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## Constructing Indians in the Colonial Floridas: Origins of European-Floridian Identity, 1513-1573

by Daniel S. Murphree

In 1599, Garcilaso de la Vega published his account of Hernando de Soto's journey through what is today the southeastern United States. Based on the author's romantic perceptions of North America and dubious evidence provided by expedition members, the work's factual validity is questionable in many regards.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Garcilaso's interpretation provides valuable information pertaining to the images of the Floridas created and perpetuated by European visitors during the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In particular, one passage attributed to Hernando de

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1. For analysis of Garcilaso and his work, see Charles Hudson, "The Hernando de Soto Expedition, 1539-1543," in *The Forgotten Centuries: Indians and Europeans in the American South, 1521-1704*, ed. Charles Hudson and Carmen C. Tesser (Athens, Ga., 1994), 100; Juan Marichal, "The New World from Within: The Inca Garcilaso," in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Freda Chiappelli, 2 vols. (Berkeley, Calif., 1976), 1: 57-61; Jerald T. Milanich and Charles Hudson, *Hernando de Soto and the Indians of Florida* (Gainesville, Fla., 1993), 6-7.
2. The plural term "Floridas" is used throughout the text in order to take account of the varied geographies of "Florida" during the colonial period. At different times during the sixteenth century, Europeans used derivations of "Florida" to describe specific areas such as St. Augustine or broader geographic locales such as the entire present-day southeastern United States. Unless otherwise stated, "Floridas" refers to the territory immediately south of the 32° 28' latitude adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean, Mississippi River, and Gulf of Mexico.

Soto encapsulated general colonist opinions regarding native peoples. The explorer concluded that "all of the land of this realm is practically identical in kind and quality . . . [and] its inhabitants live, dress, eat and drink in somewhat the same manner. Even in their idols and their rites and ceremonies of paganism . . . and in their weapons, their social distinctions and their ferocity, they differ little or nothing from each other."<sup>3</sup> Garcilaso's report revealed an intrinsic characteristic of cultural interaction in the New World: settlers tended to envision the region's natives and the region itself as one, as the same.

That Europeans linked North America's environment with its indigenous peoples is well established and generally accepted by historians concerned with intercultural relations of the colonial era. Regarding the continent as a whole, prevailing sentiment among scholars is that these connections indicated promise and optimism to European colonists who believed that natives represented the purity of the environment. The images of both natives and environment, therefore, were positive. Indians symbolized the wonders of uncorrupted nature, their simple existences unfettered by material concerns, limited resources, or modern vices. Even when subsequent encounters destroyed romanticized images, association of natives with the environmental beneficence of the continent endured, in many ways maintaining its hold on Western society even to the present.<sup>4</sup>

Applying this theory to the sixteenth-century Floridas is problematic, however. Past scholars of the region have addressed the subject only in general terms. Amy Turner Bushnell proposed that in light of Indian conversion opportunities, "to Spaniards, Florida

3. Book 2, Chapter 30, Garcilaso de la Vega, *The Florida of the Inca: A History of the Adelentado, Hernando de Soto, Governor and Captain General of the Kingdom of Florida, and of Other Heroic Spanish and Indian Cavaliers, Written by the Inca, Garcilaso de la Vega, An Officer of His Majesty, and a Native of the Great City of Cuzco, Capital of the Realms and Provinces of Peru*, trans. and ed. John G. Varner (Austin, Texas, 1962), 170.
4. See Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1978), 38-44; Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Boston, 1999), 68; Gary B. Nash, *Red, White & Black: the Peoples of Early North America*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1992), 36; Gregory H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* (New York, 1997), 29-30; David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), 18.



must have seemed like a native Utopia by comparison to other colonies.”<sup>5</sup> Focusing on easily obtainable native labor and natural resources, Charles Hudson concluded that early Spanish visitors viewed the Floridas “as a land of milk and honey, begging for colonization.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Hoffman broadened this theme, titling a book in its regard and promoting the idea that, to many Europeans, the region “assumed the form of a new Andalucia,” rich with malleable native peoples and endless environmental treasures.<sup>7</sup> Yet, investigations of imagined parallels between the land and its natives do not exist. Despite a rapidly growing assortment of scholarly works concentrating on the Floridas, no systematic evaluation of colonists and how they connected Indians to the environment has been undertaken.

European commentaries on Indians and environment reveal that consensus theories do not apply to the Floridas during the early colonial period. While propagandists and Enlightenment intellectuals in Europe promoted the “Native = good environment” model (later generally enunciated as the “Noble Savage” paradigm), explorers, missionaries, and settlers favored a different interpretation. Acknowledging that Indians and the physical settling of the Floridas were symbiotic, European immigrants, with growing frequency over the years, believed neither entity to be beneficial to their goals in any regard. Colonists actually inhabiting the peninsula and its hinterlands increasingly condemned natives whom, they believed, represented a bewildering environment responsible for European failures. Unable to convincingly blame the land itself, colonists resorted to damning its most acceptable manifestation in the European mind—the very human, and therefore fallible, Indians. Explorers and settlers constructed an enduring image of natives while erecting a psychological barrier that would undermine intercultural understanding and catalyze the formation of a European-Floridian identity.<sup>8</sup>

5. Amy Turner Bushnell, *Suado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida*, American Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Papers 74 (Athens, Ga., 1994), 211.

6. Charles Hudson, *Knights of Spain, Warriors of the Sun: Hernando de Soto and the South's Ancient Chiefdoms* (Athens, Ga., 1997), 36.

