

Cycles of Conquest in Florida

By CHARLES W. ARNADE

The celebrated anthropologist from the University of Arizona, Edward Spicer, has recently published a most valuable study entitled *Cycles of Conquest*. It deals mainly with the impact of the three successive sovereignties that ruled the American Southwest: Spain, Mexico and the United States. The Spicer book discusses the Indian policies, Indian behavior and Indian acculturation problems of the three civilizations. A similar study of the Southeast, Florida for example, would be most appropriate. Since the Indians are not as numerous any more in the Southeast, the Indian emphasis could be less and the study of the various cultural contacts and their comparisons could be most exciting. This little essay will explore this topic in a most superficial fashion, using the state of Florida as an example.

First of all, Florida is the classical example of the Southeast. Here the Spanish occupation was far the longest, going from 1513 to 1821 with only twenty years of English rule, that is from 1763 to 1783. Furthermore, Spanish rule was more intense, not equaled by any other state in the Southeast (with the possible exception of Louisiana whose Spanish occupation was far shorter). Also the Spanish control of Florida had some basic similarities with those of the Southwest, say Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. Spanish occupation was not for exploitation of resources and for active colonization such as in Peru or Mexico but was rather peripheral and was more of a protective military frontier or buffer zone. It had military forts and these were reinforced by missions. These missions served a double function—religious and military. They were there to convert the Indians and change their way of life and also to serve as forts on the frontier.

At the same time there were some basic dissimilarities from the example of the Southwest. Indians, climate and topography were different. Florida is sub-tropical and had far less clearings than today. Indeed there is the need of a good historio-geographic study which should sketch the topography and ecology of Florida at the time of the conquest. The Indians were somewhat less civilized; they were forest Indians and many quite adapted to the ocean. Not doubting that Indians of the Southwest were often

ferocious—and more colorful to the eye of the modern movie and T. V. industry—but I think that the Florida Indian of the time of the conquest, especially those of central and southern Florida, was a much more difficult individual to acculturate. And Spanish success with these Indians and again especially with those of the central and southern region, Tequestas, Caloosas, Ais, etc., was nearly nil. Not even the mission system had the slightest success. In north central and north Florida and in the Florida panhandle the more sedentary Indians made the mission system far more satisfactory.

Another difference was the relative unimportance of cattle and horses as key elements in the cultural developments and acculturation processes. The arrival and utilization of the horse by the early Florida Indians is still a matter of speculation and another interesting subject of research. In my own Spanish Florida investigations I have found little mention of the horse, either by the Spanish or Indian side. There were horses in the St. Augustine garrison and there are indications that the horse was used by soldiers and officers and that often the Spaniards traveled by horse. But we also know that a common way of moving was by foot and by boat. The Franciscan priests, who covered huge territories visiting their widespread flocks, have left us little news as to their means of transportation. But apparently their favorite means of transportation were the waterways since most Indian settlements were located along the water. The same applies to the Indians who mostly moved on the water in their famous dugout canoes. But again here is a valid subject of research as what has been said is based on flimsy documentations. Because of the tropics and the waterways the horse was not as important as in the Southwest.

As to cattle the same conclusion can be reached, although my recent research and as explained in the journal *Agricultural History* show that there was much cattle in Florida especially during the period 1650 to 1750 and that this cattle industry had some sociological impact. But cattle in large proportions did not arrive in Florida until the Seminole period and later with the coming of the Americans. Indeed the whole story of cattle during the three sovereignties remains a needed topic for research. As commendable as the book of George Dacy, *Four Centuries of Florida Ranching* is, it is inadequate and based on insufficient research in the primary documents. The arrival of cattle as an industry always has an influence on acculturation and on the social structure of a given area. For example, I discovered that the establishment of cattle ranches during the Spanish period was really to give

more independence and freedom from military rule to the St. Augustine garrison. Most leading citizens in St. Augustine were employees of the Crown and subject to the rule of the Governor who was always an outsider. Grabbing land and making cattle ranches out of it gave them not so much more economic well being but rather a sense of independence and also a feeling of pride for Florida. For the first time there was no great desire by everyone to leave Florida for more civilized places such as Havana or Mexico City. At the same time a strong trend of conservatism developed with the establishment of cattle ranches and the social structure became much more rigid with the development of a landed gentry. It must also be stated that since little other agricultural enterprise was developed such institutions as Indian peonage or Negro slavery, as practiced in the English colonies of Carolina and Georgia, did not come into existence under the Spanish rule. But again we do not know who were the cowhands on these ranches—probably soldiers of the garrison on excused or illegal absences.

