La Florida in the Creole Imaginary: The Frontier of New Spain in Francisco de Florencia’s Historia de la Provincia (1694)

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by Jason Dyck

“Are our oldest heroes only to be found in the colonial history of the “Thirteen Original States?” José Manuel Espinosa posed this question in 1935 in a brief article on the Jesuit Francisco de Florencia (1620-1695), one of the most prolific sacred historians of Spanish America. As a student of Herbert E. Bolton—a pioneering historian of the borderlands—Espinosa argued that Florida should be considered part of the colonial history of the United States even if it was mostly under Spanish rule until 1821. Since Florencia was born in Saint Augustine, Espinosa debunked what he called the “Brooke legend,” the belief that Robert Brooke (1665-1714) of Maryland was the first American-born Catholic priest. By including the borderlands in his vision of colonial U.S. history, Espinosa gave Florencia the boast of pre-

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cedence and transformed him into an early “hero” of America. A few years later, in 1939, Francisco Zambrano categorized Florencia as “Mexican” in his historical guide to the Society of Jesus in New Spain. Indeed, several scholars have represented Florencia as a true Mexican patriot given his account of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Marian image that became a symbol of Mexican nationalism ever since Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1753-1811) raised her banner in the wars for independence in the early nineteenth century.

The tendency to project the Mexico-U.S. border back into the colonial past explains why Florencia became an honorary “citizen” of two countries he never knew. More recently this anachronistic view of the Jesuit’s “nationality” has been partially corrected, for modern scholars now refer to him as a creole—someone born of European ancestry (whether real or imagined) in the Americas. But even if they have restored Florencia’s creole status, their analysis of his life and corpus of writings is still primarily rooted within the central valley of Mexico. This observation is also pertinent to the vast and still growing scholarship on criollismo (creolism), which tends to focus on cultural symbols and developments in the centre of viceregal power in New Spain to the exclusion of frontier regions like La Florida. In the same way that Florencia’s Floridian past has been largely ignored, La Florida is often excluded from studies of New Spain and from how Latin America is conceptualized as a region in the present. Given his connection to both the centre and the periphery of the viceroyalty, Florencia’s sacred histories offer an important yet neglected window into the development of creole patriotism in the mid-colonial period.

For a more expansive reading of creole symbols and geography, I turn to Florencia’s description of La Florida in his Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España (1694). In Book I of his provincial chronicle, he retells the earliest history of the Jesuit missions in La Florida, initially penned by Diego de Soto (b. 1579) in an unpublished manuscript entitled Historia de las cosas más dignas (ca. 1601). Although Florencia closely follows de Soto’s version, he inserts personal observations and provides a more positive description of both the land and its indigenous inhabitants. I contend that Florencia’s modified version of the La Florida missions was a call for the Spanish crown to fortify the frontier, which formed an integral part of his overall patriotic vision of New Spain. An analysis of the Historia de la Provincia—the first published history of the Jesuit Province of New Spain—demonstrates that La Florida was not always on the periphery of intellectual currents in Mexico City, especially when the English and the French were increasingly encroaching on Spanish territory in the late seventeenth century. My study begins with an overview of Florencia’s attachment to his patria before turning to his treatment of the La Florida missions and his discourse of Floridian fertility.

The Edges of Empire

Florencia’s life and vision of La Florida and New Spain need to be understood within the context of a major cultural development during the colonial period: the transition from the gachupín to the creole. Gachupines, according to the travelling Carmelite friar Isidoro de la Asunción (1624-1701), were Spanish-born in Spain while creoles, in the words of the Jesuit José de Acosta (1540-1600), were those “born of Spaniards in the Indies.” Both were considered Spaniards, but they were different based upon an accident of birth. Yet even

