For those of you raised and educated here in Florida, and I expect that most of you fit into this category, the subtitle of my talk today may appear a bit odd. Kagan, you ignorant northerner you, don’t you know anything about Florida’s history? It was Spain that discovered Florida, not the other way round. [Spain did so, moreover, in 1512, when Juan Ponce de León, sailing north from Cuba, landed on the east coast of Florida, not far from what is now Saint Augustine.]

By discovery, I am not referring to the siting of new lands or uncharted seas. Rather I am rather using it metaphorically in the sense of the learning about something new, or previously unknown. In this case the new is Florida’s Spanish past, and along with its art, architecture and history, all of which the territory, following its acquisition by the United States in 1821, did its best to forget. Starting in the 1880s, this began to change. What had been foreign, became a friend, and even more importantly, something that developers across the state
deployed to attract northerners to visit, relax and spend their money in the Sunshine State.

Before going further, a word or two about terminology. To begin with, by Spain, I am referring to Spanish culture in the broad sense of the term, one that encompassed not only peninsular Spain but also what we are apt today to define as Hispanic culture, with its origins in various parts Hispanophone America. In the nineteenth century, however, Anglo-Americans regularly used the term Spanish to refer to the cultures of both of Spain and Spanish America, and that is how I will use the term today.

In addition, these same Americans tended to conceive Spanish culture in racial terms. As they saw it, the Spanish race was decidedly different from, and inferior to the Anglo-Saxon and together it comprised an odd blend – call it a cocktail – of the various peoples who had once made the peninsula their home-Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, Berbers, the North African peoples traditionally and derogatorily referred to Moors, and more. Put these peoples into a shaker, and the Moorish component predominated, so much so that Americans living in the nineteenth-century tended to view Spanish culture through an orientalist lens. Spain, in their imagination, was Andalusia, and Andalusia the
Alhambra and the Giralda, monuments that harked back to the era of al-Andalus and the centuries during which southern Spain was subject to Muslim rule.

As for Florida’s discovery of Spain, I want to emphasize that Florida was by no means alone in its effort to integrate Spanish culture into its definition and understanding of itself. Rather it was part of a broader cultural phenomenon, call it a vogue or even a mania, or what I have referred to elsewhere as the Spanish Craze. Starting in 1880s, this craze swept across much the US — initially in Florida and New York, then in California, New Mexico and Texas, and subsequently in Chicago, Kansas City and other parts of the Mid-West. The craze gained momentum in the decade or so following the Spanish-American War of 1898, peaked in the early 1920s before it finally ran its course. This craze was not the country’s only craze — at different times and places there were manias for things Egyptian, Japanese, even Dutch. But compared to these other crazes, the Spanish one was remarkable for its duration, geographical spread, and diversity to the extent that it found outlets in art and architecture as well as cinema, fashion, and food. In other words, there was not just one Spanish craze but many, none of which were exactly alike.

Why Spain, you ask? No simple or easy answer exists, as numerous factors— artistic, cultural, economic, and political—come into play, and it is
difficult to weigh the importance of each. I begin with what I perceive was a shift in America’s attitudes toward both Spain and its culture that began in the 1880s and which continued, interrupted only briefly by the onset of the Spanish-American War — right through the decade of the 1920s. This shift was all the more remarkable given that the weight and preponderance of the so-called Black Legend, that centuries-old, largely Protestant tradition of anti-Spanish beliefs that equated Spain with the horrors of the Inquisition, religious bigotry, despotic monarchy, the ruthless slaughter of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, together with a lengthy laundry list of other abominations and cruelties. That image began to soften during the Romantic era when writers such as Washington Irving, himself an ardent hispanophile and the author of popular books on Columbus and the Alhambra, imagined Spain as quintessentially and delightfully picturesque, a country equated with bullfighters, gypsy dancers, dashing caballeros and other equally romantic types. The country’s economic backwardness was also part of its allure, and in general Spain was imagined as a place where visitors could catch a glimpse of what life in the Middle Ages was actually like.

