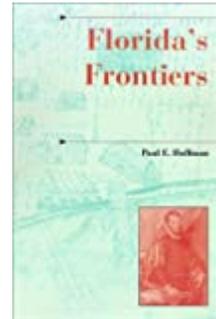




**Paul E. Hoffman.** *Florida's Frontiers. A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier Series.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. xvii + 470 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34019-1.



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## Synthesizing Florida's Colonial Past

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Peninsular Florida and its hinterlands during the colonial period have been the subject of extensive historical research for centuries. Exotic tales featuring savage natives, heroic conquistadors, and fountains of youth have consistently titillated tourists, antiquarians, and some academic historians since Christopher Columbus's pivotal voyages. Over the past thirty years, certain romantic notions have receded as interdisciplinary-trained researchers, employing a variety of new interpretive paradigms and information gathering techniques, reevaluated Florida's early period with an emphasis on balance, accuracy, and careful analysis. Scholars such as Jane Landers, Jerald Milanich, and Amy Turner Bushnell have constructed an entirely new version of the region's past more inclusive in coverage, less exaggerated in celebration, and generally better integrated into the overall historiography of the Americas. Still, until the present, no single-volume synthesis of Florida's colonial development, regardless of time or interpretive style, has existed. Thanks to Paul Hoffman, this omission has been corrected.

Published as part of the Indiana University Press History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier series (a worthy endeavor, at least in terms of design), Hoffman's work attempts to categorize the often complex interaction of peoples, empires, and environment in Florida between 1562 and 1860. Utilizing a chronological focus, the author organizes the period under consideration via a standard "civilization" (some would say Turner-esque) pattern. To Hoffman, following the initial exploratory phase of European settlement, Florida experienced a succession of frontier periods delineated by the extent of European-American settlement; Spanish Tidewater Frontier - First Phase (1562-1586), Spanish Tidewater Frontier - Second Phase (1586-1608), Inland Frontier (1609-1650), Military Frontier (1702-1763), New Tidewater Frontier (1763-1790), and American Frontiers (1790-1860). Temporal gaps are filled with thematic chapters concentrating on the natural setting and English-Native-Spanish interaction. The text is supported with an array of extremely informative tables, maps, and illustrations (most previously published elsewhere) that enables the reader to visualize key aspects of Hoffman's arguments and better understand the nuanced implications of his conclusions.

The result is an effective textbook-structured survey of pre-Civil War Florida. Yet, Hoffman also provides new insights into old topics while at times challenging historiographic consensus. In chapter 2, he carefully analyzes the multiple factors integral to Spanish colonists' attitudes toward the region's environment and resources, revealing that assessments of Florida involved a complex mix of personal and imperial motivations. He also asserts that the key factor leading to "Spanish-Indian accommodation" throughout much of the seventeenth century was the shift from a "per-capita tribute to labor service" arrangement in terms of servitude expectations, a stance that should promote disagreement among readers. Along these lines, Hoffman integrates the "Middle Ground" debate into Florida's early intercultural relationships, thus highlighting the many examples of native agency in the region (pp. 85-86). In addition, the author offers new insights on native migration trends in the 1680s-90s (pp. 167-68), contests commonly held viewpoints on Indian resistance to Spanish rule at the beginning of the 18th century (pp. 179-180), and makes a solid argument for the previously understated significance of French intervention attempts between 1793-95 on Florida's eventual acquisition by the United States (p. 248). Perhaps of greatest importance, Hoffman incorporates as a major theme of his work a frequently overlooked but extremely vital determinant of Florida's development: food availability. In all these areas, this effort transcends traditional models of synthesis and exemplifies the author's firm grasp of the subject.

In other regards, however, this work fails to live up to the high standards set by the author. Editorial errors and undefined/unexplained terminology mar content throughout the book (pp. 38, 52, 56, 63, 144, 187, 237, 254). Turgid, anthropological jargon alternates with imprecise traditional narrative in a manner that detracts from the synthesis. Coverage of material also proves problematic. While Hoffman goes into intricate and ex-

pansive detail when describing Spanish colonization institutions and policies, coverage of Florida's history after 1763 is cursory and general at best. Particularly in his survey of the region under British rule (1763-84), the author seems to be on unsteady ground. Unlike his authoritative depiction of the peninsula during the first Spanish period, coverage of the late eighteenth century is offered with less confidence and more speculation, despite the comparative abundance of primary and secondary resources available on the subject. Moreover, though Native American communities in Florida between the 1500s and 1700s receive ample treatment, analysis of Seminole peoples and their relationships with European Americans is hurried and abbreviated. Such coverage is especially puzzling considering the comparative minutia explored at length in earlier chapters and the publishers' decision to extend the scope of this work to the U.S. Civil War.

That said, any flaws in *Florida's Frontiers* only highlight the difficult task faced by its author and the exceptional accomplishment he has achieved. In Hoffman's words, this study should be considered as a "beginning and overview," an introduction that he hopes "will suggest avenues of research that others will follow" (p. xv). Unquestionably, he has succeeded in this regard. This work should become standard reading material for undergraduates in courses pertaining to Florida's formative period and the South as a whole. More important, Hoffman's endeavor has opened the door for a new mode of interpretive synthesis in Florida's historical literature, one that transcends artificial research-chronological boundaries and attempts to integrate the region's *entire* colonial past into mainstream North American, Latin American, Atlantic World, and Global historiography. Thus, *Florida's Frontiers*, and works like it, should serve as models for all scholars dedicated to researching the peninsula's early modern past.

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