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5 Francisco Zambrano, La Compañía de Jesús en México. Compendio histórico (Mexico City: Buena Prensa, 1939), 100.
4 For two examples, see Alberto Valenzuela Rodarte, “El padre Florencia y las informaciones guadalupanas,” Abierto 31 (1967): 3-28 and Francisco de la Maza, “Los evangelistas de Guadalupe y el nacionalismo mexicano,” Cuadernos Americanos 8, no. 6 (1949): 169-188. Florencia also plays a significant role in studies of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the two most important being Stafford Poole, Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995) and David A. Bradley, Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe—Image and Tradition across Five Centuries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
3 There are several encyclopaedia entries on Florencia but no full-length biography. The most detailed account of his life is Francisco Zambrano and José Gutiérrez Casillas, Diccionario bio-bibliográfico de la Compañía de Jesús en México (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1966-1977), 6703-6707.
8 Solange Alberro deals with this theme in several studies, the most pertinent being Del gachupín al creolí o de cómo los españoles de México dejaron de serlo (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1992).
if several creoles proclaimed to be “pure” Spaniards through what María Elena Martínez calls “genealogical fictions,” many of them were, in fact, of mixed racial ancestry. They were the offspring of conquistadors and other settlers who had either married the daughters of indigenous nobles or had sexual liaisons with Indian commoners and African slaves. Many Spanish fathers, in turn, legitimized some of their mestizo and mulatto children as “Spaniards” and secured their place within the creole elite. Although several creoles shared bloodlines with Indians, Africans, and castas (people of mixed ancestry), they envisioned themselves as natural rulers in a society—to use the words of Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra—that was “obsessed with identifying and enforcing racial hierarchies.”

Scholars have shown that early signs of creole patriotism emerged in New Spain among the offspring of the conquistadors in the second half of the sixteenth century. Bitter with the crown for phasing out the encomienda (a grant of labor and tribute rights from a group of Indians), they painted a picture of themselves as dispossessed heirs in a land their ancestors had subdued and upon which their blood was spilt. Forced to leave their seignorial aspirations aside, they joined other early Spanish settlers to form a creole aristocracy, a small portion of the entire population of New Spain that by the end of the seventeenth century well outnumbered those arriving from the Iberian peninsula. Over time creoles developed separate identities from their parents and ancestors based upon their interaction with Amerindian intellectuals, their engagement with the land, and through their appropriation of indigenous and African customs. They also formed ideas of themselves as a “creole nation” as a result of discrimination, particularly when peninsular Spaniards were favoured for higher ecclesiastical and bureaucratic posts in the Americas. But perhaps most troubling for creoles was when Europeans—employing early modern theories of American degeneracy—claimed that they were corrupted by their natural environment. Others pointed to their intimate interactions with the Indian, African, and casta populations, believing that creoles had acquired several of their immoral habits.

Many of the creoles who began to address their purported degeneracy and moral depravity were religious scholars, like Florencia, who had been filling up the secular and regular wings of the Catholic Church in New Spain since the late sixteenth century. They weaved patriotic defenses of their land and people into histories, sermons, maps, city views, paintings, shields, scientific tracts, viudas (lives), devotional literature, and into their accounts of the pre-Hispanic past. While scholars have identified various

10 According to María Elena Martínez, the creole aristocracy produced some of the most elaborate genealogies in the early modern period. Genealogical Fictions: Límites de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).


14 Scholars are increasingly recognizing that creoles borrowed discursive practices and archival materials from Indian nobles, both of which influenced their patriotic descriptions of the pre-Hispanic past and contemporary history. Especially good on this subject is Peter B. Villela, Indigenous Elites and Creole Identity in Colonial Mexico, 1500-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).


17 For a chilling example, see the Neapolitan traveller Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, Viaje a la Nueva España (1700), trans. Francisca Perin, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002), 22.

symbols around which creole identity was formed, a core patriotic
trinity for New Spain has been identified that centres on the fol-
lowing three themes: (1) the Mexica (or Aztecs), (2) the Virgin
of Guadalupe, and (3) the land. While the Mexica past and the
shrine of Tepeyac were certainly integral to the formation of a
creole consciousness, my focus in this study is on the land, which
was affectionately known as the patria in the Spanish world. In
the early modern period the patria was a sacred place, a source of local
pride that formed the base of both individual and local identities.
Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco (1539-1613), author of an early
seventeenth-century Spanish dictionary, defines patria as “the land
where one was born.” In most cases this “land” was a local town
or city, but in other cases this “land” referred to kingdoms like New
Spain or even to all of America.