7. Paul Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La., 1990), 4.

8. For an alternate perspective on European-American views of natives and the environment of North America, see Karen O. Kupperman, *Indians & English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2000), 142-44.



Formed through this process, the settler identity transcended ethnic and national boundaries. Though previous works have addressed Spanish and French colonial endeavors, most treated the communities as segregated entities in terms of cultural development, and few acknowledged the role of English visitors in the construction of identity.<sup>9</sup> While Spanish, French, and English colonization attempts in the Floridas should be evaluated in terms of their unique situations, certain ideas and images that all colonists shared must also be recognized. Previous scholars rarely, if ever, noted such commonalities and tended to highlight, rather than minimize, national and ethnic differences. Yet, like settlers in other areas of North America, Europeans in the Floridas connected to natives through their multiple failures and subsequent responses. As Eric Hinderaker has pointed out in the colonial Ohio Valley, in an environment similar in population diversity, images derived from uncertainty, danger, and misfortune “undergirded a broadly shared regional identity” among settlers.<sup>10</sup> Thus, recognizing the gradual formation of a European-Floridian identity, rather than distinct Spanish, French, or English identities, is crucial to understanding the region’s cultural development.

European-Floridian viewpoints belied the image generated by observers in Europe. For at least three hundred years, Spanish, French, and British writers in the Old World stridently promoted the natural wealth obtainable in the Floridas. Identified and explored shortly after the first voyages of Columbus, the peninsula and its hinterlands became the site of numerous European settlement attempts before the founding of other American colonies. Bolstered by nationalist bravado, private entrepreneurs and public statesman advocated the mineral, military, climatic, and agricultural benefits through publicized and widely circulated tracts encouraging many individuals and groups to seek fortunes in this enigmatic but assuredly resource-rich portion of the New World.<sup>11</sup>

9. John T. McGrath, *The French in Early Florida: In the Eye of the Hurricane* (Gainesville, Fla., 2000); and Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers* (Bloomington, Ind., 2002) are the most recent examples.

10. Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (New York, 1997), 256-59.

11. See Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: The Peopling of America on the Eve of Revolution* (New York, 1986), 431, 435; W.J. Eccles, *France in America* (East Lansing, Mich., 1990), 2; Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 63-69; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 88.

But early writers and strategists in Europe rarely published complete accounts of people who actually visited the peninsula and gulf coast. Exploits and accomplishments of some were applauded in general terms, but specific disappointments of these immigrants only surfaced in bits and pieces scattered throughout propaganda literature. More complete depictions might have shown that words actually written or spoken by the earliest explorers, missionaries, and settlers painted a different picture of the environment. The natural setting often betrayed the purposes of the Europeans (or so it appeared to them), not only failing to provide the riches expected but placing colonists in the difficult position of trying to rationalize failure in a setting unendingly depicted in Europe as paradise. One result was a progressive but indirect condemnation of the environment as personified in the indigenous inhabitants. Only after difficulties mounted between natives and Europeans throughout the Western Hemisphere did this mode of rationalization gain greater acceptance among both Floridian and non-Floridian Europeans, thereby becoming a recurring theme in the development of the Floridas specifically and the American colonies in general.

European-Floridian construction of a Native-Floridian image occurred gradually and, for the most part, unconsciously. From the early days of settlement, Spanish, French, and English visitors tended to generalize characteristics of the indigenous peoples in their specific descriptions of the population and broader commentary on the region. This occurred despite colonial interaction with a variety of different native groups during the sixteenth century, including the Calusa, Timucua, and Apalachee. Often descriptions emphasized Indian features and abilities that Europeans admired. Colonists reacted to survival techniques and evidence of native physical accomplishments with marvel and appreciation. Nevertheless, almost all comments, whether positive or negative, pointed out definitive differences between the two groups. Over time, the most seemingly benign or even approving comments re-enforced distinctions between settlers and natives, distinctions that more and more appeared divisive and insurmountable.

Most prevalent in the accounts of early European immigrants are descriptions of Native American "barbarism." In its simplest form, stripped of racial and religious connotations, the term barbarism during the early contact period referred to individual or



group deviance from European standards of behavior in terms of morals, manners, activities, lifestyles, and philosophies. Europeans frequently used the term to describe other peoples, including at times other Europeans.<sup>12</sup>

Generally entwined in references to barbarism were observations on native heathenism.<sup>13</sup> The worship of idols, resistance to biblical instruction, and lack of defined spiritual orthodoxy and hierarchies seemingly marked indigenous life as a deviant existence of godlessness, imprecise theology, and unconventional ceremonies. Consequently, Europeans grouped natives with traditional enemies like Moors or Turks. Though most settlers did not perceive the Indians as inherently evil, the fact that natives could not or would not embrace Christian teachings pointed to "ineradicable qualities of savagery."<sup>14</sup>

The physical appearance of the Indians garnered attention from Europeans as well.<sup>15</sup> In terms of dress and anatomy, Indians sparked lengthy comment and speculation. Again, while peoples of all cultures and regions commonly noted physical appearance in others, European comments on Indians were especially frequent and associated with character and civilization. As would become progressively more evident throughout North America, physical distinctions between Indians and Europeans functioned as an important medium for differentiation and the construction of separate identities.

