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## 500 Years of Florida History—The Sixteenth Century: An Introduction

by Connie L. Lester and Daniel S. Murphree, editors

The year 2013 marks the quincentennial of Juan Ponce de León's exploration of lands known for the past five hundred years as Florida. Historians have long noted the consequences of Ponce's activities, interpreted their origins, and offered assessments of the region's past as it related to events taking place in 1513 and the century that followed. Some have focused on European conquistadores, highlighting the exploits of colorful individuals and the institutions they represented. Others have emphasized the lives of Florida's indigenous inhabitants, especially their existence prior to colonization and reactions to foreign invaders in subsequent years. In terms of methodology, scholars from a variety of disciplinary fields have relied on travel accounts, government ledgers, and international correspondence to re-construct the period while increasingly incorporating other forms of evidence uncovered by processes such as bioarchaeology, climate analysis, and oral traditions. Partially as a result, the historiography of sixteenth-century Florida has shifted in emphasis over the years and highlighted various themes. Yet many questions concerning the period and region remain unanswered, or at least, subject to debate. Rather than provide definitive answers that will endure for another five centuries, this *Special Issue* of the *Florida Historical Quarterly* offers understandings of Florida's sixteenth-century past as crafted a half-millennia after Ponce made his momentous journey.

The issue begins with Paul E. Hoffman's historiographic essay that complements and is complemented by Kathleen Deagan's

discussion of the state of archaeological knowledge about Native American and European settlements and interactions during the sixteenth-century. This pairing arose because the guest editor and Dr. Deagan believe that it is not possible to study the historical record of this period without reference to the archaeological one, and vice versa. These foundational essays are followed by two examples of the newer approaches to the history of sixteenth-century Florida written by a new generation of historians who have recently taken up the study of the time and place. Jonathan DeCoster shows how a careful re-reading of a familiar story can reveal surprising new perspectives, in this case on the interactions of the French and Spaniards with the Timucua of northeast Florida. John McGrath explores the discourse that Europeans constructed during the sixteenth century around what they imagined were Florida's riches and potentials. Together, these assessments provide both an overview of historiography related to the region over time as well as samples of the newest and best scholarship being produced in 2013.

Much has changed in Florida since Ponce waded ashore five hundred years ago. Similarly, much has changed in how modern historians have evaluated sixteenth century Florida in the recent past. While such changes will continue into the future, the goal of this *Special Issue* is to provide scholars and non-scholars alike with a sophisticated yet easily understandable snapshot of both previous and contemporary interpretations of the Florida that existed in the years after Ponce's arrival. These assessments will hopefully spark more debate and research in the future. Their enduring impact notwithstanding, the articles that follow remind us of Florida's dynamic sixteenth-century past and the continued value of ongoing scholarly interpretations of it.

This publication not only commemorates the quincentennial of Ponce's encounters but initiates a series of six *Special Issues* of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, each devoted to examining Florida over the previous five centuries. Beginning in 2013, a *Special Issue* will be published each consecutive year (two in 2016) that provides an overview of current interpretations and evaluation of historiographic trends relevant to the period covered. Next year's (2014) publication in this series is devoted to the Seventeenth Century and will be edited by Dr. Jane Landers, the Gertrude Conway Vanderbilt Professor of History at Vanderbilt University. Future *Special Issues* will be edited by Dr. Sherry Johnson (Eighteenth Century—2015), Dr. James Cusick (Nineteenth Century—2016),

Dr. John David Smith (Nineteenth Century—2016), and Dr. Gary Mormino (Twentieth Century—2017).

Publication of this series would not be possible without the continued support of the Florida Historical Society and its members. The editors of this *Special Issue* are especially grateful to Dean José B. Fernandez and the University of Central Florida College of Arts and Humanities for underwriting the 2013 *Special Issue* on the Sixteenth Century.