

# Ponce's Ghosts: Spain and Florida

by Gary R. Mormino  
(April 2010)

When Spanish seafarers returned from their global voyages in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they reported to the most secret room in Seville. Wrested from the Moors in 1248, Seville was becoming fabulously wealthy for reason of conquest and empire. In *La Casa de Contratación* (the House of Trade), cartographers and cosmographers scrutinized logs and navigational charts. Amerigo Vespucci—he of the eponymous name--proposed in 1508 that Spain create an official set of maps, *el padrón real*, a master chart of the known world and the official record of discoveries. Contours of a New World appeared on vellum and linen, adorned with ornate cartouches displaying terrifying and fascinating images: man-eating cannibals, fierce tribes of female warriors, and cities of gold.

At some point in the early sixteenth century, the royal cosmographer identified a spit of land north of Cuba. Caribbean Indians spoke of an island called Bimini north of Cuba. As Vázquez de Ayllón, Alvarez de Pineda, Juan Ponce de León, Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, and Sebastian Cabot explored the Gulf Coast, the body of land became a peninsula, in time revealing that La Florida was no mere island but an appendage of a great continent. Janus-faced, with one side facing North America and the other looking towards the Bahamas and Cuba, Florida became the pathway between the Americas. Five-hundred years later, Florida occupies the distinct position of being America's southernmost state *and* the northernmost province of the Caribbean.

## Ponce de León

Ponce accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to the New World in 1493. Burnishing his reputation as a fierce fighter on the island of Hispaniola, he helped conquer and later govern the province of Higüey (northeastern Haiti). In 1506, leading an expedition to the island of Borinquen (Puerto Rico), he ruthlessly put down Taino uprisings, earning the governorship for his deeds. He later plundered the Lucayas (Bahamas).

In the quarter century after 1492, the Caribbean had become the proverbial Spanish lake. But conquest had yielded precious little treasure. Ominously, the Tainos and Caribs perished at alarming rates, victims of what conquest wrought: disease, warfare, and labor tribute paid to the new rulers. In 1512, King Ferdinand of Spain rewarded Ponce with an *asiento*, or charter, to discover and conquer the Island of Bimini. The contract stipulated:

*Firstly, that with the ships you wish to take at your own cost and expense,  
You may go to discover, and you shall discover, the island aforesaid . . .  
That when you find the island you shall be obliged to settle at your cost in the sites and places  
you can best do it . . .*

The expedition sailed from San Germán, Puerto Rico, on 3 March 1513, in three ships “well provided with food, men, and mariners.” The manifest of the *Santa Maria de Consolación*, *Santiago*, and *San Cristóbal* included two women, a free African named Juan Garrido, and two Taino seafarers.

Guided by a brilliant pilot, Antón de Alaminos, the voyagers sighted land after a month at sea. According to Antonio Herrera, the court historian who had access to the now lost journal of the voyage, “They ran along the coast seeking harbor . . . Believing that land to be an island, they named it La Florida, because it appeared very delightful, having many fresh groves, and it was all level, and also because they discovered it at the season which the Spaniards call Flowery Easter [Pascua Florida] . . . they went ashore to discover and take possession.”

The ships turned and sailed southward, hugging the coastline. Sailors sighted a cape of land jutting into the ocean and named the sight Cabo Cañaveral (Cape of Canes) because the reeds reminded them of sugarcane. They anchored near a river christened Santa Cruz (Sacred Cross), believed to be Jupiter Inlet where sailors took on water and wood. They also suffered their first casualties when warriors from the local Indian tribes attacked the party. They later noted the Indian village of Chequescha, probably the site of today’s Key Biscayne, home of the Tequesta.

On 21 April 1513, Alaminos encountered in the vicinity near today’s Key Biscayne “El Cabo de las Corrientes,” (the Cape of Currents). Arguably, this was the greatest discovery of the expedition: the Gulf Stream. A native of Palos, Spain, a cabin boy on Columbus’s fourth and final journey, the 38-year-old Alaminos was awe-struck by a rush of water so powerful that it forced his ships backward. “So great was the current that it was more powerful than the wind . . . the current was so strong it made the cables tremble.” Six years later, the mariner was sailing across the Straits of Florida on his return voyage to Spain when he again encountered the Gulf Stream. He became the first to chart and understand how the winds and currents could guide future voyagers to and from Spain and the West Indies.

Turning northward, Ponce’s ships anchored off one of the many barrier islands, exploring San Carlos Bay (Charlotte Harbor) and the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River. There they gathered fresh water and firewood. The visitors also encountered fierce resistance from Calusa Indians who attacked the strangers in dugout canoes. Ponce commemorated the first Spaniards to die on La Florida’s shores by naming the island Matanzas (massacre). Matanzas Island appears on historic maps as Puerto de S.

Nivel, Santa Ybel, Santa Isabel, and finally Sanibel. Returning to Puerto Rico, the expedition “sailed among Islands . . . called Las Tortugas, or Tortoises, because they took 170 of them in a short time.”

The decade following the exploration of La Florida witnessed Hernán Cortés’s conquest of Tenochtitlan and the fabulous treasures of the Aztec Empire. The ambitious Ponce wrote Emperor Charles V in February 1521: “Among my services I discovered at my own cost and charge, the Island of Florida . . . and now I return to that Island, if it pleases God’s will, to settle it.” The emperor awarded Ponce the position of *adelantado* (governor) of this new land.

The second voyage aimed to conquer and colonize La Florida. The journal of the expedition is lost, but a contemporary court historian, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, left an extended account. “Not exhausted by his outlays and labors,” Ponce de León sailed from the future city of San Juan with a formidable force, described by Oviedo as consisting of “200 men and fifty horses . . . and as a good colonist, he took mares and heifers and swine and sheep and goats.” His caravan also included “seeds for planting” as well as missionaries and priests.

In the spring of 1521, brigantines sailed up the southwest coast of the peninsula, anchoring off one of the islands in today’s Charlotte Harbor. “The natives,” wrote Oviedo, “were rough and savage and untamed and not accustomed to peace.” The belligerent Calusa assailed the invaders, killing several Spaniards and wounding Ponce, who suffered a mortal leg wound. The thwarted colonists sailed to Havana, Cuba, where the leader died in July 1521. His body was later shipped to Puerto Rico, where his remains rest in the Cathedral of San Juan. Ponce became the first of a series of conquistadores to fail in La Florida, the graveyard of dreams.

### **Naming Rights and Rites**

We know when Ponce first sighted land in 1513, but no one is certain as to where the place was. Most scholars believe the sighting occurred somewhere between Cape Canaveral and the St. Johns River. The City of St. Augustine, along with other places, claims the Ponce landing sweepstakes. In 1945, a state senator from St. Augustine took a Miami historian to court because the impertinent scholar doubted the Ancient City’s claim.

But the name La Florida and the dream of conquest endured. The origins of the name “La Florida” has been mythologized and popularized. In the nineteenth century, Washington Irving—he of the “Knickerbocker Tale”—lyricized that since “the trees were gay with blossoms and the fields covered with flowers,” the exotic landscape must have seemed like sirens seducing the Spanish sailors. Of course Ponce chose the name “La Florida” not because of the lush landscape, but rather because of the time of year, “La Pascua Florida” (The Paschal Season of Flowers).

The historian Samuel Eliot Morison stubbornly liked Florida's secular allusions. "One tires of the repetitious Spanish names," he wrote, "so many Trinidads, Santa Marías, Espiritú Santos, Santa Fes, Concepcions and the like." The poet Elizabeth Bishop may have written the shortest and most beautiful sentence about the subject of state names. "Florida," she mused, "the state with the prettiest name."

