

**Missions of the Camino Real:
Timucua and the Colonial System of Spanish Florida**

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Prior to European contact during the 16th century, the interior of present-day northern peninsular Florida and deep southeastern Georgia was home to a handful of autonomous aboriginal chiefdoms within the broad and internally diverse linguistic and cultural grouping known by modern researchers as the Timucuan Indians. By last quarter of the 17th century, however, aboriginal populations in this same region either had been reduced to a chain of small mission towns along the primary road through the Spanish colonial administrative district known as the Timucua province, or had aggregated as fugitives in several remote areas beyond effective Spanish control. When repeated English-sponsored raids forced the final retreat of Spanish-allied Indians during the first decade of the 18th-century, the human remnants of these interior Timucuan chiefdoms became neighbors of the huddled Spanish community at St. Augustine, and ultimately resettled in Cuba as members of the late 18th-century Spanish colonial world.

The process by which the initial stages of this massive transformation occurred is known broadly as missionization, and has been the subject of considerable research not only in the southeastern United States, but also across the European colonial world of the modern (post-1492) era. Particularly on the frontiers of the vast Spanish colonial empire of the 16th-18th centuries, aboriginal societies were gradually assimilated into the broader colonial system by a process initiated and fostered by Christian missionaries, whose efforts to convert and catechize these groups served as an important step in the structural linkage between what was known as the "Republic of Indians" and the "Republic of Spaniards." While its name might tend to emphasize the religious dimension, missionization was actually a much more intricate and complex process, with implications far beyond the simple conversion of the members of aboriginal societies to Christianity. Indeed, the establishment of mission provinces along the frontier of established Spanish colonial zones was primarily a secular political process, in which localized aboriginal chiefdoms became integrated into the globally-oriented Spanish colonial system. The construction of churches and convents within aboriginal towns was actually only a small part of a massive and truly complex process, involving conscious and intentional interaction between political leaders of both republics.

Ultimately, while missionization often led directly or indirectly to tragic consequences, as a process it served as a direct contrast to military conquest, in which societies were involuntarily subjugated beneath Spanish colonial domination (as was the case with the early 16th-century Aztec and Inca empires). In practice, missionization represented an alternative solution to the problem of societal integration and assimilation along the colonial frontier. Essentially voluntary in nature, the establishment of colonial mission provinces was in effect a negotiated capitulation between unequal societies, and in this sense may have mirrored precolonial aboriginal norms in many ways. An examination of the details of this process--how it worked, and under what circumstances did it not work--may thus inform our understanding of not only how aboriginal societies were assimilated into the Spanish and broader European colonial system, but also how these same aboriginal societies may have interacted with one another prior to European contact.

The details of the initial process of assimilation among the interior Timucuan chiefdoms is beyond the scope of this paper, and in any case is covered extensively in my upcoming 2-volume book The Timucuan Chiefdoms of Spanish Florida, scheduled for release by the University Press of Florida in spring 1998. Furthermore, Paul Hoffman has dealt with the evolution of this same process among the Guale in his paper. For our purposes here, I will focus primarily on the eventual role of Timucua within the 17th-century colonial system of Spanish Florida, as well as the internal stresses which led to the 1656 Timucuan rebellion and the subsequent wholesale transformation of the interior.

Missionization was a complex mechanism for the integration and assimilation of aboriginal societies on a colonial frontier. The key to understanding the process by which Florida's interior Timucuan chiefdoms were assimilated, and as well as the ultimate impact on the societies involved, lies in the structure and function of the broader colonial system of Spanish Florida. Viewed within the context of the vast colonial empire ruled by Spain during the 16th-18th centuries, Spanish Florida was a strategic military outpost on the northern periphery of a complex web of productive colonies centered on the Caribbean basin and mainland Central and South America. Lacking the direct economic benefits afforded by richly populated New World

