

Imperialism & St. Augustine: 1670-1763

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During the colonial era of Latin America, most of Spain's colonies served to enrich conquistadors and the Spanish crown. Florida was an exception as it lacked in both material wealth and population. Despite this, Florida remained an important colony and by far its most important settlement was St. Augustine. The latter half of what is known as the First Spanish Period saw Florida caught in the struggle between Spain and England in North America. The Age of Enlightenment meant this conflict was mostly one of imperialism instead of a Catholic-Protestant religious conflict as it had been in the past. This imperial conflict brought hardship and destruction to Florida and defined race relations between the Spanish and their Native American and black subjects during this period. These included multiple attacks on St. Augustine itself, a destructive Native American proxy war, and an unusual role for by St. Augustine as a beacon for runaway slaves.

The Spanish made St. Augustine part of their *presidio* (fortified outpost) system. Presidios were manned by professional soldiers and sailors of the king. "Unlike conquistadors, they were forbidden to take booty or captives; unlike encomenderos...they were not entitled to the tribute or forced services of Indians."¹ Presidios were supported by an annual transfer of royal revenue called the *situado*.² The nearby Gulf Stream made St. Augustine important: it was a safe harbor at which to stop and a base for rescuing shipwrecked sailors and salvaging wrecks. The Gulf Stream was used by ships returning to Spain from New Spain and New Grenada, especially the Spanish treasure fleets from 1566 to 1790.

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés came to Florida in 1565 to shore up Spain's claim by founding a city and eliminating a French Huguenot settlement, Fort Caroline founded the previous year near the mouth of the St. Johns River.³ Menéndez captured Fort Caroline then massacred both the French settlers at the fort and their shipwrecked compatriots at Matanzas Inlet.⁴ The seizure of the fort was necessary to maintain Spanish control, but the massacres were largely due to Protestant Christians being seen as heretics by Catholic Spain. This would be the last major incident of Catholic-Protestant-based violence in Florida's history; henceforth, the rivalry over Florida centered on Imperialism.

¹ Michael Gannon, *The new history of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 63.

² Gannon 63.

³ Gannon 43.

⁴ Gannon 46.

A raid by Sir Francis Drake in 1586 marked the end to the initial expansion of Florida; afterward, the colony “became a shrinking empire, struggling with powerful England over disputed lands.”⁵ The conflict between Spain and England began in earnest with the sacking of St. Augustine by English privateer Robert Searles in 1668 and the founding of Charles Town, South Carolina by the English in 1670. Spanish Queen Regent Mariana realized the danger; she declared Florida “too strategic to be abandoned to the English” and demanded it be made a priority.⁶ This included increasing the garrison and the *situado* and building a stone fort to replace the series of wooden forts that had done a poor job of defending the city thus far.⁷ Construction on the Castillo de San Marcos lasted from 1672 until 1695.⁸ The Castillo would eventually become “the only visible symbol of Spanish sovereignty of Florida.”⁹ Spain’s continued claim to Florida during the 18th century depended on continued control of St. Augustine.¹⁰

The Castillo was finished in time for the official outbreak of English-Spanish hostilities known in the Americas as Queen Anne’s War. South Carolina Governor James Moore led an army that arrived at St. Augustine on November 10, 1702 and laid siege to the Castillo. Moore plundered and burned the town, but was unable to force the Castillo’s surrender before reinforcements from Havana forced the English to retreat back to South Carolina on December 30, 1702.¹¹

The English threat grew closer with the founding of Georgia in 1733. This colony was in clear violation of the 1670 Treaty of Madrid which placed the English-Spanish border at latitude 32°30’ (near Hilton Head, South Carolina).¹² This territorial dispute was among the reasons why war broke out again between the English and Spanish in 1739. During this conflict, the War of Jenkins’ Ear, Georgia Governor James Oglethorpe led a second siege of St. Augustine. Oglethorpe’s army arrived in Florida in May 1740, overrunning various small Spanish military

⁵ Gannon 59.

⁶ Gannon 73.

⁷ Gannon 72-73.

⁸ Gannon 102.

⁹ Gannon 108.

¹⁰ Carl Halbirt, "La Ciudad de San Agustin: A European Fighting Presidio in 18th Century La Florida," *Historical Archaeology* Fall 2004: 33.

¹¹ Halbirt 36.