The historian David Weber explained the portents of Spanish flags planted on a distant Florida beach. "Natives would surely reject such presumption," he writes, "but until the late 18th century, most European nations recognized the rituals of possession as establishing legal validity of claims to sovereignty over *terra nullius*—land previously unknown to Europeans. Native rulers, Europeans supposed, lacked legitimate dominion over their lands and subjects for they were neither Christians nor did they live according to what Christians understood as 'natural law.'"

By authority of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and Spanish claims, La Florida ranged from the Florida Keys north to Newfoundland and lands to the west of the Georgia Sea Islands and beyond.

## **Fountains of Youth**

Carib Indians supposedly planted the seed of a Fountain of Youth. The first accounts of a Fountain of Youth appear in the works of a remarkable Italian cleric, Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (Peter Martyr). A humanist in the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, Martyr interviewed returning navigators at the Spanish court, between 1493 and 1526. Antonio de Herrera chronicled Ponce's voyages in his magisterial eight volume study, *Historia general de los Hechos de los Castellanos* (1601-1615). "It is certain that Juan Ponce de León was intent upon finding out the Springs of Bimini and a River in Florida . . . where there is a continual spring of running water of such marvelous virtue, that the water there of being drunk, perhaps with some diet, make the old men young again."

For centuries, the notion of a Fountain of Youth has tantalized businessmen and vexed historians. Oviedo, a contemporary who had access to Ponce's journal, even scoffed at the idea of a spring turning old men into boys. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a veteran of the Cortés siege of Tenochtitlán, was more honest in his memoir. "We came to serve God and his Majesty," he wrote, "and to give light to those in darkness, and also acquire the wealth that most men covet."

If the Fountain of Youth was a thin veneer for greed and rapacity, it has survived as a powerful myth and invented tradition. Addressing members of the Florida Advertising Association in 1950, an executive speculated, "Had one of our modern high-pressure publicity organizations been in existence at the time, we might have capitalized on the Fountain of Youth story more extensively." He need not have worried. For hundreds of years, tourists have traveled south to partake of the restorative elixir at St. Augustine's Fountain of Youth, Warm Mineral Springs along U.S. 41, and countless road sites.

Curiously, the Fountain of Youth grounds and the waters of Warm Mineral Springs have, indeed, yielded fabulous archaeological secrets.

Is there a legitimate place for the Fountain of Youth in the history or folklore of Florida? Consider the 16<sup>th</sup>-century European world view. Legends of Amazonian women, cities of gold and fountains of youth, when contrasted to the real-world encounters with the Gulf Stream, Alachua Savanna, Silver Springs, alligators, flying squirrels, humming birds, toucans, anaconda, and iguanas, do not seem too phantasmagorical.

The Florida Dream incorporated the birth myth of the Fountain of Youth into a publicity campaign that lured millions of senior citizens to the Sunshine State. “Come to Florida,” the dream promised, and grey-haired auto workers and accountants from Kokomo and Kankakee migrated in hopes of palm trees, balmy Februarys, and youthful vitality. A refuge and dream, a time warp and brave new world, Florida provided a new home to millions of Americans wishing to reinvent themselves.

### **Columbian Exchange**

The most momentous event in the history of Florida occurred sometime in the early sixteenth century. No chronicler recorded the exact time, place, and details, but it most likely involved a Spanish sailor or soldier wading ashore to encounter an Ais or Tequesta warrior or shaman. Perhaps the inhaling of strange body smells, the pain inflicted by Toledo steel or stone-tipped spears, or the unintelligible words marked Florida’s chapter of genesis.

The significance of 1513 lies not so much in what Ponce discovered but in the interaction that followed. The historian William H. McNeill’s observations about Columbus aptly applies to his successors: “What Columbus did was to change to world in which he lived and the world in which the American Indians lived by connecting the two in a way that lasted half a millennium.” The environmental historian Alfred Crosby called this phenomenon “the Columbian exchange.”

For centuries, text books hailed Columbus and Ponce for “discovering” America and Florida. The term carries uncomfortable meanings. If there was any discovery made, it was mutual, between peoples and cultures alien to one another. Ponce, Narváez, and de Soto brought Spain to Florida, and the exchange of plants and animals, foods and microbes, was reciprocal. The encounters among Europeans, Africans, and Natives wrought disastrous consequences for the inhabitants of Florida. The Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes suggests that we reconsider the conquest as a “shared defeat,” leading to the possibility of a shared victory in the form of greater understanding.

When Calusa and Apalachee first encountered Ponce and his successors, the population of Florida numbered hundreds of thousands of indigenous people. Natives might resist mounted knights

and harquebusiers, but they lacked defense against diseases that had ravaged Europe, Africa, and Asia for thousands of years. Small pox, yellow fever, influenza, measles, and other “vectors of death,” decimated every pre-contact tribe and confederation in La Florida, crossing ancient boundaries and borders, reaching tribes deep within the American Southeast and beyond.

Between contact and extinction, between colonization and assimilation, new multi-tiered societies evolved, comprised of *mestizos* and *mestizaje* (offspring of a European and Native Indian), *criollos* (children of Spanish immigrants born in the New World), *cimarrones* (maroons-fugitive slaves), *bozales* (unseasoned African slaves), *ladinos* (Spanish-speaking Catholic slaves), *conversos* (converted Jews), *moriscos* (converted Moors), *forzados* (convicts) and mulattos, octoroons, and quadroons. Floridanos lived in cities (Pensacola and St. Augustine), on fishing *ranchos* (located along the barrier islands) and *haciendas* (rural estates), and within the 140 missions established along the peninsula. Always, *peninsulares* (Spaniards) were a distinct minority. In early 17<sup>th</sup>-century St. Augustine, 70 percent of the community’s wives were Indian. The term “Middle Ground” aptly describes such frontier zones where peoples fought and loved, traded, and shared. New groups emerged, challenging established notions of race, nationality, and ethnicity in this fluid hybrid society.

The historian Bernard Bailyn proposed the metaphor of a circling satellite to understand the profound demographic changes affecting the Americas between 1500 and 1800. The circling satellite recorded unfathomable population losses in the American Southeast, the Central Valley of Mexico, and Andes, but also monumental population shifts from West Africa to the Caribbean and Western Europe to the Americas. Consider that if pre-contact Florida’s population was 200,000, a conservative estimate, modern Florida did not reach that demographic plateau until the late 1870s.

No single event devastated Florida’s Natives. Rather, a series of epidemics—a typhus outbreak in 1585 brought by Francis Drake’s crew; between 1613 and 1617, half of the region’s Indians died because of “pests & contagions”; in 1649, yellow fever killed the governor, treasurer, and many friars, as well as large numbers of Indians; smallpox spread rapidly in 1655, followed by measles in 1659—scoured La Florida. Spanish soldiers who came in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, referred to Florida as the “uninhabited land.” The population of Timucans, estimated at 10,000 in 1600, had plummeted to 14 by 1727. The arrival of Bishop Dionisio Resino in 1709 was greeted with great fanfare, but he quickly realized La Florida was barren of Indians to convert. Crestfallen, Florida’s first resident bishop returned to Cuba two weeks later.

