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BLACK COMMUNITY AND CULTURE IN THE SOUTHEASTERN BORDERLANDS

Jane Landers

In 1992 David J. Weber published a masterful synthesis called *The Spanish Frontier in North America* which reminded readers that despite a national historiography that tends toward the Anglocentric, Spanish claims on North America date to 1513 and its governance of communities scattered across the entire southern rim of what is today the United States lasted well over two centuries. Weber's sweeping book chronicles the complex history of Spanish conquests and settlement in North America while also noting the essential and common elements of Spanish culture across time and space.[1]

The Spanish explorations and initial settlements in what is today the United States had earlier attracted the attention of Herbert Eugene Bolton, who expanded on his mentor Frederick Jackson Turner's vision of "frontier." Although Bolton produced three studies of the Southeast, where Spaniards made their first settlements, his primary interest was the institutional and diplomatic history of the Spanish Southwest. Along with Hubert Howe Bancroft who researched Spanish California, Bolton was among the first American scholars to appreciate that much of the history of our modern nation could be uncovered in the rich Spanish archives of Mexico. Using these long-neglected sources, Bolton created a new Borderlands school of American history, which was further developed by

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[1] David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (New Haven, 1992), 2. Weber's book is the first borderland study to successfully integrate the history of North America's Spanish colonies.

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his numerous Ph.D. students.[2] Nevertheless, despite the impressive historiographical contributions of Bolton and his many students, as Weber noted, American histories still pay scant attention to the long Spanish tenure across the Southern tier of the nation.

One early monograph to venture into a multi-national and multi-ethnic colonial Southeast was Verner W. Crane's classic, *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732* which appeared in 1928, only three years after Bolton's work on the region. The difficulties of crossing cultural and linguistic barriers, however, kept many from following Crane's lead into Spanish Florida. More than thirty years would pass before John J. TePaske produced his fine study of the governors of eighteenth-century Spanish Florida which, like Bolton's earlier work, was based on extensive research in Spanish archival materials—this time from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. Some twenty years later, scholars trained in Florida began to produce new works on the Spanish period based, like those of TePaske, on research in Spanish archival materials. Most notable were the works of Eugene Lyon, Paul E. Hoffman, and Amy Turner Bushnell which concentrated on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[3]

Since those important works appeared, the historiography of the Spanish southeastern Borderlands has taken a new direction. For several decades now, historians of the Spanish Southeast have been working hand-in-hand with historical archaeologists on jointly designed projects that have enriched both disciplines. Together they have researched the routes of the earliest Spanish explorations through the Southeast, intensively studied St. Augustine, the first European city in what is today the United States, and located and investigated the chain of missions

[2] Bolton's works on the Southeast included, Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (Albuquerque, 1921), and Bolton and Mary Ross, *Debatable Land: A Sketch of the Anglo-Spanish Contest for the Georgia Country* (Berkeley, 1925). For a more complete discussion of Bolton's contributions and impact, see John Francis Bannon, *Bolton and the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, 1964), 3-19. Also see David Weber, "John Francis Bannon and the Historiography of the Spanish Borderlands," *Journal of the Southwest*, 29 (Winter 1987), 331-63.

[3] For the innovation and importance of Crane's work, see Peter H. Wood's preface to the work's latest edition. Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670-1732* (New York, 1981); John J. TePaske, *The Governorship of Spanish Florida, 1700-1763* (Durham, 1959); Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida: Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and the Spanish Conquest of 1565-1568* (Gainesville, 1976); Amy Turner Bushnell, *The King's Coffer: Proprietors of the Spanish Florida Treasury, 1565-1702* (Gainesville, 1981); and Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, 1990).

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running along the Atlantic coast from modern South Carolina southward to St. Augustine and from that hub westward along the Gulf Coast. These collaborations have transformed Borderlands studies in the Southeast. European institutions and diplomatic maneuvers may still serve as a backdrop, but historians have shifted the focus of their inquiries to foreground social history and the ethnohistory of a much more diverse group of historical actors. In association with archaeologists Gary Shapiro and Bonnie McEwan, John Hann has produced a trilogy of detailed ethnohistories of the Apalachee, Calusa, and Timucuan Indians that detail their relations with Spaniards. Eugene Lyon and Paul E. Hoffman have worked with archaeologist Stanley South on the Spanish settlement at Santa Elena, South Carolina, and Amy Turner Bushnell has collaborated with archaeologist David Hurst Thomas on researching the mission at St. Catherines's Island off the Georgia coast. Paul E. Hoffman is helping search for the missing settlement of Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón on the Georgia coast and Hoffman and Lyon have helped Kathleen A. Deagan research a wide variety of Spanish sites in St. Augustine. This author has also worked with Deagan to produce the history of a free black town on St. Augustine's periphery.[4]

While this fruitful collaboration between historians and archaeologists proceeds, Amy Turner Bushnell has recently highlighted the differences between southwestern and southeastern Spanish Borderlands by, among other things, emphasizing the Atlantic and Caribbean orientation of the latter. This essay adopts Bushnell's perspective but moves it forward to the second Spanish period (1784-1821), placing Spanish Florida on the "maritime periphery" of the Atlantic world, but still linked to a variety of Indian nations in the hinterlands.[5] It also examines the implications of the particular physical and social environment of the Southeast and of the

