

AMERIND STUDIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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**NATIVE AND SPANISH
NEW WORLDS**

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ENTRADAS IN
THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST AND
SOUTHEAST

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again by the introduction of Old World diseases and Indian slave raiders. Chiefdoms then began to collapse in quick succession, thus interrupting the processes that regulated regional stability. The Mississippian world could neither withstand nor recover from the region-wide and unprecedented succession of chiefdom failures in the first 190 years of contact.

Inventing Florida

Constructing a Colonial Society in an Indigenous Landscape

John E. Worth

Beginning with the 1513 discovery of Florida, Spanish explorers and colonists embarked on a lengthy process to incorporate the American Southeast into the expanding Spanish colonial empire. Despite multiple false starts over the course of the next half-century, it was ultimately the colony of San Agustín de la Florida, established in 1565 by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, that set the stage for the successful integration of southeastern North America into Spain's global colonial system. The mechanism by which this occurred was not dissimilar to that which resulted in the spread of Spanish influence across much of the New World and across the Pacific Ocean, namely, the structural assimilation of Indigenous local polities into a vast overarching political and economic system administered in Spain. Part and parcel to this strategy was the assimilation of living, functioning Indigenous societies on a local scale, and the structural linkage of these societies into the broader political and economic milieu that was the emerging Spanish colonial system of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even though the effects of internal demographic collapse and external slave raiding ultimately doomed the Spanish Florida experiment to failure by 1706, it nonetheless stood in marked contrast to other colonial endeavors elsewhere in eastern North America during the same period, shaping the trajectory of the European colonial era across a broad region.

The Spanish colonial system differed fundamentally from that of other European colonial powers such as the English who principally sought unoccupied land for immigrant settlers and generally interacted with Indigenous groups at a distance, commonly through bilateral trade. In Florida, as elsewhere in the Spanish colonial world, local Native American groups ultimately became part of a newly formed, multiethnic

colonial society that, although clearly dominated in a political and military sense by immigrant Spanish settlers, was demographically more Native American than Spanish (e.g., Bannon 1974; McAlister 1984; Weber 1992). The difference between these two colonial approaches is perhaps best viewed in terms of the primary resources of value in each system. In the Spanish system, colonial expansion was measured more in terms of human resources, whereas in the English system, it was measured in terms of territorial resources. Spanish Florida grew by assimilating people, not simply land. The growth and success of the Florida colony would ultimately be measured by the extent to which it harnessed the labor of Indigenous groups, and its ultimate failure by the early eighteenth century was in large part a result of demographic collapse among those same groups (Bushnell 1994; Hoffman 2001; Milanich 1999; Worth 1998a, 1998b). For Spanish Florida, colonial success depended not on dispossessing Indigenous groups of their land and populating it with immigrant settlers but instead on assimilating those groups into a new colonial society. This strategy was founded on the vertical integration of Native American and Spanish populations into a new political and economic relationship based on human labor and the product of that labor. As such, the colonial system of Spanish Florida ultimately depended on winning and maintaining the voluntary cooperation of Indigenous groups within that broader system.

While this system only reached its full development in Spanish Florida during the middle decades of the seventeenth century, at the height of the Franciscan Mission era (McEwan 1993), the groundwork for the system was laid during the sixteenth century, when first contact was made between Spanish explorers and would-be colonists. It was during the sixteenth century that Spanish authorities first began to learn about the social and physical geography of the American Southeast, and when initial experiments were conducted regarding the most effective strategies for assimilating Indigenous groups in different regions (Hoffman 2001; Milanich 1999; Skowronek 2009; Weddle 1985). Indeed, I would argue that at the dawn of the seventeenth century, many of the most ineffective strategies had already been tried and failed, leaving only that strategy which ultimately led to the successful expansion of Spanish Florida into the interior and across the Florida peninsula to link the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. In this sense, it is instructive