A Timucua warrior, returning to his ancestral home on the Saint Johns River after fifty years of isolation, would have been startled to witness the amazing variety of new animals inhabiting his world. Horses, cows, burros, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, ducks, swans, geese, and rats accompanied the

Spaniards. In new environments, not all species survive what scientists call “ecological release.” In a root hog or die setting, the omnivorous razorback hog devoured weeds, grasses, roots, nuts, birds, eggs, shellfish, and fruit. They also provided settlers an almost limitless supply of fresh meat. Swine herders and pigs accompanied de Soto and his armed expedition, providing what Alfred Crosby called an “ambulatory meat locker.” In the Spanish hinterlands, “*la tierra de bravos toros*,” Castilians bred an especially strong breed of cattle. Ponce brought the first cattle to Charlotte Harbor in 1521. By 1737, a Spanish engineer observed, “the country seems to be well stocked with horned cattle and wild horses.” Sheep, however, died by the flock because of the hot, humid, and predatory environment.

## **Globalization**

*Floridanos* became agents, willingly and unwillingly, of a powerful new force: globalization. Increasingly, decisions in Madrid, Paris, Rome, Havana, Mexico City, London, Charleston, and Mobile affected pious friars and flinty merchants, Apalachee *caciques* and African slaves. Failed wheat harvests in Castile, a devastating hurricane in Hispaniola, and the price of tanned leather in Florence affected lives of distant *floridanos*.

Between 1500 and 1700, two vast, seemingly contradictory forces unfolded: global integration and tribal disintegration. In 1513, the identities defining and separating Indian tribes by territory, clan, and language were bewildering. By 1800, Apalachee, Ais, Timucua, and Calusa were extinct. Natives who had lived on the Florida peninsula for thousands of years, having survived alternating cycles of global heating and cooling, the loss of Ice Age mega-mammals, fell victim to global pathogens.

La Florida’s global connections are well documented. Archaeologist Judith Bense described the findings at the Presidio de Santa Maria: “We discovered that the first Hispanic Pensacolians smoked Dutch pipes and drank tea from Chinese porcelain cups. They had French and Italian rosaries, German stoneware mugs, Swedish cannons, and an abundance of Mexican pottery.” Pensacola’s first settlement included 100 Aztec warriors. The Catholic Church fused old and new images and worlds. A religious medallion survives that incorporates the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe, the Aztec goddess Tonatzin, and the Catholic Virgin Mary. St. Augustine wills document velvet gowns and linen sheets woven in Flanders, books printed in Amsterdam, and majolica earthenware baked in Venetian kilns.

Florida’s global connections transcended boundaries and nation states. Russell D. Jones described the Panton, Leslie & Co., in the following way: “The firm was run by Scots, with British citizenship who spoke English, French, Spanish, and in some cases, Portuguese, not to mention Native languages. The firm’s partners worked under Spanish, British, and American rule in Florida and were friendly with colonial governments of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, and Danish, as well as others.”

Consider the remarkable life of Francisco Menéndez. Born in Africa, the Mandingo became a British slave who, with the help of Yamasee Indians, escaped to Spanish Florida where he converted to Catholicism, and rose to the position of captain of the militia for the free black settlement of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose. In 1740, General James Oglethorpe and his Georgia troops invaded Florida, overrunning Fort Mose. Under the command of Menéndez, black troops counterattacked, reclaiming Fort Mose. While serving as a corsair on a Spanish pirate ship, he was captured and re-enslaved in the British Bahamas. He somehow managed to escape or purchase his freedom and returned to St. Augustine where he resumed command of the Mose militia. In 1763, Spain ceded La Florida to the British. Menéndez was on the move again, taking his Mandingo wife and four children to Cuba.

### **Black Legends and Legacies**

Victors write text books. To win holy wars, enemies must be demonized. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Imperial Spain waged war against Protestants in Europe and America, fought Ottoman armies and navies across the Mediterranean, and toppled empires and chiefdoms in the Americas and Asia. The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries unleashed powerful forces of religious reform that steeled the Protestant Reformation. The same passionate, creative energies that inspired and spread the artistry of Dürer, de Bry, and Brueghel, also championed *la leyenda negra* (the black legend). Contemporary broadsides, essays, and engravings pilloried the Spanish as tyrannical, cruel, and fanatical, sinister tools of a Papal conspiracy. “If papistry was a defining element of infidelity,” writes Jill Lepore, “cruelty was a defining element of savagery.” From early wooden engravings to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century writings of William Hickling Prescott to *Zoro*, popular culture has reinforced the image of Spain in America. In his 1898 history, *The Jesuits in North America*, the acclaimed historian Francis Parkman neatly summarized the comparative histories of Canada and South America: “Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; British civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him.”

Tales of Spanish cruelty must not be dismissed as merely the product of Protestant propagandists. Spaniards, indeed, slaughtered French Huguenots, enslaved Africans, tortured Catholics, impressed Native Americans, and expelled Jews and Muslims. But moral indictments imposed across centuries ignore changing sensibilities and the harsh realities of earlier ages. History records few examples of conquest without violence and cruelty. The essayist Garry Wills observed, with part tongue-in-cheek, that Columbus is “the deadest white male now offered for our detestation.” He adds, “If any historical figure can appropriately be loaded with all of the heresies of our time—Eurocentrism, phallocentrism, imperialism, élitism, and all-bad-things-generally-ism—Columbus is the man.”

Britain and Spain both lost colonies in America. But as Otto von Bismark observed famously, “The most important fact of the modern world is that Americans speak English, and not German.”

In 1988, *National Geographic* lamented that the 16<sup>th</sup> century had been labeled “The Forgotten Century.” Stewart Udall asked, “How can a nation that celebrates John Smith and William Bradford slight founders who preceded them in other parts of the United States? And why have we been so grudging in acknowledging contributions made in the dawn years of our history by people with Spanish surnames?” Historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and others have contributed mightily to our understanding of this era of quixotic adventures and shattered dreams, but also spectacular advances and creativity.

### **Freedom and Slavery**

“If you ask Americans about the origins of slavery in this country,” speculates historian Jane Landers, “most would doubtlessly tell you that it all began at Jamestown in 1619.” She adds, “The assumption is that the first slaves were Africans—which they were not—and that the United States history begins with English settlement—which it does not.” Spanish slavery differed markedly from the chattel slavery found in the Carolinas and the British Caribbean. Spain fully expected to exploit Native Floridians, but epidemics drastically reduced their numbers. To make Florida work, Spanish officials relied upon a feudal institution of labor tribute. Some have called this system, “Conquest by Contract.” Imposed by the Crown and not by private individuals, tribute consisted of obligations to provide food to the garrison or labor on public works. Spanish authority in Florida was, at best tenuous, and governors never imposed a formal system of *la encomienda*, as witnessed in most of the Americas.

Natives may have been exploited but they were not enslaved. Freedom and slavery, however, exist as moral as well as legal concepts. At the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, don Juan or Juanillo, a Tolomato chieftain, confronted Franciscan missionaries who had challenged the power of *caciques*. A friar recorded Juanillo’s lamentations: “They [Franciscans] deprive us of every vestige of happiness which our ancestors obtained for us, in exchange for which they hold out the hope the joys of Heaven.” Indians often rebelled, burning missions, killing friars, and slaughtering cattle. Historian J. Michael Francis, however, argues, “The most striking point is how *rare* Indians rebelled.”

The history of African slavery in Spanish Florida was not a mirror of Jamestown or the Carolinas. The first African to set foot on Florida soil was Esteban or Esteve the Moor, a slave and scout accompanying Narváez in 1528. Esteve survived the harrowing expedition, only to die a decade later as an interpreter in the Coronado expedition. Spanish law held that human slavery insulted the laws of nature. The Catholic Church served as a moral and legal buffer, pontificating that slaves held legal as

well as natural rights. Slaves could sue their masters on the grounds of cruelty and purchase their freedom.

