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## A Caribbean Borderland: The Tampa Bay Area during the Sixteenth Century

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*A* CARIBBEAN BORDERLAND:  
THE TAMPA BAY AREA  
DURING THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

BY GREGORY JASON BELL

Have you not hard of floryda,  
A coontre far bewest.  
Where savage pepell planted are  
By nature and by hest.

Author unknown, early seventeenth century<sup>1</sup>

*P*rior to the first documented arrival of Spaniards on the shores of Tampa Bay in 1528, the Safety Harbor Culture of Florida's Gulf Coast actively and quite naturally participated in a pan-Caribbean trade network. In fact, at the time of first contact, the Tampa Bay area's connection with the Caribbean, and especially Cuba, was thousands of years old, stretching back at least to the Late Archaic period (3000–500 BC). The arrival of the Spanish and their subsequent repeated efforts to tame the area and its inhabitants, with the stated purposes of procuring transportable wealth and converting the natives to Catholicism, marked the beginning of a slow and often violent end for the Safety Harbor Culture. The combination of Spanish

<sup>1</sup> Author Unknown, "Floryda," early seventeenth century, reprinted in Charlton Tebeau and Ruby Leach Carson, *Florida from Indian Trail to Space Age: A History* (Delray Beach, Fla.: Southern, 1965), 2:290.

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swords and germs gradually took its toll throughout the sixteenth century, greatly reducing the native population in both size and strength.

Yet, even as the Amerindian population declined precipitously, threatening to sever the Tampa Bay area's relationship with the Caribbean, the Spanish, based in Hispaniola and Cuba, unwittingly kept the Caribbean connection alive by using the Tampa Bay area, geographically positioned along the Florida Gulf coast almost directly north of Havana, as a staging area for incursions into northern Florida as well as southeastern North America. This essay documents the Spanish efforts to conquer and colonize the Caribbean and Florida during the sixteenth century and demonstrates the effects that those efforts had on the Tampa Bay area and its inhabitants. In doing so, it documents the maintenance of a cultural relationship between the Tampa Bay area and the Caribbean that clearly had strong repercussions for Tampa's future identity. It also supports the growing consensus among historians and anthropologists that peninsular Florida should be viewed not only as part of North America but in a circum-Caribbean context.<sup>2</sup>

Muslims had been a thorn in Spain's side since AD 711, when Moorish soldiers, under the leadership of Tarik bin Ziyad, crossed over to the Iberian Peninsula from North Africa and with lightning speed conquered the peninsula. Although Spain, by the fifteenth century, had regained all of its territory except for the state of Granada, a major setback occurred in 1458, when Constantinople fell to Muslim Turks, making continued trade with Asia prohibitively expensive. Spain needed an alternative trade route to Asia, and it actively began global explorations to find one. Then, in 1492, Spain finally managed to expel the Muslims from their last stronghold on the Iberian Peninsula. As a result, the Spanish co-monarchs, Isabel de Castilla y León and Fernando II de Aragón, were in a jubilant mood. Christopher Columbus took advantage of this fact, pleading for financing for a voyage in search of a western route to Cipango (Japan) and Cathay (China). Columbus received not only the requisite financial backing but also authority to sail. Fearing a royal change of heart, he prepared quickly and sailed that same year. Of course, he never reached his proposed destination. A large landmass, purportedly unknown to Europeans at the time, blocked his westward path.<sup>3</sup>

When Columbus first saw land, he guessed, incorrectly, that his fleet had reached an island in the Indian Ocean, and weary from the lengthy voyage, Columbus naturally ordered his fleet to lay anchor so that his men might stretch their legs and

<sup>2</sup> Michael Gannon, "The Coming of the Judeo-Christian Religions to the Caribbean and Florida," in *Myths and Dreams: Exploring the Cultural Legacies of Florida and the Caribbean* (Miami Lakes, Fla.: Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1999), 1–2; Margaret Villanueva, "El Golfo de Mexico: Sixteenth and Eighteenth Century Views of the America's Sea," Newberry Library: Smith Center Publications, Slide Set #26, 1997, [www.newberry.org/smith/slidesets/ss26.html](http://www.newberry.org/smith/slidesets/ss26.html); Jane G. Landers, "Black Community and Culture in the Southeastern Borderlands," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 1 (1998): 119.

<sup>3</sup> Sherry Johnson, "Dreams of Empire: The Legacies of Contact," in *Myths and Dreams*, 22–24. The Vikings visited North America in the late tenth century, but evidence suggests they spread no word of their voyages.

renew themselves, so that his fleet might be resupplied, and so that he might ascertain his exact location. As a result, the first contact between Spaniards and Amerindians occurred on October 12, 1492, on the Bahamian island of Guanahani (San Salvador). The native inhabitant Lucayans, who were Taino, did not fear the strange-looking Europeans with their “three large floating houses with wings.” Instead, as participants in a well-established pan-Caribbean trading network, they simply expected to trade with them. The Spanish initially gave the Lucayans nothing to fear. They traded with them, ate and drank with them, and engaged in intercourse with the Lucayan women. This last interaction would ultimately result not just in the spread of syphilis to Europe when these sailors returned to port, but in the emergence of mixed-blood people called *mestizos*. Still, Columbus and his men, who though having seemingly enjoyed the company of the Lucayans, saw little of value in the Bahamas, did not long tarry. As Harold Gilman notes, “explorers, like any other group entering a new land, are often influenced as much by what they wish to find as by what they actually observe. If a group entering a new area does not find what it desires, or the newly discovered land exhibits characteristics with which the group is not familiar, the area is often perceived as . . . useless.” Such was the case with the Spanish in the Bahamas, at least at first contact. Later, these invaders would find value in the human resources of the Bahamas, but at the moment, what caught Spanish attention was the glitter of the gold jewelry the Lucayans were wearing. When they found that it came from islands to the south, they quickly resupplied their ships and disembarked.<sup>4</sup>