Starting in the 1870s, America’s prominent artists also did their best to capture what the softer, sunny side of Spain. One was Mary Cassatt, others
included Thomas Eakins, John Sargent Sargent, Samuel Coleman, and William Merritt Chase. This same era also marked the moment when a number of writers also began to integrate Spain’s history into that of the United States. One was the famed poet Walt Whitman, from whom we shall hear later in this talk; another was Helen Hunt Jackson, whose wildly popular novel *Ramona* (1884) offered a wholly positive assessment of Spain’s presence in North America, as did Charles F. Lummis (1859–1918), whose influential book *The Spanish Pioneers* (1893) claimed Spain’s conquistadors and missionaries did as much, if not more, than the “anglo-pioneers” to bring both civilization and religion to what later became the United States. Spain was given an additional boost at the Columbian International Exposition held in Chicago in 1893. There, in the legendary White City, visitors could marvel at statues and purchase commemorative coins honoring both Columbus and his Spanish patron, Queen Isabella I of Castile, visit a full-scale replica of the Franciscan monastery at La Rábida near Huelva, another featuring the interior of the great Umayyad mosque at Córdoba, along with a gothic-style Spanish pavilion modeled after Valencia’s merchant hall and filled with the work of Mariano Fortuny and other contemporary Spanish artists.

Spain and its culture subsequently reappeared — again in positive light — in a number of other expositions, most spectacularly at Buffalo’s Pan-American
Exposition of 1901, which featured a replica of Seville’s Giralda, and San Diego’s Pacific Panama Exposition of 1915, a fair whose buildings were modeled after the Baroque architecture of both Spain and Spanish America.

By 1915, moreover, the Spanish Craze had already made important inroads into Florida, most notably in St. Augustine, arguably one of the places where the country’s discovery of Spain began. Today St. Augustine unabashedly promotes its Spanish heritage to attract the tourist dollar. Prior to the 1880s, however, what is now an asset, was a liability, something that the municipal government tried to forget as it struggled to transform what was seen as the old “ruinous” Spanish town into what Rufus King Sewall described in 1848 as the “neat, attractive style of American village architecture.”

As for the old Spanish fort of San Marcos there was little to be done other than anglicize its name (to Ft. Marion) and hope that visitors would regard it, together with the town’s old Spanish gate, as bordering on the “picturesque.” Otherwise, what was little was left of Spanish culture was considered an embarrassment. Carnival and Sherivaree were both viewed as “drunken revels” and “relics of popish superstition and Spanish practice, and in 1885, one guide to the city happily reported that another old Spanish custom — the Holy Week celebration known as “shooting the Jews” — had disappeared along with the Minorcan families who had kept that tradition
alive.⁴ So rapid was the disappearance of the old city that in 1843, two years before Florida became a state, William Cullen Bryant observed that Saint Augustine “soon will part of all that reminds the visitor of “Spanish origin” — its narrow streets, its high garden walls of shell-rock and its overhanging balconies — all but its fine old fort of St mark – to look like any other American town in the Southern States.”⁵ Bryant was right. In the decades in which St Augustine attempted to build its reputation as a winter retreat, it did so by building houses, cottages and hotels in a purely American or at least English idiom. The first was Magnolia House— in plantation style— followed by Hotel St Augustine (1869) and the San Marco, erected in 1885 in Queen Anne style. The town, in short, was doing its best to bury its Spanish past.

But change was in the air. It began, not with an architect or a developer, but with a brace of lawyers --- George Fairbanks (1820-1901) and Thomas Buckingham Smith (1810-1871) -- whose immersion in the maze of lawsuits and property disputes stemming from Spanish land titles issued prior to 1821 led both to the study of Spanish and later to a shared interest in Florida’s Spanish past. Smith, led the way when, in 1851, he published the first English-language translation of Cabeza de Vaca’s peregrinations through Florida and the Southwest, followed by another of Hernando de Soto’s account of his adventures in Florida,
In the book’s preface, Smith steered away from the Black Legend and presented de Soto in the heroic terms (‘brave, prudent, kindly, magnanimous’), and Spaniards of his era ‘as refined, enlightened and humane as any in Europe.’