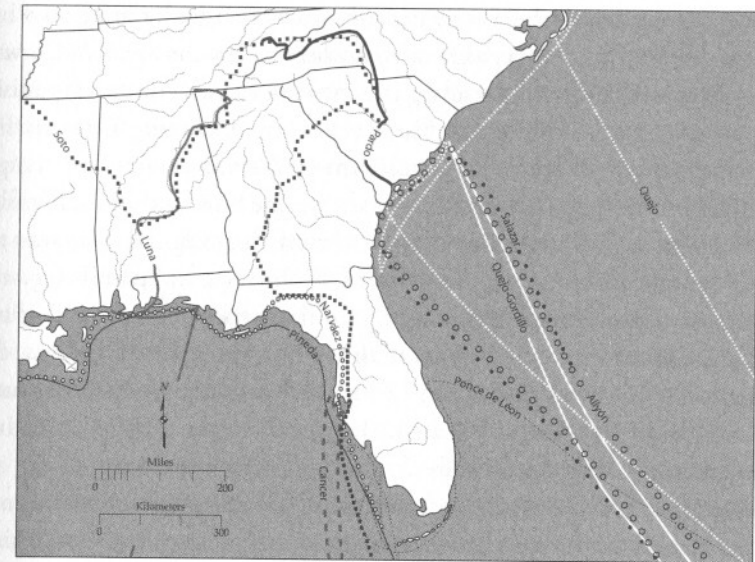


FIGURE 11.1. Sixteenth-century Spanish expeditions to Florida, A.D. 1513–1568 (created by John Worth and prepared for publication by Clay Mathers).

to explore the origins of this strategy during the exploratory and early colonial phases of Spanish Florida's development during the sixteenth century.

During the first quarter-century after Juan Ponce de León's 1513 accidental discovery of the Florida peninsula, the vast majority of the American Southeast remained an unknown frontier on the edge of Spanish awareness. The earliest Spanish contacts during this period were almost exclusively with coastal groups, with only the briefest penetration of the near-shore interior in the Apalachee province along the northern Gulf of Mexico (see Figure 11.1). Until 1537, the Spanish Crown subdivided the Southeast into two colonial territories, one on the Gulf Coast known as La Florida, as visited and explored by Juan Ponce de León, Diego Miruelo, Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, and Pánfilo de Narváez between 1513 and 1528, and one along the lower Atlantic coast known as the Tierra de Ayllón, as explored by Pedro de Salazar, Francisco Gordillo, Pedro de Quejo, and Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón between 1514 and 1526 (Hoffman 1980, 1990, 1992, 1994b; Lawson 1946).

Though a number of these early expeditions were initially motivated by slaving, two early attempts were officially licensed by the Spanish Crown in order to establish colonies along the coasts of these territories (Spanish Crown 1514, 1523). Both resulted in rapid failure, including a 1521 settlement attempt by Ponce de León in southwest Florida and a 1526 attempt by Vázquez de Ayllón in southeast Georgia. The 1528 landing of Pánfilo de Narváez near Tampa Bay was accidental (his original goal was to settle far to the west along the margins of New Spain; Spanish Crown 1526), but it nonetheless resulted in a similarly spectacular failure during the expedition's attempt to return westward (Núñez Cabeza de Vaca 1989). Within fifteen years of Florida's first discovery, three successive would-be colonial leaders had perished in the attempt to claim southeastern North America for Spain.

Less than a decade later, and just a year after the only four survivors of the Narváez expedition had been rediscovered in northern New Spain, a new expedition was authorized in 1537 that explicitly combined the two earlier territories—Ponce's Florida and the land of Ayllón—into a single, vast region within which Hernando de Soto was to explore and select a two-hundred-league stretch of coastline which he would subsequently govern (Spanish Crown 1537). A successful and wealthy veteran of the Pizarro conquest of the Inca, Soto associated riches with mountains, and over the course of four long years, his expedition plunged deep into the interior of North America, probing the boundaries of the geographically extensive Southeastern culture area from the Carolinas to Arkansas and Texas (Hudson 1997). Commonly employing brutal tactics with Indigenous populations, the survivors of this ill-fated expedition never returned to the planned coastal rendezvous at Pensacola Bay, and the survivors and a number of captive Indians eventually fled by sea to Mexico, leaving Soto's body behind as the fourth Spanish leader to die in the attempt to settle greater Spanish Florida. Nevertheless, despite the failure of any of these early expeditions to establish a permanent Spanish colonial presence, by the mid-sixteenth century Spanish authorities had gained a broad, if coarse-grained, portrait of the social and physical geography of the American Southeast, and this knowledge would ultimately shape all future colonial endeavors in the region.