That Europeans constantly referred to Indian barbarity, emotional expression, heathenism, and physical appearance is significant in itself. More illustrative of the evolution of the identity

12. See James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), 282-83; Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 15-16, 24; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, 1996), 149-50, 178, 202; Francis Jennings, *The Founders of America: From the Earliest Migrations to the Present* (New York, 1993), 82-83, 172-73.
13. For European views on native paganism/heathenism, see Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 34-38; Thomas D. Matijasac, "Reflected Values: Sixteenth Century Europeans View the Indians of North America," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 11 (1987): 32-36; Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 29; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, 20-24.
14. Ronald Takaki, "The Tempest in the Wilderness: The Racialization of Savagery," *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 906.
15. See Kupperman, *Indians & English*, 41-76; Matijasac, "Reflected Values," 36-38; Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a World View*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo., 1999), 28, 74; Alden T. Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism: Essays on the Colonial Experience* (New York, 1995), 3-17, 22.



process in the Floridas, however, is how these themes surfaced during times of European-Floridian frustration. Descriptions of Indian barbarity, heathenism, and physical appearance became much more fervent during times of stress for conquistadors and colonists. As Indians became the outlets for European-Floridian anxiety and disappointment, estrangement increased. Yet, genuine native obstruction of colonial goals did not truly account for Spanish, French, and British failures. Therefore, Europeans constructed an idea of native insufficiency, a racialized image that would serve their purposes on a consistent basis. This elastic characterization allowed European Floridians to condemn the natives, regardless of their actual role in European lives.

Juan Ponce de León, one of Spain's first explorers to visit the Floridas, laid the basis for this image of natives. Landing on the peninsula's eastern coast in April 1513, Ponce de León's expedition encountered hostile natives and very little that inspired the leader to stay in the region. Moving along the southern and western shores of the peninsula, the expedition again violently encountered Indians, and at least one Spaniard died in the fighting. By June, Ponce de León had seen enough of the Floridas and departed for Puerto Rico. Rejuvenated, he returned again in 1521 hoping to establish a colony for Spain. Again, local natives attacked his expedition and forced the Spaniards to depart for Cuba where Ponce de León died from a wound received in battle.<sup>16</sup>

As a consequence of his experiences, Ponce de León and his followers constructed negative impressions of both the land and its inhabitants, making Florida's indigenous peoples integral to Spanish explanations for misfortune in the region. According to his chronicler, Ponce de León believed that "the temperature of the region was very unsuitable and different from what he imagined, and the natives of the land [were] a very austere and very savage and belligerous and fierce and untamed people." Explaining his decision to leave the peninsula, Ponce de León complained, "but inasmuch as everything went wrong . . . it is believed that God was not served nor the time come for conversion of that land and province to our holy Catholic faith, since he [God] permits the

16. Michael Gannon, "First European Contacts," in *The New History of Florida*, ed. Michael Gannon (Gainesville, Fla., 1996), 17-21.

devil still to keep those Indians deceived . . . and the population of hell to be augmented with their souls."<sup>17</sup>

Ten years later, members of Pánfilo de Narváez's expedition made similar observations, though on a more extensive basis. Consisting of at least five ships and five hundred people, the contingent inadvertently landed on the western shores of the peninsula near Tampa Bay in 1528. Intending to reach a destination on the gulf coast northeast of Mexico, Pánfilo de Narváez instantly regretted the necessity of landing in the Floridas. Nevertheless, he sent his ships to find a better harbor to the north while a majority of his expedition accompanied him ashore to explore the area. Unable to find a harbor, the ships instead departed for Cuba, leaving the landing party with few supplies. Some of the desperate soldiers eventually destroyed their horses and used the carcasses for food. Dozens of Spaniards died from illness; Indians killed others. Despondent and yearning to go home, Pánfilo de Narváez and his remaining followers built rafts and attempted to sail along the coast to Mexico. None completed the journey, and most of the expedition's members, including Pánfilo de Narváez, perished.<sup>18</sup>

Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the most famous survivor, provided an account of the events that further illustrates the relationship between Spanish disappointments, depictions of the region, and images of natives. Throughout his reports, Cabeza de Vaca alluded to native behavior and appearance, and the relationship of both to the environment. Following a series of violent engagements with Indians, he described native demeanor and tactics at length, finally concluding that "the Indians of that land are very warlike and wild and strong."<sup>19</sup> Like many observers of warfare, Cabeza de Vaca viewed the enemy's battlefield expertise as partially attributable to exceptional physical strength and alarmingly aggressive temperament. Other chroniclers agreed with this assessment, noting that members of the expedition believed that

17. "Oviedo on Juan Ponce de León's Second Voyage, 1521," in *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, ed. David B. Quinn, 5 vols. (New York, 1979), 1: 247.

18. Jerald T. Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe* (Gainesville, Fla., 1995), 115-25.

19. "The Official Narrative of the Expedition of Hernando Soto, by Rodrigo Rangel, his secretary as rendered by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, 1539-1541," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 163.



Floridas' Indians were "well built . . . [and] had large bodies."<sup>20</sup> Reasserting the theme of physical uniqueness, Cabeza de Vaca and his fellow explorers asserted, "All the many Indians from Florida we saw were archers, and, being very tall and naked, at a distance appear giants. Those people are wonderfully built, very gaunt and of great strength and agility."<sup>21</sup> Rather than being derisive, Spanish comments generally expressed awe and appreciation. For the first time, however, Cabeza de Vaca referenced the Indians' nakedness, and the size of natives was conveyed with the label "giant," a term typically used in association with non-European peoples and settings.