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[4] Jerald T. Milanich and Charles Hudson, *Hernando de Soto and the Indians of Florida* (Gainesville, 1993); Bonnie G. McEwan, ed., *The Spanish Missions of La Florida* (Gainesville, 1993); John H. Hann, *Apalachee: The Land Between the Rivers* (Gainesville, 1988), Hann, ed., *Missions to the Calusa* (Gainesville, 1991), Hann, *A History of the Timucua Indians and Missions* (Gainesville, 1996); Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient*; Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens, GA, 1994); Kathleen A. Deagan, *Spanish St. Augustine: The Archaeology of a Colonial Creole Community* (New York, 1983); Eugene Lyon, *Richer Than We Thought: The Material Culture of Sixteenth-Century St. Augustine* (St. Augustine, FL, 1992); Jane G. Landers, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida," *American Historical Review*, 95 (Feb. 1990), 9-30.

[5] Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana*, 23-28.

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volatile international border for Spanish Florida's black community and culture.

Traditional studies portray eighteenth-century Florida as a backwater of the Spanish empire, characterized by a military structure and a stagnating economy, but the province was more than a garrison, if less than a thriving metropolis.[6] Despite a restrictive mercantilist policy and political instability, ordinary people of many ethnicities, including persons of African descent, lived and worked and sometimes even improved their lot in St. Augustine. They cleared the land and coaxed forth a wide range of agricultural products, they harvested the plentiful forest and coastal resources, and they did both well enough to produce surplus for export. They built homes and raised families and occupied themselves with small businesses and trade. And because Spanish Florida had the misfortune to be the southern desire of a "nation, as ambitious as it is industrious," and because it had an important Atlantic port, the people participated, more fully than many would have wished, in the dramatic political and military events of the era.[7]

Spain claimed Florida in 1513, made its first permanent settlement at St. Augustine in 1565, and governed its Atlantic colony until forced by the Treaty of Paris to cede Florida to the British in 1763. After a twenty year interregnum, Spain returned to Florida in 1784. Governor Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes assumed command of a colony that in many ways resembled others in the Spanish Caribbean. Dominating St. Augustine's landscape was the Castillo San Marcos, the *coquina* (native shellrock) fort on the northern perimeter, which withstood attacks by pirates and English and Indian raiders in the first Spanish period. The city's streets were laid out in the traditional Spanish grid pattern, surrounding a central plaza onto which faced the two most central institutions in the Spanish community, the government house and the Catholic church. At the public market situated between the plaza and the harbor, and along the waterfront shops and docks, Spaniards, mestizos, Indians, Africans, and mulattos carried on business and social life.[8]

Although Spanish Florida in many ways resembled its circum-Caribbean counterparts, it was also in many ways different. North of St.

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[6] TePaske, *The Governorship of Spanish Florida*; James Cusick, "Across the Border: Commodity Flow and Merchants in Spanish St. Augustine," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 69 (Jan. 1991), 277-99.

[7] Carlos Howard to Luis de las Casas, July 2, 1791, Cuba 1439 (Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla); Susan R. Parker, "Men Without God or King: Rural Settlers of East Florida, 1784-1790," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 69 (Oct. 1990), 135-55.

[8] Deagan, *Spanish St. Augustine*.

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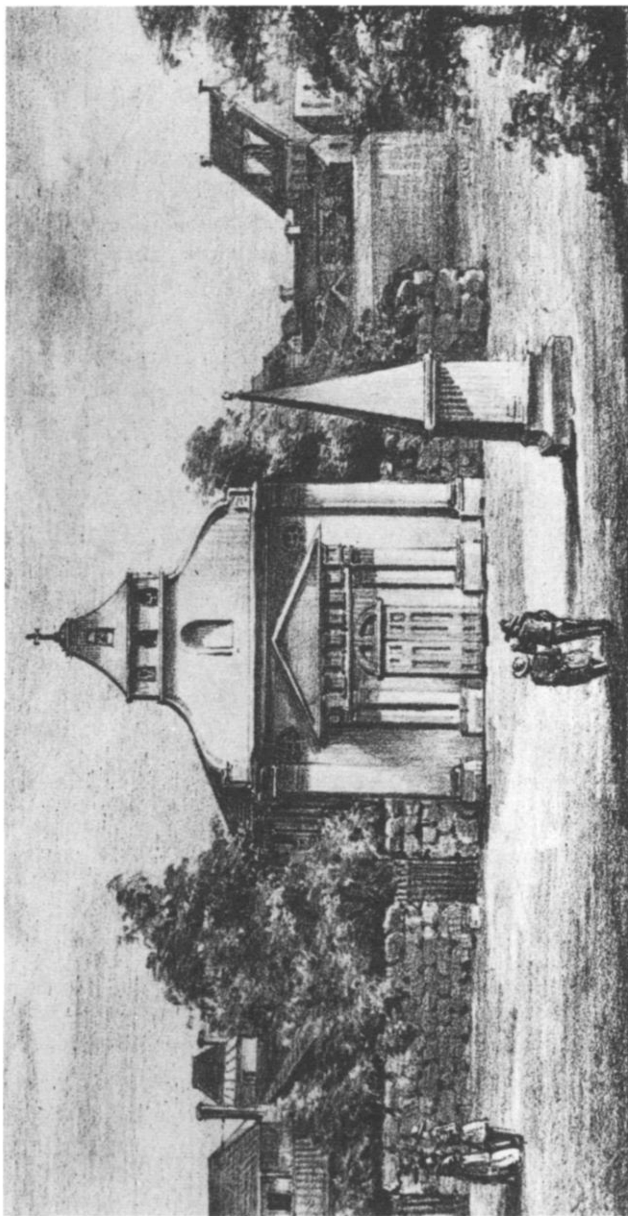

CATHOLIC CHURCH, ST AUGUSTINE, E.F.