One of the most important details gleaned from Soto's expedition was the fact that there appeared to be no readily available sources of

gold or silver or other intrinsic wealth in La Florida, nor densely populated Native empires on the scale of the Aztec or Inca of Central and South America. The importance of this fact cannot be overstated from the point of view of the eventual assimilation of Indigenous societies across the American Southeast. Lacking the profit motive to encourage private settlement and local economic development within a colonial context, the territory of Spanish Florida was effectively relegated to a marginal role within the broader Spanish empire and was eventually colonized primarily for its strategic value in protecting the returning New World treasure fleets. While this ultimately ensured a relatively stable source of royal funding to maintain the Florida colony over the long term, it also meant that Spanish colonists in Florida would have to rely even more substantially on local Native American populations to buffer against interruptions in external supply lines for their presidial garrisons (Bushnell 1994; Sluiter 1985; Worth 1998a, 1998b).

Another important change that had occurred during Soto's expedition was the promulgation of the "New Laws of the Indies" by the Spanish Crown in 1542 (Mathers, this volume; Santa Cruz 1923:222–236). These laws explicitly outlawed Indian slavery and overtly abusive treatment of Native groups, and ultimately marked a watershed change in Spanish imperial policy with respect to the Indigenous peoples of the New World. The failure of all previous Spanish expeditions to settle Florida prior to 1542 meant that when Florida was finally colonized more than two decades later, events would unfold under far different circumstances than might otherwise have been the case. Nevertheless, when Spanish settlement did finally occur, it was not under the wholly pacific circumstances envisioned by Dominican idealist Fray Luíís Cancer, whose 1549 expedition to Tampa Bay was originally designed as a catalyst for the purely "spiritual" conquest of Florida, manned by only four Dominican priests and a single Spanish farmer (Lowery 1911:411–427; Weddle 1985:234–246; Worth 2009a). The murders of the farmer and two of the priests, including Cancer himself, not only marked the end of Cancer's novel experiment (and the death of the fifth Spanish expedition leader to Florida) but also ensured a consistent military presence in future expeditions.

Subsequent attempts to establish a Spanish foothold in southeastern North America were ultimately framed within a rising fear of French

settlement in the very same region. The first attempt under Tristán de Luna y Arellano in 1559 was financed largely by the Spanish Crown and launched from New Spain. This enterprise was originally designed to establish a Spanish foothold at Ayllón's renowned Atlantic port of Santa Elena by tracing Hernando de Soto's route across the Appalachian summit and connect the Gulf and Atlantic coasts from modern Pensacola, Florida, to Port Royal Sound (Santa Elena) in South Carolina (Hudson et al. 1989; Priestly 1928). Taking the explicit advice of four Indian women brought out by the Soto expedition two decades earlier, the supplies for Luna y Arellano's expedition included substantial stores of food loaded onto a total of eleven ships in the colonial fleet, in order to ensure that there would be no need to rely upon Indigenous populations for food or other supplies for the colony.

Pivotal to Luna y Arellano's effort was the Indigenous chiefdom of Coosa located in northwestern Georgia (Smith 2000), intended to be the lynchpin in the anticipated Spanish road across the interior Southeast. The importance of Coosa only increased after the unexpected devastation of Luna y Arellano's fleet and food reserves in Pensacola Bay just five weeks after their arrival, leaving some fifteen hundred soldiers and colonists both stranded and hungry. Nevertheless, when veterans of the Soto expedition finally led a military detachment northward to Coosa in 1560, finding only minimal surplus food in contrast to their recollections from two decades earlier, the last hope for Luna y Arellano's interior road was dashed, and even a brief maritime expedition to Santa Elena by Luna y Arellano's successor was unfruitful. Tristán de Luna y Arellano was the sixth to fail in the settlement of Florida, but the first leader to survive the attempt, even though he lived out the rest of his days in relative poverty in Mexico City.

