

Spanish Florida

Spanish Florida refers to the Spanish territory of ***La Florida***, which was the first major European land claim and attempted settlement in North America during the European *Age of Discovery*. *La Florida* formed part of the *Captaincy General of Cuba*, the *Viceroyalty of New Spain*, and the *Spanish Empire* during Spanish colonization of the Americas. While it had no clearly defined boundaries, the territory was much larger than the present-day *state of Florida*, extending over much of what is now the *southeastern United States*, including all of present-day *Florida* plus portions of *Georgia*,^[1] *Alabama*, *Mississippi*, *South Carolina*,^[2] and southeastern *Louisiana*. Spain's claim to this vast area was based on several wide-ranging expeditions mounted during the 16th century. However, Spain never exercised real control over *La Florida* much beyond several settlements and forts which were predominantly located in present-day Florida.





Spanish Florida was established in 1513, when *Juan Ponce de León* claimed peninsular Florida for Spain during the first official European expedition to North America. This claim was enlarged as several explorers (most notably *Pánfilo Narváez* and *Hernando de Soto*) landed near *Tampa Bay* in the mid-1500s and wandered as far north as the *Appalachian Mountains* and as far west as *Texas* in largely unsuccessful searches for gold and other riches. The *presidio of St. Augustine* was founded on *Florida's Atlantic coast* in 1565; a series of *missions* were established across the *Florida panhandle*, *Georgia*, and *South Carolina* during the 1600s; and *Pensacola* was founded on the western Florida panhandle in 1698, strengthening Spanish claims to that section of the territory.

Spanish control of the Florida peninsula was made possible by the collapse of native cultures during the 17th century. Several Native American groups (including the *Timucua*, *Calusa*, *Tequesta*, *Apalachee*, *Tocobaga*, and the *Ais people*) had been long-established residents of Florida, and most resisted Spanish incursions onto their land. However, conflict with Spanish expeditions, raids by the English and their native allies, and (especially) diseases brought from Europe resulted in a drastic decline in the population of all the *indigenous peoples of Florida*, and large swaths of the peninsula were mostly uninhabited by the early 1700s. During the mid-1700s, small bands of *Creek* and other Native American refugees began moving south into Spanish Florida after having been forced off their lands by English settlements and raids. They were later joined by *African-Americans* fleeing slavery in nearby colonies. These newcomers – plus perhaps a few surviving descendants of indigenous Florida peoples – eventually coalesced into a new *Seminole culture*.

Government of Florida

La Florida

Territory of New Spain

←		1513–1763		→
←		1783–1821		→



Royal standard of Castile (1503)

Cross of Burgundy (1565)

First national flag of Spain (1785)

Motto

Plus Ultra
(Further Beyond)

Anthem

Marcha Real
(Royal March)



Spanish Florida after Pinckney's Treaty in 1795

Capital St. Augustine

Government Monarchy

History

- Spanish exploration and settlement 1513–1698

The extent of Spanish Florida began to shrink in the 1600s, and the mission system was gradually abandoned due to native depopulation. Between disease, poor management, and ill-timed hurricanes, several Spanish attempts to establish new settlements in *La Florida* ended in failure. With no gold or silver in the region, Spain regarded Florida (and particularly the heavily fortified town of St. Augustine) primarily as a buffer between its more prosperous colonies to the south and west and several newly established rival European colonies to the north. The establishment of the Province of Carolina by the English in 1639, New Orleans by the French in 1718, and of the Province of Georgia by Great Britain in 1732 limited the boundaries of Florida over Spanish objections. The War of Jenkins' Ear (1739–1748) included a British attack on St. Augustine and a Spanish invasion of Georgia, both of which were repulsed. At the conclusion of the war, the northern boundary of Spanish Florida was set near the current northern border of modern-day Florida.

Great Britain temporarily gained control of Florida beginning in 1763 as a result of the Anglo-Spanish War, but while Britain occupied the territory, it did not develop it further. Sparsely populated British Florida stayed loyal to Crown during the American Revolutionary War, and by the terms of the Treaty of Paris which ended the war, the territory was returned to Spain in 1783. After a brief diplomatic border dispute with the fledgling United States, the countries set a territorial border and allowed Americans free navigation of the Mississippi River by the terms of Pinckney's Treaty in 1795.

