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The Blurry Line: Robert Montgomery's Public and Private Interests as U.S. Consul to Alicante

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- 1 Robert Montgomery, a wealthy Irish-American merchant, became the United States' first consul to Alicante, Spain in 1793. At that time, Nathaniel Cutting, assistant to the American Minister to Spain to whom Montgomery would report, described him as a "steady, active and zealous" friend to American interests. Four years later, Humphreys himself wrote that Montgomery was the consul of which he had "heard more ill spoken than any others" and "that he is by many others looked upon as a very self-interested character; and by some as a man destitute of principle."¹ These contradictory assessments may be a product of time; perhaps after four years as consul Montgomery's true colors became more visible. But they probably also reflect some fuzziness about the role of a consul and, particularly, the problem of self-interest when the American consular service was very new, very understaffed and very poor.
- 2 The tension between republican virtue and the perceived cosmopolitan self-interest of the British court was at the heart of the republican critique of George III that underpinned the American Revolution, and, consequently the issue of interests was one that Americans took very seriously. There appear to have been three potential areas where consuls' personal interests could pose a danger to the republic. The first was if their loyalty was somehow co-opted by a foreign state. Consequently, many in Congress hoped that consuls would be American citizens.² However, in actuality it became clear that in many places where the new nation hoped to develop an infrastructure to facilitate trade, most notably in the Mediterranean, there simply were not enough American citizens in residence or willing to move to preclude appointments of foreigners. In Spain, for example, other than Montgomery, the first American consuls were all foreigners, mostly Irish or Scottish. A second sort of conflict of interest could

occur when a consul violated the law for personal profit. For example, the American consul to Marseilles complained that the consul in Genoa had “compromised the consular seal, on the service of the United States during the siege of Genoa for his private affairs.”³

- 3 While Montgomery was later accused of the former transgression and may possibly also have indulged in the latter (though the evidence is not yet clear), it is a third type of conflict of interest to which he appears to have been most closely tied –the conflict between pursuing the national good and the aggressive pursuit of personal business profits. When David Humphreys wrote that Montgomery was the most self-interested consul, he placed James Simpson, a Scotsman who had never been to America but served as U.S. consul first to Gibraltar and then to Tangier at the other end of the spectrum. Simpson appears never to have been a major merchant, and by the time he reached his salaried position in Tangier, he had virtually no opportunity to pursue mercantile activity due to the paucity of shipping there in the 1790s. These facts suggest that, for Humphreys, the problem with Montgomery was his aggressive and successful merchant house. This sort of conflict between personal profit and the national good was a much murkier type of conflict than the other two for early consuls whose jobs involved facilitating and increasing national trade, because, for them, personal profit and national gain often appeared to be closely aligned.
- 4 Some founding fathers hoped that the new nation’s consuls would avoid potential conflicts of interest by avoiding mercantile activity altogether, and the original Franco-American consular convention prohibited them from engaging in trade, as was the case in the French consular system.⁴ However, as with the efforts to exclude foreigners from the consulates, the reality of building a consular infrastructure undercut this idealistic view. The impecunious early American legislatures consistently refused to offer consuls any salary, with the exception of those in the Barbary states of Tunis, Tripoli and Algiers. The combination of a lack of salary and a prohibition on mercantile trade would, according to one of the first American consuls, leave “no means of affording an adequate support to persons who are properly qualified,” thereby removing “the only inducement to accept the appointment.”⁵ Recognizing this difficulty, Congress almost exclusively appointed merchants to the first consular posts. Some members of Congress saw the use of merchants as a positive good rather than a necessary evil. John Adams hoped that the typical consul would be “an American, some merchant of known character, abilities, and industry, who would consent to serve his country for moderate emoluments.” Merchants, presumably, would demand only “moderate emoluments” because they could support themselves through their business. Even so, Congress often had problems inducing appointees to accept positions other than those in the busiest, most lucrative ports such as Lisbon and Liverpool.⁶ Montgomery himself viewed the appointment of merchants as beneficial to all, because “the more experienced a consul in business, his knowledge and information must be the greater.” “And,” he continued, “it will be more in his power to serve the country than those who are confined to the simple vocation of their office and who for want of a proper [stimulus] seldom trouble themselves about anything else.”⁷
- 5 Montgomery’s unusually successful business career is well documented in American and Spanish archives and, as a result, his case offers particularly useful insight into the blurred line between personal and national interest. Montgomery’s career falls naturally into three broad periods. From his arrival in Alicante in 1777 until his