¹² Gannon 101.

outposts along the St. Johns River before laying siege to the city in June with the aid of a small naval force. Early on June 15th, a sortie from St. Augustine of 300 Spanish, Indians, and free black militia surprised 143 Highlanders, colonial militia, and Indians occupying one of those outposts, Fort Mose. More than half of the English soldiers were killed or captured and the rest fled. This sortie helped weaken the attackers and, when his naval support left due to hurricane fears in July, Oglethorpe lifted the siege and returned to Georgia.¹³ It is worth noting that Native Americans participated on both sides of both sieges.

When Europeans first visited Florida in 1513, there were approximately 350,000 natives in what is now Florida. The largest groups were 150,000 Timucua in northeast Florida and 50,000 Apalachee mostly located between the Suwannee and Apalachicola Rivers.¹⁴ Most of Florida's Native Americans had in common “an unwillingness to settle down in farming villages” and a history of small-scale government by “consensus rather than coercion” (rather than oppressive domination by a large empire like the Aztecs or Incans).¹⁵ There were rebellions against the Spanish by the Guale and Ais in 1597, the Apalachee in 1647, and the Timucua in 1656.¹⁶ Once the English and French founded colonies in North America, Florida’s native population “could not be quarantined from contact” with those rival nations. The inability to pacify and control most of the Florida natives meant the more fertile inland portions of the colony were mostly unsettled. Thus “the colony would never lose its character as a military outpost.”¹⁷

Native labor in Florida was used less in Florida than in most Spanish American colonies. After a rebellion, some unmarried Guale males were used in St. Augustine for a time for construction and cultivating *sabanas* (soldiers’ farm fields).¹⁸ Apalachees were also punished for rebellion by contributing workers to St. Augustine for the latter half of the 17th century.¹⁹ This included the only mining in Florida: the quarrying of coquina for the construction of Castillo de

¹³ Rodney Baine, "General James Oglethorpe and the Expedition Against St. Augustine," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* Summer 2000: 207-223.

¹⁴ Gannon 14.

¹⁵ Gannon 63.

¹⁶ Gannon 69 & 72.

¹⁷ Gannon 63 & David Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 73.

¹⁸ Gannon 68.

¹⁹ Covington 369.

San Marcos. The quarries employed up to 300 Apalachee *repartimientos* at a time.²⁰ The Apalachee missions did supply several thousand bushels of maize and beans to St. Augustine under instruction from the Franciscan missionaries. Apalachee transported these foodstuffs on the often difficult 200 mile journey to St. Augustine.²¹ Despite the occasional rebellions, there was no slavery imposed by the Spanish on Florida's Native Americans. "The relative lack of settlers and the Crown's close supervision of the developments in Florida spared its natives from some of Spain's most exploitative economic institutions."²²

Jesuits arrived soon after St. Augustine's founding in an attempt to win the allegiance of the Florida natives through peaceful religious methods, but due had given up by 1572 due to native hostility. The Franciscans arrived in 1587 to try their hand at converting the native population. By 1670, they had spread their *doctrinas* (mission centers) from St. Augustine to the Apalachee around modern Tallahassee and the Guale in coastal Georgia. Like the garrison of St. Augustine, the Franciscan missions were supported by the *situado*. The success of these missions peaked in the 1630s with 30,000 Christianized Indians in over 200 settlements under the religious care of 35 Franciscans operating 40 missions. The missions began to decline after this point, weakened by epidemics, native rebellions, and delays and shortages in the *situado*. But while these weakened the missions, what proved fatal to the mission system was the proxy war waged between the English and Spanish using Native Americans.²³

The English won the allegiance of some tribes with textiles and firearms and decimated the populations of others with warfare and slave raids by their native allies.²⁴ British-backed Indian raids on the Spanish had started as early as the 1620s, but the frequency of attacks greatly increased after the founding of South Carolina in the 1660s. The missions in coastal Georgia were wiped out by English-allied Indians in the 1680s.²⁵ Creek Indians destroyed several Apalachee and Timucua missions in 1701 and 1702 and routed a Spanish-led force of Apalachees attempting to retaliate. On their way to besiege St. Augustine in 1702, Governor

²⁰ Wasserman 50.

²¹ Covington 367-370.

²² Gannon 79-80.

²³ Gannon 49-50, 57, 66-72, 78-79, 93, 100, & 108.

²⁴ Gannon 74 & Weber 181.

²⁵ Gannon 93.

