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***Mullet on the Beach: The Minorcans of Florida, 1768-1788* by  
Patricia C. Griffin**

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*Mullet on the Beach: The Minorcans of Florida, 1768-1788*. By Patricia C. Griffin. Jacksonville, Florida. 1991. University of North Florida Press. Pp. 219. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper \$14.95.

The upcoming Columbus quincentenary has generated many new descriptions and reevaluations of the Spanish *entrada* and New World colonization. This welcome volume describes a different group of European settlers, the Minorcans of British East Florida. In 1768 Scottish physician Andrew Turnbull brought these indentured workers to an indigo plantation at New Smyrna. The group, which also included Italians and Greeks, left overpopulation and famine. Turnbull thought that white Mediterraneans, used to a warm climate, would be well suited for Florida and cheaper than slaves. After a miserable voyage over 1,250 Minorcans arrived in east Florida, which then had a population of about 2,000. Disease, maltreatment, and terrible living conditions inspired an immediate rebellion. The leaders were hanged and the oppression continued, but for a few years the enterprise made a profit. Then came crop failure, drought, Indian troubles, and the colonists' realization that they were not, despite their expectations, soon to be free landholders.

While Turnbull was in London in 1777, the colonists deserted, walking seventy-five miles to sanctuary in St. Augustine. These 600 survivors established themselves as farmers, fishers, craftworkers, and tradespeople in the boomtown of British St. Augustine. When Florida was returned to Spain after 1783, most of the Minorcans, culturally closer to the new regime even though nominally British subjects, decided to stay. St. Augustine became "a Minorcan capital" as they reestablished traditional settlement and subsistence patterns and folkways, and came to prominence in later years.

This book vividly details the first twenty years of the colony's existence. It includes personal histories and anecdotes, demographic summaries, reconstructions of physical conditions and diseases, based on biological information and some archaeological data. Griffin's writing is filled with vivid images: the colonists' departure from their home island is described as a break "as clean as death" (p. 24); the portrait of Turnbull's wife in a huge feathered hat is said to give the "impression of a ship under full sail" (p. 78). Unfortunately, most of the photos are not reproduced well, and the book contains no maps of east Florida or the colonists' Mediterranean homelands, both critical elements of the story.

Nonetheless the author, a cultural anthropologist, constructs colorful tales from letters, census records, and church and government records. She explains cultural conflicts that added to the physical oppression of the colonists. For example, Turnbull operated on the British Protestant single-crop work model, destroying the Minorcans' original varied agriculture and kin/community/church-centered life. Moreover, Minorcans valued the Mediterranean patron/client bond of friendship. Turnbull, however, acted as the distant overlord, forbidding Catholic holiday celebrations and even hunting and fishing, which had been so important in the Mediterranean.

These lifeways reemerged in St. Augustine. The book's title refers to the rallying cry of the Minorcans, who found mullet to be a familiar fish in the strange wilderness of the New World. The Minorcan adaptability is explored in great depth. They developed a hybrid cuisine, for

example, emphasizing fish, maize, peppers, and especially the gopher tortoise. Griffin examines interrelations among the diverse Mediterraneans lumped together as “the Minorcans,” explaining kin and godparent ties and original connections of different regions of Minorca. Although the author addresses the role of women, the narrative at times is sparsely documented. One also wishes for more on the colonists' cultural relationships with non-whites. Though Native Americans were said to be hostile to the Minorcans, who looked and sounded like the hated Spaniards, there is little on relationships with them or with African populations (except for the few slave foremen on the plantation), or on the emergence of the mestizo. Still, this work demonstrates the value of the holistic anthropological approach in understanding the historical foundations of Florida. It is also a fascinating and well told story.

Nancy Marie White