Greater insight into the construction of Indian identity and its intersection with environmental disappointment also can be gleaned from records of the Narváez expedition. On one occasion, members of the *entrada* sought assistance from a group of Indians in the Floridas, explaining to them that one of their boats had sunk and four Spaniards had drowned. Though it is unclear what kind of reaction the Spaniards expected, it is apparent that they were unprepared for what followed:

The Indians, at sight of what had befallen us, and our state of suffering and melancholy destitution, sat down among us, and from the sorrow and pity they felt, they all began to lament so earnestly that they might have been heard at a distance, and continued so doing more than half an hour. It was strange to see these men, wild and untaught, howling like brutes over our misfortunes. It caused in me as in others, an increase of feeling and a livelier sense of our calamity.<sup>22</sup>

20. "Herrera's Account of the Breakup of the Narváez Expedition, 1528," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 11-13.

21. Fanny Bandelier, trans. and ed., *The Journey of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and His Companions from Florida to the Pacific* (New York, 1905), 31-32. Also see, "Relation that Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca Gave of What Befell the Armament in the Indies Whither Pánfilo de Narváez Went for Governor from the Year 1527 to the Year 1536 When with Three Comrades He Returned and Came to Sevilla," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 23.

22. "Relation that Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca gave of What Befell the Armament in the Indies Whither Pánfilo de Narváez went for Governor from the Year 1527 to the Year 1536 When with Three Comrades he Returned and Came to Sevilla," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 29.



In the mind of Cabeza de Vaca, the Indians' response was inexplicable. Native compassion for European misfortune perplexed soldiers accustomed to viewing indigenous peoples as military adversaries. Failing to understand the Indians' actions, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions reacted with confusion and a heightened degree of uncertainty. It was an unnerving situation because it indicated just how little the explorers understood about native culture, and in effect, the Floridas.

Blaming Indians for failures in the Floridas became a recurring theme. Much like accounts of Ponce de León's departure from the region, Cabeza de Vaca explained Pánfilo de Narváez's decision to leave the Floridas by making parallels between the land's insufficiency and Indian obstruction. According to Cabeza de Vaca's report, his leader declared, "In view of the poverty of the land, the unfavorable accounts of the population and . . . the Indians making continual war against us . . . we determined to leave that place and go in quest of the sea."<sup>23</sup> Again, both environmental and human factors combined to frustrate European efforts, though the indigenous inhabitants received greater attention in explanations of the causes.

Intrigued by the mysteries surrounding Pánfilo de Narváez and his experiences in the Floridas, Spanish conquistador Hernando de Soto organized an expedition and sailed for the region in 1539. Like earlier explorers, Hernando de Soto and his contingent endured frustrations as they proceeded across the peninsula. Hazardous travel through swamps, inconsistent food supplies, continuous threats of mutiny, and repeated violent encounters with local natives hampered the expedition as it journeyed first northward and then westward. By 1541, Hernando de Soto's men had traversed Florida and most of the southeast, but the expedition failed to secure an empire for the Spanish crown or wealth for the adventurers. Two years later, less than half of the expedition's members survived and returned to Mexico; among the missing was Hernando de Soto who had died in June 1542.<sup>24</sup>

One of the participants and chroniclers of this expedition, the Gentleman of Elvas, added to ideas earlier generated in reports on Ponce de León's and Pánfilo de Narváez's experiences. "The Indians are well proportioned," the chronicler wrote, but "Those

23. Ibid., 2: 23.

24. Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 127-36.

of the flat lands are of taller stature and better built than those of the mountains.”<sup>25</sup> Physiologically distinguishing natives in the hilly north from those of the generally flat peninsula further highlighted the Floridas’ geographical distinctiveness. The Gentleman of Elvas also established a connection between the Indians’ behavior and their physical features. Describing the natives of the north-west Florida coast, he wrote, “Alonso de Carmona [another member of Hernando de Soto’s expedition] . . . makes particular mention of the ferocity of the Indians of the province of Apalache, saying the following, which is taken to the letter: ‘These Indians of Apalache are gigantic in stature and are very valiant and spirited. . . . In fact their going naked is a great help to them.’”<sup>26</sup> Either through encouragement from Alonso de Carmona or his own interpretation of the situation, the chronicler forged an association between native behavior, size, and nakedness.

As de Soto’s expedition encountered greater hardship, some members speculated on specific native behaviors and their connections to the unique setting of the peninsula. Pedro Calderón, a soldier accompanying de Soto, believed that the “natives of the great kingdom of Florida are in general very brave, strong and skillful in shooting arrows,” but explained their talents as partially a result of inherent predispositions:

The children for instance, when they are three years of age and even less, in fact as soon as they are able to walk, are moved by their natural inclination and by the sight of what their parents do, to ask for bows and arrows. When denied these things, they themselves make them of little sticks . . . and with such implements go unendingly in search of the disgusting reptiles which they run upon in their houses. . . . On account of such continuous exercises and the consequent habit the Indians have formed in shooting arrows, they are skillful and ferocious in the art . . .<sup>27</sup>

25. Gentleman of Elvas, *True Relation of the Hardships Suffered by Governor Fernando de Soto & Certain Portuguese Gentleman during the Discovery of the Province of Florida*, trans. and ed. James A. Robertson, 2 vols. (Deland, Fla., 1932-33), 2: 258-59, 312-13.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Book 2, Chapter 2, Garcilaso, *The Florida of the Inca*, 234.