Catholic Church, St. Augustine. Free blacks donated funds to construct St. Augustine's church which was completed in 1790. In the foreground is a monument to Spain's liberal Constitution of 1812. Courtesy of hte St. Augustine Historical Society.

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Augustine, the St. Marys river proved to be an easily penetrated barrier separating Spanish Florida from the United States of America. Navigable for forty miles inland, an interior passage, although shallow, connected it to the St. Johns river, which cut through the western portion of the peninsula.[9] Laced with waterways, the province was almost impossible to police. In addition to the two main rivers, the Nassau River and its branches, and the Matanzas and North rivers also allowed small boats and skillful pilots access to the colony. However, "numerous thickets, lagoons, and swamps," sweltering heat, swarming insects, and a dearth of potable water made land passage difficult for both invaders and defenders. One miserable invader described Florida as "pregnant with sickness and death" and "but a fit receptacle for savages and wild beasts."[10]

In 1790 the natural Spaniards, including troops and dependents, accounted for only about one-sixth of the total population, making it unlike any of the other Spanish possessions in the New World.[11] The largest group of non-Spaniards consisted of approximately 460 Italians, Greeks, and Minorcans, remnants of Dr. Andrew Turnbull's ill-fated attempt to establish an indigo plantation at New Smyrna. They were, in the main, Roman Catholics, and although they spoke a variety of languages—Catalán, Italian, Greek and assorted dialects—they were

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[9] Approximately sixty families lived along the L-shaped course of these two rivers on some of the province's richest plantations. Lying in the passage between the rivers were several small islands—Talbot, St. George's, Doctor's and Pierce—which also held fine stands of timber and important plantations. Census Returns, 1784-1821, East Florida Papers (P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL), microfilm, reel 148.

[10] Manuel de Montiano to the king, Jan. 31, 1740, quoted in William B. Stevens, ed., "Letters of Montiano, Siege of St. Augustine," *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society* (10 vols., Savannah, GA, 1909), VII, 32; "Letters of the Invaders of East Florida, 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28 (July 1949), 61-63. Only three roads connected the province, including the Camino Real, another from St. Augustine to the mouth of Pablo Creek, and a third from St. Augustine to the landing at Six Mile Creek. Report of Nicolás Grenier, Nov. 10, 1784, cited in Joseph Byrne Lockey, ed., *East Florida, 1783-1785: A File of Documents Assembled and Many of Them Translated* (Berkeley, 1949), 305-11.

[11] Theodore G. Corbett, "Migration to a Spanish Imperial Frontier in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 54 (Aug. 1974), 414-30; Corbett, "Population Structure in Hispanic of St. Augustine, 1629-1763" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 54 (Jan. 1976), 263-84; Carlos Howard to Luis de las Casas, 2 July 1791, Cuba 1439.

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Mediterranean people and could easily assimilate into the Spanish culture.[12]

Many "British" still inhabited Florida, a designation the Spaniards used to identify English-speaking people of many ethnic backgrounds—English, Irish, Scotch, even Swiss.[13] In general they were welcomed by Spanish administrators, for they operated large plantations that helped supply the colony and were a source of credit to the oft-impoverished government. The group included people with useful skills and connections to the American state and national governments, but some of its members also became involved in assorted plots to wrest control of the area from their hosts.[14]

The Seminole and black Seminole settlements that lay west of the St. Johns River proved a good buffer against Anglo encroachment, and the Spanish government attempted to ensure their friendship by regularly hosting and gifting them in St. Augustine.[15] With unruly and land-hungry Americans constantly testing their northern border, the Spaniards stood to lose their colony, the blacks their freedom, and the Seminoles their rich lands and cattle herds. Spanish officials capitalized on this convergence of interests often during their second tenure in Florida.[16]

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[12] Memorial of the Italians, Greeks, and Minorcans, July 12, 1784, July 13, 1784, cited in Lockey, *East Florida*, 232-33; Zéspedes to Bernardo de Gálvez, Oct. 20, 1784, *ibid*, 285-86. For the history of this community, see Patricia C. Griffin, *Mullet on the Beach: The Minorcans of Florida, 1768-1788* (Jacksonville, FL, 1991).

[13] Governor Zéspedes ordered all non-Spaniards to present themselves and declare their intentions. Memorials of Francis Philip Fatio, Feb. 23, 1785, James Clarke, Feb. 26, 1785, cited in Lockey, *East Florida*, 464-65.

[14] Jane G. Landers, *Across the Southern Border: Black Society in Spanish Florida* (forthcoming).

[15] Governor Zéspedes granted permission for the merchant house of Panton Leslie & Company to continue the Indian trade it had conducted under the British regime and later assigned the government Indian trade contract to Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo. The Crown allotted 6,000 pesos annually for their gifts that included items such as cloth and clothing, hats, thread and needles, thimbles, scissors, beads, pipes, knives, axes, razors, mirrors, tin pots, spurs, munitions, tobacco, aguardiente, and food. Caleb Finnegan, "Notes and Commentary on The East Florida Papers: Lists of Gifts to Indians, 1785-1788," unpublished research notes drawn from East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 160.