France sold Louisiana to the United States in 1803. The U.S. claimed that the transaction included West Florida, while Spain insisted that the area was not part of Louisiana and was still Spanish territory. In 1810, the United States intervened in a local uprising in West Florida, and by 1812, the Mobile District was absorbed into the U.S. territory of Mississippi, reducing the borders of Spanish Florida to that of modern Florida.

In the early 1800s, tensions rose along the unguarded border between Spanish Florida and the state of Georgia as settlers skirmished with Seminoles over land and American slave-hunters raided Black Seminole villages in Florida. These tensions were exacerbated when the Seminoles aided Great Britain against the United States during the War of 1812 and led to American military incursions into northern Florida beginning in late 1814 during what became known as the First Seminole War. As with earlier American incursions into Florida, Spain protested this invasion but could not defend its territory, and instead opened diplomatic negotiations seeking a peaceful transfer of land. By the terms of the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, Spanish Florida ceased to exist in 1821, when control of the territory was officially transferred to the United States.

- Transferred to Britain 1763
- Returned to Spain 1783
- Pinckney's Treaty 1795
- Occupation of Pensacola 1814
- Adams–Onís Treaty signed 1819
- Treaty ratified. Joined U.S. 1821

Today part of

-  United States
 -  Alabama
 -  Florida
 -  Georgia
 -  Louisiana
 -  Mississippi
 -  South Carolina

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Discovery and early exploration



Florida from the 1502
Cantino planisphere

Cantino planisphere

Anonymous Portuguese explorers were likely the first Europeans to map the southeastern portion of the future United States, including Florida. As documented in the Cantino planisphere of 1502, Portugal explored and mapped much of the Atlantic seaboard and the eastern Gulf of Mexico during the decade following the first voyage of Christopher Columbus, who never sighted mainland North America in any of his expeditions. The Portuguese kept their discoveries secret, however, and did not attempt to establish settlements or explore very far inland.^{[3][4][5]}

Juan Ponce de León

Ponce de León probably was not the first Spaniard to reach Florida, although he was the first to do so with permission from the Spanish crown.^{[6]:107} Evidence suggests that Spanish raiders from the Caribbean had conducted small secret expeditions to Florida to capture Indian slaves at some time between 1500 and 1510.^{[6]:107}

In 1512 Juan Ponce de León, governor of Puerto Rico, received royal permission to search for land north of Cuba. On March 3, 1513, his expedition departed from Punta Aguada, Puerto Rico, sailing north in three ships.^[7] In late March, he spotted a small island (almost certainly one of the Bahamas) but did not land. On April 2, Ponce de León spotted the east coast of the Florida peninsula and went ashore the next day at an exact location that has been lost to time.^[8] Assuming that he had found a large island, he claimed the land for Spain and named it *La Florida*, because it was the season of *Pascua Florida* ("Flowery Easter") and because much of the vegetation was in bloom.^[9] After briefly exploring the area around their landing site, the expedition returned to their ships and sailed south to map the coast, encountering the Gulf Stream along the way. The expedition followed Florida's coastline all the way around the Florida Keys and north to map a portion of the Southwest Florida coast before returning to Puerto Rico.



Juan Ponce de León
claimed Florida for Spain in
1513

Ponce de León did not have substantial documented interactions with Native Americans during his voyage. However, the peoples he met (likely the Timucua, Tequesta, and Calusa) were mostly hostile at first contact and knew a few Spanish words, lending credence to the idea that they had already been visited by Spanish raiders.^{[6]:106–110}

Popular legend has it that Ponce de León was searching for the Fountain of Youth when he discovered Florida. However, the first mention of Ponce de León allegedly searching for water to cure his aging (he was only 40) came more than twenty years after his voyage of discovery, and the first that placed the Fountain of Youth in Florida was thirty years after that. It is much more likely that Ponce de León, like other Spanish conquistadors in the Americas, was looking for gold, land to colonize and rule for Spain, and Indians to convert to Christianity or enslave.^[10]