Given the multiple meanings of the patria in the early mod-
ern Spanish world, it is not surprising that creoles manifested signs
of both local and regional pride. This observation is crucial for
a broader understanding of creole patriotism, one that is inclusive
of the frontier in how New Spain was conceptualized throughout
the colonial period. Instead of making a direct link between cre-
ole patriotism and Mexican nationalism, one needs to consider, as
John H. Elliott has wisely urged, the various loyalties creoles had
within the Spanish empire. Creoles held allegiance to their fam-


fili, municipality, king, and god. They also shared a pride in place,
one rooted in their homelands and in their kingdom, providing
them with a larger legal framework in which to understand their
position within the empire. In the case of Florencio, his patria was
clearly New Spain, a territory he claims “produced everything the
fertility of Spain provides, not only in the same measure but in
many cases much more.” But his patria (sometimes referred to
as the patria chica) was also Saint Augustine, a military fort estab-
lished along the Atlantic coast of La Florida. According to surviv-
ing parish records, Florencio was born in this Spanish outpost on
August 13, 1620 to Claudio de Florencio and Juana de Leyba.

When Florencio was a child there were roughly three hundred
residents in Saint Augustine and several homes were only simple
huts of palmetto. The military garrison was never a major magnet
for settlers given the lack of foodstuffs, the shortage of supplies,
and the irregular arrival of the royal subsidy (situado). Although
Saint Augustine was underdeveloped, it still possessed several
Spanish institutions, including a hospital, a shrine dedicated to
Santa Bárbara, and a Franciscan convent where young boys like
Florencio learned how to read and write. Patricia R. Wickman
argues that the fort was not entirely marginalized by Spain because
it still had access to all of “the basic elements of Spanish society.”
More importantly, as Robert L. Kapitcke explains, Saint Augus-
tine was a common Spanish parish held together by the unifying
power of Catholicism, which allowed its inhabitants “to maintain
their identity as Spanish citizens, despite the geographical distance
and environmental differences separating Florida from the Iberian

21 Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia (hereafter BNAH), Fondo Jesuita, carpeta 1X, doc. 8, 13r. Florencio refers to New Spain as the patria of the Augustinian friar Juan de Grijalva (1580-1638) in Descripción histórica, moral del terreno de San Miguel, de los esclavos en el reino de la Nueva España (Cádiz: Imprenta de la Compañía de Jesús, por Cristóbal de Requena, 1689), 89-90.


Peninsula. The social hierarchy of Spain was also uniquely re-created in Saint Augustine as Spanish settlers distinguished themselves from their African slaves, European commoners, indigenous peoples, and an emerging casta population. Members of the Florencí family were hidalgos in this multiethnic frontier community, dubbed "North America's first 'melting pot' of races" by Henry Kamen.

There were limited options for the sons of hidalgos in Saint Augustine, so at a very young age Florencí's parents sent him to Havana to continue his studies with the Franciscans. Like other creoles in La Florida, Florencí had extended family in Cuba, which was the major link connecting the military fort to the Spanish world. After a short stay on the island, however, he was sent to Mexico City in 1629 to begin his education with the Jesuits at San Ildefonso. Although Florencí never returned to his birthplace, he maintained contact with his family in Saint Augustine and Havana via personal correspondence throughout his adult life.

29 See Félix Osores y Sotomayor, Noticias de algunos alumnos o colegios del seminario más antiguo de San Pedro, San Pablo y San Ildefonso de México, Nettie Lee Benson Library, Cenaro Garcia Collection, G109, vol. 1. Florencí's history of education is available in the Archivo Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ARSI), Catalogus Provincia Mexicana, Mexicana 4 (ff. 386r, 422r, 424r, 436v, 441r), Mexicana 5 (ff. 15r, 55r, 111r, 152v, 210v, 252v, 287v, 326v, 377r), and Mexicana 6 (ff. 2v, 47v, 146v).
30 In 1677 Florencí received a letter from his brother Juan concerning the indigenous ball game in La Florida. Amy Bushnell, ""That Demonic Game": The Campaign to Stop Indian Pelota Playing in Spanish Florida, 1675-1684,"" The

have stressed the little that is known about Florencí's early childhood and sustained connection to La Florida because of its complicated relationship to New Spain. La Florida was theoretically under the governance of the viceroy in Mexico City, but in practice it was relatively independent, a position that allowed governors to work directly with the Council of Indies. Saint Augustine was secluded from the centre of viceregal power and as a result did not always form part of the creole imaginary of New Spain. But since Florencí had been reared on the frontier, his vision of the kingdom would always include La Florida. His decision to become a Jesuit only strengthened the connection for him between the two.