[16] Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida* (Columbus, OH, 1858); Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1971). See also George Klos, "Blacks and the Seminole Indian Removal Debate, 1821-1835," in *The African American Heritage of Florida*, ed. David R. Colburn and Jane L. Landers (Gainesville, FL, 1995), 128-56.

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Abraham, black advisor to Chief Micanopy, of the Seminoles, 1830s.
From Joshua R. Giddings, *The Exiles of Florida* (Columbus, OH, 1858).

The other main group of non-Spaniards to inhabit the province were people of African descent, including African-born peoples of various nations, creoles born in Spanish and French colonies of the Caribbean and South America, and African and country-born runaways from the Anglo plantations north of Florida. Most of Florida's black population was enslaved, but Florida was atypical of many slave systems in that sex ratios were fairly evenly balanced, at least for the first forty years of the second Spanish period. This is probably due to the general absence of labor-intensive industries and the pattern of maintaining family units even on large-scale plantation operations. As more Anglo planters moved into Florida with their slave forces, however, the black population grew proportionally larger and more male. By 1813, the slave population of Amelia Island was more than double that of the white, and while the white population showed a fairly even sexual division, the enslaved population

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was two-thirds male.[17] By the late eighteenth century, Spanish Florida held some very large plantations with sizeable slave populations. Daniel L. Schafer has described the deliberate attempt by British planters to model their plantations after those of South Carolina, which themselves carried the imprint of their Barbadian antecedents.[18] It is not surprising then, that Florida's late-eighteenth-century plantation system resembled the more-studied Anglo-Caribbean/Lowcountry model. Planters employed slaves on the task system, and the slaves often provisioned themselves. Florida's system tolerated slave mobility, free market and feast days, and an internal slave economy, and permitted the slaves relatively free cultural expression. Slaves lived in fairly durable families and developed extensive and long-term networks of kin, shipmates, and friends across plantations and in the city. A significant difference, however, was that Florida's plantation owners actually lived on their estates for most of the year and had close contact and sometimes personal relationships with many of their slaves. More importantly, Florida slaves knew that the power of their owners was limited in key respects by Spanish legal and religious institutions, which were never far away. Emancipation was always a tangible possibility—via legal and extralegal pathways. The proximity of the Seminole nation, trackless forests and swamps, and rivers and oceans provided alternatives for those who would take them.[19]

Spanish Florida also held a significant free black population. During the British evacuation of Florida, hundreds of slaves ran away from departing owners rather than face unknown places and climes or forced separation from loved ones.[20] Spain's seventeenth-century sanctuary policy for escaped slaves seeking Catholic conversion remained in effect, although Governor Zéspedes charged that, "not one of them [the new petitioners] has manifested once here the least inclination to be instructed

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[17] The free white population on Amelia Island totaled 428 (217 males and 211 females) while the enslaved population totaled 861 (524 males and 337 females). Fernandina Census, June 1, 1813, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 55.

[18] Daniel L. Schafer, "'Yellow Silk Ferret Tied Round Their Wrists': African Americans in British East Florida, 1763-1784," *African American Heritage of Florida*, 71-103.

[19] Landers, *Across the Southern Border*.

[20] Twenty-eight of Alexander Patterson's slaves "eloped" during the evacuation. Robert Robinson's slave, Jack, ran away on the day of Robinson's departure for Halifax "for his dread of encountering so cold a climate." Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1783-1785: The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited With an Accompanying Narrative* (2 vols., Deland, FL, 1929), II, 125, 140.

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in and converted to our Holy Faith." The governor required anyone wishing to remove a slave from the province to obtain a license bearing his signature, any whites "having in their control Negroes or mulattoes, either free or slave," to register them, and "every vagrant Negro without a known owner or else a document that attests to his freedom" to report to the authorities within twenty days to clarify his or her status and obtain a work contract. Any blacks failing to report would forfeit their freedom and be enslaved by the king.[21]

More than 250 blacks formerly owned by British masters came forward to be registered and were freed by the Spanish governor. Their declarations gave information on previous owners, family composition, occupations, reasons for escaping, and employment in St. Augustine. The numerous groupings demonstrate that the fugitives sought to maintain family and friendship ties even in flight.[22] In 1786, after several failed attempts, Prince Witten, his wife, Judy, and their children, Polly and Glasgow, escaped from slavery in Georgia and requested sanctuary in St. Augustine. Witten had belonged to Lt. Col. Jacob Weed of the Georgia Assembly who advertised to try to recover his valuable property. Weed's notice described Prince as "6 feet high, strong built and brawny, a carpenter by trade, 30 years of age . . . talkative," Judy, as a "smart, active wench," and their children, Glasgow, "about 8 years of age, a well looking boy of an open countenance and obliging disposition," and Polly, "6 years old, lively eyes and gently pitted with the small pox." Weed had been arranging to return the family to former owners from whom they had been stolen by the British, and he believed that Prince had "carried them off with him to Florida to avoid a separation from his family to which he is much attached." What transpired in the next three years is unknown, but in 1789 Prince presented himself to the Spanish notary as required by Governor Zéspedes's decree, and hired himself out to the Minorcan Francisco Pellicer, who was also a carpenter.[23]

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[21] Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes to Joseph de Ezpeleta, Oct. 2, 1788, Cuba 1395; Jane Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary: Fugitives in Florida 1784-1790," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 62 (Jan. 1984), 296-313; Landers, "Gracia Real"; Proclamation of Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, July 26, 1784, cited in Lockey, *East Florida*, 240-41.