provinces bearing gold, silver, and other valuable commodities, Florida's primary function was strategic, guarding the sea-routes of the Bahama Channel, through which all the real treasures from the Americas were funneled on their way to Spain. As a consequence, direct royal support for the Florida garrison-town of St. Augustine was only scarcely sufficient for most of the garrison, and occasionally lacking altogether, for which reason St. Augustine ultimately developed a reputation as a wretched frontier town to which few colonists would relocate willingly. During the 17th century, external support became even less and less reliable, and delays in the shipment of wheat, corn, and other products from New Spain and Havana, and in the delivery of cash from the situado--the royal dole from the coffers of Mexico--left the inhabitants of St. Augustine in the precarious position of having too many poor military families and not enough colonial farmers.

The survival of this garrison-town, therefore, was ultimately based on an extensive support-system, including not only periodic infusions of cash, armaments, provisions and other supplies from other Spanish colonies external to Florida, but also a vast pool of human and natural resources comprising greater Spanish Florida. Without readily-available internal sources of wealth with which to supplement purchasing power based on royal support, St. Augustine's population was in many ways almost wholly dependent upon Indian labor, both directly and indirectly, to make up for substantial shortfalls in vital foodstuffs (principally corn) and other supplies. As a consequence, the colonial system of 17th-century Spanish Florida was fundamentally based on the structural assimilation of largely self-sufficient centers of Indian population distributed across an unevenly-productive landscape. In this sense, Florida's mission provinces served an integral function for the residents of St. Augustine: the maintenance of a vast Indian labor pool comprising an interconnected web of population centers subordinated beneath the Spanish crown and church. In effect, then, Florida was not so much an independent Spanish outpost interacting with neighboring and autonomous Indian societies, but was instead a broader community of interdependent Spanish and Indian populations woven into a functioning (if inherently flawed) colonial system.

At its core, the internal economic structure of the colonial system in 17th-century Florida revolved around the production and distribution of staple food crops, and particularly corn. While this is of course a considerable simplification of a far more complex economic system, local corn production does seem to have played a determining role in the overall structure of Florida's economic system, and particularly as regards the role of the mission provinces (the "Republic of Indians") in that system. It was the production and distribution of Florida's yearly corn crop that constituted the primary economic relationship between St. Augustine and its mission provinces. Together, the mission provinces provided both surplus corn and surplus labor for producing more corn, all of which was subsidized at least in part using funds derived from Florida's yearly royal subsidy, the situado. While local officials seem to have commonly skimmed personal profits from all such transactions, the end result of this system was the yearly production of substantial supplementary food reserves for the garrison-town of St. Augustine. Given existing limitations both in available Spanish agricultural labor in St. Augustine (including royal slaves and prisoners) and in subsidy funds which could have been used to purchase staple foods from other Spanish colonies, Spanish officials ultimately came to rely on the food and labor provided by the mission provinces as a relatively inexpensive local solution to food-supply problems in St. Augustine. In times of crisis, Florida's corn reserves were the primary buffer against privation.

One perpetual dilemma in this system was the fact that St. Augustine was situated in a comparatively unproductive region of Florida, and had few resident Indians remaining by the first decades of the 17th century as a result of epidemic depopulation resulting from early and sustained European contact. The most agriculturally-productive areas in colonial Spanish Florida (both in terms of soil fertility and human population) were located far to the west and north of St. Augustine, in the mission provinces of Apalachee and Guale. While surplus corn and other foodstuffs were regularly transported by ship from coastal ports in these provinces, repartimiento laborers always came on foot across the less-productive Timucuan mission provinces of Timucua and Mocama. Some two-thirds of the annual repartimiento draft of 300

laborers (specifically the Apalachee) thus traversed the Timucuan missions of the Camino Real--once in the winter and once in the summer--to provide the labor force needed to produce St. Augustine's yearly corn crop. This important crop amounted to perhaps a million pounds of corn each year during the mid-17th century, providing something on the order of eight times the amount of surplus corn available annually from Apalachee and Guale (if top figures of 4,000 and 1,000 arrobas respectively are indeed accurate, as they seem to be based on fragmentary account records).