The Vice-Province of La Florida

Saint Augustine may have been Florencí's birthplace, but he adopted Mexico City as his new home, his primary place of residence for most of his life. Similar to creoles born in the viceregal capital or in other regions of central Mexico, he describes the metropolis as the Venice of the New World and a major centre of piety, learning, and culture. It was in Mexico City that Florencí became a Jesuit after two years of probation as a "novice in the house of Santa Ana." In 1643 he took his simple vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity; roughly seven years later he was ordained a priest; and then in 1650 he took the Jesuits' fourth vow of obedience to the Pope concerning missions. By 1668 Florencí was chosen as the procurador (representative) of his religious province in the curiae of Madrid and Rome, so over the next decade he lived, travelled, and performed pilgrimage throughout the modern countries of Spain, France, and Italy. In the fall of 1678 he returned to New Spain

32 Francisco de Florencí, La milagrosa invenzione de un tesoro escondido . . . (Mexico City: María de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1685), 42r.
33 Profesión del padre Francisco de Florencí, Archivo General de la Nación de México (hereafter AGN), Indiferente Virreinal, Colegios, caja 4270, exp. 7.
34 Francisco Javier Alegre, Historia de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de Nueva España [ca. 1786], eds. Ernest J. Burrus and Félix Zubillaga (Rome: Institu-
after what he describes as a "long and turbulent trip of ninety-five
days."35 Little is known about the final years of Florence’s life, but
the archival record shows that he was a professor and rector at vari-
ous Jesuit colleges in both Puebla and Mexico City until he passed
away on June 29, 1695. On that day the priest Antonio de Robles
(ca. 1646-ca. 1710) recorded in his diary that “Father Francisco de
Florence, a member of the Society of Jesus, died in San Pedro y
San Pablo of a very old age; he wrote and printed various works.”36
Over his lifetime Florence penned a menology, three vidas of
Jesuit missionaries, four sermons, six devotional histories of local
shrines and their images, a compendium of Marian devotions
entitled the Zoetico mariano, and his provincial chronicle.37 Among
his final projects was his Historia de la Provincia, which he appears
to have started sometime in the early 1680s and finished around
1693.38 Similar to other sacred historians across the Americas, Flo-
rence used his provincial chronicle to glorify the Christian god, to
edify his readers, to thank and seek out donors for generous con-
tributions, and to provide pious examples to upcoming novices.
Provincial chronicles were a specific genre under the larger banner
of sacred history, and they were distinguished by their concentra-
tion on the origins and ministries of a given religious province.39

35 Francisco de Flores to Manuel Fernandez de Santa Cruz, October 15, 1678,
Biblioteca Palaciminca, Manuscriptos 496/422.
36 Antonio de Robles, Diario de susSuccessos y Notables (1665-1763) [1946], 2nd ed. (Mex-
ico City: Porri, 1972), 3:20. His death was also recorded in another anony-
mous diary of the seventeenth century. BNAH, Fondo Jesuits, carpeta IX, doc.
11.
37 A listing of Florence’s writings is available in Zambrano, Diccionario bio-bibli-
ografiico, 6:705-707.
38 Florence references “the Annals of the Province” in La estrella del norte de Méxi-
co... (Mexico City: Doña María de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de Ribera, 1688),
18v-18r. He also states that it was “the year 1663” in which he wrote the third
volume of his provincial chronicle. Archivo Histórico de la Provincia Mexicana
(hereafter AHPM), Fondos Documentales, Fondo Decorne, caja 3, carpeta 9,
doc. 1, f. 29v.
39 For more on provincial chronicles as a genre of historical writing, see Ernest
J. Burrus, “Religious Chroniclers and Historians: A Summary with Annotated
Bibliography,” in Robert Wauchop, ed., Handbook of Middle American Indians,
vol. 15, Guide to Ethnohistorical Sources: Part Two, ed. Howard F. Cline (Austin:
University of Texas Press, 1973), 188-185; Assunción Lavrin, “Misión de la histo-
ria e historiografía de la iglesia en el período colonial americano,” Anuario de
estudios americanos 46, no. 2 (1989): 11-54; Rosa de Lourdes Camelo Arredon-
do, “Las crónicas provinciales de órdenes religiosas,” in Las fuentes eclesiasticas
para la historia social de México, eds. Brian F Connaughton and Andres Lira
González (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and the Insti-
tuto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1996), 165-176; and Antonio

Most begin with an account of the arrival of the religious order to
the New World, which is followed by a description of their labour
among indigenous peoples, the development of their convents or
colleges, and the vidas of their founders and other outstanding
members. Official chroniclers were normally chosen by their supe-
riors to write provincial chronicles, which entailed them to access
their province’s archives. It is unknown when Florence was select-
ed for this task, but after Rodrigo Vivero he was the second creole
to hold this post for his Jesuit Province of New Spain.