A buffer between the Protestant North and the Catholic South, La Florida became a sanctuary for escaped slaves from the Carolinas. Spain offered runaway slaves freedom, provided that the newcomers accepted the “True Faith” and swore obedience to and bore arms for the crown. In 1738, Governor Manuel de Montiano approved a refugee community for British ex-slaves north of St. Augustine. Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose became the first legally sanctioned free town in the present-day U.S. Spanish motivations for granting freedom were part religious, and part pragmatic. Precariously situated, La Florida was surrounded by enemies and constantly at war. Everyone was expected to bear arms.

### **Cradle of Institutions**

In Spanish history, the year 1492 is memorable because of four significant events: the voyage of Columbus, the completion of *la reconquista*, the expulsion of the Jews and Moors, and the publication of the first book of Spanish grammar. The last achievement may be the most significant. A nation that has codified rules of grammar has the capacity, in triplicate form, for administration and empire.

The Spanish legacy includes institution-building in Florida. “Here were founded the first school and seminary,” notes historian Michael Gannon, “the first hospital, first court of law, and first institutions of banking and commerce.” The Church in Florida expressed a Spanish zeal for organization, discipline, and salvation. Over several centuries, Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans established scores of such missions. The products of superb training, missionaries studied the Native languages, presided over Mass while competing with suspicious shamans, and faced the threat of invasion and Indian revolts. Their accomplishments included Fray Francisco Pareja’s compilation of a Timucan dictionary and grammar book. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, over 26,000 Christian Indians were part of the Florida network connected by El Camino Real. The system collapsed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a result of devastating diseases, British marauders, and rebellious Indians. Because the mission buildings were constructed of pine, clay, and thatch, no architectural legacy equivalent of the California missions survived.

The first planned cities on the American continent occurred in Florida. St. Augustine was a planned city, laid out according to the town ordinances promulgated by Spain in 1563, an imperial practice dating to ancient Rome. Florida governors instituted the practice of locating public markets on plazas and policies regarding weights & measures and the price of bread. During religious fiestas and the festivities surrounding royal weddings and ascension of monarchs, the *la plaza mayor* provided public space for St. Augustinians to celebrate and enjoy the generosity of the governor. “If the great

symbol of the English colonist is the frontiersman clearing the wilderness,” writes Donald Meinig, “the symbol of Spanish colonist is the *adelantado*, pacing out the grids of a Spanish town.” For all of the planning and hopes, St. Augustine remained a small outpost, never numbering more than a few thousand inhabitants until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The New American Table**

The Columbian Exchange created a new American table. Perhaps the first contact between Europeans and Natives involved not a clash of civilizations or the clank of steel cutting human flesh, but rather an offering of maize porridge, oysters, or a gourd containing a caffeinated drink.

Food is power. To the Calusa and Apalachee, the Spanish fondness for salted pork, weevil-infested bread, and rotted anchovies was as revealing as it was revolting. To Spaniards who were in the process of creating the greatest empire since Ancient Rome, the food they carried heightened their sense of moral superiority. The fact that Indian women performed agricultural work, that heredity depended upon matriarchal order, that natives did not plant crops in orderly European-style rows, only reinforced notions of superiority.

When Pedro Menéndez de Avilés asked the Lord for thanksgiving in 1565—fifty-five years before pious Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony paused to ask such a blessing—the table was laden with salted pork preserved in lard, dried garbanzo beans, and hard tack. Food defined and divided Europe and America, invaders and hosts.

Food also defined and divided Spaniards and their subjects. Rank, race, and fortune determined what and how one ate in La Florida. “An *hidalgo*’s table was set with Mexican majolica rather than Guale pottery and sea shells,” writes Amy Bushnell, adding, “Instead of a soldier’s diet of salt meat, fish and gruel, the *hidalgo* [a gentleman and a warrior, one certified to be of noble birth] dined on wheaten bread, pork and chicken raised on shellfish.” Rank and file soldiers dined on Indian food.

Determined to impose a Nueva España upon a new land, Spain faced environmental, cultural, and political obstacles. The Andalusian plow replaced Indian tools, but maintaining and supplying a Spanish diet of wheat, oil, and wine proved logistically impossible. Most discouraging, Florida’s hot and humid climate doomed the cultivation of vineyards, wheat fields, and olive groves. Sheep died by the flock.

The Spanish diet evolved in Florida, as did native tastes. Borrowing from 1,500 years of ranching tradition, *vaqueros* introduced hardy Castilian range cattle to the grassy interior, while the black Iberico pig multiplied prolifically in forests and wetlands. Minorcan Reds and Andalusian Blues, along with white-faced black Spanish chickens dubbed “the fowls of Seville,” became familiar sights in

backyards. Spaniards, as well as Africans, Italians, and Greeks, adapted to Indian corn, snap beans squash, pumpkins, and sassafras. “Maize, not wheat,” contends Amy Bushnell, “was the staff of life in Florida.” Tomatoes and potatoes, New World crops, arrived relatively late in Florida. Old-World crops, such as Mallorcan datil peppers, Valencia oranges, Canary Island sugar cane, and African okra, bananas, and watermelons, thrived in the new setting; Archaeologists excavating Pensacola’s earliest settlements have found evidence of persimmon and papaya that originated in Mexico, as well as almonds, plums and cherries that may have crossed the ocean from Spain to Veracruz, and then aboard ships to Florida. Not everyone accepted the new dietary order. In 1573, a soldier stationed in St. Augustine complained of a diet of “herbs, fish and other scum and vermin.”

Harvests, too, frustrated residents and alarmed officials. The spring of 1662 witnessed “starving times,” while the year 1712 was known as “*la gran hambre*” (the great hunger).

### **Strategies and Distances, Disasters and Dependencies**

St. Augustine and Pensacola served myriad roles: a buffer to the Protestant North, a barrier to dreams of a French Gulf Coast, The mere occupation of St. Augustine and Pensacola reinforced Spanish territorial claims of legitimacy. St. Augustine and Pensacola were poor but strategic outposts on the fringes of a far-flung empire. The riches of New Spain--silver bars mined at Potosí, gold melted from Aztec temples, sugar and coffee from Jamaica and Cuba—traveled the Spanish Main, skirting St. Augustine and riding the Gulf Stream. St. Augustine and Pensacola functioned as sentinel for Spanish ships fleeing Dutch sea beggars and British sea dogs, and a haven for survivors of ship wrecks and piracy.

Lacking precious metals and self sufficiency, La Florida’s towns, forts, and interior depended upon the imperial granaries and treasuries of Havana and Mexico City. But the annual royal subsidy (*el situado*) arrived regularly but occasionally not at all. Colonial officials understood that physical distances allowed for bureaucratic latitude. The expression, “*Obedezco pero no cumpro*”—“I obey but do not comply”—eloquently and prosaically underscored one of the few advantages of isolation. A royal appointment to St. Augustine or Pensacola must have been a shattering disappointment, compared to assignments in Cartagena, Buenos Aires, or Vera Cruz. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century governor, complaining of a shortage of troops to defend St. Augustine, explained that Spaniards recoil with “horror . . . when they even hear the name Florida.”

St. Augustine, Pensacola, and the missions depended greatly upon the kindness of strangers. St. Augustine’s survival depended upon provisions and coin from Cuba, along with bushels of corn harvested from native fields and transported to workers at El Castillo de San Marcos and friars in the

hinterlands. Pensacola's survival was even more precarious, considering the hostile Natives, frequent hurricanes, and the impoverished soil. The besieged presidio survived because of provisions purchased from French traders in Mobile and royal officials in Mexico.

