pérouse should deal with runaway convicts attempting to gain refugee on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item La Pérouse, \textit{The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788}; Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}.
  \item Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 244-46.
  \item La Pérouse, \textit{The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788}, 447.
  \item Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 246-47.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
his ships. Dunmore writes that La Pérouse returned any English deserters who reached his ships to Philip to be flogged, although in a footnote he suggests that one man supposedly named "Peter (Pierre) Paris," who may have claimed to be a wrongly imprisoned Frenchman, was likely taken in by La Pérouse's crew.310

A potentially much larger issue was relations between the British and French on a new continent, ripe for either power to settle. When La Pérouse's ships first arrived at Botany Bay, they encountered an English ship with a crew that, although decorous, had little desire to help the French and apparently attempted to conceal the move from Botany Bay to Port Jackson. Dunmore clarifies in a footnote that this anecdote is often misunderstood for, having itself just arrived on the long journey from England, "the King of England's frigate Sirius" had little to offer the French in terms of material aid. Moreover, if these sailors were wary of offering the French information, their instincts were correct given the nature of La Pérouse's visit to New South Wales.311 Yet, a review of the surviving correspondence from La Pérouse to Castries and Fleurieu suggests that, although some maps were produced by the cartographers, La Pérouse was in no fit state to conduct an efficient reconnaissance mission. In his dispatches to Versailles, parts of which have been cited above, La Pérouse stresses his plans to modify his route and

310 La Pérouse, The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de La Pérouse, 1785-1788, 448; Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 247.
The last words of La Pérouse's journal read, "Later we had only too many opportunities of obtaining news of the English establishment whose deserters caused us a great deal of trouble and inconvenience as we will explain in the next chapter." The true nature of the relationship between La Pérouse's men and English "deserters" is but another story lost in the shipwreck.
La Pérouse's phrase "the King of England's frigate Sirius" is interesting for it sells to Louis XVI the technically accurate narrative of the French and English kings as owners of their fleets, competing on the high seas. In reading his journal, we should not forget that La Pérouse wrote expecting his words to be read by the king and the public. He makes this clear in the letter to Fleurieu: "Do your utmost, my dear friend, to get hold of this journal, because I can foresee that the King and even the Maréchal de Castries will only have time to read extracts from it selected by you; I also beg you to correct the error of style &c &c [sic] and to make it worthy of the public should the Court order it to be printed" (540). La Pérouse evidently did not know the king very well. Louis XVI was certain to read every word La Pérouse returned to Europe.
return to France as soon as possible more than providing useful information on the British colony. These letters reflect a burning desire to explain the massacre in Tutuila and the greater emotional toll that the last months had taken. As he wrote to a friend from Australia, "Whatever professional advantages this expedition may have brought me, you can be certain that few would want them at such cost, and the fatigues of such a voyage cannot be put into words... Farewell until June 1789. Tell your wife she will mistake me for my own grandfather."\(^{312}\) It is impossible to say if future installments in his journal would have included significant detail on Australia for they did not survive. This is the second reason why La Pérouse's time in Australia is so significant. From New South Wales, an English Lieutenant John Shortland returned the last writings of La Pérouse and the men on board his ships.\(^{313}\)

**Conclusion**

Raleigh Ashlin Skelton said at the end of his *Commemorative Address* on Captain Cook, "Take ten years from Cook's life, and how much poorer the world would have been!"\(^{314}\) Well, give ten years to La Pérouse's life and how much richer might the world have been! It is perhaps fitting that La Pérouse met his fate on Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands, mere miles away from the island of Tanna where Cook explored in 1774.\(^{315}\) La Pérouse, it seems, although keen to return to France, was following his instructions, as usual, to sail through the same seas as Captain Cook but explore different islands and coasts wherever possible. Despite extensive

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\(^{312}\) Cited in Dunmore, *Where Fate Beckons*, 248.

\(^{313}\) Dunmore, *Where Fate Beckons*, 247.

The next chapter of his journal would likely have included some significant detail on Australia. It is not uncommon for La Pérouse to spread his discription of a place over two chapters. As written in the footnote above, the last surviving words of journal suggest that more information about New South Wales (specifically on runaway convicts) was coming the next chapter.