In the aftermath of Luna y Arellano's failure, it would be Pedro Menéndez de Avilés who in 1565 established what would become the hub of all subsequent Spanish expansion into the American Southeast from St. Augustine (Lyon 1976). Concurrently attempting to establish colonial bases all along the coast and to penetrate and fortify the vast interior, Menéndez initially embarked on a strategy that focused heavily on the military occupation of Indigenous administrative centers in strategic locations, albeit within the context of the 1542 laws ensuring good treatment for Indigenous peoples and thus with explicit permis-

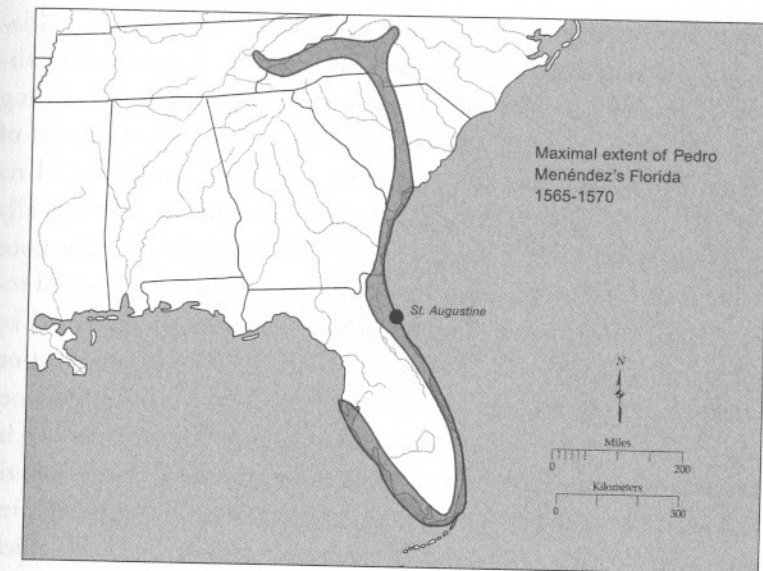


FIGURE 11.2. Maximal extent of Pedro Menéndez's Florida, A.D. 1565–1570. (Created by John Worth and prepared for publication by Clay Mathers.)

sion from all Native leaders. Apart from establishing a second Spanish colonial port city at Santa Elena in Port Royal Sound, between 1566 and 1568 he stationed Spanish garrisons at the capital towns of all major Indigenous coastal chiefdoms allied to the Spanish along the Atlantic coastline and the entire Florida peninsula. These garrisons included Orista and Guale to the north, and Ais, Tequesta, Calos, and Tocobaga to the south, not to mention the besieged garrisons stationed successively at San Mateo and San Pedro in the French-allied Mocama region between Guale and St. Augustine (Hann 1996, 2003). From Santa Elena he also dispatched an exploratory expedition under Juan Pardo in yet another attempt to cross the Appalachian summit and establish a direct connection to New Spain (Hudson 1990). Though Pardo's expedition turned around due to rumors of an ambush by a coalition of chiefs led by Coosa, he managed to leave a string of garrisoned forts in the capital towns of deep interior chiefdoms at Olamico, Cauchi, Joara, Guatari, and Cofitachequi. All told, Pedro Menéndez established some fifteen fortified garrisons across Spanish Florida (see Figure 11.2), distributing a handful of secular priests and Jesuit missionaries to

promote conversions in these newly assimilated communities (Milanich 1999:82–103). By 1570, only five years after St. Augustine's establishment, just two of these forts remained, virtually all the rest falling victim to Native resistance resulting in the slaughter or withdrawal of all Spanish garrisons except St. Augustine and Santa Elena. Santa Elena fell to Indian rebellion in 1576, and despite reoccupation it was finally withdrawn in 1587. The subjugation of Spanish Florida's Indigenous chiefdoms by military means was at an end, and a new era dawned toward the latter decades of the sixteenth century, one characterized by the primacy of Franciscan missionaries in the subsequent assimilation of chiefdoms from the single remaining Spanish port at St. Augustine.