After briefly exploring Cuba, the next stop was Hispaniola, where Columbus and his men were entertained by a local cacique, given presents of gold, and told that they could have “as much gold as they wished for.” Being greeted so pleasantly prompted Columbus to establish a colony on Hispaniola called La Navidad, which he manned with thirty-nine sailors from his flagship, the *Santa Maria*, which had earlier grounded and floundered. He reembarked for Spain, carrying with him the golden gifts and the happy news that the gold on Hispaniola was Spain’s for the taking. A second expedition that Columbus led, this time with a fleet of seventeen ships holding 1,500 men and women, departed Cádiz, Spain, on September 25, 1493, and arrived at Hispaniola on November 22. They found La Navidad in ruins and the inhabitants dead. As reported by the chronicler Fernandez de Oviedo, the deadly attack on Columbus’s men was retaliatory. “Christians did many vicious things and robbed [the Amerindians] of their wives and daughters and everything they had, as their fancy dictated,” he wrote. “And with all this they acted as if each one was a law unto himself and they were insolent to the captain who had been left to command them and they strayed into the interior, a few at a time, so that all were slain.” Rather than confirm

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 23–24, 26; Milanich, “When World’s Collided: Native Peoples of the Caribbean and Florida in the Early Colonial Period,” in *Myths and Dreams*, 11–12; Harold F. Gilman, “Florida’s Gulf Coast as First Seen by Europeans,” in *Threads of Tradition and Culture along the Gulf Coast*, ed. Ronald V. Evans (Pensacola: Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference, 1986), 186.

or deny the story of his sailors' deprivations, Columbus tabled the matter and set about establishing a new settlement that he named La Isabela. This settlement, however, also proved unsuccessful. In 1500, Fernando and Isabel, heeding the persistent complaints of colonists, removed Columbus from his posts of viceroy and governor of Hispaniola. When Columbus resisted this royal order, the new commander of the island, Francisco de Bobadilla, arrested him and returned him to Spain in chains. Although the monarchs ultimately freed Columbus and even granted him the right to a third voyage to the New World, his star waned, contrary to the myth that had enshrined his heroic memory by the late nineteenth century, when white Americans celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of his maiden voyage.<sup>5</sup>

Such an inauspicious beginning did not deter Spain from going full bore after Caribbean riches. In 1494, Spain, Portugal, and Rome signed the Treaty of Tordesillas, whereby, in exchange for Spain's promise to convert Amerindians, the pope legitimized Spain's claim to all of the Western Hemisphere except for parts of Brazil, which fell under Portuguese dominion. Armed with such authority, between 1492 and 1504 more than eighty ships departed Spain for the



*Courtesy of the Florida Museum of Natural History*

There are very few images of the Calusa people and their predecessors, which makes this portrait incredibly important for historians and anthropologists. The image on the clam shell was created roughly 1,000 years ago and found by archaeologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in 1896.

<sup>5</sup> Edward T. Stone, "Columbus's La Navidad: The Fate of the New World's First Spanish Settlement," *American Heritage Magazine* 29, no. 3, (April/May 1978), reprinted by AmericanHeritage.com at [www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1978/3/1978\\_3\\_82.shtml](http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1978/3/1978_3_82.shtml).

Americas. Using Hispaniola as a base, voyages of discovery and conquest quickly brought much of the Caribbean into the Spanish realm. The local Tainos, Sibonneys, and Caribs resisted the Spanish incursions, and although they had a sizeable advantage in numbers, they proved no match against Spanish weapons and military tactics. Consequently, Juan Ponce de León conquered Puerto Rico in 1508, Jamaica fell in 1509, and as Jerald T. Milanich argues, “Cuba was next. In 1511 one Spanish army moved eastward across the island from the west while another, led by Pánfilo de Narváez, newly arrived from the bloody conquest of Jamaica, marched west. Caught between the armies, thousands of Indians were slain. By 1515 the conquest of the island was complete.” Once conquered, the conquistadors took some islanders captive and sent them to Spain to be sold into slavery or to work as house servants, while they enslaved others and forced them to labor in mines or on *ranchos* or as servants for Spanish colonists. Those lucky enough to remain free were subjected to a system of tribute through which, in exchange for freedom, they were forced to supply the Spanish with food, cotton, and of course, more gold.<sup>6</sup>

Although war and forced labor both took their tolls on the local populations, European diseases, to which Amerindians had few or no immunities, largely decimated their numbers. Beginning in 1506, influenza was the first disease to afflict the Caribbean people. Smallpox struck in 1519, followed by measles, tuberculosis, diphtheria, typhus, and bubonic plague. As a result of these illnesses, the native population declined precipitously. Although the mixed-blood population grew, the fledgling Spanish colonies found themselves facing a severe shortage of labor. To secure additional labor, slavers raided Lucayan villages in the Bahamas, removing an estimated forty thousand residents between 1509 and 1513 alone. Consequently, by 1520, the Bahamas were largely depopulated. Slavers then turned their attention to the mainland of Central America, and when they still could not meet demand, they began importing slaves from Africa. With greater immunity to European diseases, the Africans had a better rate of survival. Slavers quickly recognized this fact, even if they did not understand the science behind it, and the African slave trade began in earnest. By 1524, there were more Africans on Hispaniola than Amerindians.<sup>7</sup>

Slavers, it should be noted, often acted outside the law. According to Milanich, “the Crown, through *asientos* (royal contracts) awarded to the leaders of expeditions, sought to regulate . . . voyages and expeditions of conquest to assure the division of spoils and future earnings.” Although they could not legally undertake voyages without permission from the crown, “unsanctioned voyages to pillage, capture native people as slaves, and locate lands for future, legal exploitation must have been ongoing.” Although Juan Ponce de León, then governor of Puerto Rico, led the first official Spanish voyage to what is now the mainland United States in 1513, slavers based in the Bahamas had already explored and raided La Pascua Florida, as Ponce de León called it. In fact, Alberto Cantino’s 1502 map of the New World clearly depicts a wedge-

<sup>6</sup> Milanich, “When Worlds Collided,” 15–16.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, “Dreams of Empire,” 26; Milanich, “When Worlds Collided,” 16.

shaped peninsula to the north of Cuba, suggesting that Spaniards had at least preliminarily explored Florida during the first decade of the Columbian Era.<sup>8</sup>

Stories of enslavement and genocide passed from the Caribbean to Florida by the pan-Caribbean trade network, cementing in Florida Amerindian minds an unfavorable opinion of Europeans and precluding any warm welcome. In fact, although Ponce de León's fleet of three caravels tarried for three weeks on the Florida Gulf Coast in May 1513, probably in the Charlotte Harbor area, relations between the Spanish and the local Amerindians, likely Calusa, quickly deteriorated. A squadron of dugout canoes filled



*Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

with bellicose natives (among them a Spanish-speaking, Spanish-hating Amerindian claiming to be from Hispaniola) attacked the fleet. When the Calusa tried forcibly to board Ponce de León's ships, the Spaniard wisely ordered a withdrawal of his resupplied fleet and a return to Puerto Rico.<sup>9</sup>

Though likely not the first European to arrive in Florida, Juan Ponce de León gave the peninsula (which he mistook for an island) its name. His expeditions in 1513 and 1522 failed to establish a permanent presence in Florida, but they did encourage others to try their luck in the Florida wilderness.