[22] Census Returns, 1784-1821, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 148.

[23] Alexander Semple to Commander McFernan, Dec. 16, 1786, To and From the United States, 1784-1821, *ibid*, reel 41; Statement of Prince, Jan. 9, 1789, Census Returns 1784-1821, *ibid*, reel 148. By 1793 Witten's neighbors were Don Juan Leslie, head of the Panton Leslie & Co. Indian trading house, and Don John McQueen, of American revolutionary fame, and a major landholder and later, judge, in Spanish Florida. Census of 1793, *ibid*. reel 148.

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Governor Zéspedes followed precedent, and like previous Florida and Cuban governors had, set an example by taking some of the 250 petitioners into his own home. The rest he parcelled out among townspeople and plantation owners able to shelter them, at least temporarily. This was the beginning of many subsequent connections between the townspeople and the former slaves. Because the black freedmen and women lived and worked among them daily, it was almost inevitable in this community that other social relations would follow. Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, and Leslie S. Rowland have argued that British slaves understood their society "in the idiom of kinship" and that, for slaves, "familial and communal relations were one."[24] The Spaniards also viewed society as an extension of family structures. The institution of the extended kinship group *parentela*, which included blood relations, fictive kin, and even household servants and slaves, and the institution of *clientela*, which bound more powerful patrons and their personal dependents into a network of mutual obligations, were so deeply rooted that according to Lyle N. McAlister, they might have been the "primary structure of Hispanic society."[25] Thus, African and Spanish views of family and society were highly compatible, and each group surely recognized the value the other placed on kinship.

Undoubtedly aided by their early contacts and patrons, refugees from the United States like the Wittens became the most important component of the free black community in second-Spanish-period Florida. Black freedmen proved to be a valuable source of skilled labor and military reserves for the Spanish community, and despite attempts by some of their former owners to recover their chattel through legal channels, Governor Zéspedes consistently supported the blacks' right to liberty. Once again Florida became a haven for runaways, and Georgia planters renewed the complaint that their very livelihood was threatened by the continued loss of slaves.

The route to Florida, however, was not always direct. Remnants of Lord Dunmore's "Ethiopians" formed maroon communities along the Savannah River, which also attracted slave runaways. In 1787 a joint force of South Carolina and Georgia militias, accompanied by Catawba Indian allies, searched Patton's Swamp determined to eradicate the menace. Chancing upon some blacks in canoes, they exchanged gunfire

[24] Ira Berlin, Steven F. Miller, and Leslie S. Rowland, "Afro-American Families in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Radical History Review*, 42 (Sept. 1988), 89.

[25] Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492-1799* (Minneapolis, 1984), 39-40.

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and gleefully reported having killed the band's leader, Sharper, but their exultation was premature. The force finally stumbled upon the maroons' hideout, killed the lookout, and proceeded with their attack upon the stockaded settlement. They killed six of the unlucky maroons outright, and more were supposed injured, by the "blankets . . . clotted with blood" that they left behind. The attackers destroyed some twenty-one houses and took seven "boats" before heading home with the women and children they had taken prisoner. The next day, they encountered Sharper and eighteen members of his community headed for the Indian nation, and another fight ensued. Once again, Sharper and some of the others were able to escape, although nine more women and children were captured. Shortly thereafter a fugitive named Sharper, and his wife, Nancy, were among those petitioning for sanctuary in St. Augustine.[26]

Such provocations led to renewed complaints against Florida's sanctuary policy. Finally, in 1790, the Spanish government yielded to the strong persuasions of Thomas Jefferson, the secretary of state for the new government of the United States, and abrogated the century-old sanctuary policy. In a letter to Governor Quesada, Jefferson expressed his pleasure with Spain's policy shift, calling it "essential" to the good relations between their two nations.[27] Despite the diplomatic agreements ending sanctuary, tangled disputes over slave property continued for many years because the United States sought the return of all escaped slaves who entered Florida after 1783, while the Spanish Crown offered up only those who entered after the notice ending sanctuary had been posted in 1790.[28]

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[26] There is no way to know if this was the same Sharper, but many of the claimants for freedom came from the Savannah region, and it is at least possible they were the same person. For more on such maroons see Jane Landers, "Slave Resistance on the Southeastern Frontier: Fugitives, Maroons, and Banditti in the Age of Revolution," *El Escribano*, 32 (1995), 12-24; Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History*, 24 (Apr. 1939), 167-84; *The Independent Journal or the General Advertiser* (New York), June 20, 1787; and Census Returns, 1784-1814, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 148.

[27] Royal decree in letter from Luís de las Casas to Governor Zéspedes, July 21, 1790, Letters from the Captain General, 1784-1821, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 1. The Spanish archives for Florida contain correspondence in original and translated forms to and from major American political, military figures and planters. Thomas Jefferson to Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, Mar. 10, 1791, To and from the United States 1784-1821, *ibid*, reel 41. See also, Landers, "Spanish Sanctuary."