Other early expeditions

Other Spanish voyages to Florida quickly followed Ponce de León's return. Sometime in the period from 1514 to 1516, Pedro de Salazar led an officially sanctioned raid which enslaved as many as 500 Indians along the Atlantic coast of the present-day southeastern United States. Diego Miruelo mapped what was probably Tampa Bay in 1516, Francisco Hernández de Cordova mapped most of Florida's Gulf coast to the Mississippi River in 1517, and Alonso Álvarez de Pineda sailed and mapped the central and western Gulf coast to the Yucatán Peninsula in 1519.

First colonization attempts

In 1521, Ponce de León sailed from Cuba with 200 men in two ships to establish a colony on the southwest coast of the Florida peninsula, probably near Charlotte Harbor. However, attacks by the native Calusa drove the colonists away in July 1521. After the skirmish, Ponce de León was wounded as he had an arrow sticking out of his thigh. However, that was not the only injury he had during the battle.^[11] Ponce de León died of his injuries upon the expedition's return to Havana.^[12]

In 1521 Pedro de Quejo and Francisco Gordillo enslaved 60 Indians at Winyah Bay, South Carolina. Quejo, with the backing of Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, returned to the region in 1525, stopping at several locations between Amelia Island and the Chesapeake Bay. In 1526 de Ayllón led an expedition of some 600 people to the South Carolina coast. After scouting possible locations as far south as Ponce de Leon Inlet in Florida, the settlement of San Miguel de Gualdape was established in the vicinity of Sapelo Sound, Georgia. Disease, hunger, cold and Indian attacks led to San Miguel being abandoned after only two months. About 150 survivors returned to Spanish settlements.^{[6]:111–115} Dominican friars Fr. Antonio de Montesinos and Fr. Anthony de Cervantes were among the colonists. Given that at the time priests were obliged to say mass each day, it is historically safe to assert that Catholic Mass was celebrated in what is today the United States for the first time, by these Dominicans, even though the specific date and location remains unclear.^[13]

Narváez expedition

In 1527 Pánfilo de Narváez left Spain with five ships and about 600 people on a mission to explore and to settle the coast of the Gulf of Mexico between the existing Spanish settlements in Mexico and Florida. After storms and delays, the expedition landed near Tampa Bay on April 12, 1528, already short on supplies, with about 400 people. Confused as to the location of Tampa Bay (Milanich notes that a navigation guide used by Spanish pilots at the time placed Tampa Bay some 90 miles too far north), Narváez sent his ships in search of it while most of the expedition marched northward, supposedly to meet the ships at the bay.

Intending to find Tampa Bay, Narváez marched close to the coast, through what turned out to be largely uninhabited territory. The expedition was forced to subsist on the rations they had brought with them, until they reached the Withlacoochee River, where they finally encountered Indians. Seizing hostages, the expedition reached the Indians'

village, where they found corn. Further north they were met by a chief who led them to his village on the far side of the Suwannee River. The chief, Dulchanchellin, tried to enlist the Spanish as allies against his enemies, the Apalachee.

Seizing Indians as guides, the Spaniards traveled northwest towards the Apalachee territory. Milanich suggests that the guides led the Spanish on a circuitous route through the roughest country they could find. In any case, the expedition did not find the larger Apalachee towns. By the time the expedition reached Aute, a town near the Gulf Coast, it had been under attack by Indian archers for many days. Plagued by illness, short rations, and hostile Indians, Narváez decided to sail to Mexico rather than attempt an overland march. Two hundred and forty two men set sail on five crude rafts. All the rafts were wrecked on the Texas coast. After eight years, four survivors, including Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, reached New Spain (Mexico). A fifth, Juan Ortiz, escaped from captivity with the Indians after 12 years.