\(^{314}\) Skelton, *Captain James Cook--after Two Hundred Years: A Commemorative Address Delivered before the Hakluyt Society*, 29.

research over the past two centuries, the exact events that led to the shipwreck of the Boussole and Astrolabe on a reef are still not fully understood. Nor can we be certain if La Pérouse drowned or lost his life—like his hero in Hawaii and his second-in-command on Tutuila—at the hands of the native peoples believed to have massacred most of the shipwreck's survivors.\footnote{As Dunmore writes in his final chapter of Where Fate Beckons "The Unending Search," researchers have gradually pieced together a narrative that some crew members drowned while others made it to shore to be massacred by natives. A British sailor named Peter Dillion led an expedition to the island in 1827 which collected testimony from an older local who recalled that some of the crew managed to stay alive and build a smaller two-masted vessel out of the wrecks. The men said to have departed on this vessel were never seen again. Dunmore writes that 2005 research of the wreck suggests that it is unlikely La Pérouse ever made it to shore. Judging by his writings from Botany Bay, his physical and mental state would not have been working in his favor. One can only speculate that perhaps La Pérouse's fatigue contributed to the uncharacteristic navigational error ending in shipwreck.}

La Pérouse was in every sense, therefore, a worthy successor to the eighteenth century's explorer \emph{par excellence}, James Cook. His singular voyage made a significant contribution to European understandings of the Pacific. La Pérouse delivered back to France considerable knowledge of the accurate location, and in some instances existence, of islands in the Pacific, the nature and shapes of coastlines, animal and plant specimens, a better understanding of how to avoid scurvy (eating fresh food), anthropological observations on dozens of little-known civilizations, and valuable information about the business of trade in the Indies in an era when France had no state trading company. Most significantly for French prestige, La Pérouse showed the French flag in the far corners of the world and gained renown in Europe as a worthy successor to Captain Cook. No longer would Europeans echo the sentiments expressed by the voyage's proposal that France had not contributed its share to Pacific exploration. Perhaps the best evidence of this shift is the way future French governments appropriated La Pérouse's legacy. The first French expedition of the revolutionary era was undertaken by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux (1791-1793) as a search and rescue mission for La Pérouse, taking up the concerns of Louis XVI and receiving funding from a National Assembly that wanted to claim La
Pérouse as a knowledge-seeking French hero. As Gascoigne writes, the secondary intentions of his voyage also "represented a continuation of old-regime goals: a search for French strategic and commercial advantage, a check on British expansion and the promotion of science."\(^{317}\) D'Entrecasteaux's expedition failed to find La Pérouse but it did significantly advance scientific knowledge of the Pacific, most importantly of Australia. True to the Old Regime's most prominent example, the crew attempted to "maintain good relations with the indigenous peoples it encountered."\(^{318}\) The expedition disbanded after its captain died in July 1793 and his royalist successor, while calling at the Dutch East Indies, transferred the ships to the Dutch to avoid giving them back to the perfidious domestic enemies of Louis XVI.\(^ {319}\) Gascoigne synthesizes his view of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition as a bridge between two eras: "in its search for the remains of La Pérouse's pre-revolutionary voyage, d'Entrecasteaux's expedition, then, carried into the revolutionary period some of the long-standing old regime interest in the Pacific."\(^ {320}\)

The revolutionary government of 1791, however, was hardly the last to remember La Pérouse. Thanks to the 1827 voyage of a British naval officer, Peter Dillion, La Pérouse shipwrecks were discovered, and artifacts were returned to France. These physical reminders of La Pérouse's expedition greatly affected Lesseps, who identified the objects, leading Charles X to pay 10,000 francs and offer a pension to Dillion, honoring Louis XVI's promise to reward whoever solved the mystery of La Pérouse's disappearance with these gifts. The king also made Dillion a chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur and sent word to a French expedition, then already in the Pacific, to survey the scene in Vanikoro.\(^ {321}\) Relics were returned to France in 1828, 1883,