The new strategy was simple and successful, and ultimately resulted in the structural assimilation of many tens of thousands of Native Americans living in local chiefly jurisdictions across the coastal and interior regions north and west of St. Augustine (Bushnell 1994:70–72; Milanich 1999:106–109; Worth 1998a:35–43). Indigenous leaders ultimately clamored to establish connections with the Spanish authorities at St. Augustine, receiving both diplomatic gifts as well as access to Franciscan friars. Once resident at Indigenous administrative centers, these missionaries acted both as religious practitioners and cultural brokers for Native American chiefdoms, whose autonomy was in theory only subject to the royal authority of the Spanish Crown through Florida's governor. In return for their formal "rendering of obedience" to the Spanish Crown, Indigenous chiefs not only augmented their own internal political authority over their own chiefdoms but also gained a powerful military ally in the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine. Moreover, chiefdoms increasingly gained access to Spanish markets for their labor and goods as the economy of Spanish Florida eventually focused on the production of corn both in the mission provinces and in the environs of St. Augustine itself. Linked into a multi-regional political and economic structure centered at St. Augustine, Indigenous Florida chiefdoms became de facto members of a Spanish paramountcy in which Native American labor and staple foods supported the Spanish administrative center in exchange for Spanish luxury goods and military protection. The previous sixteenth-century landscape of competing autonomous local and regional chiefdoms was replaced in the seventeenth century by what might be referred to as a sort of *Pax Hispanum*, in which a diversity of local Native American societies were assimilated

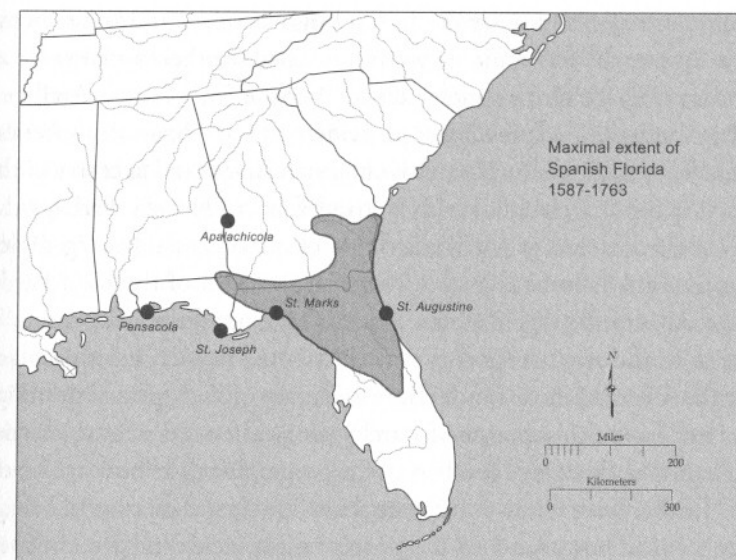


FIGURE 11.3. Maximal extent of Spanish Florida, A.D. 1587–1763. (Created by John Worth and prepared for publication by Clay Mathers.)

into a far-flung, multiethnic colonial society centered at the Spanish port city of St. Augustine (see Figure 11.3).

This new polity of greater Spanish Florida was probably larger than anything ever witnessed in the same region of the lower American Southeast, but it was built with the same building blocks that had characterized the late Prehistoric Period and maintained a considerable degree of internal autonomy for its constituent chiefdoms. In this sense, it reflected a unique accommodation between Spanish and Indigenous political and economic systems. The reasons for this are of course complex, but in part it was a direct result of the lessons learned during the exploratory and early colonial era of the sixteenth century. Many such lessons were learned as a result of the failures and occasional successes of this early period, but a few are worth highlighting here.