consular appointment in 1793 he was heavily involved in overseas trade, most lucratively during the American Revolution when, after the expulsion of British merchants from Spain, he made a fortune exporting Spanish barilla into the Netherlands.⁸ His consular appointment came just as the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars lured growing numbers of neutral American ships into the Mediterranean. Taking advantage of both developments, he switched to the commission trade and once again made large profits. The Peninsular War, however, destroyed that trade and, at first slowly and later rapidly, eroded his fortune. In an attempt to counter these inexorable losses he moved out of the commission trade and began purchasing agricultural land in larger quantities in and around Alicante from 1807 until his death in 1823.

- 6 The most fruitful period in Montgomery's career to examine in order to get insight into the conflict of interest question would be the second, when he was making substantial profits as a commission merchant. However it is worth considering the pre-consular years briefly. During this period, Montgomery managed to make contacts with a remarkable number of influential American figures, including Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, George Washington, William Bingham, and others. His excuse for doing so often was to provide valuable information that would aid the United States. For example, in August of 1788 he wrote to Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay to provide important political news from Algiers, where the crews of two American ships were being held captive and to offer to go there to negotiate a peace.⁹ No doubt there was an element of patriotism to such offers, but they also gave Montgomery an excuse to begin corresponding with the leaders of the new republic. He was not hesitant to milk these connections, both in quest of consular positions in Algiers and Alicante and, in the case of Jay, to try to find new merchant contacts to dispose of his shipments to New York.¹⁰
- 7 After receiving his consular appointment, Montgomery's first actions were to appoint vice consuls to Barcelona and Cartagena. Within the next two years he would appoint three more vice consuls to Valencia, Benicarlo, and Santander.¹¹ As with most of his consular activity, these appointments can be viewed either as intended to assist American trade or intended to assist Montgomery's business, depending on one's perspective. And, as is also the case with most of his actions, the first perspective is not entirely antithetical to the second. On the one hand, the consular service was, as already noted, woefully understaffed. Having officials to assist merchants, captains, and sailors in these major Spanish ports was a necessary first step in creating an infrastructure to support the new republic's trade and a matter of stimulating further commerce under the assumption that "if you build it they will come."
- 8 However, it is also undeniable that developing this little network connecting the major Spanish ports to Alicante also benefitted Montgomery, the only resident American merchant there at that time. At a minimum, these merchant vice consuls would serve as important commercial contacts for Montgomery. At most, a cynic might see a potential *quid pro quo* in that they would benefit from their appointments (through consular fees and increased likelihood of business with American ships) while Montgomery could potentially benefit from their gratitude (through new commissions directed to him and favorable terms of trade). At any rate, Spanish records show that most of the appointees would become valuable contacts to Montgomery later on if that was not already the case at the time of their appointment. The vice consul to Barcelona was his brother, John Montgomery, who was also his once and future business partner.

Thomas Vague, the appointee to Valencia was also appointed British vice-consul by another of Montgomery's business partners, British consul Daniel Budd, and would continue to have a long-term trading relationship with Montgomery. Decades later, at Vague's death, Montgomery would appoint his partner, Francis de Llano, to replace him in the Valencia post.¹² The Benicarlo appointee, Ricardo Ryan, a young Irish merchant, would later marry Montgomery's daughter and purchase some of his property.¹³ Lewis O'Brien, the Santander appointee, had excellent connections to English merchants (he was also the British vice consul) as well as American merchants in Boston and the Italian and Scottish-born American consuls to Cadiz and Malaga respectively, all of which would have benefitted Montgomery as the two became more closely acquainted.¹⁴