<sup>8</sup> Jerald T. Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 107; Milanich, "When Worlds Collided," 17; Doris Weatherford, *Real Women: Of Tampa and Hillsborough County from Prehistory to the Millennium* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2004), 5–6; Michael Gannon, "The Coming of the Judeo-Christian Religions to the Caribbean and Florida," in *Myths and Dreams*, 4; Gilman, "Florida's Gulf Coast as First Seen by Europeans," 186–88. See also Jerald T. Milanich, *Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 134.

<sup>9</sup> Karl A. Bickel, *The Mangrove Coast: The Story of the West Coast of Florida* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1942), 15–17; F. R. Vernon-Williams, "History of Florida," in *Florida Cruise*, ed. Norman



This hostile reception did not deter the Spanish from exploring the Gulf coast, whether in search of a water route to Asia or for other reasons. In 1516, Diego de Miruelo claimed to have discovered a “beautiful bay” where he engaged in “trading with the natives,” suggesting he might have been the first Spaniard to anchor in Tampa Bay. The following year, the fleet of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (or Córdoba), guided by Ponce de León’s former pilot, Anton de Alaminos, and carrying the noted Spanish historian Bernal Diaz, experienced a shortage of potable water while traveling from the Yucatan to Cuba. Probably desperate, Alaminos sailed the fleet into Charlotte Harbor, known at that time as San Carlos Bay, and procured water. Much like Ponce de León’s fleet four years prior, the Calusa quickly forced the Spaniards to leave. In March 1519, Alonso Álvarez de Pineda and his four-ship, 270-man expedition left Jamaica and sailed along the Gulf coast from Key West to Texas. Adding to preexisting knowledge, Álvarez de Pineda was able to produce a map in 1520 that clearly depicts two harbors on the Florida Gulf coast, one probably being Tampa Bay. His map also clearly depicted Florida as a North American peninsula and demonstrated that the Spanish had largely ruled out the possibility of a Gulf waterway to Asia. More important, the Spanish by then claimed the Gulf of Mexico. Also, it was reportedly common knowledge by this time that sailing due north from Havana would lead directly to a fine deepwater port, this being either Charlotte Harbor or Tampa Bay.<sup>10</sup>

Their dream of a water route to Asia quashed, the Spanish turned to Florida in hopes of fulfilling what historian Herbert Bolton notes were their developing dual desires for “the heathen’s gold and the heathen’s soul.” In 1514, King Fernando II awarded Ponce de León a patent to colonize Florida and transplant on to her shores both Spanish people and Spanish civilization. Rankled yet by the outcome of his previous visit to Florida’s Gulf coast, Ponce de León made plans to return to the Charlotte Harbor area, but a revolt by the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles delayed these plans for seven years. In 1521, he wrote a letter to Ferdinand stating: “Among my services I discovered at my own cost and charge the Island of Florida. . . . Now I return to that Island, if it please God’s will, to settle it.” Ponce de León then led a fleet up the west coast of Florida, ordered it to anchor in or near Charlotte Harbor, and landed several hundred men as well as horses and agricultural equipment. Native hostility once again cut short the endeavor. Slavers had continued to raid the area in

Alan Hill (Baltimore: George W. King Printing Company, 1945), 7–8; Gary R. Mormino and Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, 1983), 1–21.

<sup>10</sup> Bickel, *The Mangrove Coast*, 54–55; Gilman, “Florida’s Gulf Coast,” 186–88; Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida’s Frontiers: A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 22–24, 29; John H. Hann, *Indians of Central and South Florida, 1513–1763*, Ripley P. Bullen Series, ed. Jerald T. Milanich (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 1, 12–13; Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, “Map of the Gulf Coast,” original located in the Archive of the Indies, Seville, Spain; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 110; Milanich, *Florida’s Indians from Ancient Times to the Present*, 137; Lindsey Wilger Williams, *Boldly Onward: The Incredible Adventures of America’s ‘Adelantados’ and Clues to Their Landing Places in Florida* (Charlotte Harbor, Fla.: Precision, 1986), 74.



the interlude between Ponce de León's visits, only increasing the extant Amerindian dislike of Spaniards. As a result, it was not long before the Calusa managed to mount a well-organized attack from both sea and land, routing the Spanish with armor-piercing arrows. Wounded in the leg by a Calusa shark-tooth arrow, Ponce de León again was forced to retreat, this time to Cuba, where his wound became infected, resulting in his death.<sup>11</sup>

Upon Ponce de León's death, King Carlos of Spain, who also happened to be Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, awarded the rights to Florida to Pánfilo de Narváez, conferring upon him the title of *adelantado* (representative of the king who held judicial and administrative powers over a particular district) and granting him permission to conquer and colonize the land stretching from the Cape of Florida to the Río de Las Palmas in Mexico. As *adelantado*, Narváez became the proprietor of the *adelantamiento* of La Florida, and as such was to furnish certain services to the king and receive certain benefits from him in return.<sup>12</sup>

Narváez wasted little time in fulfilling his contractual obligations. Five ships, piloted by Diego de Miruelo, who claimed intimate familiarity with the area, and containing about six hundred soldiers, priests, and settlers, as well as eighty horses and supplies, set sail from Trinidad, Cuba-bound for Río de Las Palmas. However, severe storms forced Miruelo to turn the fleet northeast, toward the Florida Gulf coast, and after consulting Narváez, he guided the fleet to the Tampa Bay area and anchored off the Pinellas Peninsula, on Good Friday, April 15, 1528. With the stated purpose of establishing a colony and converting the locals to Catholicism, the "redheaded, red bearded, and one-eyed" Narváez and his men reconnoitered the area and walked across the peninsula to the shores of Old Tampa Bay, which he then named La Bahía de la Cruz (The Bay of the Cross). In the course of these explorations, they encountered a handful of Amerindians who led them to the local village of Tocobaga. Once in the village, Narváez's men were surprised by the number of European salvaged goods they saw, including wooden boxes containing bodies, linen, and other cloth. Then, in one of the thatched huts of Tocobaga, a small gold ornament was found, the discovery of which prompted Narváez to unfurl the royal standard and recite a proclamation written by Spanish jurists to acquaint the Amerindians with the laws of their new

<sup>11</sup> Herbert E. Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest*, Yale Chronicles of America Series (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, 1970), 2–3; Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 1–21; Gloria Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 25; Vernon-Williams, "History of Florida," 7–8; Gilman, "Florida's Gulf Coast," 186–88; Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 6–11; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 110; Kenneth W. Mulder, "Tampa from Shell Mound to Modern Town," *Sunland Tribune* 6, no. 1 (1980): 24.

