Guillaume Delisle, *Carte de la Louisiane et du cours du Mississippi* Dressée sur un grand nombre de Mémoires entraîtres sur ceux de Mr. Le Maire par Guillaume Del’isle de l’Académie Rle. des Sciences. Engraving (with hand-colored outlines) on paper, 49.5 x 66 cm. (Paris : Chez l’Auteur, 1718).

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Highly controversial and widely influential in its time, Delisle’s 1718 map was one of the landmark maps of the eighteenth century. It caused a considerable stir for several reasons. First, the map’s release coincided with the frenzy for investment in John Law’s *Compagnie d’Occident* and the *Compagnie des Indes* that soon collapsed in the “Mississippi Bubble” stock crash in 1720. Second, it boldly announced that France claimed most of North America under the names of “Louisiane” and “Canada or New France.” Although exaggerating the actual topography of French territory and compacting the surrounding lands claimed by foreign powers, it nevertheless gave a good general idea of the course of the Mississippi along with an inset showing its mouth in the Gulf. Further, by emphasizing the river and its important tributaries, the map made visually obvious to all the river’s vital strategic importance for the control of North America. Europeans could now see clearly that travel and transportation on rivers rendered the interior of North America wide open to French discovery and exploitation. Spanish Florida had disappeared, Spanish New Mexico was shrinking, and the British were now hemmed in along the east coast. In addition, the map conveyed symbolically -- without the aid of what was increasingly becoming “trivial” pictorial imagery -- the ideas that French power was growing, that French Louisiane was a promising investment, and that French cartographic prowess in producing such an amazing map was evidence of that power.

In addition to sources Delisle had previously used for his earlier maps, this map benefitted from a series of manuscript maps compiled, drawn, and sent to France by François Le Maire, a French missionary in Louisiana, who had interviewed the French trader Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis sometime around 1716. Saint-Denis had traveled through Texas deep into Spanish territory and down to Mexico City and back between 1713 and 1716 (his route shown on Delisle’s map). Saint-Denis would return there again in 1716-1717.

Besides the location of the ill-fated French fort established by René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle along the Texas coast in 1685, this map now shows La Salle’s 1687 assassination site as well as the Spanish “Mission de los Tejas” (re-established in 1716 after an earlier attempt in 1690). The map shows Spaniard Alonso de Leon’s route through south Texas in search of La Salle in 1689 and further east, Delisle attempted to show the routes of Hernando de Soto in 1539-1541 and his successor Luis de Moscoso Alvarado in 1542-1543. These reconstructions strongly suggest the influence of Delisle’s father Claude Delisle, who was a historian and geographer. Delisle probably rendered Florida as an archipelago based upon the captured Spanish chart by Juan Bisente del Campo. Especially ominous for future Native-American and European relations since it was repeated many times by other
European cartographers is a label that would soon come to haunt the coastal-dwelling Karankawa: *Indiens errans et Antropophages* or “Wandering Indians and Man-eaters.”

– Ben W. Huseman 5-10-2019