We know very little about cattle, land tenure and the Seminole Indian relationship during the twenty year English interlude. Apparently whatever changes the English tried to make had little permanency because of the short period of their Florida occupation. For example, the much advertised Minorcan project—colorful and good for a good story—had little overall influence on the whole structure of civilization of Florida. The true plantation system that tied Florida to the antebellum American South did not come into existence until the nineteenth century. Only a few roots go to the English period. It was rather a continuation of the thin geographical distribution of Spanish Florida with southern Florida and the interior removed from European impacts. St. Augustine turned from a Spanish garrison town into a small English colonial town and this transformation is an interesting chapter but of little significance for the whole of Florida. More or less the same occurred with Pensacola. Pensacola was since its existence more tied in with the Mobile - New Orleans complex than with the Florida peninsula. The history of Pensacola is more an independent history or part of the history of the Mississippi Delta than that of Florida. England did make Pensacola the capital of West Florida and therefore gave it more status than under Spain. There were a few more successful attempts by the English to expand—especially along the coast—the area of European civilization.

The real change occurred in the interior where the original aborigines had died out during the last days of the first Spanish rule. The disappearance of the original native remains a valid topic for a good scholarly book. The mission system had failed to save the Indian although in the mission area along the St. Augustine - Gainesville - Tallahassee trail, the decimation of the natives was less severe than in the wilds of south Florida, mostly untouched by strong European contacts. But at the same time it must be admitted that outside forces (which includes the arrival of new diseases) were primarily responsible for the death of the pre-Columbian Indians of Florida. The repopulation of Florida, begun during the first Spanish period, now in the English occupation received great impetus. Most of these were Indians of the Southeast—run aways from English oppression or caught in the international rivalries of the great white powers. Among them were a few Negroes who too escaped from the harsh Anglo-Saxon concept of total slavery of men of their race. All these runaways—who started to come to Florida around 1715—became around 1763 (the year of the cession to England) under the leadership of Secoffee and Cowkeeper two identifiable units that soon became to be known as the Seminoles. The Indians of the Tallahassee areas who had responded to Secoffee were pro-Spanish and became the Mikasukis and the Indians of Cowkeeper of the Gainesville neighborhood tended to be pro-British and became the Seminoles. Both bands actively took possession of interior Florida that had either been Spanish mission territory or totally in the hands of the aborigines of Florida. The Indians were attempting to build an Indian nation in Florida, the area so neglected by Spain and by England. The Indians failed.

This failure was for two basic reasons. There was never Indian unity and petty rivalries within and between the Apalache group (Mikasuki) and the Alachua ones (Seminoles) was always intense. This made it possible for the repopulated Indians to become a tool of the International rivalries—Spanish, English and later Americans. The European powers played the Indians against each other in all parts of North America but this game was intensively done with the new Indians of Florida. The second reason was the expansionist nature of the young United States. The Indians could have forced the Spaniards and the English to turn all of Florida or at least the non-coastal areas over to them. Once the Americans came into the picture with their lust for expansion, their belief in Manifest Destiny and their Indian hatred there was no hope for a Seminole nation. With the arrival of the Americans also arrived their economic and agricultural system of the

American South which rapidly integrated northern and part of north central Florida into the ante-bellum way of life. The Negro slave arrived and the Seminole was pushed into the depths of the peninsula. When the American frontier advanced farther south it was obvious that the Indian must be eliminated since the American system of land proprietorship coupled with the dominance of Protestant ethics clashed or did not agree with the Seminole philosophy of free hunting grounds and liberty from imposed religious dogmatism.

With the defeat of the Seminoles the peninsula was made free of Indians. Just then occurred the Civil War which overthrew the rule of the southern plantation owners who had previously failed to acquire Cuba—the natural geographical extension of Florida—as new slave territory. Should Cuba have become a part of the South then the plantation complex would have swept into southern Florida. It did not and the area was now open for new ventures not related to slavery and the Southern complex. These came with such men as Flagler and Plant. These came as the railroad came; as the cattle industry, as citrus, as tourism and as advertisement of year-round sunshine. Therefore two Floridas had been created. The one rooted in the St. Augustine - Gainesville - Tallahassee - Pensacola axis of the mission time and later the plantation complex which has tradition, a long history, a deep conservatism. The other Florida was that of the wild Caloosas, Tequestas and others who died out and whose land was never settled either by Spain or England. It has no good recorded history and no long traditions. Its emptiness served as a refuge for the new Indians and as a new place for the dynamic America of the post Civil War period, as a base for the War of 1898 and for the renewed dynamism of post World War I. Today's fight for reapportionment is one clash of these two Floridas.