Beyond reinforcing European impressions that native distinctions resulted from the peculiarities of the region, the passage promoted the idea that through instinctive practices, Indians attained unusual expertise in martial abilities, expertise that contributed to their fierceness in battle and set them apart from Europeans in the Floridas.<sup>28</sup>

Accompanying references to Indian size were remarks on Indian color.<sup>29</sup> Some accounts by members of de Soto's expedition described natives as "brown of skin," providing no commentary as to the origins or meanings of the pigment to colonists.<sup>30</sup> On other occasions, members of the expedition pondered the significance of natives' facial and body colors. Relating a hostile meeting between Florida Indians and Spaniards, Rodrigo Rangel noted how the expedition "came to another plain where the Indians had taken the position, having made a very strong barricade, and within it there were many Indian braves, painted red and decorated with other colours which appeared very fine (or rather, very bad, at least it meant harm to the Christians)."<sup>31</sup> Rangel chose to emphasize "red," which he believed the Indians used to frighten their opponents, despite his own admission that the Indians decorated themselves with multiple colors.<sup>32</sup>

28. For European viewpoints on Native Americans and warfare, see Colin G. Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore, Md., 1997), 92-114; Matijasic, "Reflected Values," 41-42; Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York, 1994), 3-36, 151-70.

29. Standard historical assessments of Indian "color" and its meaning to European colonists in North America can be found in Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 29, 36-37; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 90; Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 11, 22. A recent analysis is available in Kathleen M. Brown, "Native Americans and Early Modern Concepts of Race," in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Daunt and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia, 1999), 79-100.

30. Luis Hernández de Biedma, *Narratives of the Career of Hernando de Soto in the Conquest of Florida, as Told by a Knight of Elvas in a Relation by Luys Hernández de Biedma, Factor of the Expedition*, trans. Buckingham Smith, ed. Edward G. Bourne, 2 vols. (New York, 1922), 1: 66-67.

31. "The Official Narrative of the Expedition of Hernando Soto," 160.

32. For assessments on how Native American skin color became "Red" during the colonial period, see Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Black Peoples* (Chicago, 1993), 239-64; Nancy Shoemaker, "How Indians Got to be Red," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 625-44; Vaughan, *Roots of American Racism*, 31.



In the opinion of at least one chronicler of Hernando de Soto's travels, by the time of the expedition's dismal ending, the sum of these impressions created in the Europeans' mind a negative image of the Floridas' Indians. Garcilaso recorded, "For in general these people are looked upon as simple folk without reason or understanding who in both peace and war differ very little from beasts and accordingly could not do and say things . . . worthy of memory or praise."<sup>33</sup> The observation echoed themes seen in the accounts of previous explorers and evinced the mounting frustration exhibited by Europeans in the Floridas.

While explorers initiated the construction of Indians, missionaries played a role as well. In 1549, Father Luís Cancer, a Dominican friar, attempted to initiate conversion efforts of local natives on the peninsula's western coast. A student of the famous "Indian protector" Bartolomé de Las Casas, Cancer hoped to Christianize the indigenous population prior to widespread European colonization, and he approached the Floridas' indigenous peoples with optimism, harboring little ill will toward the potential converts. Until the time of his death, he dealt with the natives openly and, he thought, on their terms.<sup>34</sup>

But as his conversion attempts proceeded, Father Cancer's descriptions of the Indians took on a more skeptical tone. Doubting the motivations of newly Christianized natives along the gulf coast, the missionary carried out an experiment to evaluate their true intentions:

To see if I was free to do so, if they would let me go to the launch [a ship offshore], I was careful to tell them that I had more to give them and I was going back to get it, although in fact I already had it in my sleeve, but I had not wanted to give them all of it since I had intended to do this: I went, and came back, and found so many who wanted to embrace me that I could not get away from them. This friendship and affection was obviously based on what they thought they could get from us than on ourselves, but since this world is the route to the other, and as we all

33. Book 2, Chapter 27, Garcilaso, *The Florida of the Inca*, 2: 157-58.

34. Hoffman, *A New Way to Andalucia*, 100-101.

35. "The Mission of Fray Luís Cancer to Florida as Told by Beteta, 1549," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 192.

know from experience and say that love is good deeds and that gifts can break rocks, I was pleased that they should receive us so well for these material matters.<sup>35</sup>

Cancer quickly assumed that native motives for friendship and conversion were based solely on greed. As Christianization efforts continued, the artificial colors of Indian adornment prompted further comment from the priest. After greeting an assemblage of natives in 1549, he remarked that, "I was getting covered in their red dye from all the embracing that was going on, although I managed to get the worst of it on my habit to leave the skin untouched."<sup>36</sup> Even though he clearly realized the red coloring to be artificial and impermanent, Cancer was disturbed by the use of dye, translating it as a marker of Indian deviance in his mind.

Cancer's words had less impact on Spanish Floridian images of the Indians than did the nature of his demise. When the natives captured three Europeans accompanying him, the priest attempted to negotiate their release, apparently unsuccessfully since he was killed during the discussions. Cancer's fellow missionaries worried about the impact of his death on their own future activities, arguing that if the expedition returned to Spain "with this news . . . they [the Spanish crown] would conclude . . . that all these pagans deserved death, and deserved having people conquer them."<sup>37</sup>

Other Europeans followed the Spanish into the Floridas. In 1564, Frenchman René de Laudonnière sailed to the Floridas accompanied by dozens of Protestant families, their livestock, and trade goods. Near the mouth of the St. John's River, the group established a small colony known as Fort Caroline. Besieged by storms, starvation, and Spaniards from the beginning, the outpost struggled for survival. Remaining under French control for less than two years, the colony finally succumbed to Spanish soldiers in late 1565 when most of the French settlers were executed, earning the site the name "Matanzas" or "place of slaughter."<sup>38</sup>

Beset by problems almost immediately upon arrival, French settlers soon began comparing themselves to the Indians whom

36. Ibid.

37. "The Mission of Fray Luís Cancer to Florida as Told by Beteta, 1549," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 194.