One lesson learned during the sixteenth century was the fact that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Southeastern chiefdoms was best accomplished within existing political structures, by dealing directly with chiefs. Moreover, political alliances of this sort were always facilitated by diplomatic gifts to chiefs and other principal

leaders, normally including cloth, clothing, jewelry, and other items such as iron tools that could be worn or carried for their social value as sumptuary regalia. Documentary accounts of the Soto, Luna y Arellano, and Pardo expeditions provide ample evidence for the Spanish awareness of these facts, as do extensive records of Menéndez-era and later sixteenth-century Spanish interactions with Native leaders in Florida. Perhaps the most detailed record of Menéndez's use of gifts in establishing diplomatic relations is to be found in the official record of the Juan Pardo expedition into the Appalachian summit region, where great care was taken to record the names and gifts distributed at each meeting place along the route (Hudson 1990). The association of such gifts with Indigenous leaders is also supported by archaeological evidence for the burial of such gifts as elite grave goods, and the geographic distribution of such goods furthermore tends to indicate that they cluster in areas of Indigenous political power and do not simply reflect incidental proximity to the sources of such goods in Spanish colonies, shipwrecks, or expedition routes (e.g., Luer 1994; Smith et al. 2008; Worth 2005). Beyond the use of diplomatic gifts, the very pattern in which Indigenous communities and chiefdoms were ultimately assimilated into the expanding Florida mission system during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries also reflects the Spanish understanding of Native power structures and the need to work from the top down within aboriginal chiefdoms (Worth 1998a:42–43). Ultimately, the pattern of interaction between Spaniards and Indians within and along the margins of Spanish Florida reflects a widespread recognition of the importance of Indigenous political structures in achieving the voluntary assimilation of such societies into the expanding colonial system.

Another lesson learned during the sixteenth century in Florida was the fact that sedentary agricultural societies were far easier to assimilate than foragers, in large part due to their infrastructural ties to specific plots of arable land, as well as the intimate relationship between political power and agricultural surpluses in such societies. Despite the pivotal position of the coastal fishing chiefdoms of South Florida with respect to Spanish maritime travel routes between Havana and St. Augustine, these areas were never effectively assimilated, as the rapid overthrow and withdrawal of all Menéndez-era forts in this region demonstrated. Moreover, the failure of the Franciscan mission system ever

to push very far southward into central Florida was in part a reflection of the generalized foraging economy that allowed such groups simply to move away when pressured (Hann 1991, 1993a, 2003). When Spanish Florida finally grew and flourished during the early seventeenth century, it was among the agricultural populations of northern Florida and southeastern Georgia, and it was their labor and staple foods that fueled the Florida economy for a century (Bushnell 1994; Milanich 1999; Worth 1998a, 1998b). Moreover, the eventual configuration of broader Spanish Florida, extending west and north from St. Augustine toward the Apalachee and Guale provinces, was in large part a reflection of the fact that St. Augustine was poor in both arable soils and Indigenous populations to farm them, requiring the input of labor and food from the more distant provinces of Apalachee and Guale, which were nonetheless more densely populated and agriculturally productive (Worth 1998b:144–151). Once anchored to the Atlantic port of St. Augustine, Spanish Florida ultimately expanded only as far as needed to assimilate nearby chiefdoms with sufficient human and natural resources to provide a buffer against interruptions in external supply routes, but rarely beyond that point. In part, this was a result of yet another lesson learned during the sixteenth-century—namely, that direct military occupation of Native American villages was both ineffective and risky as a means of controlling Indigenous populations in the Southeast.

Pedro Menéndez's initial strategy of military fortification of the Florida coast and interior turned out to be an utter and complete failure. As a result, there were no fortified garrisons placed in the mission provinces for nearly a century, and then only in the face of English-sponsored slave raiding after 1659 (Worth 1998b:112–113, 2007:15–24, 2009c). For this reason more than any other, Spanish Florida ultimately grew slowly and over far shorter distances than the bold expeditions of the sixteenth century. Since Franciscan friars led the way and became the primary agents of societal assimilation in Spanish Florida, they only pushed as far as Spanish military aid could reach by land or sea from St. Augustine, and even then only with a few yearly visits by soldiers bringing supplies or recruiting laborers (Worth 1998a:171–175). After the peregrinations of Soto, Luna y Arellano, and Pardo, the chiefdoms of the deep interior remained blissfully devoid of any European presence for more than a century, and far beyond the more spatially limited