- 9 There are hints that contemporaries might have viewed such appointments with suspicion. The Spanish officials certainly thought that Montgomery had far too much power to appoint vice consuls over such a wide area (Santander is 500 miles from Alicante as the crow flies and much further by 18th century shipping routes). They also bristled at his appointment of Ryan "*durante tan solo mi voluntad*," ("as long as I will") which they felt interfered with the King's authority to remove foreign officials.¹⁵ David Humphreys also suspected that appointments made by consuls generally, and especially by Montgomery, might be made out of self-interest. Immediately after voicing concern that Montgomery was trying to send a nephew to Algiers to set up a branch of his merchant house there under the guise of negotiating a peace, Humphreys wrote, "I question how far stress is to be laid upon the recommendations [...] of consuls who happen to be mercantile men themselves, of other persons for consuls, by whose appointment they may be either directly or indirectly benefitted in their affairs."¹⁶
- 10 Shortly after he was appointed consul, Montgomery began to shift his focus from overseas trade to acting as a commission merchant who would broker deals between owners of incoming ships and local merchants who could buy portions of the incoming cargo and sell their own products as outgoing cargo. Montgomery typically claimed a two percent commission for these deals. For the 1780s and early 1790s there is ample evidence that Montgomery was personally involved in the barilla and bacalao trade and in the sale of ships with correspondents in America, England, Ireland, and the Netherlands. But I have not yet found a single piece of evidence that he was directly involved in the overseas trade after his consular appointment, although his brother John did continue to be involved in it.¹⁷
- 11 It is possible that this shift was partly an ethical issue. Some other consuls did not believe that they and their colleagues should engage directly in overseas trade due to the conflicts of interest it might create.¹⁸ However, considering Montgomery's earlier position on the desirability of merchant-consuls and his subsequent aggressive behavior as a commission merchant, it seems more likely that this transition was based on financial calculation. The mid-1790s saw a remarkable increase in the number of American ships entering Alicante, which was broadly consistent with the rise in the American neutral trade throughout the Mediterranean after 1793 with the onset of the French Revolution and subsequent warfare. The limited data on shipping shows that while just twelve American ships entered Alicante in the last three years of the 1780s combined, that same number entered in the single year of 1796. Traffic appears to have grown rapidly thereafter, with 42 arriving in the peak year of 1803 and approximately 30 in each of the two subsequent years. These ships were primarily involved in the

traditional Anglo-American trade of fish and grains to Mediterranean ports.¹⁹ As the only American merchant in town until 1802 and with excellent mercantile connections throughout eastern Spain from Santander to Malaga, Montgomery would have been in an ideal position to benefit from this increased trade even if he were not the American consul.

- 12 Being consul, however, gave Montgomery a number of other advantages as a commission merchant. First off, the robust mercantile network that he was able to enter through his connections to other American consuls and vice consuls, some of whom he appointed himself, was very valuable. Consuls frequently sent business to each other in exchange for split commissions.²⁰ Beyond that, consuls also had unparalleled access to goods and information arriving in their ports. In theory, captains were required to report to consuls to have their papers and cargoes examined. American consuls often complained that they lacked power to enforce these requirements, but captains nevertheless appear to have followed them fairly regularly.²¹ Montgomery and other consuls submitted semi-annual reports of ship arrivals based on information reported by captains. And, after passage of an 1803 act to protect seamen, captains could face steep fines for failing to produce an accurate list of crew members to consuls when they arrived at port.²² Consequently, Montgomery would likely have met nearly every American captain who arrived in Alicante and had an opportunity to gain a commission from them.
- 13 Montgomery was known to be particularly aggressive in soliciting commissions. In 1798 Captain Henry Prince wrote in the logbook of the American ship *Astrea* that Alicante commission merchants “have [a] very suspicious look after one another in business, which keeps up a competition between them for the most part.” He added that the greatest competition was between Montgomery and the British merchants Damasier and Stenberg whom he described as “at swordpoints” to get commissions from American ships. According to Prince, when an unconsigned vessel arrived Montgomery and his clerk would pull up alongside it in a boat “to enquire who does your business with the greatest pretensions of friendship.” The minute the unconsigned vessel landed, “clerks will attend you to his house and it is next to impossible of getting away without engaging to dine with him.” At Montgomery’s house, “his wife will force you to eat in such an overbearing manner and insist on your not refusing and in such a manner that one must affront her or kill himself with eating.” While he acknowledged that “some may look upon such kind of people as very polite,” Prince’s opinion was that their hospitality was “only to answer their own end.”²³ If this analysis was correct, Montgomery was taking advantage of the public hospitality a consul would be expected to provide his countrymen to secure commissions. But, as Prince acknowledged, the line between self-interest and hospitality in this case was not the clearest.
- 14 Besides personal profit, Montgomery’s role as commission agent also helped extend his personal and business network. Unfortunately, documentation of his business activities during this period can be difficult to find as merchants who consigned their shipments to him in advance would have done so in their home ports, and the local notarial records have few examples of captains consigning goods on arrival, suggesting that often times these arrangements were not formerly notarized.²⁴ An agreement with the Boston firm of Caleb Loring and Thomas Curtis serves as a rare example. In 1801 Loring and Curtis dictated a power of attorney that gave Montgomery’s firm, Roberto y Juan Montgomery, broad powers to negotiate the disposal of the cargo of their ship, the