38. Eugene Lyon, "Settlement and Survival," in Gannon, ed., *The New History of Florida*, 40-46.

they encountered. While expressing admiration for the natives' bravery in battle, Laudonnière proclaimed, "they are great liars and traitors." Indian sexual practices attracted special attention: native priests "always carry with them a bag full of herbs and drugs to treat diseases—mainly syphilis, for they love women and girls very much, whom they call 'Daughters of the Sun' (However, some of them are homosexuals)."<sup>39</sup> Even when natives agreed to help the French repair damaged houses, Fort Caroline settlers questioned the motives of the natives. According to Laudonnière's account, the native headmen

Proposed to all their subjects that they hasten to build another house, pointing out to them that the French were affectionate friends to them, as was obvious from the gifts and presents that they had received from them. They declared that he who did not work on it with all his ability would be regarded as worthless and as not having anything good in him (which is a reputation these barbarians fear above all other things). That was the reason that each of them began to work hard.<sup>40</sup>

While Frenchmen perceived the natives as duplicitous, they also believed them to be expert pilferers. Infuriated, Laudonnière declared the Floridas' Indians to be "the biggest thieves in the world because they can steal with their feet as well as their hands." And though the women appeared to be "not as thieving" as the men, females did "covet rings and chokers around their necks."<sup>41</sup> Much like Spaniard Father Cancer almost twenty years previous, the French suspected that Indian motives for friendship stemmed from selfish interests and a preoccupation with acquiring material goods.

39. René de Laudonnière, *Histoire Notable de la Floride. A Foothold in Florida: the Eye-Witness Account of Four Voyages Made by the French to that Region and Their Attempt at Colonization, 1562-1568*, trans. Sarah Lawson (East Grinstead, N.Y., 1992), 7-8. For analysis of European attitudes towards natives and gender during the colonial period, see Linda L. Sturtz, "Spanish Moss and Aprons: European Responses to Gender Ambiguity in the Exploration and Colonization of South-eastern North America," *Seventeenth Century* 11 (1996): 125-40.

40. Laudonnière, *Histoire Notable de la Floride*, 39.

41. "Copy of a Letter Coming from Florida, Sent to Roen and then to M. D'Everon, Together with the Plan and Picture of the Fort Which the French Build There, 1564," in Charles E. Bennett, *Laudonnière and Fort Caroline* (Gainesville, Fla., 1964), 67.



Laudonnière focused too on Indian clothing. He concluded that the males “are naked except for an animal skin covering their private parts . . . and the women have long strands of white moss wrapped around them covering their breasts and private parts.”<sup>42</sup> Natural clothing—animal or vegetation—associated Indians with the natural environment, leading to further speculation on the natives’ appearance. Laudonnière observed how the Floridas’ Indians were “very tall, handsom, and well proportioned without any deformity. . . . Their hair is very black and grows down to their hips; however, they do it up in a way that is very becoming to them.” Referring to one Indian couple in particular, he marveled at their exotic attractiveness. The male was “one of the tallest and best built men to be found anywhere,” and his wife was endowed with “Indian beauty.”<sup>43</sup> Jean Ribault, a French explorer and contemporary of Laudonnière, held comparable opinions, writing that the Indians were “all naked and of a goodly stature, mighty, faire, and as well shapen and proportioned of bodye as any people in all the worlde.”<sup>44</sup> In an exotic and distinctly non-European sense, Indians could be visually enticing; but it was a beauty associated with the anticipated beauty of the environment. When natives put “paint [on] their faces much and put feathers in their hair in order to appear frightening,” Europeans’ appreciation for native beauty dissipated.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of their splendor, this unnatural appearance signified the ever-present threat that natives represented to European ideals and goals.

Like Spanish predecessors, members of the Laudonnière expedition failed to understand Indians or the land. Hoping to gain more knowledge, the Frenchmen selected two natives to take back to Europe. Initially, the Indians “feeling more favoured than the others, considered themselves very lucky to go,” at least according to the Europeans. However,

The sails forthwith were made ready and we sailed toward the big river. But the two Indians, seeing that we were apparently not going to land and were only following the

42. Ibid.

43. Laudonnière, *Histoire Notable de la Floride*, 8.

44. Jean Ribault, *The Whole and True Discovery of Terra Florida*, facsimile reproduction of the 1563 English edition (Deland, Fla., 1927), 69; Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 206-15.

45. Laudonnière, *Histoire Notable de la Floride*, 7, 57.

middle of the channel, began to get a little nervous. Regardless of the consequences, they wanted to throw themselves into the water. . . . However, realizing their intentions, we kept an eye on them and tried by every means to please them, which was impossible. Although they were presented with things that they prize highly, they disdained to take them and gave back everything that they had been given, thinking that such gifts put them in [our] debt and that in giving them back they would be granted their liberty.<sup>46</sup>

Unable to control the Indians' erratic behavior, the Frenchmen grew exasperated, eventually allowing the natives to go ashore. The episode offers a metaphor for European experiences in the Floridas. Much like the land itself, Indians did not meet and would not adhere to settler expectations, despite the resources and attention expended.

Hence, resentment ran high when Indians demanded material exchange or attempted to control the terms of interaction. French settlers at Fort Caroline, increasingly desperate for food, became dependent on native provisions for survival. Dejected over their situation, members of the expedition reacted with anger when Indians demanded valuable merchandise in exchange for food.