Moore's army destroyed the missions north of St. Augustine.²⁶ In 1704, Moore led another invasion of Florida, this time aimed at the Apalachee missions rather than St. Augustine. With 50 white volunteers and 1000-1500 Indian allies, Moore's raid burned down 9 of the 12 remaining missions in Apalachee. The Franciscans were killed as well as Indians and Spanish soldiers, with some tortured to death. About 1,300 Apalachee surrendered and were forced to return with Moore to South Carolina to resettle; within a decade, half would die. Over 4,000 more were brought back as slaves. Moore's men also looted the villages and missions and stole before burning them.²⁷ Moore's rampage continued until 1706 and "destroyed everything in Spanish Florida from the Apalachicola to the St. Johns River."²⁸ Despite the Age of Enlightenment, this brutality had some religious undertones, but mostly the English were interested in forcefully eliminating rivals and perceived threats.

The mission system in Florida and the native populations never recovered. In 1746, Bourbon reforms caused the Franciscans to lose most of their authority to secular clergy and by 1759 only 10 Franciscan priests were left in Florida.²⁹ The Yamasee War of 1715-1717 caused an influx of Indian refugees to Florida, mostly settling around St. Augustine. After that war, as many as 19 different tribes may have been living near St. Augustine.³⁰ Ironically, many of these "had played prominent roles in the destruction of the Florida missions."³¹ Instead of being punished for their past relations with Spain, these Indians were armed and supplied to fight the English.

Surviving Indians from around Florida sought safety near St. Augustine as English-sponsored raids by Creek Indians are believed to have reached all the way to the Keys.³² By 1726, there were only a little over 1000 Indians left in a handful of missions near St. Augustine. Raids and disease continue to whittle down the remaining population. A 1728 raid destroyed Nombre de Dios Chiquito, the largest village of Yamasee refugees "on the very edge of St.

²⁶ James Covington, "Apalachee Indians, 1704-1763," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Apr. 1972: 371.

²⁷ Covington 373-375 & Verner Crane, "The Southern Frontier in Queen Anne's War," *The American Historical Review* Apr. 1919: 387.

²⁸ Charles Arnade, "The English Invasion Of Spanish Florida, 1700-1706," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* July 1962: 35-36.

²⁹ Gannon 114.

³⁰ John Hann, "St. Augustine's Fallout from the Yamasee War," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Oct. 1989: 199-200.

³¹ Hann 180.

³² Gannon 94 & 108.

Augustine.”³³ This raid was particularly embarrassing because of its proximity to the city; it made the Spanish appear inept and incapable of protecting their Indian allies.³⁴ When the Spanish left in 1763, “all of the fewer than 100 Indians” living near St. Augustine left with them for Cuba. The rest of Florida was essentially depopulated of its aboriginal inhabitants, a void the Seminoles would fill.³⁵

St. Augustine also had black residents, a mix of free and slave. Only a few dozen black slaves accompanied the original settlers in 1565. As with the rest of Spanish America, black slaves were generally treated better than their counterparts in English colonies, with certain legal rights. Slaves were used in farming, construction, loading and unloading ships, and mining coquina for the Castillo de San Marcos. There were no plantations, slaves were allowed free time, the slave trade in St. Augustine was always small, and slaves could eventually purchase their freedom.³⁶ This stood in sharp contrast to the harsh system of chattel slavery by the English. By 1683 there were enough free blacks in St. Augustine that they formed an all-black militia unit and elected their own officers, a common practice in many Spanish American colonies.³⁷ Florida’s governor was so impressed by the bravery of some blacks defending the city against a 1728 raid that he freed them and abolished the city’s slave market, an uncommonly benevolent act even for the Age of Enlightenment.³⁸

Free blacks joined in some of the raids by Spanish and Native Americans against the Carolinas.³⁹ By 1689, enough slaves had either escaped or attempted escape that the South Carolina government had begun to worry.⁴⁰ Complaints were made by the English to the Spanish governor of Florida in 1688, 1716, 1724, and 1738 attempting to secure the return of runaway slaves and slaves captured in raids, but the Spanish refused.⁴¹

³³ Weber 180.

³⁴ Charlton Tabeau and William Marina, *A history of Florida* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1999), 58.

³⁵ Gannon 94.

³⁶ Gannon 168-172.