\(^{317}\) Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 337-38.
\(^{318}\) Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 338.
\(^{321}\) Dunmore, *Where Fate Beckons*, 160-61.
and by a 1938 naval unit. In the 1950s, with the aid of modern diving tanks, the French Navy and researchers found further artifacts. The search continued under the Fifth Republic with the establishment of an association in 1981 in New Caledonia which has succeeded in tracing La Pérouse's route from Botany Bay to Vanikoro. Further dives have been conducted as recently as the early 2000s, and remnants like a skull, believed to be from a scientist or artist on board, were sent to Paris for examination by government forensic laboratories.322

The point of this brief survey of La Pérouse's post-1788 legacy is merely to underscore the fact that, in sponsoring and planning the expedition, Louis XVI made an enduring contribution to the European pursuit of knowledge and France's reputation. By envisioning the La Pérouse expedition, the king affected a transformation from a world in which he and La Pérouse looked to Captain Cook and Britain as leaders in exploration, and understood that France was making no meaningful contribution to it, to an early nineteenth century when the great Sir Joseph Banks himself was imploring British navigators to look out for any signs of La Pérouse's fate as they sailed the Pacific.323 Despite considerable financial constraints, Louis XVI used his power as commander of the French Navy for exploration on a level that none of his predecessors ever had. Due to his unusual love of the sea and fascination with Britain, the king created the most effective plan possible to make a French contribution to the global pursuit of knowledge he so admired. Like much else in Louis XVI's reign, bad luck and timing dampened the glory Pérouse's voyage might have accorded him. If La Pérouse had returned to France in June 1789 as he predicted from Botany Bay, what greater knowledge would he have delivered? What credibility might this triumph have given Louis XVI at a critical political juncture? La Pérouse's voyage certainly remained popular in France in 1789 and beyond, as evidenced by the

322 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 264.
323 Dunmore, Where Fate Beckons, 260.
attention given to his fate in the National Assembly. Yet, any benefit that La Pérouse offered to Louis XVI's image was soon outweighed by bigger issues. The legend that while mounting the scaffold on January 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1793, Louis XVI asked "A-t-on des nouvelles de Monsieur La Pérouse?" certainly seems improbable.\textsuperscript{324} At the very least, even if the story is apocryphal, whoever invented it understood the importance of the La Pérouse expedition to Louis XVI personally, and its significance in the context of his reign.

\textsuperscript{324} Dunmore, \textit{Where Fate Beckons}, 252.
"Is there news of Mr. La Pérouse?
Perhaps the greatest praise that Louis XVI received in his lifetime came from an unexpected source: Edmund Burke speaking in Parliament. The ceremonial rhetoric of the Archbishop of Reims, calculated compliments of obsequious ministers and courtiers in Versailles, or even the more genuine praise of Norman villagers can hardly compare for Burke articulated better than anyone values of fundamental importance to Louis XVI. A reader familiar with English literary discourse during the French Revolution would be hardly surprised to find Edmund Burke praising the French monarch. Burke's address is remarkable because—having already taken a firm political stand for American Independence—he delivered it in 1780, displaying a striking understanding of Louis' reasons for intervening in the war against England.

By economy Lewis XVI has found sufficient resources to sustain the war. In the first two years of it he has laid no burden whatever on his people. The third year is arrived; still no talk of imposts; and I believe that even those which are common in time of war have not been laid on. I conceive that in the end France must have recourse to imposts but those three years saved will extend their benign influence through a whole age. The French people feel the happiness of having an economical master; economy has induced that monarch rather to retrench his own splendors than the subsistence of his people. In the suppression of great numbers of places he has found a resource to continue the war, without adding to his expenses. He has despoiled himself of the magnificence and purple of royalty; but he has established a navy as she never before possessed, and which will immortalize his reign; and he has established it without laying on a penny of imposts. The people under his reign are great, glorious, and formidable; they do not groan under the burden of expenses to which our nation must submit to acquire greatness and to inspire fear. This is true glory; this is a reign which must raise the name of Lewis XVI above the boasted reign of Henri IV.\footnote{Cited in Hardman, \textit{The Life of Louis XVI}, 153.}

Implied in Burke's praise is the belief that Louis XVI's support for the Americans is just—a conclusion few listening in the House of Commons would have been surprised to hear although one might have been taken aback that Burke had chosen to commend the King of France in
wartime personally rather than the American patriots who other prominent politicians like Pitt the Elder and Horace Walpole also supported. The real thrust of Burke's statement, however, is not merely the justice of Louis XVI's objectives but the way he suggests they are being carried out.