Otter. Although the power of attorney did not spell out financial terms, the Montgomerys would doubtless have received their usual two percent commission, which could be a windfall for the cargo of a large ship and, potentially, the sale of the ship itself as suggested by Loring and Curtis.²⁵

- 15 The connection to Loring and Curtis would also prove of value over the long term. They were among an influential cadre of New England merchants who dominated American trade in the Mediterranean and had the power to recommend the Montgomerys' services to others and the ability to consign multiple shipments. They also regularly offered recommendations for individuals hoping to become American consuls. They and their peers viewed consuls more or less as merchants' representatives abroad and as such they felt a responsibility to see to it that capable and responsive men occupied those positions. Loring signed a petition recommending Thomas Appleton as consul to Paris in 1797.²⁶ More relevant to Montgomery, in 1815 he and eight other merchants wrote a letter to President James Madison recommending that Obadiah Rich be appointed consul to Malaga. Rich was not only a merchant who had previously lived in Valencia, he was also the husband of Montgomery's niece and an important member of the extended Montgomery family.²⁷
- 16 In fairness, the blurring of Montgomery's personal and consular business was as much a result of weak, if not derelict, direction on the part of the young U.S. State Department. Vague directives and extremely erratic communications from Washington forced Montgomery and other consuls to improvise as they went along. Loring and the merchants who wrote recommendations for consular candidates viewed them as representatives of American nations abroad and understood their task to be to facilitate American trade. This view more or less accorded with that of most consuls, who were merchants themselves, and, at least, did not generally contradict what could be discerned of the State Department's views. Looked at this way, nearly everything Montgomery did could be construed to benefit American commerce. As the only American there, he was in a good position either as commission merchant or consul to guide American captains and supercargoes through the intricacies of Spanish commerce. He could speak English clearly to them and had a wide range of contacts who might be willing to purchase their shipments. When they ran into trouble, he could offer assistance, or, as in the case of Loring and Curtis, when a ship consigned to him ended up in a different port, he could connect them to responsible Americans there. Of course, all this came at a price in the form of commissions, consular fees, or split commissions when he substituted another merchant for himself. Montgomery and other consuls could, and doubtless did, argue that valuable assistance does not come free, and that his services were well worth the expenses.
- 17 A set of three notarized documents from 1799 provides some insight into how Montgomery viewed the line between consular and personal. Two of them list Montgomery as "consul of the American nation," a designation that was hardly ever used in Montgomery's notarized documents. The first, drawn up in February, was a bond that Montgomery put up on behalf of the Captain and crew members of the U.S. ship *Hazard* detained by authorities who suspected that a portion of their cargo was not imported according to Spanish law. The second, notarized two months later, was a similar case in which an American Captain with a cargo of cod allegedly had not received proper authorization from the Spanish consul in Boston before departing. Montgomery, acting in his official consular capacity, gave security for the cargo while

the matter was being cleared up. In a third document, Captain Robert Peele of the American ship *Portland* gave Montgomery power of attorney to resolve a conflict with local authorities who had confiscated a large amount of Spanish money as well as some silk seized from his ship on suspicion it had not been properly certified by a Spanish consul. Although very similar to the previous case, in this document the notary described Montgomery as a member of a merchant firm established in Alicante, not as the American consul.²⁸