Today's state political struggle can be among other things explained by history and by anthropology. What was in the history of Florida; in short, the difference and impact of the three sovereignties—Spain, England and America? Spain was in Florida longer than any other nation. The United States will have caught up with Spain in 2009. Yet when one looks at Florida today there is hardly anything left from the Spanish period—only St. Augustine stands as a reminder. But even here the Spanish flavor and the Spanish remains are slowly dying a sure death and the fight for preservation and true honest restoration is difficult and nearly impossible. Only the Fort stands as an authentic monument. Some materialistic business enterprises

have capitalized on the Spanish heritage and created false claims and monuments. The heritage is there in history and in nothing else—Florida does not even have one restored mission such as California can claim. Florida's Spanish heritage does not even have a veneer imprint such as Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and other states. The Spanish impact has vanished completely.

It has vanished because it was never really there. Spain never occupied Florida except a few tiny spots. Spain never brought its institutions, political, social, economic and cultural, to Florida. Not even St. Augustine was a typical Spanish colonial town. It had no municipal government. It was strictly a military garrison and over ninety percent, if not nearly a hundred percent of the economy came from the military payroll. In the countryside we cannot find such institutions as the *Encomienda* or the *Repartimiento* which were the core of the Spanish American colonial land tenure system. There was the mission system which was indeed identical to those of the other Spanish areas. But the missions were not successful and were wiped out by the English and the pro-English Indians. They—the missions—had no permanent effect. The Spanish-Indian relationship was based on a strict paternalism and in sharp contrast with the English system. This relationship was indeed influential in enticing runaway Indians from the English colonies and was, I believe, greatly responsible for the emergence of the Seminole nation. This then is all—not even the trails used by Spain have become later routes of communication. When Spain left in 1763 the total—and by total is meant every one—Spanish population left St. Augustine. Florida was Spanishless. Florida had lost its aborigines, too. The replacements were the English and the Seminoles.

As said, the English left little impact and no permanent institutions such as was the case in other English colonies in North America where the English heritage was quite strong. They failed to settle the Indian problems and their presence only aggravated the whole issue. The English did do something that had some effect for the future. It was in the field of letters rather than administration or institutions. There developed a vast literature about Florida written by Englishmen or those employed by the English Crown. During those days such Florida classics as the reports of William De Brahm, Bernard Romans and John Bartram for the first time advertised Florida as an exciting land full of beauty and riches and a nature's paradise. Many lesser meritorious books also saw print in England. Florida, thanks to the

British, became known in America and Europe. If Florida had remained English there is no doubt that its effect would have been profound for the two colonies called East and West Florida. But twenty years were not enough.

There is one interesting matter which should encourage more investigation. Florida was English during the War for the American Independence. Its northern neighbors such as Georgia and the Carolinas rebelled. The Bahamas and Bermuda remained loyal. Florida followed the Bahamas-Bermuda example and there was not even a revolutionary ripple. This steadfast loyalty or the revolutionary apathy is an interesting development that requires much research to determine the why. We all know that English Florida became the haven for the loyalists but there is some doubt if this was the main reason for the revolutionary apathy or the staunch loyalty of the English Floridas. In Florida there was no institutional heritage as there was in Virginia, for example. The American colonists rebelled when the Crown introduced innovations and changes which challenged their customs and doings of the past. But in Florida there was no such past and there were no colonists with a long colonial genealogy and with deep local roots. But by the end of the English period there had arrived in Florida a large number of restless adventurers and of undesirable elements. These roamed around the Florida provinces and when the English settlers left in 1783—just as the Spaniards had done 20 years earlier—this riffraff stayed. Dr. Helen Tanner, who is a leading authority on the second Spanish periods, strongly believes that the legacy of the short English period was these undesirables who plunged Florida during her second Spanish period into anarchy. Indeed these Spanish years from 1783 to 1821 are those of immense confusion and the many figures such as William Augustus Bowles, Daniel McGirth, Alexander McGillivray, Gregor MacGregor, Ruggles Hubbard, Luis Aury, Jesse Fish, the men of the Panton, Leslie and Company and many others were, using the most gentle word, “adventurers”. They had no loyalty toward anyone and they used Florida as their hunting grounds for fast riches, saluting this and that flag and playing the Spaniards, English, Americans and the many Indian groups against each other.