Despite the fact that they provided few repartimiento laborers and virtually no saleable surplus corn, the missions of interior Timucua, and particularly those along the trans-peninsular Camino Real, nonetheless played a crucial role in the maintenance of the travel, transport, and communication network that effectively linked the population centers of Apalachee and St. Augustine into a functioning economic unit. As way-stations along the primary east-west land transportation corridor in Spanish Florida, the Timucuan missions were links in the western mission chain, without which the colonial system would be unable to function efficiently. Just as Apalachee was a major agricultural production center in the Florida colony, Timucua served as a major transportation corridor. Larger surpluses in Apalachee were purchased for the royal warehouses, whereas minimal surpluses in Timucua presumably served to ration travelers of all sorts, including Spanish soldiers and officers, Franciscan friars, repartimiento laborers, burden-bearers, and couriers. Each province thus had a unique role in Florida's colonial system, making both Apalachee and Timucua interdependent parts of a broader society.

The driving force behind the entire economic system was aboriginal labor. Without resident aboriginal labor, the fertile soils of Apalachee could yield neither the agricultural surpluses regularly purchased by Spanish agents nor the subsistence-base of resident Indian and Spanish populations, including friars and garrisoned soldiers. Without aboriginal labor, the missions of Timucua could not produce the staple foods that supported resident and transient populations along the Camino Real, nor could they provide ferry services across the rivers of northern Florida. Furthermore, without aboriginal labor from both these regions (and

particularly Apalachee), the yearly corn crop in St. Augustine would effectively vanish, leaving the Spanish residents of St. Augustine without any important local source of staple foods as a backup in case of the failure of external supply lines. Finally, without aboriginal labor on a local level, the Florida caciques would have little real basis to their hereditary positions of leadership, undermining not only traditional aboriginal sociopolitical systems, but also the overlying Spanish administrative structure on which the entire colonial system was based. In these fundamental ways, aboriginal labor was perhaps the most important commodity in 17th-century Spanish Florida.

Ironically, it was precisely this commodity which entered a freefall decline during the 17th-century mission era. The fatal flaw in the colonial system of Spanish Florida was its substantial dependence upon stable aboriginal population reserves as a source of labor. Even as Indian chiefdoms were incorporated into the expanding colonial system through the process of missionization, they were simultaneously exposed to a variety of European plague diseases to which they possessed little or no innate resistance. Epidemic population decline was soon supplemented by other forces leading to increased mortality, decreased fertility, and simple flight from the mission provinces. The 17th-century colonial system of Spanish Florida was thus characterized by an almost continual process of adaptation and change, driven by rampant demographic collapse in the mission provinces. This tragic phenomenon ultimately transformed the colonial system, setting up internal stresses that, in the case of Timucua, led to violence.

Due to its strategic position, the depopulation of the Timucua mission province along the Camino Real effectively jeopardized the entire colonial system. Consequently, as population levels dropped in strategic missions, plans were formulated and implemented for the directed resettlement of Timucuan towns and villages, aggregating and relocating entire communities, including converted groups north and south of the primary trans-peninsular road. As the strains of the system worsened, more and more fugitives fled the Timucuan missions, and Spanish efforts were increasingly directed toward the recovery of these fugitive cimarrones. Even the immigration of unconverted, non-Timucuan Indians (the Chisca) was encouraged, ultimately

resulting in disastrous consequences. The 17th century was thus characterized by increasingly substantial transformations to the social geography of the peninsular interior, resulting not only in a general decline in total population, but also in the directed resettlement of surviving Timucuan communities. Even by mid-century, interior Spanish Florida was already a changed landscape, a fact not unnoticed by the Timucuan caciques who ultimately rose up in rebellion in the spring of 1656.