<sup>12</sup> Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 22; Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 29–32; Eugene Lyon, "The Enterprize of Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1974): 411–12. According to Lyon, "the juridical origins of the Castillian institution of the adelantado can be traced back at least as far as the twelfth century," and the adelantado was "an essential ingredient in the reconquest of Spain" that was "later transferred, legally intact, to the New World." Spain's expansion into the Western Hemisphere, notes Lyon, was "accomplished chiefly by adelantados."

king. Possibly owing to this proclamation, Narváez and the village cacique (chief), whose name is recorded in Spanish documents as Hirrihigua, became embroiled in a dispute, the result being that Narváez, who by that time had earned a reputation in Jamaica as a murderer and who had extended that reputation during the conquest of Cuba by directing several mass killings that helped break native resistance, cut off the cacique's nose and then fed the cacique's mother, while still alive, to his war dogs.<sup>13</sup>

Barbarous and inhumane violence toward natives was appropriate both religiously and culturally to these sixteenth-century Spaniards. As Caribbean historian Sherry Johnson points out, the 750-year conflict with Muslims had left the Spanish "with the ideological and cultural baggage of the glorification of military service and the exploits of military heroes," as well as with "an unwavering belief, bordering on fanaticism, in the infallibility of Catholicism." Both traits shaped the Spanish experience in the New World. According to historian Michael Gannon, prior to 1540, Spaniards generally believed that the indigenous peoples "were a subhuman species—a collection of not fully developed human beings, who had no claim to the same rights and privileges accorded Europeans, but, rather, were by their natures subject legally and morally to



*Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

One of only four survivors of the ill-fated Pánfilo de Narváez expedition, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca walked from the Tampa Bay area to the west coast of Mexico, completing the first documented crossing of the North American continent by Old World explorers. Cabeza de Vaca recounted the eight year journey, which was published in Europe and read by many, including conquistador Hernando de Soto.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, *Boldly Onward*, 52; Vernon-Williams, "History of Florida," 9; Mulder, "Tampa from Shell Mound to Modern Town," 25; Milanich, *Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present*, 107–10; Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 20–22; Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888–1950* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 19–20.

exploitation.” Thus, for Spaniards inured to war against Muslims and who left Spain to meet destinies in the New World, violence was a part of life. Furthermore, thanks to violence and diseases, life did not last long; the average life span in fifteenth-century Europe was only thirty years. This is not to suggest that life was valued less but to point out simply that death and suffering were much more commonplace. In the Americas, the Spanish faced another group of dark-skinned, non-Catholic people who, not surprisingly, resisted foreign control. The Spanish transferred their attitudes toward Muslims onto these new peoples and treated them accordingly. In this light, Narváez’s actions in Tampa, although brutal even by Old Testament standards and unforgivable by twenty-first-century sensibilities, are understandable. Still, historian Samuel Eliot Morrison does not buy into these justifications, declaring Narváez “both cruel and stupid” and “the most incompetent of all who sailed for Spain in this era.”<sup>14</sup>

After widespread rumors of Spanish maltreatment of natives—known collectively today as “the Black Legend” (*La Leyenda Negra*)—made their way to the Tampa Bay area, and following repeated visits from slavers, any chance for an amicable relationship between the Spanish and Tampa’s Amerindians was unlikely. Narváez and his men took just one week to destroy it. Leaving Tampa, they made an ill-fated march north to “Apalachen” in search of transportable wealth that the Amerindians told them falsely was there (only four men, not including Narváez, survived this expedition, the remainder dying from hunger, wounds, or exposure). When Narváez failed to return to Cuba, his wife sent out a twenty-five-man search party. When this party sailed into Tampa Bay, the natives made it clear that the party was unwelcome. Still, two mariners dared to go ashore. One was killed immediately, while the other, Juan Ortiz, was tortured almost to the point of death, when the chief’s daughter persuaded her father to spare Ortiz’s life. She then nursed Ortiz back to health, and he ended up living among the Amerindians for eleven years, during which time he not only learned Amerindian dialects but supposedly taught the locals some Spanish. Ortiz was important in part because he represented a constant Spanish presence among the local American Indians during the 1530s and because he demonstrated to them, albeit in a small degree, the humanity of Spaniards. In fact, his presence, and the bravery he once demonstrated in rescuing the body of a recently deceased infant from a hungry panther’s clutches, might have gone a long way toward rehabilitating the Spanish in local minds. This rehabilitation, however, was immediately undone when the next conquistador, Hernando de Soto, a veteran of Francisco Pizarro’s Peruvian campaign, arrived on Tampa’s shores.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, “Dreams of Empire,” 30; Gannon, “The Coming of the Judeo-Christian Religions,” 3–4; Jeff Klinkenberg, “History under Foot,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 19 January 2004, [www.sptimes.com/2004/01/19/Floridian/History\\_under\\_foot.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2004/01/19/Floridian/History_under_foot.shtml).