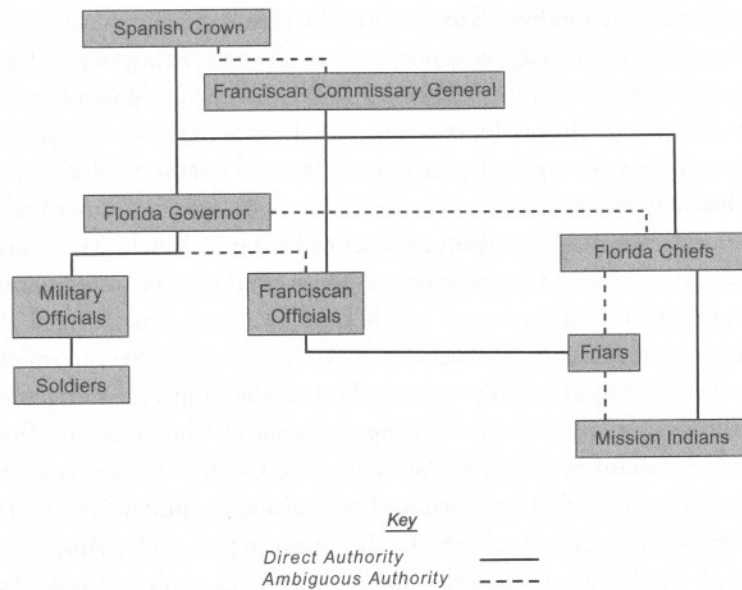


FIGURE 11.4. Schematic diagram of political relationships in seventeenth-century Spanish Florida.

colonial society comprising greater Spanish Florida. With few exceptions (e.g., Worth 1994), neither friars nor soldiers ventured very far beyond the established mission provinces.

In the end, Spanish authorities in Florida adopted a policy of quasi-autonomy for the assimilated mission chiefdoms within their nominal jurisdiction (see Figure 11.4). Chiefs ruled in secular local matters, albeit within the broader structure of Spanish military and ecclesiastical policy as related to the so-called Republic of Indians (Worth 1998a:77–80, 114–115). Resident friars supervised only in spiritual affairs, particularly after the disastrous Guale rebellion of 1597, in which five missionaries were murdered following their attempt to disinherit a chiefly heir, nominally over his refusal to abandon polygamy (Jones 1978). Indeed, during the seventeenth century internal matters of chiefly inheritance seem to have been outside the realm of any normal Spanish intervention, and even when practiced it was generally only to reinforce Indigenous norms and ensure the smooth transition of power (Hann 1986, 1993b; Worth 1998a:96–102, 1998b:192–197). Food and labor were always purchased,

never appropriated or seized, in order to avoid the kinds of violent uprisings witnessed by the overthrow of Menéndez's forts and the Guale-Orista rebellion of 1576. The entire economic system of Spanish Florida was fundamentally based on the voluntary integration of missionized chiefdoms into an exchange network that funneled surplus labor and staple foods toward the administrative center at St. Augustine in exchange for goods and services provided via Native leaders to Indigenous populations (Worth 1998a:126–214).

While at any scale of analysis, one might argue that there was a certain amount of coercion and involuntary constraints on the freedom of action exercised by individuals and leaders living within the mission provinces of Spanish Florida, the entire system was predicated upon a mutually voluntary and negotiated relationship between colonists and Indigenous populations, one that bore only superficial resemblance to Spain's earliest and most overtly militaristic conquests during the early sixteenth century. Ultimately, it was this sort of accommodation that characterized the Spanish-Indian society that emerged in colonial Florida toward the end of the sixteenth century, and which resulted in the successful assimilation of many Southeastern chiefdoms into the Spanish Colonial world. The successful strategy ultimately employed in Florida did not arise untested, however, for it was in the turbulent exploratory and Early Colonial Period of the sixteenth century that the pattern for Spanish Florida's eventual growth in the seventeenth century was forged, including not only its eventual size and configuration on the Southeastern landscape but also its internal political and economic structure, as well as the fatal flaw—depopulation—that would eventually doom it to failure. The false starts and failures of the sixteenth century ultimately served their purpose and laid the foundation for a new kind of colonial polity, which though short-lived, marked a novel integration of Native American and Spanish political systems into something entirely new.