Spanish efforts to counter the ongoing demographic collapse in the interior began almost as soon as the Indians began to die or flee. Ultimately, a number of strategies would be employed in this plan, including the aggregation of subordinate communities within local chiefdoms, forming congregated mission towns, or congregaciones; the intentional establishment or re-establishment of strategically-placed towns using relocated populations; and the ongoing recovery and resettlement of fugitive cimarrones. In sum, as populations dwindled in the most strategically-important mission towns, Indians were either voluntarily or forcibly resettled in an attempt to maintain the infrastructural base of the colonial system. Although at first this simply involved the aggregation of neighboring communities on a local scale (probably within each principal cacique's local chiefdom), by the second quarter of the 17th century, more drastic measures were introduced in heavily depopulated areas. The transformation of the social geography of the Timucuan interior was gradual at first, eventually resulting in the reduction of local chiefdoms into little more than a single community surrounding the Franciscan mission compound at the principal town, or the relocation of individual communities to uninhabited sites along the transportation network. In hindsight, however, such alterations would pale in comparison to the sweeping resettlement plan initiated following the Timucuan rebellion of 1656. Nevertheless, the pattern for such resettlement was established long before the rebellion, as Timucuan populations dwindled to less than 50% of their original condition.

Ultimately, the pace of demographic collapse among the missionized Timucuan chiefdoms of interior Florida outstripped the pace of Spanish efforts to counter this trend. Over the course of the first half of the 17th century, as the Franciscan mission frontier expanded

westward, the balance between increases in the number of converted Indians through new missionization and decreases in that number due to depopulation and out-migration gradually shifted, resulting in substantial rates of population loss within the developing colonial system of Spanish Florida. The effects of demographic collapse seem to have been most pronounced in precisely those areas that were of the greatest strategic importance to the continued viability of the entire system, and for this reason, Spanish authorities directed considerable energy toward programs of directed resettlement in these strategic locations. As individuals and towns were relocated, in some cases forcibly, old sociopolitical divisions lost their significance, and new mission provinces largely replaced the local and regional chiefdoms of the early 17th century. By the midpoint of the 17th century, only two major administrative districts remained in Florida's peninsular interior, each consisting of several previously autonomous units. The Ibiniute province, comprising the towns and missions of the old Acuera, "Agua Dulce," and even the neighboring Mayaca chiefdoms, was increasingly a haven for Timucuan fugitives from the Camino Real mission of San Diego, and the Timucua mission province represented the aggregated missions of the local chiefdom of Potano and the regional chiefdoms of Timucua and Yustaga, perhaps half of which lay along the path of the Camino Real between St. Augustine and Apalachee. The remnants of the local Oconi and Ibihica chiefdoms along the northern frontier were considered at that time part of the coastal Mocama province, and would shortly fall victim to forced resettlement. By the summer of 1654, the western interior was characterized by increasingly dysfunctional Timucuan societies, due in large part to the combined effects of demographic collapse and the pressures of the colonial labor system. Into this scene stepped Governor Don Diego de Rebolledo, whose term of office witnessed an armed rebellion by the Timucuan caciques, and the complete restructuring of the mission frontier.

It would be impossible to explore the nuances of Governor Rebolledo's unfortunate Indian policy within the confines of this paper. It is sufficient to note that not only did he sacrifice the military readiness of the fort and garrison at St. Augustine in the pursuit of personal profits garnered from the lucrative trade in coastal amber and deerskins from the interior, but he

also broke with precedent and tradition in failing to regale the chiefs of Timucua with gifts and food during their visits to the city, leaving many of them disillusioned and resentful. In addition, Rebolledo's unyielding demands for repartimiento laborers after heavy epidemics in the interior were compounded by the unprovoked destruction of several interior Timucuan villages by Spanish troops during February of 1656 in an effort to force their inhabitants to relocate to mission Nombre de Dios near St. Augustine. Ultimately, all that was required for open rebellion was a spark.