Burke describes Louis' leadership as more enlightened than France could ever possibly hope for. The king is personally modest, understands the plight of his people, and while fighting a just war is using his wisdom to minimize their financial burden. Louis is the best of kings for he exercises the monarch's power for the good of his nation and people with no care for the "magnificence and purple of royalty" — surely a reference to Louis XIV and the expensive vanities which preoccupied most of Louis XVI's predecessors. The king spends on things that matter granting the worthy Americans their liberty from a tyrannical empire and in so doing building the navy France "never before possessed, and which will immortalize his reign." Louis XVI — for whom we know paying attention to the navy came so naturally — has achieved an indelible triumph in raising its power. "This is true glory," in Burke's conception: building power for the good of one's people and a just cause. Echoing the future words of Le Tellier, Louis XVI has met, even surpassed, the great example of Henri IV. If Louis XVI was as great of a wartime leader in 1780 as he suggests, little wonder Burke would endorse the monarchy so passionately a decade later in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written during a far worse political crisis.

Louis XVI is a poorly understood figure in part because his pre-revolutionary legacy has been lost in the historical colossus that is the French Revolution. We read history backward because it is comfortable to do so; more often than not, a ruler who dies by execution was an
unpopular tyrant. This is hardly to say that Louis XVI's reign was a great success. Had this thesis taken as its subject the study of Versailles' efforts to solve the financial problem, adapt to gradual demands for political reform, or even the king's personal conduct during the Assembly of Notables and Estates General—key elements of John Hardman's distinguished recent biography—it would hardly give Louis XVI so much credit. Rather, this study has looked at three relative triumphs in the pre-revolutionary reign of Louis XVI and sought to explain the values underpinning them and, wherever possible, how the monarchy sought to sell these values to the French people. Burke's words seem so extraordinary because they express in 1780 a clear conception of the interests and principles that this thesis argues motivated French participation in the American War, the king's Voyage to Cherbourg, and royal patronage of La Pérouse's expedition. Most who have studied the late-Ancien Régime will agree that Louis XVI was not a man well-suited to solving a financial crisis: he was too indecisive and willing to change strategies; caught between an abiding faith in traditional royal privilege and allured by forward-thinking, enlightened ideals. Yet, there was no single responsibility of kingship that better melded Louis' passions and understanding of the nation's interests than the need to rebuild the navy. Attaining victory in America, fortifying Cherbourg's harbor, and sending La Pérouse to follow in the footsteps of the Royal Navy's Captain Cook: none of these acts would have been possible without the attention and resources Louis gave to his navy from 1776 on; none of them would have made sense if aggrandizing the French Navy and projecting its influence across the sea were not priorities of the king. The navy was, as Burke's words imply, to be put to use in pursuit of just conduct and French national interests.

The narratives extolled by effective works of propaganda like *Exposé des Motifs* are not mere inventions. As the first chapter explores, Louis' wartime writings to Vergennes suggest concern to act in the interests of justice and a genuine desire to bring liberty to America. These were hardly the only interests for which Louis committed the French fleet and considerable royal resources. Louis wanted to protect French commerce and territory (both colonial and metropolitan) against a rival navy they saw encroaching arrogantly on the French sovereignty. Once these principal French War aims were achieved around 1782, Louis XVI remained willing (perhaps even more willing than the Spanish) to use his navy to advance the war aims of his Bourbon allies, upholding the *Pacte de Famille*. In Cherbourg, Louis used French funds on an ambitious project to augment the navy's ability to protect French territory and commerce. A town that had suffered British attack twice before and was strategically poised to defend French trade through the Atlantic, was wisely selected to be fashioned as a naval stronghold. As Louis XVI traveled through Normandy, he was praised for attaining victory in America and making a vigilant defensive investment in Cherbourg. Yet, as Louis XVI was being lauded during his week in Normandy, his mind likely occasionally wandered to the status of two ships in particular.