<sup>15</sup> David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America* (Hartford: Yale University Press, 1992), 42–43; Vernon-Williams, “History of Florida,” 9; Weatherford, *Real Women*, 5–6; Milanich, *Florida*

Narváez's death vacated the proprietorship of the *adelantamiento* of La Florida, albeit not for long. Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, one of the four survivors of the Narváez expedition, had entertained the Spanish court in Seville by telling stories of La Florida, "the richest country in the world." Thirty-three-year-old Hernando de Soto, present at the court, believed the stories and upon request in November 1536 was made *adelantado* for life of La Florida, which at that point encompassed much of what is now the southeastern United States. In exchange for the proprietorship, he was instructed by Emperor Charles V to "explore, conquer, fortify, and settle La Florida," to search for mineral wealth, and to "establish a protected overland route from the Atlantic coast westward to the Gulf of Mexico and onto New Spain (Mexico)." On April 6, 1538, heavily armed and with legal documents making them representatives of God, the pope, and the king, de Soto and his army sailed from Spain. After arriving in Cuba, de Soto, being cautious or thorough, sent scout ships to reconnoiter a landing site at Tampa Bay, a harbor known to Spanish navigators as "Bahía Honda" (Deep Bay) that had been explored the previous year by Juan de Anasco, de Soto's chief pilot. Then, on May 18, 1539, de Soto's fleet of eight to ten ships, carrying 600 soldiers and about 125 support staff and livestock, departed Havana. After a stopover in the Dry Tortugas, they arrived on May 25 on Florida's Gulf coast somewhere between Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay, probably near the mouth of the Little Manatee River.<sup>16</sup>

As luck would have it, the de Soto expedition made landfall near the village of Ucita, where Juan Ortiz was living after a number of years among the Tocobaga a few miles to the north. With Narváez's depredations fresh in mind, the Ucita did not wait to see what the Spaniards wanted but instead fired upon them with arrows and then fled into the wooded and swampy interior where horses could not pursue. They also set signal fires to warn the other local chiefdoms of danger. De Soto quickly confiscated the village, making it his base camp. Once settled, de Soto invited the cacique of the Ucita to a meeting. The cacique, however, did not wish to meet, but replied that he would happily "receive the severed heads of the Castilians." De Soto then sent out companies in search of other Amerindians who might direct him toward mineral wealth. On one such excursion, Spaniards were pleasantly surprised to find Ortiz, who had come from the nearby village of Mocosó to investigate the reason for the signal fires. Although appearing like an Amerindian both in skin color and in dress, Ortiz still spoke broken Spanish even after more than a decade

Indians and the Invasion from Europe, 122; Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 23; Sylvia Sunshine, *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes* (1880, repr., Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976), 285–87.

<sup>16</sup> Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 127–30; Jerald T. Milanich, "Tracing the Route of Hernando De Soto through Florida," in *Essays in Florida History* (Tampa: Endowment for the Humanities, 1980), 7; Vernon-Williams, "History of Florida," 9–10; Ernest Lauren Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical* (Saint Augustine, Fla.: Record Co.—printers, 1928), 13–16; Kenneth W. Mulder, "The Amulet," *Sunland Tribune* 8, no. 1 (1982): 26; Hampton Dunn, "Hernando De Soto: Saint or Sadist?" *Sunland Tribune* 15 (1989): 4–7.



*Tampa Bay History Center Collection*

This image, created by French artist Jacques LeMoyne and engraved by German printer Theodor de Bry, is among the most popular 16th century drawings of Florida's original American Indians. LeMoyne likely witness a scene like this or heard about it during his time at Fort Caroline near today's Jacksonville.

of captivity. He also spoke several Native dialects, which broke the language barrier between the Spaniards and the locals and which, as de Soto wrote, "put new life into us . . . for without him I know not what would have become of us." In fact, de Soto viewed the appearance of Ortiz as a sign that God "has taken this enterprise in His special keeping." It gave him strength to continue, with renewed energy. After reconnoitering the area for about six weeks, pillaging native settlements and making few friends among the local Ucita, Pohoy, and Mocoso in the process (the exception being the cacique of the Mocoso, whom he plied with gifts), de Soto determined that the area was sterile and did not contain exploitable resources. As a result, de Soto and his new interpreter Ortiz, with about five hundred men and an untold number of captive American Indian porters, moved inland, heading northward through modern Hillsborough, Pasco, Hernando, and Citrus Counties, to the Cove of the Withlacoochee River and beyond, in search of a "rich country thirty leagues inland." However, de Soto left behind a garrison of fifty soldiers with thirty horses and a two-year supply of food. These men, under the command of Pedro Calderon, remained in the Tampa Bay area, disrupting local native life, until de Soto arrived near modern-day Tallahassee and sent orders for Calderon and his men to decamp and join him in the province of Apalachee. Clearly, the de Soto expedition was a negative force in

the area, keeping the Caribbean connection with the area alive but doing nothing to repair the reputation of Spaniards so damaged by Narváez.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, during his travels through Florida and what became the southeastern United States, de Soto was, as one historian concluded, “a scourge upon the land.” Florida historian Gloria Jahoda quotes a primary source document lamenting that de Soto and his men “tormented and killed [the Indians], leading them like animals. When one became tired or fainted, they cut off his head at the neck, in order not to free those in front from the chain that bound them.” The source also stated that de Soto

had the faces of many Indians cut, so that they were shorn of nostrils and lips . . . Thus he dispatched these mutilated, suffering creatures dripping with blood, to carry the news of the deeds and miracles done by those baptized Christians, preachers of the Holy Catholic Faith. It may be judged in what state those people must be, how they must love the Christians, and how they will believe that their God is good and just.

A rare native primary source supports this conclusion, referring to de Soto and his men as “professional vagabonds who wander from place to place, gaining your livelihood by robbing, sacking, and murdering people who give you no offense.” Such seemingly inhumane actions go counter to the 1537 Papal Bull, “*Sublimus Dei*,” which declared Amerindians “truly human beings with full intellectual and moral capacity to become Christians.” As such, they were to be treated not as slaves but as possible converts and parishioners. Although staunchly Catholic, Spain did not act quickly to make this official policy. Delayed, as Doris Weatherford points out, by economic and racist motives, as well as by a “cult of military violence nourished over many centuries of the *Reconquista*, the struggle to regain control of Iberia from the Muslims,” the Spanish Crown took five years to succumb to papal pressure and issue what were called “New Laws” that “reinforced the Papal Bull and forbade all further enslavement of the Indians.” Although certainly aware of the Bull’s much-publicized contents, de Soto focused on conquering natives in Florida instead of converting them.<sup>18</sup>

At least eight Spanish explorers made contact with the Tampa Bay area between 1513 and 1539, and many, if not all, of these contacts, resulted in violence against Amerindians. If, as historian Karl Bickel points out, one adds “the unreported and illegitimate hijacking slaving expeditions which certainly took place . . . it is