When alerted to rumors of an imminent assault by an English fleet against St. Augustine in the spring of 1656, the governor found himself lacking in both soldiers and rations. In an ill-advised attempt to provide for immediate temporary reinforcements, Rebolledo issued an order activating the standing Indian militia in the mission provinces, furthermore stipulating that each warrior, including chiefs and nobles normally exempt from all manual labor, carry up to 75 lbs. of corn on their backs for their own sustenance in St. Augustine. From the governor's perspective, this was the only solution, since the normal chiefly retainers, including burden-bearers, would place further stress on already-limited food reserves in the city. From the perspective of both the chiefs and their subordinates, however, this order would have effectively reduced privileged aboriginal leaders to the status of subordinate laborers under the direct command of the governor. Taken alone, this order might only have resulted in a minor dispute, the solution to which could have been negotiated through normal channels. But within the broader context of general 17th-century societal decline and transformation, Rebolledo's actions resulted in an uprising that eventually sealed the fate of the Timucuan chiefdoms.

It is important to note that the Timucuan rebellion only began after the caciques and other ranking members of noble lineages in the province were ordered to carry burdens personally. Decades of participation in the repartimiento labor system had not pushed the Indians of Timucua to rebel; quite to the contrary, as long as the caciques themselves administered the draft (and were also exempt), no significant protests by the caciques themselves seem to have surfaced. The only reason universally given for the rebellion after the fact was the section of

Rebolledo's order that explicitly mandated that caciques and principales carry corn on their own backs. The order's activation of the standing militia was not disputed, and even the requested contribution of corn was never contested.

The crucial point was that after so many assaults to their traditional authority, the aboriginal leaders were finally ordered to subject themselves to manual labor at the direct bidding of the Spanish governor of St. Augustine. Had principal chief Lúcas Menéndez and the remaining caciques of Timucua submitted to this command, they would have been openly relinquishing their position as independent leaders of their own societies. Hereditary rank distinctions would have dissolved among common Indians who viewed their caciques doubled over with sacks of corn on their backs, effectively de-legitimizing the hereditary birthright that the Timucuan chiefs spent so much energy to maintain. In sum, what the Timucuan rebellion ultimately boiled down to was a jurisdictional struggle between the Republic of Indians and the Republic of Spaniards, in which the caciques of Timucua resisted the final assimilation of their chiefdoms into the colonial system of Spanish Florida.

The rebellion itself only resulted in seven deaths, including three Spanish soldiers, a Spanish servant, two African slaves, and a Mexican Indian servant; Franciscan friars were explicitly excluded from harm, as was chief Lúcas Menéndez's long-time friend and ally Sergeant Major Don Juan Menéndez Márquez. After the spring murders, Spanish presence was reduced to only three soldiers in the Apalachee mission at Ivitachuco on the Timucuan frontier. After the dispatch of a handful of reinforcements, Governor Rebolledo simply waited for the onset of hurricane season in the fall before mounting his response, at that point liberated from the rumored English threat. With advice and assistance from Spanish-allied Timucuan chiefs in the more isolated northern frontier of the province, an army of sixty Spanish infantrymen ultimately surrounded the palisaded rebel stronghold on a hilltop near the Timucuan mission of Machava along the Apalachee frontier. All the Timucuan rebel leaders were eventually captured without bloodshed, and were subsequently tried and convicted by Governor Rebolledo at Ivitachuco. The principal culprits were all hanged, and the rest were sentenced to forced labor in St.

Augustine. Virtually the entire leadership of the interior Timucuan chiefdoms was thus eliminated in a single blow, and Rebolledo's strategic reorganization of provincial and local leadership eventually paved the way for even more sweeping geographic changes, involving the physical relocation of virtually all Timucuan mission communities.

Ultimately, the plan set in motion by Governor Rebolledo resulted in the rapid and permanent transformation of a geographically-dispersed and demographically-imbalanced aboriginal landscape into a compact, linear chain of populated way-stations along the Camino Real between St. Augustine and Apalachee. Principal towns and surviving satellites of some 13 local Timucuan chiefdoms scattered across much of the Suwannee River watershed and adjacent zones were ultimately restructured and consolidated to form a line of 10 more evenly-spaced aggregate mission towns with outlying satellites. For the Franciscans, this consolidation and contraction of the Timucua mission province actually occurred at an opportune moment, for by the summer of 1657 only 28 Franciscan friars remained alive in Florida after the death of 6 of their number in a shipwreck between Apalachee and Havana. In broader perspective, however, Rebolledo's reorganization of Timucua had more far-reaching implications.