Arriving at that very moment in Alaska was a naval project closer to Louis' heart than any other. If Louis' desire to do justice in politics found expression through his patronage of American Independence, then his intellectual interests and love for the sea reached their apex in preparing the La Pérouse expedition. Louis' "immortaliz[ing]" mark on the French Navy was

From 1776, Louis began to ramp up naval spending and began to send ships on war-like training and reconnaissance missions against the English in the Caribbean. Hardman lists yearly naval expenditures as follows, 1776: 47 million livres; 1777: 59 million livres; 1778: 150 million livres; 1779: 155 million livres. Recall that France only committed forces to the war in 1778.
not merely in increasing its size or using its newfound power in battle. Rather the king, for the
first time in French history, used state resources, the navy, and France's exceptional scientific
community in conjunction to make a meaningful contribution to enlightenment knowledge.
Along the way, La Pérouse was to advance French commercial and foreign policy interests
wherever possible within the admirable constraint of not harming native populations and
friendly powers. Louis XVI and his bureaucracy made no apparent effort to use this
distinguished mission for political or reputational gain—it was conceived through the king's
genuine interests and the interests of France as he saw them.

If this thesis has failed to clearly delineate Louis XVI's values from the royal priorities as
projected to the French nation, it is in part the author's fault and in part Versailles'. In his
excellent chapter on the political crisis preceding the Estates-General, John Hardman writes,
"one of the great enigmas of the period 1787-88 is why the king was unable to get this fairly
simple message across." He means the basic point that if uncooperative nobles provoked a
change of regime, they would be financially far worse off than if they merely provided some
concessions. Yet Hardman might as well be talking about Louis' reign as a whole. Versailles
under Louis XVI had dreadful public relations. Among the most effective pieces of propaganda
consulted by this thesis, only the *Exposé des Motifs* and the designs used for the obelisk in Port-
Vendres were directly commissioned by Louis XVI's government. Accounts of Normandy were
published by independent booksellers, town administrations, regional journals, and
universities. The two stunning tableaus from Crépin and Monsiau indeed received royal funding
through the Naval Ministry, if only under Louis XVIII some twenty-five years after his brother's

execution. Vergennes in his obsession with global power, Castries through his focus on the navy
and advocating combat wherever possible against the English, and Turgot, Calonne, Necker,
and Brienne, rightly focused on the intractable financial problem, had little time or interest to
devote to the promoting the royal image.\footnote{Charles Walton, \textit{“The Free-Trade Origins of the French Revolution”}; Elizabeth Cross, \textit{“The Last French East India Company in the Revolutionary Atlantic”}, 613–40.} Louis XVI, by nature and necessary spending
restraint, was not a seeker of glory. The concept of a 'department of glory,' a term coined by
historians of Louis XIV's reign, would have made little sense under Louis XVI.\footnote{Cited in Burke, \textit{The Fabrication of Louis XIV}, Reprinted (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 59.} 1774 was hardly
1661 when Louis XIV proudly wrote the words "I was almost equally pressed and restrained in
my aspirations by the same desire for glory."\footnote{Louis XIV, \textit{Mémoires For the Instruction of the Dauphin}.} Alas, one can only imagine what a Colbert-like figure would have done for the promotion of Louis XVI's image—a king unquestionably more
virtuous than his great-great-great-grandfather.

A causal chain from the king's values to royal image—with actions and propaganda
selling it to the people as intermediate steps—is, for many events in Louis XVI's time, an
exercise so tenuous as to be unproductive to attempt to study. This thesis has chosen instead
to study Louis XVI's values, actions, and public image wherever possible instead of forcing all
three on each topic. Yet, insights into Louis XVI's image—always the hardest of the three to
examine—have emerged. Edmund Burke paid Louis the supreme compliment of declaring his
reign "above" that of France's greatest king, Henri IV. We know that Versailles welcomed
comparisons to Henri IV and two of the most compelling tributes to Louis, Le Tellier's narrative
and Monsiau's painting, place Louis XVI's legacy in the realm of his distinguished predecessor.