<sup>17</sup> Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis*, 39–41; Gilman, “Florida’s Gulf Coast,” 189–92; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 50; Milanich, “Tracing the Route,” 7; Hoffman, *Florida’s Frontiers*, 36–37; Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 24; A. H. Phinney, “Narvaez and De Soto: Their Landing Places and the Town of Espirito Santo,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (1925): 21; Milanich, *The Timucua*, 76–77, 80; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 75; Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 49–51, 55.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Gannon, “The Coming of the Judeo-Christian Religions to the Caribbean and Florida,” in *Myths and Dreams*, 4–5; Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis*, 50, 3–4; Weber, *The Spanish Frontier*, 50; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 101–2.



clear enough why the natives of the bay district became such fierce and unrelenting antagonists of everything Spanish.” It also explains why, after the “New Laws,” they were in no mood to listen to Dominican friar Luis Cáncer de Barbastro spreading the message of Spain’s change of heart. While in Mexico City in 1546, Barbastro heard the stories of Cabeza de Vaca and “resolved to bear his standard to Florida” in order to “undo the damage done to Christianity’s image by these early invaders.” In 1549, after receiving a royal patent to establish missions among the natives in Florida, Fray Luis and four companions departed the Mexican port city of Vera Cruz for Cuba. Before their departure, Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas warned Fray Luis to avoid Tampa Bay because “all that land is running with the blood of Indians.” Once in Cuba, the staging ground for the expedition, heeding the bishop’s advice, the friar hired a pilot and ordered him “not to sail to any port tainted by the misdeeds of the Spanish.” Leaving Cuba the second week of June, the pilot, Captain Juan de Arana, either from ignorance or irresponsibility, sailed into Tampa Bay. Threatened and warned to leave, the Spaniards did manage to have a couple of meetings with the locals, as well as to hold the first recorded Catholic mass in Florida on June 20, 1549. That the native people on shore did not immediately actualize their threats only emboldened the friars, who vowed to press on with their godly endeavor even in the face of danger. Two of the friars were then kidnapped and killed. Undaunted, Fray Luis went ashore on June 26 with Bible and crucifix, and still in sight of his ship, was bludgeoned to death with war clubs. Witnessing this, the remaining friars, still on deck, ordered an immediate return to Vera Cruz, and Tampa was left once again to its native inhabitants. In fact, although illegal slavers and traders most certainly kept up their visits to the Gulf Coast, as evidenced by a 1557 letter to the king of Spain describing Tampa Bay as a place where “many slaves can be had,” and although a Spanish ship occasionally foundered near the shore, providing the local Amerindians with both Spanish goods and captives, it was not until 1566 that the Tampa Bay area received another official visit.<sup>19</sup>

By the late 1550s, Spain had grown quite concerned about “the Floridian machinations” of rival colonizing forces. France, England, and Holland, having refused to acknowledge Spain’s pope-given right to the New World, quickly encroached on Spain’s territory, either through officially sanctioned exploratory visits, such as France’s attempt to establish a fort on Florida’s east coast in 1564, or by granting sanction to privateers, such as England’s John Hawkins, or later, Francis Drake. Indirect evidence suggests that the French visited Tampa Bay in the mid-sixteenth century. Of equal

<sup>19</sup> Karl A. Bickel, *The Mangrove Coast*, 56–57; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 19–20; Vernon-Williams, “History of Florida,” 10; Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 123–28; Weatherford, *Real Women*, 9; Miguel A. Bretos, *Cuba & Florida: Exploration of an Historic Connection, 1539-1991* (Miami: Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1991), 22; Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 25–26; Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 22–23; Johnson, “Dreams of Empire,” 30; Charles W. Arnade, *Cattle Raising in Spanish Florida, 1513-1763* (St. Augustine: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1965), 5; Sources differ on the number of friars, three or four, traveling with Fray Luis.



concern was that by that time the indigenous Caribbean societies had been virtually destroyed, leaving Spain without an important justification for colonization, namely to convert the locals. Consequently, Spain renewed her efforts to colonize La Florida. A royally sanctioned attempt by Tristan de Luna y Arellano to establish a colony at Pensacola Bay in 1559 failed miserably. Shaken but undeterred, on the Ides of March 1565, Spain made an *adelantado* of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and awarded him a royal contract to found a colony in Florida, thereby protecting Florida and Spain's claim to it. By that point, most Spanish officials realized that La Florida would never yield the riches of New Spain, but Spain still needed Florida to ensure the safety of her treasure ships and maritime trade. Menéndez was more optimistic. He would obey orders and fortify the peninsula to protect both it and the shipping lanes that surrounded it, but he also had great hopes of developing and harvesting Florida's natural resources to make Florida richer than even Peru. Furthermore, Menéndez embraced the new attitude toward natives fostered by the Papal Bull of 1537, informing King Phillip II that he would also attempt to evangelize those people "sunk in the thickest shades of infidelity." To these ends, Menendez appointed his nephew, Pedro Menéndez de Márquez, as the regional governor of Tocobaga, Carlos, and Tequesta (modern-day Tampa, Charlotte Harbor, and Miami) and sent him from Havana with four ships and 150 sailors on an expedition "to reconnoiter and sound, see and discover the coast" from Mexico to Santa Elena (modern-day Beaufort, South Carolina). Engaged in these efforts, Menéndez de Márquez visited Tocobaga several times between 1565 and 1569. Meanwhile, his uncle planned to establish a line of posts from Santa Elena to Tampa Bay. On September 8, 1565, he first founded a fort, St. Augustine, to serve as his base of operations on Florida's east coast. Then, after replenishing his supplies and troops at Havana, on February 10, 1566, he sailed to the west coast, landing at Charlotte Harbor on Valentine's Day. There, Menéndez was well received by the Calusa cacique, who promised to release the Calusa's Spanish captives if Menéndez agreed to marry his sister. Menéndez did so, and then sent the Calusa princess to Cuba for education. The cacique then kept his word by presenting Menéndez with a handful of Christians who were, according to the cacique, the sole survivors of more than two hundred Europeans who had been shipwrecked on Florida's coast during the previous decades. If Spanish primary sources are to be believed, the cacique had been sacrificing Christians each year to deities.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Mulder, "Tampa from Shell Mound to Modern Town," 21; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 144–50; Jerald T. Milanich, *The Timucua*, ed. Alan Kolata and Dean R. Snow (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 52; Johnson, "Dreams of Empire," 28; Wiley L. Housewright, "Music and Change in Florida," in *Myths and Dreams*, 1; Robinson, *History of Hillsborough County*, 13–16; Vernon-Williams, "History of Florida," 11–13; Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*, 150–51; Eugene Lyon, "Menendez's Strategic Plan for the Florida Peninsula" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1988): 8–10; Gannon, "The Coming of the Judeo-Christian Religions," 5; Weatherford, *Real Women*, 9; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 155–56, 160; Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis*, 58–65.