They brought their fish in their little boats, to which our poor soldiers were obliged to go, and very often (as I have seen) to strip off their own shirts to have one fish. If they at any time remonstrated with the savages for the excessive price they charged, those villains would answer imprudently, "If you're so fond of your merchandise, why don't you eat it, and we'll eat our fish!" They then burst out laughing and made fun of us. At this, our soldiers, losing patience, often felt like tearing them limb from limb and making them pay for their foolish arrogance.<sup>47</sup>

Rather than mourn the true environmentally-based origins of their starvation, the colonists blamed Indians for their grim circum-

46. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

47. *Ibid.*, 105-106.



stances. Native desires to profit from the colonists' misfortune antagonized Frenchmen already unhappy with their situation in the Floridas and led to further erosion of the Indians' standing among the Europeans.

Other French visitors concurred. In 1566, Nicolas le Challeux explained how local natives whom he encountered at Fort Caroline had "loose morals; they never teach or correct their children; they steal unscrupulously and claim for themselves all they can secretly carry away." He placed special emphasis on Indian dress. Besides war decorations, "Neither the men nor the women have any other clothing, except that the women girdle themselves with a small apron made of the skin of deer or other animals, tied on the left side in order to cover the most shameful part of their body."<sup>48</sup>

French commentators also explored the issue of skin color in their descriptions of the Floridas' Indians. Ribault believed them to be "of tawny colour;" Challeux, after much study of the Indians, asserted that they had "a somewhat ruddy complexion;" Laudonnière depicted the Indians as exhibiting a variety of skin colors.<sup>49</sup> Upon first arriving on the peninsula, he claimed, "The men are olive coloured . . . Most of them are painted on the body and on the arms and thighs in beautiful patterns. The pigments cannot be removed because they are pricked into the flesh."<sup>50</sup> Yet at other times, Laudonnière contended that certain Indians "are painted in black all over, in beautiful designs."<sup>51</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century, skin color, natural or artificial, had become an unmistakable marker distinguishing settlers from natives in the Floridas.

Though they visited the peninsula in far fewer numbers than their European adversaries during the sixteenth century, English explorers did journey to the Floridas on occasion. In 1565, English sailor John Sparke recorded observations on the region while accompanying the plunderer John Hawkins.<sup>52</sup> Like many

48. "Discours de l'histoire de la Floride, 1566," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 373.

49. Ribault, *The Whole and True Discovery of Terra Florida*, 69; "Discours de l'histoire de la Floride, 1566," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 372-73.

50. Laudonnière, *Histoire Notable de la Floride*, 7.

51. "Copy of a Letter Coming From Florida, Sent to Rouen and Then to M. D'Everon, Together with the Plan and Picture of the Fort Which the French Built There," in Bennett, *Laudonnière and Fort Caroline*, 67.

52. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 222.

Spaniards and Frenchmen before him, Sparke believed "those people of the cape of Florida are of more savage and fierce nature, and more valiant than any of the rest." He expressed amazement over the Indians' penchant for painting themselves, viewing with awe the meticulous care they took in decorating: "They do not omit to paint their bodies also with curious knots, or antlike worke, as every man in his owne fancy deviseth, which painting, to make it continue the better, they use with a thorne to prickle their flesh, and dent in the same, whereby the painting may have better hold." Again, unnatural adornment signified peril in the European mind; as Sparke concluded, Indians endured tattooing "to make themselves shew the more fierce."<sup>53</sup>

English and French accounts mirrored those of the Spanish in terms of Indians and the environment of the Floridas, indicating that the process of constructing native images transcended national and ethnic boundaries of Europeans. Images originating among the earliest European visitors determined patterns of future differentiation. Precedents established during the opening decades of the sixteenth century influenced intercultural relationships for two more centuries.

No single individual exemplifies the continuation of earlier ideas more than Pedro Menéndez de Avilés. Charged by the Spanish crown to secure the peninsula for the empire in 1565, he successfully orchestrated the campaign that destroyed Fort Caroline and the French presence. Like many Europeans before him, Menéndez de Avilés hoped to profit from his efforts through mining, trade, and agriculture. Also like many of his predecessors, he failed. Though credited with establishing St. Augustine, Menéndez de Avilés proved unable to secure the region for Spain or attract Spanish settlers. Instead, he repeatedly engaged in battle with the region's Indians. When he died in 1574, few of his dreams for himself or Spain had become reality in the Floridas.<sup>54</sup>

As these circumstances unfolded, Menéndez de Avilés formulated his attitudes toward local Indians. Two years after arriving in the region as recently appointed governor of the colony, he expressed how "The Indians were warlike, intractable, and wanted

53. "John Sparke's Report on Florida, 2 July, 1565," in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 365.