New Spain, when compared to imperial rivals New England, New Netherland, and New France, maintained centralized control of its American possessions. The Archives of the Indies stands as a monument to imperial efforts to duplicate Old Spain in New Spain. Geographer D.W. Meinig, contends "[Spain's] transatlantic connection was an exact opposite" of patterns found in northern America: "a singular route from a single port connecting to two portals on the American mainland, one the focus for the traffic of Mexico and the other for that of Peru; a rigidly controlled maritime axis of an enormous imperial system that asserted exclusive territorial rights to most of the American world . . ." Yet for all of the bureaucratic commands and directives, New Spain's northern borders were notoriously porous and ungoverned.

Life in La Florida, as governors and slaves came to understand, depended upon the shifting winds of fortune. The Tainos of the West Indies called the ferocious storms that brewed toward the end of summer, *huracán*. Combining unimaginable power and fury, *el huracán* was a natural wonder and a political nightmare. Hurricanes dashed the dreams of Spanish kings and Creole planters, altering the course of the Spanish Florida. "During the night of the nineteenth of this month of September [1559]," wrote Tristán de Luna, Governor of Florida, to Phillip II, King of Spain, "there came up from the north a fierce tempest, blowing for twenty-four hours from all directions . . . without stopping but increasing continuously, did irreparable damage to the ships of the fleet." The Spanish fort on Pensacola Bay was destroyed. Four years later, a hurricane scattered a French fleet sailing to relieve Fort Caroline. Spanish forces destroyed the French settlement and put to the sword French Protestants.

## **Literature and Culture**

The quixotic and mythical search for the Fountain of Youth set a tone for the literature that defined Florida. The doomed 1528 *entrada* led by Narváez begat the chronicle of Cabeza de Vaca, a work whose fantastic journey and half-believable resurrection blur the boundary between literal and fantastic. Published in 1542, *La Relacion* was the first book to describe the vast continent north of Mesoamerica. Narváez's widow dispatched a small party to reconnoiter Tampa Bay in hopes of finding the lost expedition. The Tocabaga Indians slaughtered the hapless Spaniards, sparing only one young man, Juan Ortiz. After enduring torture, the chief prepared to fling Ortiz upon the fire, but a young Indian woman pleaded for his life. Thus began the first great captivity narrative in American history.

Eight decades later, the Englishman John Smith may well have pirated the Florida tale and transplanted the story line to Pocahontas's Virginia.

Born in Cartagena in 1538 of Spanish parents, Hernando Escalante de Fontaneda was en route to Spain when his boat was shipwrecked off Florida's Ten Thousand Islands. Rescued, the young boy learned to speak four Indian languages, living among the Calusa for four decades until an exploring party led by Menéndez de Avilés rescued and returned the Spaniard to civilization. Upon returning to Spain, Fontaneda wrote *La Memoria*, considered one of the first great captivity narratives. "These Indians have no gold, less silver, and less clothing," he recounted to a captivated public." He also—rather ungratefully—recommended Florida's Indians be sold into slavery, so that "their number become thinned." *La Memoria* also introduced a number of place names that would be familiar to later generations: Mayaimi, Tequesta, and Tampa.

In 1539, the intrepid Hernando de Soto set out from Cuba with 600 men, 237 horses, 200 pigs, a dozen Catholic priests and two women to conquer La Florida. His audacious adventure across the continent yielded four precious accounts, including a work that may claim to be the first book set in the present-day United States by a Native "American" author, *La Florida del Inca*, by Garcilaso de la Vega. In addition, de Soto's audacious endeavor rescued the seemingly doomed Juan Ortiz, whose newfound skills at speaking and translating Native dialects proved useful.

In 1587, the first Franciscans arrived in St. Augustine. One of the friars, Father Alonso Escobedo left behind a rhymed narrative, *La Florida*, considered to be the first work of literature written in Florida, and an invaluable source on Native American life.

The Quaker traveler and botanist William Bartram barely survived his attempts to establish a plantation on the St. Johns River a few centuries later, yet those miseries failed to curb the enthusiasm of his 1791 *Travels*, a scientific-lyrical account of a mystical place that inspired William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Florida continues to enchant and lure authors. The state has a peculiar way of inspiring and befuddling authors who, in the spirit of Ponce's journey, find themselves shuttled between a place both real and imagined.

### **From Ball to Bolita**

In 1676, Father Juan de Paiva served as a pastor at San Luis de Talimali, an important mission near present-day Tallahassee. He confronted grave challenges—a persistent shortage of dedicated friars, Native revolts, and conflicts with secular officials—but he also grappled with an issue challenging men of the cloth today: Is the love of sport compatible with Christian virtues? The Indians' fondness for ball,

*“el juego de la pelota,”* perplexed missionaries. Their writings include a drawing of a goal post (a pole topped by a nest cradled by a stuffed eagle). If an Apalachee player kicked the ball into the nest, his team was awarded two points. A bishop criticized the game as “barbaric and bestial,” and called for its abolition. “And they fall upon one another at full tilt,” he wrote, adding, “when the pile is broken up, four or five are lifeless, others have their eyes gauged out, and many arms and legs are broken.” The players, dressed only in deerskin loincloth, painted their bodies with fetid bear grease. Three and a half centuries later, Tallahassee remains the site of games played with religious passion. Proving that there is nothing new under the sun, a professor of religion describes our modern obsession with games of ball: “Thousands of faithful followers, dressed in ritual clothing, go on long pilgrimages to sacred shrines where they writhe in emotional fervor, enacting bizarre rituals of worship of their god-like leaders.” He was, of course, describing the annual Florida-Florida State football match.

### **The Fourteenth Colony and the American Revolution**

Schoolbooks typically ignore the American Revolution’s Florida Theater. A pawn on the great diplomatic chess board, Florida became a British possession in 1763, as a result of Spanish missteps in the Seven Years War/French and Indian War. Britain had taken possession of Havana and Spain offered Florida in return for the valuable Cuban port city. King George III wrote Lord Butte in November 1762, “Mr. Townshend [Colonial Secretary of State] was here today . . . said he heard Florida was given us instead of Puerto Rico, that it was an uninhabited country . . .” Britain’s Fourteenth Colony, Florida remained loyal to the Crown during the American Revolution, while Spain aided the American cause. To this day, Spaniards affectionately call the Málaga Cathedral by the nickname, “*la manca*” because funds that would have financed the “missing tower” instead supported the revolution across the ocean.

Spain supported the Revolution militarily as well as financially. Spanish general and governor of Louisiana, Bernardo de Gálvez expelled British merchants from New Orleans, bedeviled the British fleet in the Gulf of Mexico, and captured Mobile. He besieged Pensacola, capturing the strategic port town on May 8, 1781. King Carlos III of Spain conferred the status of Conde (Count) upon the dashing and decorated hero, who emblazoned upon his coat of arms the inscription, “Yo Solo” (I Alone). Galveston, Texas, honors his memory, as does an equestrian statue at the entrance of the U.S. State Department.

### **Imperial Misfortune**

Emblazoned on Spain’s royal coat of arms, the words “Plus Ultra” (Further Beyond) reminded the world of Emperor Charles V’s favorite motto. Between the Columbian voyages and 1790, the year

the last treasure fleet sailed the Spanish Main, Spain forged an empire ranging from Central Europe to North Africa, from Florida to Patagonia, from California to the Philippines. Alas, Spain overreached and underachieved. In spite of the tons of bullion and silver that flooded Spain, noted Paul Kennedy, precious metals “was to Spain as water on a roof—it poured on and then was drained away.” In slow motion, the Netherlands, and then Spanish colonies in the New World gained independence.