*Courtesy of the Library of Congress*

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine, the oldest city in the United States, in 1565. The city's founding came on the heels of Menéndez's crushing victory over a group of French Huguenots, first at Fort Caroline and then on Anastasia Island near today's St. Augustine.

Among the Christian survivors was Hernando de Escalante Fontenada, who was just thirteen years old when he was shipwrecked on the Florida southwest coast in 1548. Escalante Fontenada lived among his captors for seventeen years, learning their language and adopting their culture, until gifted to Menéndez. He later returned to Spain, where he wrote a very popular and still extant captivity memoir, three aspects of which are worth noting. First, Escalante Fontenada recorded a legendary Cuba-Florida connection. According to Escalante Fontenada, Caribbean Amerindians believed that a fountain of youth was in Florida, and “anciently many Indians from Cuba entered the ports of the Province of Carlos [Calusa] in search of it. The father of King Carlos, whose name was Senquene, stopped those persons and made a settlement of them, the descendants of whom remain to this day. . . . those of Cuba determined to venture their lives on the sea. And it ended in all that numerous people, who went over to Carlos, forming a settlement.” Second, Escalante Fontenada described Tocobaga, located at the far northern point of Tampa Bay, as “the nearest town . . . [where] resides the king who is chief cacique of the region.” Finally, one of the villages within the dominion of the Calusa, south of Tocobaga, was a place called Tanpa, which, according to historians Mormino and Pizzo, was the first recorded reference of the name that would later be attached to both a city and a bay.<sup>21</sup>

How the modern-day city and bay received the appellation Tampa is in itself a bit of a mystery. The word *tampa* has yet to be definitively translated. Some etymologists believe that it meant “sticks of fire” in the Calusa tongue, possibly in reference to the lightning frequently seen in the area. Others, however, translate the word as “the place to gather sticks.” Toponymist George R. Stewart disagrees with such “stick” translations altogether, arguing instead that the word *tampa* was a Spanish corruption of the Amerindian word *itimpi*, meaning simply “near it.” No matter the word’s original meaning, it is clear from Escalante Fontaneda’s memoir that Tanpa was an important Calusa town. This fact originally prompted confusion among scholars because modern-day Tampa, as far as is known, was within the Tocobaga sphere of influence throughout the sixteenth century. Archaeologist Jerald Milanich, however, cleared up the apparent inconsistency between Escalante Fontaneda’s account and the archaeological record when he determined that the Calusa mullet fishery known as Tanpa was actually located at the mouth of Charlotte Harbor, the original “Bay of Tanpa.” A later Spanish expedition, argues Milanich, “failed to notice Charlotte Harbor while sailing north” from Havana, “and assumed that today’s Tampa Bay was the bay that they had sought.” This mistake was recorded in charts and later picked up by the official historiographer of King Felipe II, Antonio de Herrera, who in 1601 printed a map of Florida depicting the location of “Tampa Bay.” Other cartographers copied Herrera’s map, and thus, the name was accidentally transferred north. In other words, modern-day Tampa took not only its pirate lore, but its very name, from the

<sup>21</sup> Lindsey Wilger Williams, Boldy Onward, 14–17; Escalante Fontaneda, Memoir of Do. D’ Escalante Fontaneda Respecting Florida, Written in Spain about the Year 1575, trans. Buckingham Smith (Miami: Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1944), 15; Mormino and Pizzo, Tampa, 26–28.

Charlotte Harbor area.<sup>22</sup>

In any case, it was not the Calusa inhabitants of Tanpa but the Tocobagans of what is now modern-day Tampa who were troubling Carlos, the Calusa chief. As a result, Carlos urged Menéndez to form a military alliance with him to destroy the Tocobagans to the north. Menéndez politely refused but did say that he would act as a mediator between Carlos and the cacique of the Tocobaga. On March 7, 1567, Menéndez and Carlos sailed to Tocobaga, arriving in the evening. Menéndez invited the Tocobagan cacique aboard his brigantine to meet his Calusa rival, but when the two caciques immediately started arguing, Menéndez decided to hold a congress on shore in three days' time. To demonstrate his power, Tocobaga summoned twenty-nine subchiefs, one hundred principal men, and 1,500 warriors to attend. Menéndez wisely persuaded Tocobaga to send his army away and then sat down with the two caciques to achieve *pax hispanica*. He also told them about heaven, the king of Spain, and the pope, and promised to Christianize the natives. Finally, for the purpose of defending the territorial integrity of Tocobaga and Calusa, Menéndez craftily promised the presence of Spanish troops as a peacekeeping force. While Tocobaga mulled over the offer, Menéndez briefly explored the Hillsborough River, which the Tocobaga called Macoya. Menéndez erroneously believed that all of Florida's major rivers—the St. Johns, Caloosahatchee, Miami, and possibly the Hillsborough—were connected with one another and the Atlantic inland waterway, and that he just needed to find their confluence. Although the physical and political impediments of the Hillsborough River area dashed Menéndez's dreams of identifying a trans-Florida water route, he was still quite impressed by Tampa Bay, which he named La Bahía de San Gregorio. When Tocobaga and Carlos met again with Menéndez, they both agreed to *amistades*, or "friendships for the purpose of trade and mutual defense." Tocobaga then asked Menéndez to leave behind thirty soldiers to defend his village and teach the natives Christianity. Menéndez willingly complied, establishing small garrisons at both Tocobaga and Carlos.<sup>23</sup>

In doing so, Menendez clearly overestimated Spanish military might and authority and underestimated his new Amerindian allies, thereby dooming the well-intended garrisons to failure. García Martínez de Cos was placed in charge of the Tocobaga garrison while another captain named Reynoso headed up the effort among the Calusa. Furthermore, to Catholicize the area's Amerindians, Menéndez recruited Jesuit priest Juan Rogel. Sent by King Felipe II in 1566 to save souls in the New World, Rogel prepared for his ministry in Florida by studying Amerindian languages in Havana and spending time in Mexico. Despite the best efforts of these men, not