- 18 Why would Montgomery have been described as a consul in the first two documents and not the third? Since the third document was created by the same notary who wrote up the two previous documents, and in the same year, it could not have been a matter of notarial style or ignorance. One difference is that, unlike in the first two transactions, Montgomery does not seem to have been present when Peele drew up his power of attorney (Montgomery did not sign the document). Perhaps both Peele and the notary viewed the disposition of the *Portland* as a private matter, not part of Montgomery's official duties. Perhaps too, the fact that Montgomery put up his own money in the previous cases (but not in Peele's) prompted him to insist that he be referred to as American consul in the hope that should he lose his money he could be reimbursed by the State Department. Whatever the reason, the line between consular and personal activity appears to have been very unclear to all involved.
- 19 Self-interest and national service blurred even more in other aspects of Montgomery's consular career. For example, he, like most other consuls, spent a good deal of effort attempting to bring more American trade to his port. To do so, he, like most consuls, attempted to improve the spread of information about trading opportunities, often including information on prices and demand in his reports to the Secretary of State, presumably on the naive assumption that the State Department would spread this data to American merchants. Montgomery, like most merchants, also sent such information, usually in the form of price currents, to as many other merchants as he could. These flyers, usually printed by the late 18th century, listed goods commonly sold in Alicante, their current prices, and commission terms offered by Montgomery's company. Some recipients may have viewed the numerous solicitations they received as we look at junk mail or cold calls today, but they performed an important role in informing merchants of economic conditions around the world. There is ample evidence that Montgomery sent printed price currents to merchants throughout the Mediterranean region and America, and eventually he began enclosing them within his reports to the Secretary of State as well.²⁹
- 20 In disseminating all of this information, Montgomery was acting exactly as most merchants did whether they were consuls or not. Some of his consular reports could have easily been mistaken for merchants' letters by readers unaware of his position. Does this mean that he was a self-interested merchant? To a large extent he was, insofar as bringing more ships carrying more saleable cargoes to Alicante increased the number and profitability of commissions for him. But, increasing American trade in the Mediterranean was surely also a national goal, and Montgomery's interests aligned with the national agenda here. One could certainly argue in this case that self-interest properly understood was a national virtue.
- 21 Montgomery also spent time and effort trying to prevent captures of American ships and redeeming captured ships and sailors. As with the dissemination of information, these activities served the good of the house of Montgomery as well as the good of the

nation. Montgomery certainly hoped to gain some personal benefit when he volunteered to negotiate peace with Morocco and Algiers. As already discussed, success in that department could provide him with influential patrons at the highest levels of the new nation's government and potentially pave the way for his firm to get in on the ground floor of business in those regions. Aware that Barbary consuls were the only ones paid salaries by the United States, Montgomery also coveted an appointment to Algiers which he believed he could hold while simultaneously maintaining his business in Alicante. But, more generally, captured ships were a serious impediment to all mercantile activity. Algerian captures of American ships in the 1780s and 1790s posed an existential threat to American shipping in Alicante and the Mediterranean, as did French captures in the late 1790s and after 1807.³⁰ Lessening these threats benefited everyone involved in American trade. Certainly the period between 1795 and 1807 when American shipping in eastern Spain was more or less liberated from both threats was the period of maximum prosperity for American business in the region and one of the most profitable periods for Montgomery personally.

- 22 Unfortunately for Montgomery and others in the region, after 1807 commercial prosperity began to slip away. The chief culprit was the Peninsular War, which both cut off shipping and devastated much of the region. By 1816 Montgomery claimed to have lost at least \$200,000, and conditions only got worse before his death in 1823.³¹ With shipping at a standstill, there were no commissions and no profits for commission merchants. As a result, preliminary indications are that Montgomery began investing more heavily in agricultural land, becoming a landed gentleman and wine producer. He spent a good deal of effort trying to work with Spanish authorities to encourage American shipping (or discourage it less) with little success. The dearth of business activity and absence of other Americans provided few opportunities for conflicts of interest. Montgomery tried to use his government connections to get himself and his children posts in Marseilles with limited success. He also hoped his position as American consul would protect him from depredations by French or Spanish troops, but ultimately it did not. He died in the middle of a crisis induced by French troops who would ultimately seize much of the property he and his family had acquired in purchases of former church lands.³²
- 23 In the end Montgomery's story may do more to point to the difficulty in defining conflicts of interest for early American consuls than anything else. The question of whether he was out for himself or his country appears to offer a false dichotomy. So far there is no evidence that he engaged in illegal activity or was guilty of any crimes other than aggressive networking, trading and solicitation of commissions. In other words, he acted within the acceptable bounds for successful merchants. What is perhaps most remarkable is the extent to which he was able to make his consular position profitable within legally (if not always socially) acceptable norms. Montgomery's success also provides a good example of how the young U.S. government could successfully use private interests to arrive at public goods. This strategy was vital for cash strapped governments domestically as well as abroad. Early state governments frequently issued corporate charters and provided other incentives to private companies willing to fund internal improvements or build factories in the expanding interior.³³ The question then and now was who benefitted from whom, or in contemporary terms, whether the tail wagged the dog or vice versa. Just as that question had no clear answer domestically, it does not appear easily answerable in the case of Montgomery or most other consuls. But what does appear quite clearly, is the tight interweaving of public and private

interests that characterized all aspects of early American government despite the republican revolutionary rhetoric that demonized self-interest and glorified disinterested virtue.