[28] The United States government appointed James Seagrove to solicit the return of American slaves, or their comparable value, from the Spaniards, and Georgia's governor appointed his own representative, Thomas King, to assist in that effort. James Seagrove

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In January 1796, a new group of exiles blended into the free black population of Spanish Florida and caused even more consternation across the northern border. One of the original leaders of the slave revolt in Saint Domingue, and subsequently, a caudillo of the Black Auxiliaries of Carlos IV, General Jorge Biassou took up residence in Florida with some twenty-five of his followers.[29] The men were seasoned by war against French planters, French and British troops, and their own countrymen, and were well-acquainted with "dangerous notions" of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The black auxiliaries raised concerns among the Spanish governors who reluctantly received them, but also among the Anglo planters on Florida's borders, who were already disturbed by Spain's racial policies and its reliance on black militias.[30]

At a time when slave conspiracies and rebellions, maroon settlements, and Indian war unsettled the southeastern frontier, this new black presence seemed particularly threatening, but men like Prince Witten and Jorge Biassou continued a long tradition of black military service in Spanish Florida. They served in black militias which saw action in a French-inspired invasion (1795), in Indian wars (1800-03), in the so-called Patriot Rebellion (1812-13), and in the various seizures of Amelia Island by Patriots, South American revolutionaries, pirates, and the United States Navy which took place between 1812 and 1817.[31] It could

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to Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, Dec. 17, 1790, Aug. 9, 1791, To and from the United States, 1784-1821, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 41.

[29] Accounts of the Royal Treasury, 1796-1814, Account of 1796, SD 2636 (Archivo General de Indias). This group was identified by searching the black baptisms, marriages, and burials for the post-1796 period: Cathedral Parish Records, Diocese of Saint Augustine Catholic Center, Jacksonville (P.K. Yonge Library), microfilm, reel 284. This represents only a partial accounting of the refugees, since many may not have been recorded in these registers.

[30] Fears of such men and their "notions" are described in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "From Planters' Journals to Academia: The Haitian Revolution as Unthinkable History," *Journal of Caribbean History*, 25 (1991), 81-99. See also David Geggus, "Racial Equality, Slavery, and Colonial Secession during the Constituent Assembly," *American Historical Review*, 94 (Dec. 1989), 1290-1308; and Jane Landers, "Rebellion and Royalism in Spanish Florida: The French Revolution on Spain's Northern Colonial Frontier," in *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and David P. Geggus (Bloomington, 1997), 156-77. Herbert Klein points out that approximately one-fourth of the reorganized Cuban army of the late eighteenth century was of African descent. Other Spanish posts in the Caribbean were similarly structured. Herbert Klein, "The Colored Militia of Cuba: 1568-1868," *Caribbean Studies*, 6 (July 1966), 17-27.

[31] On earlier black militias in Florida, see Jane Landers, "Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose." For the later ones, see Landers, *Across the Southern Border*.

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well be argued that the Spaniards' dependence upon armed black forces actually contributed to the U.S. acquisition of Florida.

It may never be possible to determine the exact size of the black population in the second Spanish period (1784-1821), but censuses notoriously undercount the poorer elements of society, and because many blacks lived outside the city on remote plantations or farmsteads, they may have escaped the notice of government or ecclesiastical officials charged with enumerating the inhabitants of the province. The accounts will sometimes admit that the figures for the countryside are estimates. Nevertheless, the censuses from 1784-1814 clearly show that Florida's black population grew progressively over the course of the second Spanish regime. Blacks, free and slave, constituted between slightly over one-quarter and almost two-thirds of the total population of St. Augustine and its environs in the census years. After Spain abrogated the religious sanctuary policy in 1790, the free black population remained fairly stable, while the slave population steadily increased.[32]

Beginning in 1800 Florida began to receive cargoes of slaves directly from Africa and the shipments were composed of a wide array of "castas" or "nations" including Mandinga, Carabalí, Congo, Gangá and Arará, to name but a few. The African slave trade to Florida was actually stimulated by the U.S. embargo of 1808, and by 1810 shipments of several hundred slaves were being unloaded at Fernandina, the port for Amelia Island. Thus, Florida's black population not only incorporated different legal statuses, but was as ethnically diverse as the larger population.[33]

Spanish administrators and churchmen worried about the "new Africans" or *bozales* and tried to encourage their conversion, but it took time and effort to convert slaves. Adults could not be baptized until they had successfully passed the priest's examination on the basic tenets of the Church. One eighteenth-century Cuban example of this *doctrina* exam

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[32] Some counts include the garrison population, which ranged between 500 men in 1784 to a little over 200 in 1814. Census of 1784, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reel 148; Census of 1814, *ibid*, reel 76. Rumors of a French-inspired invasion led to an increase in garrison strength in 1793, and the 430 soldiers account for part of that year's population growth. The apparent decline in black population as a percentage of the whole in 1797 is also deceptive, for that year's census did not include the St. Johns, St. Marys or Nassau River areas included in 1793. Taking those factors into account, the general population shows moderate growth, despite the political turmoil of later years. Censuses, *ibid*, microfilm, reel 148; Landers, *Across the Southern Border*.

[33] Licenses on Slave Imported into East Florida, 1762-1763, Cuba 472 (Archico General de Indias).