Spain surrendered Florida twice, a result of geopolitical misfortune, internal decay, and restless neighbors. A pawn during the epic Seven Years War, Florida became a chessboard piece, ruled by Great Britain between 1763 and 1783. When Britain lost the American Revolution, Florida was returned to Spain. Second Spanish Period Florida Governor Manuel de Zéspedes (1783-90) famously predicted, “The best fortification would be a living wall of industrious citizens.” Land hungry Americans poured across the porous borders along with Miccosukee-speaking Indians, Swiss planters, African slaves, and Italian and Minorcan refugees from the British New Smyrna fiasco. Spain’s imperial grasp may have displayed signs of overreaching, but the royal flag still flew across the peninsula as well as a critical but narrow panhandle from the St. Mary’s River to Mobile Bay across the Pearl River.

Few could have imagined the convulsive tremors registered in Florida as the result of the War of 1812. Across the southern frontier, so-called American “War Hawks” greeted the onset of war with Great Britain. Some blamed the British for the Creek uprisings in the American Southeast; others urged America to seize the moment and oust Spain from the Gulf region. General Andrew Jackson, in a series of military expeditions, methodically crushed the Red Stick Creeks, tweaked the Spanish in Pensacola, and in January 1815 mauled the vaunted British forces at the Battle of New Orleans. What Jackson lacked in diplomacy and portfolio, he made up in bravado and courage. He accused the Spanish governor of Pensacola of harboring “refugee banditti from the Creek Nation” and threatened “an eye for an eye.” While critics in Washington gasped at Jackson’s brazen conduct, supporters cheered the Tennessean, even if his conduct violated international niceties. “Old Hickory” marched again to Florida in 1818, ostensibly to demand the return of runaway slaves and to punish unrepentant Seminoles. In two months, he hanged two British citizens, destroyed a handful of Seminole towns, and captured Pensacola.

Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, realizing Jackson’s actions delivered the message the equivalent of a diplomatic battering ram, defended the Hero of New Orleans. The New Englander bluntly told the Spanish minister that if Spain did not surrender Florida, “Spain would not have the possession of Florida to give us.” In Madrid, King Ferdinand VII realized imperial troops could not possibly defend Florida. The Spanish Empire was beginning to crumble, not only in Mexico and Florida but South America. The only question remained when, not if, aggressive neighbor to the north would

seize Florida. The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 ceded Florida to the U.S., providing a semblance of face-saving for humiliated Spain.

### **The Eagle Screams**

The Jacksons left the Hermitage in Nashville for Florida. He had been appointed Florida's first territorial governor. As the impetuous Tennessean learned of Governor José Callava's delaying tactics, his fiery temper erupted. When the new governor arrived in Pensacola—his third “visit” to the city-- on June 21, he was prepared to take military action, if necessary, to speed the transfer of power. On 17, July 1821, flag-raising ceremonies in St. Augustine and Pensacola signified a new chapter in Florida history. Once again, boats awaited Spaniards and *floridanos* bound for Cuba. In St. Augustine, Alcalde Juan Entralgo's delays so annoyed American authorities that they forcibly ousted him from his office. To put these events into perspective, consider the words of Michael Gannon: Not until the year 2055, will the flag of the United States have flown over Florida as long as the Spanish pennant.

New accents could be heard in Pensacola and St. Augustine. As the Ancient City attracted increasing numbers of Northern Protestants, the newcomers disapproved of old customs, labeling the celebration of Carnival and the trafficking of goods on Sunday as “vulgar and gross.” Symbolic of the new order was the Americanization and de-Catholicization of El Castillo de San Marcos to Fort Marion, in honor of the Revolutionary War hero.

As St. Augustine's influence, prestige, and population diminished, Pensacola's position steadily grew. Jackson estimated the city's population at 3,000 in 1821, comprised principally of French, Spanish, and American residents. Following a devastating yellow fever outbreak in 1822, the city's population and strategic importance as a naval base grew until it reached 2,300 in 1839. Rachel Jackson, the embattled wife of Florida's first territorial governor, arrived in Pensacola in the summer of 1821. “The inhabitants all speak Spanish and French,” she exclaimed. “Some speak four languages. Such a mixed multitude! . . . Fewer white people by far than any other.” Horrified at the lack of morality she found in Pensacola, Mrs. Jackson was especially alarmed at how the Spanish kept “the Sabbath profanely.” Still, Mrs. Jackson was charmed at the physical setting. “The most beautiful water prospect I ever saw,” she wrote. Adding, “There is something in it so exhilarating, so pure, so wholesome, it enlivens the whole system.” Claiming injuries to his pocketbook and family's health, Governor Jackson resigned his appointment and left Florida in October 1821.

For centuries, the presence of creoles, the result of miscegenation, attracted little concern; however, as Florida and the Deep South became increasingly paranoid and obsessed over slavery and its future, race became a central concern. The “colored Creoles” of Pensacola had enjoyed freedoms not

shared by other Africa Americans, such as the right to carry firearms and the occasional right to serve on juries. Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831 served as a "fire bell in the night" for white southerners. State laws tightened control over urban blacks, free blacks, and slave education. A Pensacola editor wrote in 1848, "Some of the Negroes of the town are in the habit of assembling . . . on Sunday evenings to amuse themselves in the way of congo dancing." In 1848, the Florida legislature passed a law demanding that all free Negroes have guardians. When the law was tightened in 1856, almost half of Pensacola's 320 Creoles fled to Mexico.

Spanish accents could still be heard in some of Florida's most remote outposts. In 1824, concerned that the Spanish or British might trade weapons to Florida's newest threat—the Seminole Indians--Colonel George Mercer Brooke supervised construction of a fort at the confluence of Hillsborough Bay and the Hillsborough River. To the troops' amazement, they discovered an encampment of Spaniards, Cubans, and "Spanish Indians" on what became known as "Spanishtown Creek." For centuries, such fishing *ranchos* had dotted the Gulf Coast of Florida. The fishermen built shacks along Charlotte Harbor, Sarasota Bay, and the Ten Thousand Islands, where they salted, smoked, and dried vast catches of mullet, pompano, and red snapper to sell during Lenten season in Cuba. In his diary dated December 1828, Major George A. McCall described the "Spanish fishermen established at Charlotte Harbor, who occasionally visited the military post with fruit, dried pompano [sic], a most delicious fish found in that bay . . ." On the southern tip of the sparsely inhabited Pinellas peninsula, Antonio Máximo Hernández supplied fresh turtle meat and fish from his *kraal* and *rancho* at Máximo Point. Other Spaniards, Joe Silva, Juan Levique, William Papy, settled along the peninsula. Impressed by the number and influence of mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish settlers in Tampa, Tony Pizzo called Tampa "a cracker village with a Latin accent."

### **New Spanish Accents in Key West and Tampa**

The place on ancient Spanish maps indicating "Cayo Hueso" (Bone Key) became Americanized to Key West. The archipelago of the Florida Keys had long provided pirates of the Caribbean a haven. In 1823, Commodore David Porter, a hero of the Barbary campaign, arrived to command a new anti-piracy naval force with its base in Key West.

In 1868, Americans were reminded—not for the first or last time—that Cuba lurked only ninety miles from Florida. Key West suddenly became a Cuban expatriate center as a violent rebellion took place in Cuba. Cuban émigrés, including cigar manufacturers, made Key West an industrial power as well as the largest city in 1890 Florida. "To a person who has never visited this island," wrote Sylvia Sunshine in her 1879 guidebook, "it is impossible to imagine that only miles from the mainland of

Florida is a city so nearly in appearance to the Spanish dominions of the Old World where hardly a sentence in English is heard.”