Connected to the legacy of Henri IV, within at least the context of the American War and
Normandy, Louis XVI enjoyed a reputation as a "just," "honest," "generous," and "bienfaisant," monarch—all of the traditional marks of a "good" French king. As discussed briefly in the introduction, the cahiers produced in anticipation of the Estates General overwhelmingly suggest that these attributes endured in the public conscious into 1789.\footnote{Shapiro and Markoff, \textit{Revolutionary Demands: A Content Analysis of the Cahiers De Doléances of 1789.}}

This thesis has not attempted to explain the revolution. It merely posits that although Versailles certainly failed to exploit the king's image to the full effect possible, the revolution did not erupt in Paris in the summer of 1789 because Louis XVI was seen as a tyrant. In fact, some Frenchmen were imploring a king they believed to be good to help them fight against a privileged nobility, "ministerial despotism," and pernicious symbols of the Ancien Régime like the Bastille and a dreadfully unjust system of taxation. All this, however, lay in the future. In the periods studied by this thesis, few vocal challenges to Louis' person were launched. We do perhaps run the risk of being anachronistic in briefly noting that, even though this thesis has studied three relative triumphs of Louis XVI, the chapters have perhaps failed to capture the sense of pessimism surrounding Versailles at this time. The narratives of authors like Madame Campan, looking back from the perspective of the revolution, naturally embedded a sense of tragic doom. Historians of the late-Ancien Régime including Padover and Hardman often imply in their narratives with casual assertions that one decision or another was the beginning of the end. Yet, reading the memos of ministers like Vergennes following victory in America or Calonne in preparing the king to visit Normandy, to say nothing of the stress finance ministers like Necker and Brienne were under, reflects a sense of foreboding. Louis XVI enjoyed a few triumphs in life; the Normandy chapter emphasizes the enormous credit Louis enjoyed for his
just victory in America. Yet, for those within Versailles, there is always this sense of looking to
the next crisis, or perhaps discomfort in communicating with an awkward king. Versailles
experienced a curious mixture of optimism and pessimism under Louis XVI. Burke's words,
reflecting his distant perspective, hardly encapsulate the mood of Louis XVI's governments.

On the other hand, Burke's cynicism regarding the politics of his own country might be
the single most important point of comparison between his speech and the findings of this
thesis: "The people under his [Louis XVI's] reign are great, glorious, and formidable; they do not
groan under the burden of expenses to which our nation must submit to acquire greatness and
to inspire fear." The last claim in this sentence regarding England "acquir[ing] greatness"
through "inspir[ing] fear" appears like a line lifted from Versailles' Exposé des Motifs de La
Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre. The understanding of England as a tyrannical
imperial power is, of course, relevant to the American War and the Cherbourg project. In
writing to his ministers, Louis certainly never used such dramatic rhetoric. His grasp on English
naval strategy and politics was far too strong, his character too reserved, to use language along
the lines of Burke's or Exposé des Motifs description of an "empire tyrannique en pleine
mer." Yet, better than empty words, Louis XVI's actions show that he understood British
ascendancy on the world stage—whether a tyrannical force or otherwise—to be the central
international affairs issue of his reign. Louis XVI profoundly admired England, but he also
understood that the kingdom fate chose him to lead was a different place. French and English
history—subjects Louis was highly proficient in—had taken different paths to leave the two

332 Exposé Des Motifs de La Conduite Du Roi Relativement à l'Angleterre, 5.
"A tyrannical empire on the open seas."
kingdoms with unique political institutions and economies. To modernize, France could not merely model itself on England. Louis XVI understood that if France was to remain a great European power, it had to compete with England on the world stage. Without this mentality, Louis certainly would not have sent forces to the new world to help rebels secure their independence from the British Empire, protect valuable French Caribbean territories from the Royal Navy, and attempt to secure a favorable trading relationship with the United States. If Louis did not see England as a significant threat to French territorial security and commerce, why fortify Cherbourg and invest in the navy in a time of great financial stress? Once Versailles realized that its hopes for a valuable trading relationship with the United States had failed to materialize the government sought, in the words of scholar Charles Walton synthesizing Vergennes’ plan, "to turn Britain, France's 'Natural Enemy' [Vergennes' words], into a friend, but also to use liberal trade as a means to neutralize and manipulate it."³³³ For all of Vergennes and Castries' bravado, Versailles was ill-prepared to outflank Britain in trade negotiations and Walton argues that The Eden Treaty had a disastrous impact on the French economy, most of all on Normandy's manufacturers.³³⁴ Nevertheless, Louis XVI's government cast its commercial nets beyond Europe, reconstituting a Compagnie des Indes in 1784.³³⁵ La Pérouse was to carry the French flag even further by exploring the Pacific. Louis XVI's design of La Pérouse's voyage exemplifies better than anything else the way his administration both at times attempted to emulate and challenge British power. Conceived in homage to Captain James Cook and designed principally to make a French contribution to the European pursuit of knowledge, La