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consisted of twenty-six questions with set answers on the nature of the Trinity, creation, immaculate conception, Christ's death and Resurrection, sin, confession, and salvation.[34] The Cuban church oversaw Florida's church, and it is probable that urban slaves in St. Augustine, at least, were instructed on the Cuban model. Just as they did in Havana, leading members of the Catholic community complied with church requirements to have their slaves baptized. Governor Zéspedes set a public example by having four of his slaves baptized, and all later governors and state officials also made sure their slaves were Christians. The same slave owners made sure that slaves living in their households married and did not live in what was commonly referred to as a "scandalous connection."[35]

A five-year summary of the religious activity in the province showed that whites and blacks alike were participating in the church. The fact that more black adults than white were converted probably reflects the efforts of fugitives from the United States to secure and protect their freedom. Unlike some whites, the fugitives had no intention of returning to a land of slavery and, thus, had more to gain by the conversion that guaranteed them sanctuary. Baptism into the Catholic faith served several important functions for black converts. Most important in the view of the priests was the religious function of removing the stigma of original sin and bringing the baptized into the brotherhood of the church. Perhaps equally important for black converts, however, was the social function of establishing a system of reciprocal obligations between the *ahijado*, the baptized, and his or her godparents, and between the *compadres*, or parents and godparents. When slaves had a choice, they chose godparents

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[34] Javier Laviña, trans. and ed., *Doctrina Para Negros* (Barcelona, 1989).

[35] Military officers such as Artillery Commandant Don Pedro Josef Salcedo and Distinguished Sergeant don Miguel Marcos de Torres also brought at least some of their slaves into the church, as did St. Augustine's leading merchant, Juan Leslie, of the trading firm of Panton, Leslie and Company. One of St. Augustine's foremost planters, don Francisco Sánchez, baptized only a few of his slaves, who may have been the favored urban slaves, but he and his brother made sure that their natural children by black and mulatto consorts were baptized. And the church leaders Thomas Hassett, Miguel O'Reilly, Francisco Troconis, and Bishop Cyril himself all baptized each others' slaves. Baptisms of Governor Zéspedes's slaves, 14, 42, 50, 53; of Governor Quesada's slaves, 132-33; of Don Francisco Sánchez's slaves 26, 100, 108, and of his son, 50; of Commandant Salcedo's slaves, 132; of Colonel de Torres's slaves, 111, 132; of Don Juan Leslie's slaves, 91, 109, 169; Father Hassett's slaves, 130; of Father Troconis's slaves, 31, 111; and of Bishop Cyril's slaves, 46; Black Baptisms, Cathedral Parish Records, reel 284. All black baptismal, marriage, and burial records from 1784-1821 are in an SPSS data base compiled by the author.

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of a higher status for their children, who might be expected to help them in some way. This might mean whites, free persons of color, or even slaves who were well-connected.[36]

In St. Augustine black Catholics celebrated a full liturgical calendar of religious observances, attended school, and were baptized, married, and buried in the Catholic church. In all these events, they reiterated their ties to each other and to the Spanish community. However, blacks who lived most of their lives on the outlying plantations of Protestants tended either to remain outside any church, or to be Protestants. When rural slaves testified in court proceedings, as they commonly did, most were sworn on the Holy Bible, "in the name of the Protestant sect which they profess" and they had to use translators, never having learned Spanish.[37]

When the Adams-Onís treaty ceded Florida to the United States of America in 1819, Florida blacks, free and enslaved, faced great changes. In anticipation of the political transition, free blacks solicited legal titles to their lands and properties, documented their manumissions, and made sure that their Catholic baptisms and marriages were recorded in parish registers.[38] Slaves also tried to secure their lives by seeking changes of owners if necessary, or by appealing to authorities not to be separated from kin. Sometimes slaves asked specifically not to be sold to Protestant owners, a request that might have been based on true religious

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[36] The three black males who most often served as godfathers were Luis Almansa, who sponsored forty-one children, Juan Bautista Witten, who sponsored twenty-three children, and Felipe Edimboro, who sponsored twenty-one children. All of these men were once slaves, but achieved freedom in St. Augustine. All were baptized and legally married, and their children were, therefore, legitimate. All three men were also born in Guinea, thus retained African identity within their Catholicism—a fact that may have also made them desirable choices, *ibid.*

[37] Some prominent residents like John McQueen and María Evans converted to Catholicism, and their slaves often followed suit. Richard K. Murdoch, "Governor Zéspedes and the Religious Problems in East Florida, 1786-1787," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 26 (Apr. 1948), 487. For numerous examples of Protestant, English-speaking slaves, see Criminales, East Florida Papers, microfilm, reels 124, 125, 126. Most slaves did not specify which variant of Protestantism they practiced, but the slave Juana, from New York, said she had been baptized in the New Light sect. Auto seguidos . . . contra Juana, Miscellaneous Legal Instruments and Proceedings, *ibid*, microfilm, reel 110.

[38] In the final years of the regime, worried parents recorded a number of baptisms for children born years earlier. For example see the entries of Ana Juana Hannahan Kingsley and Josefa Ana Kingsley, baptized on October 17, 1819. Their birth dates are not given, but they were the children of the Wolof, Sophia Chidigene Kingsley, and of Abraham Hannahan, a mulatto from Charleston, both former slaves of Zephaniah Kingsley. Black Baptisms, Cathedral Parish Records, reel 284.