In 1886, a new Cuban exile community rivaled Key West. Don Vicente Martínez Ybor, a Spanish patron who had fled Cuba for Key West, founded Ybor City, near Tampa. Thousands of Cubans (white and black), Spaniards, and later Italians created one of America’s most extraordinary industrial towns. *Lectores* (readers) in Ybor City and Key West read novels of Cervantes, Pérez-Galdós, and Hugo to *tabaqueros* (cigar workers).

Ybor City and Key West were cities of ideas and intellectuals. A vibrant and prolific Latin culture and Spanish-language press flourished. Scores of long-forgotten newspapers and magazines sprang to life between the 1870s and 1920s: *Eco de Florida*, *El Yara*, *Cuba*, *El Cubano*, *La Contienda*, *El Internacional*, *La Traducción*, *La Gaceta*, *El Porvenir*, *El Avisador Cubano*, and *Hispano-Americano*.

In Tampa, Spaniards built enduring institutions. In 1891, Spaniards organized El Centro Español, a society of mutual aid. The club’s by-laws stipulated that all members “be Spaniards by birth and by patriotic inclination *or* they be loyal to Spain and to its prestige in America.” In 1892, members dedicated an ornate wooden structure, an event highlighted by fireworks and several lyric operas. In 1910, the Spanish community was so confident of its future that it dedicated two elaborate brick structures, one in Ybor City and another in West Tampa. Asturian immigrants eventually organized their own society. El Centro Asturiano became a North American auxiliary of Havana’s renowned namesake building and club. Cuban leaders approved the new charter in 1902. A decade later, work began on a new clubhouse that the local paper described as “the most beautiful building in the South.” The \$110,000 structure featured a 1,200-seat theatre, a *cantina*, and a modern *biblioteca* (library). By 1919, El Centro Asturiano boasted 3,600 members. During the New Deal, the club housed America’s only Spanish-language theater.

The most far-reaching and progressive achievement by Tampa’s Spanish mutual aid societies occurred in the field of cooperative health care. Spaniards built two modern hospitals and several medical clinics that offered free health care to members. The American Medical Association condemned “collectivized medicine” and blackballed physicians who worked for the Latin medical clinics.

Immigrants from the provinces of Galicia and Asturias recalled injustices inflicted upon their families by two despised institutions: the Spanish army and the Catholic Church. It was no coincidence that the doctrine of anarchism flourished in Galicia and Asturias. In 1913, Manuel Padrinas, a Spanish anarchist who had lived in Tampa assassinated Spain’s Premier José Canalejas y Mendez.

## Cuban Wars of Independence

If the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church, Captain Joseph Fry seemed an unlikely candidate for martyrdom. Born in 1826 in Fort Brooke, the military cantonment that evolved into the City of Tampa, Fry graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. Following the Civil War, Fry became captain of the *Virginus*, a side-wheel steamer. Its cargo, however, was not tourists hoping to enjoy Cuban beaches but rather guns targeted for Cuban rebels. In 1868, a rebellion erupted in Cuba known as the Ten Years' War. As Captain Fry sailed near Guantanamo, Cuba, a Spanish corvette commandeered the American vessel. In drumhead courts-martial, Captain Fry and his crew were convicted of piracy. The penalty was death. On 7 November 1873, Spanish firing squads shot Fry and 57 other Cuban revolutionaries and some Americans. The incident became an international cause-célèbre.

The Ten Years War created a pantheon of heroes. The son of Spanish immigrants, the Cuban-born José Martí was exiled following his arrest for treason and sedition in the Ten Years' War. He became a fiery revolutionary following his visits to Ybor City and Key West in the early 1890s. "In Tampa, the eagle screamed," he wrote; "in Key West, the sun shone." In 1895, Martí and other expatriates launched a second uprising known as the Cuban War of Independence. Cubans in Tampa and Key West pledged "*un dia para la patria*," one's day's wages for Mother Cuba. Motivated by prophets and profits, the Cuban cause brought together a strange coalition in Florida. Insurgents battling Spanish *voluntarios* needed arms and ammunition. In 1896 alone, thirty gunrunners managed to smuggle cargos along the Cuban coastline. The filibusters included a future Florida governor, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward.

Martí admired American freedoms and values but feared American power. In February 1898, his fears became reality, when the USS *Maine* exploded in Havana harbor. The Cuban War of Independence quickly morphed into the Spanish-American War, famously encapsulated in a contemporary slogan, "Remember the *Maine*; To Hell with Spain."

The young author Sherwood Anderson shared his countrymen's contempt of Spain, likening this war to "robbing an old Gypsy woman in a vacant lot after a fair." The war came to Florida fast and furiously. Secretary of War Russell Alger announced that Tampa would serve as the base of military operations for the invasion. American soldiers also gathered in Fernandina, Jacksonville, Lakeland, Miami and Key West. War-fever spiked a virulent hatred of all-things Spanish. A *New York Times* reporter noted in Tampa, "Dark scowls lurk upon the faces of American men as Spanish is heard spoken. whether by Cuban or Spanish refugee, the language is hated." Fearing a fifth column, the U.S. military took possession of El Centro Español.

## **Neo-Spanish Revival: Gilded Age St. Augustine**

In 1883, one of America's greatest Robber Barons, Henry Morrison Flagler, made a fateful trip to Florida. A newly wed, Flagler took his bride to St. Augustine. His marriage to Alice Shourds may have been loveless, but Flagler did fall in love with the Ancient City. "We can make St. Augustine," he announced, "the Newport of the South." With an iron wheel and millions of dollars, Flagler did not so much create a southern Newport, but reinvented St. Augustine.

In one astonishing decade, Flagler built three of the grandest hotels in Florida history, reshaping St. Augustine and recasting Florida tourism and transportation. The architectural team of John Mervin Carrère and Thomas Hastings designed on a grand scale, and the Ponce de Leon, did not disappoint. Louis Tiffany stained glass decorated the interiors. Dedicated in 1888, the Spanish Revival hotel ushered in Florida's Gilded Age. Two additional hotels, the Cordova and Alcazar, also dazzled visitors in their Spanish Renaissance motifs.

## **Florida Discovers Spain: The 1920s**

The decade of the 1920s introduced Florida to America through the news reels of land booms, bathing beauty pageants, and new architectural styles. Redefined and reimagined once again in the 1920s, Florida became a place Americans wanted to visit, a fast-paced dreamstate. Places not-yet born or not-yet part of Wall Street or Main Street conversation—Miami Beach, Boca Raton, and Coral Gables—symbolized the new Florida.

A new or newly adapted architecture defined Florida and California, the two great American dreamstates. The mission style and Mediterranean Revival stamped a new identity upon the Sunshine State. Ironically, the California mission style caught on in a way that the Florida mission style was never popular. Florida's missions, built of palmetto thatch and wood, did not survive, whereas California's missions survived because of their stucco design. The popularity of *Zoro* in book and film also helped popularize a mythical mission past.

Florida became identified as the Mediterranean of America, a place of escape for businessmen who needed a Spanish vacation but did not like Spanish waiters or Spanish accents. Why travel to Córdoba or Barcelona when one could drive the Model T to Sarasota or Palm Beach and be surrounded by buildings that looked like they belonged in Andalusia and Castille. Architects, many who had traveled to Europe and Latin America, created an American style called Med Rev or Mediterranean Revival. Alexander Moore, once ambassador to Spain, is said to have gasped upon first seeing Addison Mizner's Palm Beach: "It's more Spanish than anything I ever saw in Spain!" To romanticize and authenticate the designs, Americans learned a new lexicon: *patio*, *plaza*, *logia*, and *cupola*.