Pérouse's mission was also to advance French commercial interests and possibly lay the groundwork for future imperial expansion in a sphere where the British enjoyed a two-decade head start.

As has been argued, although La Pérouse's voyage should be viewed as a comparatively friendly challenge to the British, Louis XVI at the very least intended to make a statement about French power. This observation is perhaps best evidenced by La Pérouse's last recorded stop: La Pérouse rushed to Botany Bay on the orders of his government which had received word that the British were planning a settlement there. La Pérouse showed the French flag in New South Wales and briefly observed British operations while maintaining friendly relations with the local governor. Yet, La Pérouse arrived to find that the British had moved on from Botany Bay to Port Jackson, a more advantageous location—one sited nearly two decades prior by the explorer he and Louis XVI sought to emulate. When La Pérouse attempted to return to France, presumably with updates on developments in Australia, he ended up dead in the South Pacific. Port Jackson evolved into the bustling English-speaking city of Sydney.

The three subjects studied by this thesis suggest that Louis XVI acted to counter British global ascendency in his pre-revolutionary reign. The question that remains is if he did a good job of it. Louis certainly made missteps, like The Eden Agreement, motivated in part by a desire to join French economic fortunes to Britain and a new enlightenment faith in doux commerce. One must, on the other hand, make allowances for the cards Louis XVI was dealt. Louis inherited a kingdom that had just lost much of its empire to Britain, a similarly depleted navy,

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336 Louis, in fact, did not like playing cards. Ever frugal, as Stephen Zweig writes, he left the gambling to Marie Antoinette and her circle.
Zweig, Marie Antoinette: The Portrait of an Average Woman.
masses of debt, and low public morale following Louis XV's dreadful leadership. A pessimist might consider evaluating Louis' success in countering the British absurd. Leaving aside Louis' and the regime's fate, the American War may have ended in victory, but it scarcely won France many lasting concessions and multiplied the debt. The visit to Cherbourg accorded Louis a moment of glory but the fortification project failed in the end. Louis failed to heed the wise concerns of his subjects, failing to support or protect Normandy's industries from British competition. Discontent among manufacturers, including Rouen's, may have accentuated the intensity of the revolution. The new Compiegne des Indes ended in failure and La Pérouse, despite returning a few finds to Europe, ended up dead on a reef or slaughtered by the inhabitants of far-away Vanikoro.

A rare defender of Louis XVI, looking at these three projects, is likely to counter that he—a man although ill-suited to be king of France in most respects, was uniquely qualified to understand the strength of Britain's global position because of his childhood interests—delivered the fledgling British Empire a great shock in America and advanced a project in Enlightenment governance. Along the way, he restored the navy and France's reputation in Europe. The Cherbourg harbor project was a philosophically brilliant bulwark against the British threat which simply lacked adequate funding, and perhaps technical expertise. Narratives of Louis' voyage suggest that both the American War and Cherbourg coastal defense project served the interests of the French people and consequently improved the king's image. Lastly, he would be sure to include that the La Pérouse expedition was a worthy successor to James

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Cook's legacy—the standard-bearer of European Pacific exploration. Had the Boussole and Astrolabe not suffered the tragedy that so commonly afflicted expeditions of the eighteenth century, Louis' investment may very well have made a renowned impact on scientific progress and strengthened France's global commercial and imperial position vis-à-vis its cross-channel rival.

Although this thesis has generally sided with the second description, neither narrative is necessarily correct. The reader should merely bear in mind that success, if that is what Louis XVI's stand against the British amounts to, often comes with considerable costs. In the end, history need not require making conclusions but asking new questions.
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