Smith also set the stage for Fairbanks, whose own histories of Saint Augustine (1868) and of Florida (1871) lauded the early Spanish explorers, de Soto in particular, for their ‘nobility of spirit, compassion towards the natives, ...and manly virtues.’ Fairbanks’s histories are not much read today, but together with Smith he paved the way — first for Florida, then for the nation at large — for a wholesale re-evaluation of the contribution of Spain to the history and civilization of the United States.

Meanwhile, here in Florida, the state’s discovery of Spain took another step forward on March 27, 1885, the day when St. Augustine’s Historical Society re-enacted Ponce de Leon’s landing in Florida with a bit of staged history. Reports on this first Ponce de Leon festival are sketchy — even the date is disputed — but it entailed nothing short of a celebration of the city’s Spanish past. Francis B. Genovar, a local politician (and cigar manufacturer) of Minorcan extraction, played the role of the Spanish explorer; forty-six townspeople donned Spanish period costumes; high mass was sung in the fort; and the locals staged what was called a Parada de los Coches y Caballos. Finally, Fairbanks delivered an oration
on St Augustine’s early history. The text of this oration has not survived, but we do know that one of the persons who heard him sing the praises of Spanish St. Augustine included one Henry B. Flagler, the railroad magnate and developer who was soon to give St Augustine the look of “Old Spain.”

As many of you are fully aware, that look began with Ponce de León Hotel, which opened its doors in January, 1888. In that massive hotel, now Flagler College, Flagler and his architect, Thomas Hastings, created what amounted a pastiche of Old Spain: some entrance ways were adorned with “bienvenidas” carved in the lintels; others were flanked with rondels featuring old Spanish proverbs and shell designs meant to evoke the old pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela; and in the spectacular dining room, the ceiling was decorated with inscriptions celebrating the deeds of the conquistadors together with reproductions of the escutcheons of the cities and provinces of Spain. As for the building’s overall design, there was little, with the possible exception of red tile roof, that was distinctly Spanish. Indeed, its somewhat mongrel mixture of design elements has led one scholar to call it a jumble of “academic eclecticism.” On the other hand, when the hotel first opened, it was generally referred to a mixture of Spanish Renaissance and Moorish, a palace that captured the spirit of Spain.
The idea of building a grand hotel in Spanish style derived partly from the Villa Zorayda, a Neo-Moorish fantasy house built by Frank W. Smith in Saint Augustine in 1884, partly from Hastings’ desire to harmonize with “the romance of Spain” and what he imaginatively called “the spirit of old (meaning Spanish) Saint Augustine,” and partly from Flagler’s personal fascination with Spanish history and literature. Flagler remarked that he wanted to do away with the “dark and forbidding” aspects of the Spanish character and use the hotel to capture the “bright side of the Spanish race.” As for the name Ponce de León, he remarked he chose this name given that “the romantic quest” of this “redoubtable knight and discoverer .... was typical of the adventurous and chimerical spirit of his age.”

At the same time, Flagler compared the hotel to a “pleasure dome,” and in doing so connected it to the nineteenth-century romantic view of Spain — think Washington Irving — as an land of Oriental luxury and delight. In the 1880s, moreover, what scholars call medievalism was all the rage, in as much as the Middle Ages was thought to embody many of the values — authenticity, honesty, integrity — that modern civilization had lost. Interest in that era led in one direction to places — Spain among them — whose backwardness supposedly ensured the preservation of those values, and in another — to paraphrase T.
Jackson Lears, — to home-grown “places of grace” -- were readily accessible to vacationers and which offered some respite from their workaday world.  

These linkages — Spain, romance, adventure, pleasure dome, luxury, escape — were central to the Ponce de León and by extension to the other two hotels, the Alcázar and Cordova (originally Casa Monica) — associated with Flagler’s St Augustine. Hotels, however, were not enough to create the illusion of the romance of Spain. Towards this end Flagler endeavored to persuade the town council to hispanicize the names of Saint Augustine’s streets with an eye towards enhancing the town’s Spanish atmosphere. He was only partly successful. The council agreed to rename Washington Street Granada Street, Gregg Lane Cadiz Street, Hospital Street, Aviles St, and so on, but drew the line at allowing King St to become the Alameda. On the other hand, it invested in another, and even more elaborate Ponce de Leon festival and would do afterwards on regular occasions, once again with an eye towards creating — and of course selling — the romance and other attractions attached to Old Spain. 