This second Spanish period is difficult to assess. What was its impact? Spanish authorities in St. Augustine and Pensacola were trying to establish a system of order in accordance with the Spanish rule and the Spanish heritage of Florida. It wished to reestablish its benevolent paternalism; this time trying to diversify its rule by breaking the military monopoly. Spain

failed and its authority was challenged or ignored or cheated everywhere by the Indians and the adventurers. What Spain needed was a stern policy and total reform and new ideas. This it did not have, but the new United States had it and it was pressing on the Florida border. Spain had in St. Augustine benevolent rulers such as Governor Don Vizente Manuel de Zespedes y Velasco. America had such a man as Andrew Jackson who hated Spain, who hated the Indians and who was ruthless enough to fight them and liquidate them. Jackson was not paternal and he was as ruthless as the riffraff whom he bought, used, or killed. And it was this Jacksonian policy combined with other pressures and the tough bargaining of Washington from a position of strength which brought Florida into the American domain.

In evaluating the American period it should never be forgotten that a whole new system was erected. That the Spanish heritage—even people (with a few exceptions)—was eliminated at once and that there never was much of the English. Neither St. Augustine, the old capital from 1565, or booming Pensacola was accepted as the capital and a whole new town, Tallahassee, was built. A plantation system identical to other Southern states was created and Florida became one of the ante-bellum states with one of the heaviest percentages of a Negro slave population. Indian hatred became more intense than in other states at that time. Pro-Southern sentiments were even stronger than in other slave states and President Lincoln did not receive one single vote in Florida. Florida was the third state to secede from the Union. At the same time Florida, better than any other slave state, showed the traditional democratic tolerance so prevalent in the South, but so much in contrast with their fanaticism for slavery, when it elected a Jew as the first Florida senator in Washington, David Levy. The American period in Florida until the end of the Civil War is one of the most interesting chapters in American history because we have the successful creation in a few years of a democratic slave system in the lush wilds of Florida which were not tamed for many centuries by the Spaniards and the English. Then we have the total collapse of the system with the War although Florida was hardly a military battleground. In that same period the Indians had finally been defeated at tremendous cost and effort. Florida was again wide open for new ventures. But this time the collapse of the slave system did leave a long heritage—different from the disappearance of the Spanish and English rules—that still can be felt today. It is usually called North Florida, small counties, rural region, cracker country, wool hat, etc. It is allied

today with the forces that oppose reapportionment, gradual integration and other policies usually classified under the heading of liberalism.

With the end of Reconstruction—indeed an era that still requires much more study—the empty Florida made up of the peninsula now became a new frontier for the aggressive northern forces. There were the Disstons, Flaglers and Plants followed by the Carl Fishers, D. P. Davises and others. There was the Spanish American War which brought Florida national fame. There were the new Spaniards and the men from Cuba like Vincente Ybor who brought a new industry to Florida and then there were the Greeks who went to look for sponges, and many more such enterprises. This then was the last period of Florida—when it became the tropical garden of the North.

In the end we have in Florida history the following periods: The pre-Columbian period, and Professor Hale Smith of Florida State University believes that what we call Indians first arrived in Florida fifteen thousand years ago. This lasted until 1513 when the Spaniards arrived. Then we have the first Spanish period, the age of St. Augustine which terminated in 1763. It was followed by the twenty years of English interlude and continued by the second Spanish period. Both eras can also be called the age of the Seminoles. By 1821 or even a few years earlier started the American plantation period which came to an end with the Civil War. And by that time the Seminole empire had also gone down in defeat. Reconstruction was a twilight that led to the new era of Florida when the state became a booming frontier region of American industrial enterprise which is now culminating into the Rocket Age of Florida.

We started out by mentioning a book called *Cycles of Conquest*. This essay should have made it clear—maybe in a very shallow way—that such a title is most appropriate for Florida history where there were many cycles of conquest. Each has an interesting story that engulfs all aspects of life and civilization: politics, economics, social matters etc. Florida history is not local history; Florida history is not alone history for the amateur, the dedicated ladies of the local societies. It is also for the trained specialist and it is wide open for research adventures.

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