De Soto expedition

Hernando de Soto had been one of Francisco Pizarro's chief lieutenants in the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire, and had returned to Spain a very wealthy man. He was appointed *Adelantado* of Florida and governor of Cuba, and assembled a large expedition to 'conquer' Florida. On May 30, 1539, de Soto and his companions landed in Tampa Bay, where they found Juan Ortiz, who had been captured by the local Indians a decade earlier when he was sent ashore from a ship searching for Narváez. Ortiz passed on the Indian reports of riches, including gold, to be found in Apalachee, and de Soto set off with 550 soldiers, 200 horses, and a few priests and friars. De Soto's expedition lived off the land as it marched. De Soto followed a route further inland than that of Narváez's expedition, but the Indians remembered the earlier disruptions caused by the Spanish, and were wary when not outright hostile. De Soto seized Indians to serve as guides and porters.

The expedition reached Apalachee in October, and settled into the chief Apalachee town of Anhaica for the winter, where they found large quantities of stored food, but little gold or other riches. In the spring de Soto set out to the northeast, crossing what is now Georgia and South Carolina into North Carolina, then turned westward, crossed the Great Smoky Mountains into Tennessee, then marched south into Georgia. Turning westward again, the expedition crossed Alabama. They lost all of their baggage in a fight with Indians near Choctaw Bluff on the Alabama River, and spent the winter in Mississippi. In May 1541 the expedition crossed the Mississippi River and wandered through present-day Arkansas, Missouri and possibly Kansas before spending the winter in Oklahoma. In 1542 the expedition headed back to the Mississippi River, where de Soto died. Three hundred and ten survivors returned from the expedition in 1543.

Ochuse and Santa Elena

Although the Spanish had lost hope of finding gold and other riches in Florida, it was seen as vital to the defense of their colonies and territories in Mexico and the Caribbean. In 1559 Tristán de Luna y Arellano left Mexico with 500 soldiers and 1,000 civilians on a mission to establish colonies at Ochuse (Pensacola Bay) and Santa Elena (Port Royal Sound). The plan was to land everybody at Ochuse, with most of the colonists marching overland to Santa Elena. A tropical storm struck five days after the fleet's arrival at the Bay of Ochuse, sinking ten of the thirteen ships along with the supplies that had not yet been unloaded. Expeditions into the interior failed to find adequate supplies of food. Most of the colony moved inland to Nanicapana, renamed Santa Cruz, where some food had been found, but it could not support the colony and the Spanish returned to Pensacola Bay. In response to a royal order to immediately occupy Santa Elena, Luna sent three small ships, but they were damaged in a storm and returned to Mexico. Angel de Villafañe replaced the discredited Luna in 1561, with orders to withdraw most of the colonists from Ochuse and occupy Santa Elena. Villafañe led 75 men to Santa Elena, but a tropical storm damaged his ships before they could land, forcing the expedition to return to Mexico.

Settlement and fortification

The establishment of permanent settlements and fortifications in Florida by Spain was in response to the challenge posed by French Florida: French captain Jean Ribault led an expedition to Florida, and established Charlesfort on what is now Parris Island, South Carolina in 1562. However, the French Wars of Religion prevented Ribault from returning to resupply the fort, and the men abandoned it.^{[14]:196–199} Two years later, René Goulaine de Laudonnière, Ribault's lieutenant on the previous voyage, set out to found a haven for Protestant Huguenot colonists in Florida. He founded Fort Caroline at what is now Jacksonville in July 1564. Once again, however, a resupplying mission by Ribault failed to arrive, threatening the colony. Some mutineers fled Fort Caroline to engage in piracy against Spanish colonies, causing alarm among the Spanish government. Laudonnière nearly abandoned the colony in 1565, but Jean Ribault finally arrived with supplies and new settlers in August.^{[14]:199–200}