But would the rest of Florida follow suit? Tampa, for one, did not, undoubtedly for reasons connected to the presence here, in Ybor City, of a large number of Cuban émigrés who were decidedly hostile to both Spaniards and Spain in the decade leading up to the Spanish American War. This hostility helps
explain, at least in part, why Henry Plant, after having decided that Tampa needed to grand hotel to rival the Ponce de León, did something other than copy the Spanish style that Flagler, his great rival, employed. The Tampa Bay Hotel, opened in 1891, would also be a pleasure dome, but one inspired less by the Allambra than the “stately palace” Kubla Khan had decreed. The Tampa Bay, moreover, opened the door to alternate models of tourist architecture which, over time, insured that the Spanish style Flagler had pioneered would not find much of a foot hold on Florida’s west coast. In Sarasota, for example, Venice was the chief point of reference, as Ca da´Zan, John Ringlng´s mansion, readily attests, and in St Petersberg the only major Spanish style hotel was the Rolyat, built at the tail end of the Florida land boom of the 1920s and which was designed to be Spanish walled town with a plaza mayor, an bridge modeled after one in Toledo, and an octagonal tower that was a replica Seville’s Torre de Oro.

But if West Florida put up some resistance to the romance of Spain, other parts of the state rolled out the welcome mat, albeit not without a few wrinkles, as Coconut Grove’s Vizcaya, which was originally designed in Spanish style but abruptly changed to Italianate, attests. There was also a false start in Palm Beach, where Flagler, possibly to distance himself from the anti-Spanish propaganda that erupted in the run up to the war of 98, opted for a more sedate
Georgian style of architecture in the first hotels (Royal Ponciana, Palm Beach Inn) he constructed in this new resort.

All this would change at the end of the First World War, when Florida’s land boom was just beginning and the Spanish Craze in New York, California, and other parts of the country was in full swing. The era marks the construction of Coral Gables, which was unabashedly modeled upon such grand old Spanish cities as Cordova, Salamanca, Toledo and lovely old Seville. In the end Coral Gables became something of an architectural mish-mash, with design elements that were Moorish, Mediterranean, Mexican as well as Spanish, but what one of its developers described as the town’s “fine old Spanish atmosphere” was reflected in the development’s centerpiece, the Ritz Carleton Hotel, whose tower was a replica of Seville’s Giralda; an expansive entrance place called the “Puerta de Sol;” street names that was largely Spanish; churches built either in Mission or Spanish Baroque; and statues dedicated to Hernando de Soto and other Spanish adventurers; and the aptly named Spanish Shop where the owners of newly constructed Spanish- and Mediterranean style houses could find Spanish paintings, furniture, and antiques.

There were more such shops in Palm Beach, which, together with Boca Raton, became the epicenter of Florida’s Spanish Craze. There is not time to
today describe the design history of either these two communities in any detail, but what is Spanish — or least Mediterranean — in both — was primarily the work of Addison Mizner. Born in California, and educated in both Guatemala and Spain — he studied for a time at the University of Salamanca. Mizner started designing Spanish style houses in New York prior to migrating to Palm Beach, determined, it seems, to create something comparable to Santa Barbara, San Clemente, Rancho Santa Fe and other Southern California towns that were to quick to embrace the architectural traditions of Spain and Spanish America. So began Mizner’s efforts to hispanicize Palm Beach — first in the guise of the Everglades Club (1918); then, starting with Mirasol, a series of large private houses, outfitted with Spanish paintings and antiques that Mizner purchased during several shopping sprees to Spain; in arcades and patios he designed for Worth Avenue, and through Mizner Industries, a workshop that provides his clients with pottery, tiles, grilles, and furniture of both Spanish and Mediterranean design and which were intended to harmonize with what he called Florida’s “profoundly Spanish character.” Mizner went one step further in Boca Raton which, though s never fully realized, was envisioned as yet another Spanish town — with a giralda, a hotel whose dining room modeled after a hospital in Vich; an administrative building meant to replicate El Greco’s house in Toledo; a Mission style town hall; a Spanish village; and for his own house, the Spanish castle, complete with drawbridge and moat.
The collapse of Florida´s land boom, starting in 1926, put most of these plans. That same year, the architect Howard Major, in an important article as well as a book both published in 1926, expressed the view that the Spanish style associated with Mizner and other Florida architects “was totally at variance with our Anglo-Saxon temperment” and thus failed to express “American ’national character. “ 17 Major rather suggested the use of Greek revival, Colonnaded Colonial or what he called British colonial, or West Indian style architecture.