³⁷ Gannon 171 & Adam Wasserman, *A people's history of Florida, 1513-1876* (Sarasota: A. Wasserman, 2009), 58.

³⁸ Jane Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives In Florida, 1687-1790," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* Jan. 1984: 299.

³⁹ Gannon 172 & Wasserman 58.

⁴⁰ Wasserman 58.

⁴¹ Wasserman 60-61 and Landers 298 & 301.

Slaves running away from English plantations often sought safety in Florida if they could survive the journey. These runaways were welcomed, though the policy “developed in an ad hoc fashion over time to suit the shifting military, economic, and diplomatic interests of the colony.”⁴² The first fugitive slaves arrived in St. Augustine in 1687: 10 adults and a child that had escaped from South Carolina. All but one converted to Catholicism and remained in St. Augustine. This practice became official policy in 1693 on orders of King Charles II of Spain: any escaped slave that converted to Catholicism would be free.⁴³ The conversion requirement shows the incomplete nature of Enlightenment. The policy was both religious in nature and started by a Hapsburg, but would not be rescinded by the Bourbons until 1790 during the Second Spanish Period and then only because of pressure from the United States.⁴⁴

King Philip V revised Spanish policy in 1733 in a pair of *cedulas* that officially prohibited any financial compensation to the English owners of runaway slaves and specified that runaway slaves would need to give four years of servitude to the Spanish crown before being given their freedom. Only a few of the earliest runaways had their freedom officially purchased by the Spanish crown, but “the labor performed by the slaves on royal works more than offset the cost of their purchase.”⁴⁵ Florida’s continued offering of haven to runaway slaves continued to unsettle the English - unsurprising since by 1705 there were already more blacks than whites in South Carolina.⁴⁶ The Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina was blamed largely on the Spanish policy: “Negroes would not have made this insurrection had they not depended on St. Augustine for a place of reception afterwards...”⁴⁷

Enough runaway slaves had arrived in St. Augustine by 1738 that they were established in their own fortified town by Governor Manuel de Montiano. This may have been partly motivated controversy earlier than same year when the governor was successfully petitioned by a group of black slaves. They claimed to be runaways who had been illegally reenslaved by private citizens.⁴⁸ Montiano’s decision was a triumph of the rule of law, an Enlightenment

⁴² Landers 296.

⁴³ Gannon 172 & Landers 297.

⁴⁴ Gannon 179.

⁴⁵ Landers 300.

⁴⁶ Landers 298.

⁴⁷ Wasserman 63 & Weber 182.

⁴⁸ Landers 300-301.

philosophy. Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose (Fort Mose) was the first free black settlement in North America. This was not entirely benevolent: it removed the main population of non-whites from St. Augustine to a strategic location 2 miles north of the city which they would be highly motivated to keep secure.⁴⁹

Governor Oglethorpe's soldiers occupied Fort Mose during the 1740 siege. Most of displaced black militia residents participated in the surprise attack on the English forces there that helped to break the siege.⁵⁰ Oglethorpe had made it clear his invasion was not just about capturing territory, declaring "all Negroes which have deserted from South Carolina, which shall be taken in Florida during the said Expedition, shall be delivered up to their respective owners..."⁵¹

The siege destroyed Fort Mose and, for a time, free blacks once again lived in St. Augustine. In 1748, Governor Fulgencio Garcia de Solis forced them to relocate to a new Fort Mose built near the location of the first one. The blacks were reluctant to stay due to fear of attacks by the English and Indians and a desire to "live in complete liberty."⁵² The requirement that free blacks live in Fort Mose amounted to forced segregation.⁵³ In 1759, there were 67 free blacks living at Mose. Expecting to be returned to slavery by the English, all the free blacks left for Cuba with the Spanish in 1763.⁵⁴

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 transferred Florida to the English in exchange for returning Havana, Cuba to Spain. It was a fitting end for the First Spanish Period of Florida, a colony defined by imperialism. Spain lost Florida due to a war (the Seven Years War) started over imperialist squabbles, exchanging it for the return of a more valuable location. Spain's departure from Florida brought peace to the region for a time, but at the cost of ending Florida as a beacon of pseudo-freedom for blacks and depopulated an entire colony.

⁴⁹ Wasserman 61-62.

⁵⁰ Gannon 172-174.

⁵¹ Wasserman 64.

⁵² Landers 301.

⁵³ Landers 302.

⁵⁴ Gannon 174.

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