The newest Spain-in-America motif appeared along the shores of Key Biscayne in 1913-1914. The fabulously wealthy Charles Deering wished to recreate palaces he had admired in Italy and Spain. He christened his 40-room, 180-acre fantasy Villa Vizcaya. Completed in 1916, Vizcaya—named after a province in the Basque region—borrowed architectural inspiration as well as the purchases of tapestries, paintings, and pottery—from Spain.

### **Fears and Hopes: The 1930s**

Between the Great Depression and Pearl Harbor, events in Europe and Asia alarmed Floridians, already reeling economically and desperate to avoid another military catastrophe. Floridians who once called Germany, Britain, and Czechoslovakia home watched in horror as their ancestral homelands were swept into the maelstrom of war. Nowhere was the “coming of war” felt more intensely than Tampa and its Spanish communities.

In April 1931, Tampeños cheered the news that their beloved Spain had deposed the decaying Bourbon monarchy and embraced republicanism. In Tampa, 1931 was remembered for two searing events: the twilight of *la lectura* (*los lectores*’ readings), a beloved custom that vanished forever because of labor disturbances, and secondly, the Great Depression that swept away the old order, and with it, the popularity of Tampa-made cigars. While the cigar industry never recovered, Tampa’s five-thousand Spaniards vicariously reveled in Spain’s democratic yearnings.

But the Republican government splintered, leading to social, economic, and political tumult. In 1936, the Popular Front (coalition of Socialists and Republicans) took power back from the right. By July, Spain drifted into a hellish civil war, one that would result in hundreds of thousands of deaths. Tampa’s Spaniards faithfully and vigorously supported the Popular Front, raising a staggering \$200,000 for the Republic, purchasing four ambulances for the Spanish Red Cross. Latin women collected clothing and milk for war-torn Spain; children organized paper drives and joined the Juventud Democrática Antifascista de West Tampa. Floridians observed a dress rehearsal of World War II as Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union sent troops and munitions to their respective sides. When General Francisco Franco triumphed in 1938, Tampeños wept.

The last gasp of what had once been one of the most radical communities in the U.S. may have occurred in 1948, in an unlikely setting. The U.S. presidential race of 1948 featured four candidates: the incumbent Harry S. Truman, the GOP nominee Thomas Dewey, the Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond, and Progressive Party’s Henry Wallace. The Iowa-born Wallace had served as Franklin Roosevelt’s vice president, 1941-1945, but the President unceremoniously dumped Wallace because of his strident liberalism and overtures to the Soviet Union. Wallace asked the great black tenor Paul Robeson to

perform a benefit concert for the ill-funded progressives in Tampa. Robeson agreed, but only if Tampa's Phillips Field permitted desegregated seating. In what must have been the first such event staged in Tampa, a huge crowd greeted the controversial singer. Robeson's greeted the crowd, "Viva España! Viva España!" Robeson understood the crowd, composed largely of elderly Latins who had passionately supported the Republican cause in Spain. One Spanish family named their son Henry Wallace Lavandera. The other Henry Wallace won six precincts in Tampa, his only such victories in the Deep South that election.

### **Revolutions in our Midst**

In 1955, a new revolutionary visited Tampa. Like Martí, he, too, was a Creole born in Cuba. Like his predecessor, he also had been jailed for revolutionary activities. But Fidel Castro was determined to finish Martí's dream of Cuba Libre. His first words to the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Club supporters in Tampa had been the first sentence Martí had uttered in 1891: "*Para Cuba que sufre, la primera palabra*"—For Cuba who suffers, the first word." Fidel understood the symbolic role of Tampa in Cuban history. "The Republic of Cuba," a beardless Fidel stated, "was the daughter of the cigarmakers of Tampa."

On December 31, 1958, *los barbudos* (the bearded guerrillas) seized Havana when dictator Fulgencio Batista abdicated. Batista had already sent his extensive art collection to his Daytona Beach mansion. Few Floridians or floridanos understood the repercussions. Fifty years later a Castro still holds the reins of Cuba, but other revolutions, more cultural than political, more economic than ideological, have taken hold across the Straits of Florida.

The first wave of Cubans arrived in 1959. Defiantly insisting that they were exiles, not emigrants, the largely middle-and upper-middle-class émigrés were welcomed by civic, humanitarian, and federal agencies. Day-by-day, through the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, small groups of Cubans arrived, determined to achieve the American and Florida Dream. A million dreams later, sociologists argue that the Cuban experience in South Florida constitutes the greatest immigrant success story in American history. In the process, Cubans profoundly changed Florida as much as Florida changed them.

Today, an astonishing 60 percent of Miami-Dade residents were born abroad. More than half the population speaks a language other than English at home. Miami-Dade County boasts the highest proportion of foreign-born than any county in America. But perhaps most remarkably, Miami-Dade and Florida are no longer exclusively Cuban; indeed, among the burgeoning Hispanic population, Cubans are minority in the state.

In Central Florida, surging numbers of Puerto Ricans have altered the politics and the accents of the region. In other places, Mexicans represent the demographic future. Hispanics now outnumber African Americans in Florida, a development considered as unimaginable as it was improbable a half century earlier.

Since the 1980s, each new Hispanic accomplishment—the first election of a Cuban-born congresswoman, the success of Unívision, the election of the first U.S. Senator who was a Pedro Pan refugee—has reverberated across the state and nation. But in a place with deep Spanish roots, what may appear to be a “first” can too often be mistaken. When Tampa’s Bob Martínez took his inaugural oath in January 1987, journalists noted the historic meaning of the day: Florida now had its first Hispanic governor. Historians reminded the Fourth Estate that Bob Martínez, the grandson of Spanish immigrants, was actually the fiftieth Hispanic governor of Florida!

The reverberations of the Columbian exchange can be felt at the dawn of a new century and millennium. Supermarkets, *bodegas*, *taquerías*, *tapas* bars, *heladerías*, and *cafes* serving *café con leche* behold the Florida’s cornucopia. Floridians and floridanos can, with ease, indulge in the new Columbian Exchange: mamey *batidos*, guava *pasteles*, mango *helados*, fried Cuban- Chinese rice, African cassava, Jamaican jerk spices, Honduran tomatillos, African yams, delicatessens serving *jamón ibérico*, Polish pierogis, Korean kimchi, and fresh mozzarella made from water buffalo. The cooking pot may prove to be more powerful than the melting pot. A history of Florida foodways presents a parade of cultures both resistant to change and eager to adapt, a virulent fear of outsiders and an innate curiosity about the “others” stockpot.

Fittingly, Florida’s oldest eating establishment is the Columbia, “the Gem of Spanish Restaurants.” In a state of bewildering mobility and change, the Columbia, founded in Tampa’s Ybor City in 1905, symbolizes deep roots and cultural persistence. One dish especially emphasizes the importance of tradition and memory: caldo gallego (Galician soup). An iconic dish in northern Spain, the peasant soup contains white beans, greens, ham, broth and potatoes (the last ingredient added after the 16<sup>th</sup> century). A hearty soup fit for cold Galician winters, the dish seems out-of-place for Florida’s hot and humid climate. Gazpacho would seem better suited, a cold tomato soup popular in southern Spain. But Galicians, not Andalusians, immigrated to Tampa, and they brought with them the memories and recipes of their beloved *caldo gallego*.

## **La Florida in the New Millennium**

Florida's historic trajectory is complete. How fitting and symmetrical that a place called La Florida in 1513—a colony, territory, and state shaped by Spanish-speaking floridanos—has become a lodestar for Hispanics at the dawn of a new millennium.

---

*Gary R. Mormino holds the Frank E. Duckwall professorship in Florida Studies at the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg.*