What Major failed to recognize is that the Spanish Craze had opened America´s eye to the importance of Spanish culture in the United States, especially in places like Florida, where it connected with a history the country had either neglected or studiously attempted to forget. Historians like Smith and Fairbanks thought otherwise, as I have tried here to suggest, but not nearly as eloquently as Walt Whitman who, writing in 1883, addressed the thorny issue of America´s national identity in an essay published in Sante Fe in conjunction with a celebration marking what was mistakenly considered 333rd anniversary of the foundation of that New Mexican town. Santa Fe´s authorities invited Walt Whitman to visit New Mexico and present an commemoration address. Whitman, old, ailing and residing in Camden, New Jersey, declined to make the cross-country trek, but as he was deeply concerned with the topic of America´s
nationality,” he sent in his place an essay, “The Spanish Element in our Nationality,” in which he explained that the Spaniard, just like Englishman, was part of the “American identity,” but better that I quite him directly as Whitman’s prose is more elegant than mine:

Character, literature, a society worthy the name, are yet to be establish’d...To that composite American identity of the future, Spanish character will supply some of the most needed parts. No stock shows a grander historic retrospect—grander in religiousness and loyalty, or for patriotism, courage, decorum, gravity and honor... It is time to realize— for it is certainly true—that there will not be found any more cruelty, tyranny, superstition, etc., in the résumé of past Spanish history than in the corresponding résumé of Anglo-Norman history. Nay, I think there will not be found so much).

As to the Spanish stock of our Southwest, it is certain to me that we do begin to appreciate the splendor and sterling value of its race element. Who knows but that element, like the course of some subterranean river, dipping invisibly for a hundred or two years, is now to emerge in broadest flow and permanent action? 18
The language is flowery, dare I say poetic, but the message crystal-clear. Taking direct aim at those nativists who identified America as Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and white, Whitman linked Spain and its heritage to that of the United States. Others writers, and even some politicians in various parts of the country, soon expressed similar sentiments, adding that Spain and America were essentially brethren in arms to the extent that they shared a common historic mission— that of converting the hemisphere’s indigenous population to Christianity and thus furthering the cause of civilization itself. Spain’s soldiers and missionaries initiated this campaign in the sixteenth century. The US, the new standard bearer of the Americas, was now seeing it through to completion.

From this linkage came the idea that, whatever the political differences between Spain and the United States, these were but superficial and temporary in as much as the culture, the language, and indeed the history of two countries, were deeply and profoundly intertwined. Much of this was pure invention, but it allowed Spanish style houses — and here I should Spanish tiles, furniture, music and dance --- to be understood as authentic, home-grown and “historical” in ways that Greek Revival, Victorian, and even British West Indian were definitely not. In addition, what architects and decorators touted as the straight-forward honesty, simplicity and workmanlike quality of the Spanish style impressed many
as quintessentially American and in touch with the values that many believed had made America great. From this perspective, Florida’s discovery of Spain was but one phase in the story of Florida’s discovery of itself.  

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4. Max Bloomfield, Bloomfield’s illustrated historical guide: embracing an account of the antiquities of St, Augustine, Florida ( St. Augustine: Max Bloomfield, 1885), p. 78.


8. “The Ponce de León Celebration, 1885 ( Extract from the St Augustine Evening Record, April 3, 1885), El Escribano 5.2 ( April 1968), pp. 3-4.


15. The best overall introduction to the Tamp can be found in Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure*.


19. See, for example, “ADDRESS OF HON. JOSEPH SCOTT OF LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, “ which was delivered at the Christopher Columbus Memorial Celebration, Washington, DC, June 8, 1912.