Following half a century of demographic collapse within the context of the developing colonial system, and the near-complete depopulation of many missions in the comparatively sparsely populated eastern reaches of the Timucua province, mid-17th-century Spanish officials were only barely able to maintain sufficient populations to support trans-peninsular land traffic across these devastated zones. Despite the frequent dispatch of small military expeditions on fugitive-hunting missions, and inconsistent programs of directed settlement congregación, occasional forced town relocation, and even reducción, it was only with the pacification of the Timucuan rebellion that Governor Diego de Rebolledo was provided with a unique opportunity to solve these recurrent problems in a more comprehensive and permanent fashion. Following the execution or imprisonment of virtually the entire aboriginal leadership of the Timucua province, Rebolledo was in a position to completely restructure the province in a form more suitable for the Spanish colonial system. By replacing ousted leaders with others loyal to the

Spanish, and by repopulating the eastern portion of the Timucua mission province with the inhabitants of forcibly dismantled missions in the northern reaches of the Yustaga region of Timucua, Rebolledo not only crushed aboriginal resistance by dividing and restructuring (both politically and geographically) the old sociopolitical order, but he also achieved a more comprehensive integration of Timucua into the colonial system of Spanish Florida. In this sense, Timucua was no longer a truly aboriginal society, but was finally transformed into a functional component of the colonial system as a series of populated way-stations along the Camino Real, inhabited by the surviving Indians of the Timucuan chiefdoms of Spanish Florida's western interior.

In broad perspective, the story of the missionization of the interior Timucuan chiefdoms serves as an object lesson in the inherent stresses of colonial assimilation. In the beginning, aboriginal chieftains willingly subordinated themselves to Spanish authorities in a conscious attempt to maintain or enhance their own internal power by acting as administrative intermediaries and cultural brokers. Despite their efforts to maintain this arrangement, rampant demographic collapse within the context of widespread epidemics and a frequently abusive colonial labor system eventually accelerated the normal developmental trajectory of Spanish colonial society, in which missionization served as only the first step in the transformation and eventual dissolution of existing aboriginal political and economic structures. Not only did the Timucuan chiefs govern increasingly dysfunctional local societies, but their role as intermediaries was increasingly circumvented within the context of the developing colonial economy of 17th-century Spanish Florida. By the time that these privileged leaders were ordered to stoop and carry sacks of corn to St. Augustine as their own provisions during a month-long activation of the Indian militia in 1656, the Timucuan rebellion was almost a foregone conclusion.

Ultimately, missionization fatally compromised the political autonomy of the Timucuan chiefdoms, undermining hereditary chiefly authority in direct contrast to the original expectations of the chiefs who voluntarily accepted resident Franciscan friars and tributary labor

arrangements with the military governor of St. Augustine. The paradox of attempting to maintain largely autonomous Indian societies subordinate to the broader Spanish crown and church while simultaneously encouraging their incorporation and full assimilation into Florida's developing colonial system set up tensions ripe for hostility and open conflict. Resident Franciscan friars, acting within local aboriginal political structures, largely resisted the ongoing erosion of chiefly authority in order to continue their efforts of conversion and catechism, while military officials actively encouraged the structural assimilation of missionized chiefdoms into the internal economy of Spanish Florida, in many cases at the expense of these very same chiefs. In the end, however, the effects of demographic collapse were compounded by English-sponsored slave-raiding, accelerating the destruction, retreat, and final extinction of the remnants of these Timucuan chiefdoms. Today, essentially nothing remains of their culture or people but historical records and the archaeological sites where they lived.