At the same time, in response to French activities, King Philip II of Spain appointed Pedro Menéndez de Avilés *Adelantado* of Florida, with a commission to drive non-Spanish adventurers from all of the land from Newfoundland to St. Joseph Bay (on the north coast of the Gulf of Mexico).^[15] Menéndez de Avilés reached Florida at the same time as Ribault in 1565, and established a base at San Agustín (St. Augustine in English), the oldest continuously inhabited European-established settlement in what is now the continental United States.^[16] Menéndez de Avilés quickly set out to attack Fort Caroline, traveling overland from St. Augustine. At the same time, Ribault sailed from Fort Caroline, intending to attack St. Augustine from the sea. The French fleet, however, was pushed out to sea and decimated by a squall. Meanwhile, the Spanish overwhelmed the lightly defended Fort Caroline, sparing only the women and children.^{[14]:200–202}^[17] Some 25 men were able to escape. When the Spanish returned south and found the French shipwreck survivors, Menéndez de Avilés ordered all of the Huguenots executed.^{[17]:94} The location became known as *Matanzas*.^{[14]:202}

Following the expulsion of the French, the Spanish renamed Fort Caroline Fort San Mateo (*Saint Matthew*).^[17] Two years later, Dominique de Gourgues recaptured the fort from the Spanish and slaughtered all of the Spanish defenders. However, he did not leave a garrison, and France would not attempt to settle in Florida again.^[18]

Missions and conflicts

In 1549 Father Luis de Cancer and three other Dominicans attempted the first solely missionary expedition in la Florida. Following decades of native contact with Spanish laymen who had ignored a 1537 Papal Bull which condemned slavery in no uncertain terms, the religious order's effort was abandoned after only 6 weeks with de Cancer's brutal martyrdom by Tocobaga natives. His death sent shock waves through the Dominican missionary community in New Spain for many years.

In 1566, the Spanish established the colony of Santa Elena on what is now Parris Island, South Carolina.^{[17]:95} Juan Pardo led two expeditions (1566-7 and 1567-8) from Santa Elena as far as eastern Tennessee, establishing six temporary forts in interior. The Spanish abandoned Santa Elena and the surrounding area in 1587.^[19]

In 1586, English sea captain Francis Drake plundered and burned St. Augustine, including a fortification that was under construction, while returning from raiding Santo Domingo and Cartagena in the Caribbean.^{[20]:429}^[21] His raids exposed Spain's inability to properly defend her settlements.^[21]

The Jesuits had begun establishing missions to the Native Americans in Florida in 1567, but withdrew in 1572 after hostile encounters with the natives.^{[20]:311} In 1573 Franciscans assumed responsibility for missions to the Native Americans, eventually operating dozens of missions to the Guale, Timucua and Apalachee tribes.^[22] The missions were not without conflict, and the Guale first rebelled on October 4, 1597, in what is now coastal Georgia.^{[23]:954}

The extension of the mission system also provided a military strategic advantage from British troops arriving from the North.^{[20]:311} During the hundred-plus year span of missionary expansion, disease from the Europeans had a significant impact on the natives, along with the rising power of the French and British.^[24] During the Queen Anne's War, the British

dismantled most of the missions.^[24] By 1706, the missionaries abandoned their mission outposts and returned to St. Augustine.

Period of friendship

Spanish Governor Pedro de Ibarra worked at establishing peace with the native cultures to the South of St. Augustine. An account is recorded of his meeting with great Indian caciques (chiefs).^[25] Ybarra (Ibarra) in 1605 sent Álvaro Mexía, a cartographer, on a mission further South to meet and develop diplomatic ties with the Ais Indian nation, and to make a map of the region. His mission was successful.

In February 1647, the Apalachee revolted.^{[23]:27} The revolt changed the relationship between Spanish authorities and the Apalachee. Following the revolt, Apalachee men were forced to work on public projects in St. Augustine or on Spanish-owned ranches.^[26] In 1656, the Timucua rebelled, disrupting the Spanish missions in Florida. This also affected the ranches and food supplies for St. Augustine.

Throughout the 17th century, English and Scottish colonists from the Carolina and Virginia colonies gradually pushed the frontier of Spanish territory south. In the early 18th century, French settlements along the Mississippi River and Gulf Coast encroached on the western borders of the Spanish claim.