NOTES

1. National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, MD (henceforth: NARA), RG 59, Despatches from United States Consuls in Algiers M23 (henceforth Algiers Despatches), Nathaniel Cutting to Secretary of State, 10 February 1794. Yale University, Humphreys-Marvin-Olmsted Collection, David Humphreys Papers, Box 1, Folder 21, David Humphreys to Timothy Pickering, 2 July 1798.
2. John Adams to the President of Congress, 29 June 1780, in *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the U.S.*, vol. III, p. 823, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lldc&fileName=003/lldc003.db&recNum=821&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(dc003628\)\):230030822&linkText=1](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lldc&fileName=003/lldc003.db&recNum=821&itemLink=r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(dc003628)):230030822&linkText=1).
3. NARA, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of Thomas Jefferson (M418), Peter Kuhn File, [Stephen Cathalan] to Thomas Jefferson (undated).
4. *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, vol. II, p. 651-652, vol. III, p. 823-824, vol. 1, p. 501, vol. 19, p. 538-539 (James Madison's Notes of Debates); *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Monday, 24 October 1785, p. 845; John Jay to Congress, 19 September 1785, in *ibid.*, vol. 29, p. 722-723. All accessed via <http://www.loc.gov>.
5. Robert R. Livingston to Benjamin Franklin, in *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 6 January 1783, vol. 6 (<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=lldc&fileName=006/lldc006.db&recNum=196&itemLink=r%3Fammem%2Fhlaw%3A%40field%28DOCID%2B%40lit%28dc0061%29%29%230060001&linkText=1>).
6. John Adams to the President of Congress, 29 June 1780 (see footnote 3).
7. Algiers Despatches, Robert Montgomery to Secretary of State, 9 October 1785.
8. Enrique Gimenez Lopez, *Alicante en el Siglo XVIII: Economía de una ciudad portuaria en el antiguo régimen*, Valencia, Institucion Alfonso el Magnanimo, 1981, p. 398.
9. Alicante Despatches, Robert Montgomery to Secretary of State, 5 August 1788.
10. Robert Montgomery to John Jay, 8 August 1786, and Robert and John Montgomery to John Jay, 8 August 1786, Papers of John Jay via Columbia University Libraries Digital Program <https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/jay/ldpd:69076>.
11. Alicante Despatches, John Montgomery, 10 October 1793. Archivos Nacionales, Madrid, Junta de las Dependencias y Negocios de Extranjeros, Estado 3554, Roll 2215, Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación de los nombramientos de Luis Meagher O'Brien como Vicecónsul de los Estados Unidos de América en Santander, 1793. Alicante Despatches, De Slanas, 31 July 1806. Portal de Archivos Espanol (hereafter PARES), Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación del nombramiento de Roberto Ryan como Vicecónsul de los Estados Unidos de América en Benicarló.
12. Archivos Nacionales, Madrid, Junta de las Dependencias y Negocios de Extranjeros, Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación de los nombramientos de Tomás Vague..., Estado, 628, Exp. 5; Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación del nombramiento de Tomás

Vague como Vicecónsul de Gran Bretaña, Estado, 632, Exp. 17. Alicante Dispatches, Robert Montgomery to Secretary of State, 16 December 1804. Archivo Historico Provincial de Alicante (henceforth AHPA), Protocolo notarial de Vicente Izquierdo y Suredo (1050-896), Montgomery and company power of attorney (*poder*) to Vague and Boneli, 3 June 1789; Protocolo notarial de Ramon Izquierdo (1026-882), Don Roberto Montgomery power of attorney (*poder*) to Vague y Llano, 6 June 1805. On Budd, see Massachusetts Historical Society, Caleb Davis Papers, John Montgomery to Caleb Davis Boston, 28 March 1793.

13. PARES, Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación del nombramiento de Roberto Ryan como Vicecónsul de los Estados Unidos de América en Benicarló, 1796; AHPA, Protocolo notarial de Pedro Fuentes y Sanchez (700-637), Dn Roberto Montgomery land sale (*venta real*) to Ricardo Ryan, 19 November 1819.

14. NARA, General Records of the Department of State, RG 59, Letters of Application and Recommendation During the Administration of Thomas Jefferson (M418), Lewis O'Brien file, Margaret L. O'Brien to Mr. Bowdoin, 2 May 1806; Strange and Co. and Others Petition, 5 November 1806; John White and sons to Samuel Welles, 21 May 1806.