54. Lyon, "Settlement and Survival," 43-59.

nothing to do with the Christians . . . [they] practice no austerity, but follow wherever their sensuality and bestial vice leads them."<sup>55</sup> He advocated severe measures to keep the Indians from rebelling against Spanish colonizers, reasoning that "if in fact a man does not resist, they are such great traitors, thieves and greedy persons, that one cannot easily live with them."<sup>56</sup> As a result, Menéndez de Avilés called for strict repression of Indian dissent: "the only way to make them keep their agreements—and they are great liars and traitors—is to rout them out of their villages, burn their dwellings, cut down their plantings, seize their canoes, and destroy their fishways. Then they realize they must do the Christians' bidding, or abandon the land." Unlike previous Europeans, however, the governor was not willing to co-exist. If natives continued to be obstructions, they were to be removed from the Floridas, and in order to justify this stance, he characterized past efforts to reform or improve the Indians as failures. Even supposedly more "civilized" Indians living within the Spanish settlements exhibited no better behavior. "The natives at St. Augustine and at San Mateo are very treacherous and deceitful," he wrote, "especially since they feign friendship with the Christians for their own immediate ends. If they are not given food, clothing, iron axes, and other presents when they come to the forts, they leave in a great rage, go on the warpath, and kill any Christian they encounter."<sup>57</sup>

Signaling the entrenchment of earlier views, the governor believed that even natives who were responsive to European efforts ultimately failed to live up to European expectations. At the same time, Menéndez de Avilés did not think that all Indians acted in a like manner; some did show promise for reform. Referring to Indians living north of Saint Helena, an island of present-day South Carolina, the governor acknowledged how "the Indians give evidence of good intelligence and are not as rustic or savage as the others. Thus they can boast of established customs. In conformi-

55. "Of the Reasons Furnished His Majesty by Pedro Menéndez for not Allowing Florida to Fall into the Hands of Lutherans or Other Foreigners, 1567," in Bartolomé Barrientos, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Founder of Florida*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Gainesville, Fla., 1965), 27-28.

56. "Pedro Menéndez's Letter to Philip II, Describing French in Florida and Their Relationships to Local Indians, 15 October, 1565," in Eugene Lyon, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés* (New York, 1995), 165.

57. "Of the Adelantado's Departure from Guale to San Mateo and St. Augustine, 1567," in Barrientos, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Founder of Florida*, 107.



ty with their idea of justice, they punish liars.”<sup>58</sup> Left unwritten was a key component of his assessments: more civilized Indians lived in the extreme northern hinterlands of the peninsula or (as seen through the colonists’ perspective) did not inhabit the Floridas at all.

Native appearance and its implications for uncivilized behavior continued to shape negative images of Indians among Europeans. Menéndez de Avilés portrayed the natives to be well proportioned, “large of body . . . slender, very strong, and swift.”<sup>59</sup> Such perceptions took on greater meaning by the 1560s. Tales of misfortune and the seemingly related behavioral transformation of colonists into natives circulated throughout the settlements. One account described how an anonymous shipwreck survivor dramatically changed after living only a short time among the region’s Indians:

I [the sailor] dressed myself in their [Indian] fashion and in every way adapted myself to their circumstances. My appearance soon took the form of a slovenly and idle Indian. I had not clothes to cover the prow or stern. My soul was like my body—miserable and ugly and I was always ready for the pleasures of vice. The Devil was my brother and I showed my fondness for him by defending him on all occasions when I sinned for pleasure and believed the ways of evil to be most glorious.<sup>60</sup>

Referring to marooned Spaniards living along the coast, Menéndez de Avilés’ confirmed how “they all went about naked, having become savages like the very Indians” they lived among.<sup>61</sup> Barbaric conduct along with deviant appearance equated to “Indian.”

58. “Bartolomé Barrientos on Pedro Menéndez’ Successful Attack on the French Colony, 1565,” in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 458.

59. Fontaneda Hernando D’Escalante, *Memoire of D’Escalante Fontaneda Respecting Florida. Written in Spain, About the Year 1575*, trans. Buckingham Smith, ed. David O. True (Coral Gables, Fla., 1944), 11; “A Description of the Land of Florida; Its Fertility,” in Barrientos, *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, Founder of Florida*, 24.

60. James M. Covington and A.F. Falcones, eds., *Pirates, Indians, and Spaniards: Father Escobedo’s “La Florida”* (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1963), 87.

61. “Gonzalo Solis de Meras on the Achievements of Menéndez de Avilés in Florida,” in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 479.

After almost a decade of disappointment, the governor decided in 1573 that the Indians were “so bloodthirsty” that “war [should] be made upon them, a war of fire and blood.” He reasoned that it was “fitting that those Indians, because they are so wicked and perverse, and have perpetrated so many deaths and robberies should be given up and sold at auction as slaves.” Summarizing his points, Menéndez de Avilés proclaimed that “removing them from the country and taking them to the neighboring islands, Cuba, Santo Domingo, [and] Puerto Rico” would be in the best interests of the Spanish empire in general, and Florida colonists in particular. Furthermore, since the Indians “persisted in their evil ways” and many of them were “infamous people, Sodomites, [and] sacrificers to the devil of many souls . . . it would greatly serve God Our Lord and your Majesty if these same were dead.”<sup>62</sup>

By the seventeenth century, the Floridas and their indigenous peoples had become inseparable in the European-Floridian mind as distinct entities. In terms of material wealth or glory, the land failed to meet the expectations of Spanish, French, and English immigrants. Similarly, Indians failed to live up to settler expectations as civilized humans or as beings capable of assimilating to civilization. Both impeded colonial designs in the New World. In response, colonists constructed images of Indians to rationalize their misfortunes and define their own identity. As colonization efforts intensified in subsequent decades, this process took on additional forms and further antagonized relationships between indigenous and transplanted populations.

62. “The Adelantado, Pedro Menéndez, Reports the Damages and Murders Caused by the Coast Indians of Florida, 1573-1574,” in *Colonial Records of Spanish Florida: Letters and Reports of Governors and Secular Persons*, trans. and ed. Jeanette E. Connor (Deland, Fla., 1925), 35-36; “Pedro Menéndez de Avilés Provides Detailed Plans for the Disposal of the Enslaved Florida Indians, 1573,” in Quinn, *New American World*, 2: 589-90.