Starting in 1680, English and Scottish soldiers from Carolina and their Native American allies repeatedly attacked Spanish mission villages and St. Augustine, burning missions and killing and enslaving Indians. In 1702, James Moore led an army of colonists and a Native American force of Yamasee, Tallapoosa, Alabama, and other Creek warriors under the Yamasee chief Arratommakaw. The army attacked and razed the town of St. Augustine, but could not gain control of the fort. Moore in 1704 made a series of raids into the Apalachee Province of Florida, looting and destroying most of the remaining Spanish missions and killing or enslaving most of the Indian population. By 1707 the few surviving Indians had fled to Spanish St. Augustine and Pensacola, or French Mobile. Some of the Native Americans captured by Moore's army were resettled along the Savannah and the Ocmulgee rivers in Georgia.

In 1696 the Spanish had founded Pensacola near the former site of Ochuse. In 1719, the French captured the Spanish settlement at Pensacola.

During the 18th century, the Native American peoples who would become the Seminoles began their migration to Florida, which had been largely depopulated by Carolinian and Yamasee slave raids. British Carolina's power was damaged and the colony nearly destroyed during the Yamasee War of 1715–1717, after which the Native American slave trade was radically reformed.

Spanish Florida was a destination for escaped slaves from the British colonies. Spain offered them freedom if they converted to Catholicism. (Some, such as those from Angola, were already Catholic.) This policy was formalized in 1693.^[27]

Possession by Britain



An excerpt from the British–American Mitchell Map, showing northern Spanish Florida, the old mission road from St. Augustine to St. Mark's, and text describing the Carolinian raids of 1702–1706.

In 1763, Spain traded Florida to Great Britain in exchange for control of Havana, Cuba, which had been captured by the British during the Seven Years' War. As Britain had defeated France in the war, it took over all of French Louisiana east of the Mississippi River, except for New Orleans. Finding this new territory too vast to govern as a single unit, Britain divided the southernmost areas into two territories separated by the Apalachicola River: East Florida (the peninsula) and West Florida (the panhandle).



The expanded West Florida territory in 1767.

The British soon began aggressive recruiting to attract colonists to the area, offering free land and backing for export-oriented businesses. In 1764, the British moved the northern boundary of West Florida to a line extending from the mouth of the Yazoo River east to the Chattahoochee River ($32^{\circ} 22'$ north latitude), consisting of approximately the lower third of the present states of Mississippi and Alabama, including the valuable Natchez District.

During this time, Creek Indians began to migrate into Florida, leading to the formation of the Seminole tribe. The aboriginal peoples of Florida had been devastated by war and disease, and it is thought most of the survivors accompanied the Spanish settlers when they left for other colonies (mostly French) in 1763. This left wide expanses of territory open to the Lower Creeks, who had been in conflict with the Upper Creeks of Alabama for years. The Seminole originally occupied the wooded areas of northern Florida. Under pressure from colonists and the United States Army in the Seminole Wars, they migrated into central and southern Florida, to the Everglades. Many of their descendants live in this area today as one of the two federally recognized Seminole tribes in the state.

Britain retained control over East Florida during the American Revolutionary War, but the Spanish, by that time allied with the French who were at war with Britain, recaptured most of West Florida. At the end of the war the Peace of Paris (1783) treaties (between the Kingdoms of Great Britain and Spain) ceded all of East and West Florida to Spanish control, though without specifying the boundaries.

Second Spanish period

Spain gained possession of West Florida and regained East Florida from Britain in the Peace of Paris of 1783, and continued the British practice of governing the Floridas as separate territories: West Florida and East Florida. When Spain acquired West Florida in 1783, the eastern British boundary was the Apalachicola River, but Spain in 1785 moved it eastward to the Suwannee River.^{[28][29]} The purpose was to transfer San Marcos and the district of Apalachee from East Florida to West Florida.^{[30][31]}