15. Archivos Nacionales, Madrid, Junta de las Dependencias y Negocios de Extranjeros, Estado, 632, Exp. 34, 4-5, 27-52, Consulta sobre petición de Real Cédula de aprobación del nombramiento de Roberto Montgomery como Cónsul de Estados Unidos de América en Alicante; Lewis M. O'Brien Expediente Personal 2, 8-15.

16. Yale University, Humphreys-Marvis-Olmsted Collection, David Humphreys Papers, Box 1, Folder 20, Humphreys to Pickering, 20 April 1797.

17. I am in the process of going through all the surviving notarial records at the Provincial Archives of Alicante that contain contracts and other documents relating to Montgomery. I have seen the majority of the existing documents but have not yet been able to see all.

18. For one example of a consul decrying mercantile activity see NARA, RG 59, Leghorn Despatches, Thomas Appleton to Secretary of State, 15 January 1802.

19. I base statements on American shipping on my analysis of the Mesadas de Sanidad at the Archivos Municipales de Alicante, which were produced by health officials who recorded data on incoming ships over a few years in the 1780s to 1800s. There are minor discrepancies between my data and Gimenez analysis (Enrique Gimenez Lopez, *Alicante...*, *op. cit.*, p. 351).

20. For example, see Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston MA, William Jarvis Papers, John M. Forbes to William Jarvis, 14 June 1803 and J. M. Baker to William Jarvis, 20 October 1804.

21. Alicante Despatches, Robert Montgomery to Secretary of State, 9 October 1795; NARA, RG 59, Amsterdam Despatches, Sylvanus Bourne to Secretary of State, 6 August 1795; NARA, RG 59, Bristol Despatches. Elias Vanderhorst to Secretary of State, 31 July 1795.

22. "An Act Supplementary to the 'Act Concerning Consuls and Vice Consuls, and for the further protection of American Seamen'," 28 February 1803, seventh congress, sess. II, chapt. IX. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/6th-congress/c6.pdf>.

23. Philips Peabody Essex Institute, Salem, Mass, [Henry Prince] Log, *Astrea*, 1798-99. The author is very grateful to Tamara Thornton of SUNY Buffalo for this reference.

24. Even when consignors made formal notarized powers of attorney, the financial terms were not included. I have deduced the commission terms from Montgomery's advertisements.

25. AHPA, Protocol de Notario Ramon Izqueirdo (1024-879), Roberto y Juan Montgomery substitution of power of attorney to Langsamere y Compania, 8 February 1802.

26. NARA, RG 59, M406, Letters of Application and Recommendation during the Administration of John Adams, N. Appleton to President John Adams, 16 October 1797.

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ABSTRACTS

This essay, based on intensive research in American and Spanish documents, addresses the problem of self-interest on two fronts. First, it examines the business and consular career of Robert Montgomery, American consul to Alicante, Spain, from 1793 to 1823. As a commission merchant, Montgomery was able to profit from his consular position in many ways. But more importantly, it questions the very nature of the problem of self-interest, arguing that the line between self-interest and national service was very blurry and perhaps impossible to delineate. American merchants and the consuls who represented them believed that what was in their interest was also in the interest of American commerce, and a weak and impoverished State Department, unable to send out professional diplomats to most ports or even pay salaries, largely agreed.

Cet article, basé sur des recherches intensives dans des archives américaines et espagnoles, aborde le problème de l'intérêt personnel sur deux fronts. D'abord, il examine la carrière commerciale et consulaire de Robert Montgomery, consul américain de 1793 à 1823 à Alicante, en Espagne. Négociant en commission, Montgomery a pu profiter de sa position consulaire de plusieurs façons. Mais, plus important encore, l'article remet en question la nature même du problème de l'intérêt personnel, en faisant valoir que la frontière entre l'intérêt personnel et le service national était très floue, et peut-être impossible à délimiter. Les négociants américains et les consuls qui les représentaient pensaient que ce qui était dans l'intérêt du commerce américain était aussi dans leur propre intérêt, et le département d'État, faible et appauvri,

incapable d'envoyer des diplomates professionnels dans la plupart des ports ou même de payer les salaires, était largement d'accord.

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Mots-clés: consuls, Espagne, Alicante, négociants, département d'État des États-Unis

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