<sup>22</sup> Milanich, *Florida's Indians from Ancient Times to the Present*, 128; *Tampa's Centennial Year, 1855–1955* (Tampa: City of Tampa, 1955), 4; Williams, *Boldly Onward*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 26–28; Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis*, 66–67; Amy Turner Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana: Spain's Support System for the Presidio and Mission Provinces of Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 37–39; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 158.

long after Menéndez's departure for Havana, relations between the Amerindians and the Spaniards soured. The Spanish unwittingly continued to disseminate diseases throughout the native population of southwestern Florida, obstructing Rogel's and other friars' efforts to convince Amerindians of the Christian God's omnipotence and beneficence. Further, the friars' attempted alteration of Amerindian cultural and societal norms, by outlawing polygamy, dancing, feasting, the ball game, and warring, led Amerindians to complain that the restrictions were causing them to "lose the ancient valor and dexterity handed down from our ancestors." Consequently, the Amerindians grew cynical toward the Spanish and their religion and prayed to their own gods to bring wrath on the Spaniards who had disrupted their lives and brought illnesses to their families. They refused to further supply the Spanish garrison at Tocobaga with food, deteriorating morale within the garrison and forcing Rogel to sail for Havana on December 10 for provisions. When he returned a month later, he discovered the murders of Captain Martínez de Cos and twenty-six of his men and watched in horror from aboard his caravel as the remaining three prisoners were tortured and hacked to death on the beach. Enraged, the ship captain, Pedro Menéndez de Márquez himself, ordered Tocobaga burned, and then he and Rogel bid good-riddance to the Bay of San Gregorio and returned to Havana. Captain Reynoso and his men soon followed in their wake. At the garrison in Calusa territory, the Amerindians, who had grown tired of the Spanish dipping into their food supply, rebelled, killing three Spaniards and wounding Reynoso. The Spanish retaliated by executing the cacique and killing the leaders of the rebellion, but the Calusa could not be pacified and ultimately forced the abandonment of the Spanish garrison in June 1569.<sup>24</sup>

The massacre at Tocobaga and the forced abandonment of the garrison in Calusa territory proved a watershed for Spanish involvement in southwestern Florida. For the Spanish, it marked an end of failed experimentation in a policy of conquest and conversion in the region. In fact, by 1571, Menéndez's dreams of a Floridian empire had been reduced to just two garrisons, at Santa Elena (near modern-day Beaufort, South Carolina) and St. Augustine. In 1572, the Jesuits, partly in response to what had happened to the Gulf coast garrisons, deemed Florida to be a poor risk and withdrew. As *adelantado and encomendado*, Menéndez bore responsibility for Amerindians learning both the Spanish language and Catholic doctrines. To these ends, and abandoned by the Jesuits, he invited the Franciscan order to Florida. With Santa Elena abandoned in 1587 in the face of English encroachment, the only remaining Spanish toehold in La Florida was St. Augustine. As historian Charles Arnade concludes, "only Spain's need to protect her fleet and her innate hope that miraculous lands lay beyond Florida kept [alive] her desire for the province."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Mormino and Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 26–28; Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, 24; Jahoda, *River of the Golden Ibis*, 68–71; Bushnell, *Situado and Sabana*, 37–39.

<sup>25</sup> Gary R. Mormino, "Tampa Time: Recollections on the Millennium," in *Threads of Tradition and*

According to historian Eugene Lyon, Menéndez's Florida plan was "essentially agricultural and commercial" but hinged on the Spaniard's relationship with the Amerindians. In order to successfully colonize Florida, the native inhabitants had to be subdued, evangelized, and then put to work in a tribute-labor system known at the time as "Repartimento de Labor" to entice and support Spanish settlement. The lack of security kept the Spanish from adequately penetrating the interior, and their living in forts and garrisons along the Florida coast prevented them from applying upon the Amerindians the requisite pressure needed to impress Spanish culture upon them. In fact, in 1573, Menéndez became so frustrated with Amerindians in peninsular Florida that he asked the king's permission to enslave them and remove them, a request that went against the Papal Bull of 1537, the New Laws of 1542, and even Menéndez's own *adelantado* contract. Consequently, it failed even to garner a response from Menéndez's superiors. Instead, Menéndez died the following year, probably realizing full well that his efforts in Florida had been largely a failure. Spain nonetheless appreciated Menéndez's efforts enough that in 1633 his heirs were granted the title of *adelantado* of Florida in perpetuity, a symbolic title they hold to this day.<sup>26</sup>

Official Spanish attempts to infiltrate the sphere of the Gulf Coast Amerindians became rarer as Spain concentrated its efforts on north Florida. The Tocobaga and Calusa attempted once again to restore the old, pre-Columbian order. Indeed, when a Spanish frigate captained by Fernando Valdés surveyed the lower Gulf Coast in 1603, he found no material traces of Spain's earlier efforts in the region. Its influence on local Amerindian life, contrary to what Valdés noted, had been defining. Diseases carried by the Spaniards and spread among native societies along Florida's Gulf Coast greatly reduced their populations, never to recover. Amerindians returned to fishing, hunting, gathering, and conducting maritime trade with their island neighbors to the south, probably hoping that the Spanish machinations on their territory were a thing of the past. If indeed they entertained such hopes, they were bound to be sorely disappointed.<sup>27</sup>

In any case, the historical and archaeological records of the Spanish presence in the Caribbean and in peninsular Florida during the sixteenth century document the near total destruction of the indigenous inhabitants of the region. The Spanish were, more often than not, cruel and unforgiving to the Amerindians, even after the Papal Bull of 1537 pronounced the Amerindians human and thereby worthy of respect. Clearly the goal of procuring transportable wealth far outweighed the goal of procuring souls, at least during the sixteenth century. Yet, in all the destruction, the

Culture along the Gulf Coast, ed. Ronald V. Evans (Pensacola: Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference, 1986), 170–71; Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 51–57, 63; Milanich, *Florida Indians and the Invasion from Europe*, 161–66; Charles W. Arnade, "The Failure of Spanish Florida," *Americas* 16, no. 3 (1960): 271–72.

<sup>26</sup> Lyon, "The Enterprise of Florida," 418–22.

<sup>27</sup> Hann, *Indians of Central and South Florida*, 1.

natural and long-standing cultural connection between the Tampa Bay area and the Caribbean remained, albeit in altered form: the indigenous connection developed and fostered over millennia subsided but was replaced by a Hispanic cultural connection that has continued in the Tampa Bay area to this day.