After American independence, the lack of specified boundaries led to a border dispute with the newly formed United States, known as the West Florida Controversy. The two 1783 treaties that ended the American Revolutionary War had differences in boundaries. The Treaty of Paris between Britain and the United States specified the boundary between West Florida and the newly independent U.S. at 31° .^[32] However, in the companion Peace of Paris between Britain and Spain, West Florida was ceded to Spain without its boundaries being specified. The Spanish government assumed that the boundary was the same as in the 1763 agreement by which they had first given their territory in Florida to Britain, claiming that the northern boundary of West Florida was at the $32^{\circ} 22'$ boundary established by Britain in 1764 after the Seven Years' War. The British line at $32^{\circ} 22'$ was close to Spain's old claim of $32^{\circ} 30'$, which can be justified by referring to the principle of actual possession adopted by Spain and England in the 1670 Treaty of Madrid.^[33] The now independent United States insisted that the boundary was at 31° , as specified in its Treaty of Paris with Britain.

After American independence, Spain claimed far more land than the old British West Florida, including the east side of the Mississippi River north to the Ohio and Tennessee rivers.^[34] This expanded claim was based on Spain's successful military operations against the British in the region during the war. Spain occupied or built several forts north of the old British West Florida border, including Fort Confederación, Fort Nogales (at present-day Vicksburg), and Fort San Fernando (at present-day Memphis).^{[35][36]} Spain tried to settle the dispute quickly, but the U.S. delayed, knowing that time was on its side.^[34] By Pinckney's Treaty of 1795 with the United States, Spain recognized the 31st parallel as the border, ending the first West Florida Controversy. Andrew Ellicott surveyed this parallel in 1797, as the border between the United States and Spanish territories. In 1798, Ellicott reported to the government that four American generals were receiving pensions from Spain, including General James Wilkinson.



Under Spanish rule, Florida was divided by the natural separation of the Suwannee River into West Florida and East Florida. (map: Carey & Lea, 1822)

Spain, beset with independence movements in its other colonies, could not settle or adequately govern Florida by the turn of the 19th century, its control limited to the immediate vicinity of towns and forts dotted across the north of the territory.^[37] Tension and hostility between Seminoles and American settlers living in neighboring Georgia and over the Florida border grew steadily. Slaveholders wanted to reclaim fugitive slaves, and slave raiders frequently entered the territory, attacking Seminole villages and attempting to capture Black Seminoles. British agents working in Florida provided arms and other assistance to Native Americans, resulting in raids across the border that sometimes required intervention by American forces.^[38] Several local insurrections and filibuster campaigns against Spanish rule flared, some with quiet support from the U.S. government, most notably the Patriot War of East Florida of 1810–1812 led by George Mathews. In 1817, a confused attack by a motley force of American and Scottish adventurers, Latin American revolutionaries, and pirates from Texas on Fernandina, temporarily claimed the whole of Amelia Island for the revolutionary republic of Mexico (not yet independent) for several months before U.S. forces retook the island and held it "in trust" for Spain until they could "properly police and govern it".^[39] U.S. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams called on Spain to gain control of Florida, calling the territory "a derelict open to the occupancy of every enemy, civilized or savage, of the United States, and serving no other earthly purpose than as a post of annoyance to them."^[40]

The United States Army led increasingly frequent incursions against the Seminoles in western Florida, most notably during an 1817–1818 semi-authorized campaign led by Andrew Jackson that became known as the First Seminole War.^[41] During the conflict, Jackson occupied Pensacola, leading to protests from Spain until it was returned to Spanish control several weeks later. By 1819, the United States effectively controlled much of the Florida panhandle, and Spain was willing to negotiate a transfer of the entire territory.^[42] The Adams–Onís Treaty was signed between the United States and Spain on February 22, 1819, and took effect on July 17, 1821. According to the terms of the treaty, the United States acquired Florida and all Spanish claim to the Oregon Country. In exchange, the U.S. renounced all its claims to Texas and agreed to pay all Spanish debts to American citizens, which totaled about \$5 million.^[42]

Hundreds of Black Seminoles escaped from Cape Florida to the Bahamas in the early 1820s, to avoid US slave raiders.

See also

- [List of colonial governors of Florida](#)
- [European colonization of the Americas](#)
- [History of Florida](#)
- [Spanish Louisiana](#)
- [Spanish West Florida](#)
- [West Florida](#)
- [Florida Territory](#)

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