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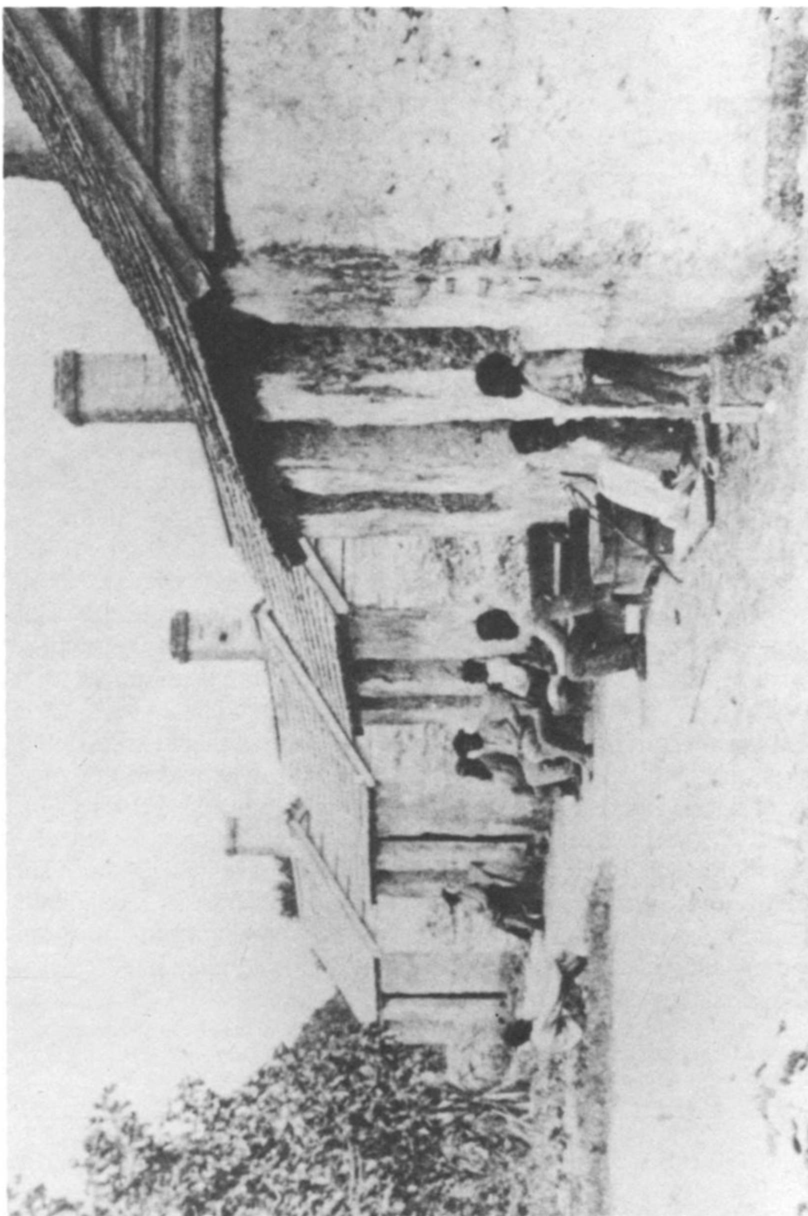

Slave cabins on the Kingsley plantation, Fort George, Florida. African masons built these two-room tabby structures in the 1820s and African American families still lived in them in the 1870s when this picture was taken. Courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

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considerations or that could have been motivated by the pragmatic desire not to be left to the mercy of the incoming system.

Although all Floridians had struggled to the best of their abilities to stave off the inevitable, Spanish sovereignty in Florida ended on July 10, 1821, and administrators planned a second full-scale evacuation to Cuba. Free blacks joined the exodus, as they had in 1763. They knew too well the racial attitudes and legal systems entering the colony with the newcomers and prepared to leave their homes for safer, if unknown, territories. The first and largest contingent of free black Floridians associated with the black militia sailed out of St. Augustine on August 22, 1821, with smaller groups following. Some did not leave until as late as 1827, but eventually forty black militiamen, twenty-seven women, and seventy-eight children were resettled in Cuba at the expense of the royal treasury. Spanish officials granted them homesteading lands and a pension of a daily ration each and kept records on the exiled group for some time thereafter, recording deaths and reducing allotments accordingly.[39]

The few free blacks who trusted cession treaties and remained in the new territorial Florida found the white supremacist planters who immigrated into the area unable to tolerate their challenge to the myth of black inadequacy. The Americans were determined to install a two-caste racial system and eliminate Florida's intermediate free black class. Over the next years these immigrants pressured many free blacks into selling what remained of their property at rock-bottom prices and in the years leading up to the United States Civil War, more free blacks left for Cuba, Haiti, and Mexico, where their histories are only beginning to be traced.[40]

For more than three centuries, blacks in Florida helped shape the geopolitics and cultural patterns of the American Southeast. By adeptly manipulating a variety of political contests, the terrain, and the demographic exigencies of the Spaniards, they shaped their lives in ways not possible across the northern border.

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[39] Relation of the Florida Exiles, Aug.22, 1821, Cuba 357, 358 (Archivo General de Indias).

[40] Landers, *Across the Spanish Border*; Daniel L. Schafer, "Shades of Freedom: Anna Kingsley In Senegal, Florida and Haiti," *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, ed. Jane G. Landers (London, UK, 1996), 130-54; Ruth B. Barr and Modeste Hargis, "The Voluntary Exile of Free Negroes of Pensacola," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 17 (July 1938), 3-14.

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