The reason why Florence was chosen as the official chroni-
cler of his province is also unknown, but given his experience as
a teacher, rector, and procurador he had a wealth of experience
to draw upon. He also had a significant amount of manuscript
text material to work with, some of which he collected while in Rome.
The most important for his provincial chronicle were three manu-
script histories of the Jesuit Province of New Spain. In 1598 the
Padre General, Claudio Aquaviva (1543-1615), sent out a mis-
ionary ordering all provincials to craft their own provincial histo-
ries that would form the basis of a general history of the order.40
Several Jesuits received this mandate throughout the seventeenth
century for New Spain, including Diego de Soto, Juan Sánchez
Baquero (1548-1619), Rodrigo Vivero, and Andrés Pérez de Ribas
(1576-1655).41 De Soto and Sánchez Baquero wrote foundational

Rubial García, “La crónica religiosa. Historia sagrada y conciencia colectiva,”
in Historia de la literatura mexicana, ed. Raquel Chang (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/
40 Alberto Aklártegui Rojorge discusses Aquaviva’s historical project in “El pro-
yecto historiográfico de Claudio Aquaviva y la construcción de la historia de la
Compañía de Jesús en la Nueva España a principios del siglo XVII,” Estudios de
41 For Diego de Soto, see Historia de las cosas más dignas de memoria que han acon-
tecido en la fundación, principios y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en esta pro-
vincia y reino de Nueva España (ca. 1601), ARSI, Mexicana 19, ff. 1-72. Rosa
Alicia Sotomayor Díaz transmitted de Soto’s work in “Historia de la funda-
ción de la Compañía de Jesús en la Nueva España” (BA thesis, Universidad
Iberoamericana, 1978). For Juan Sánchez Baquero, see Relación breve del prin-
cipio y progreso de la Provincia de Nueva España de la Compañía de Jesús (ca.
1609), ARSI, Mexicana 19, ff. 73-112. Félix Ayuso transmitted de Soto’s work as
Fundación de la Compañía de Jesús en Nueva España (1571-1580) (Mexico City: Editorial
Patría S.A., 1946). For Rodrigo Vivero, see his request for a printing licence in
Muito Viellecoish to Pedro de Velasco, AHPM, Sección III: Documentos Antiguos,
ceja 7, 243, 288-rv. According to Gerard Decorne, his manuscript history
has been lost. La obra de las jesuitas mexicanos durante la época colonial, 1572-1767
(Mexico City: Antigua Libraria Robredo de José Parrúa y Hijos, 1941), 1:200.
And for Andrés Pérez de Ribas, see Cronicas e historia religiosa de la Provincia de la
Compañía de Jesús en Nueva España, Library of Congress, Washington,

4281
historias, completadas around 1601 and 1609 respectively, and Vivero and Pérez de Ribas were given the task of writing provincial chronicles, the former finishing in 1640 and the latter around 1653. None of these four histories were published during the colonial period, making Florencio’s first volume of the Historia de la Provincia the first printed history on the Jesuit Province of New Spain when it came off the press in Mexico City in 1694.

But before Florencio could send the Historia de la Provincia to the viceroy for a printing license, he had to await the decision of the censors his provincial assigned to the manuscript. He eventually obtained the permission he needed from his superior, but not without some difficulties. The Padre General, Tirso González de Sántalla (1624-1705), wrote to Diego de Almonacir (1542-1706), provincial of New Spain, telling him that Florencio had removed and changed all of the indicated parts from his provincial chronicle “with great punctuality.”

Until recently scholars were unaware that Florencio was forced to leave out at least nine chapters from his patriotic description of Mexico City and New Spain in Book II of the first volume. The Jesuit censors most likely flagged this part of his provincial chronicle because of his critique of the Spanish crown, which included an unfavourable analysis of its ability to administer all of the silver flowing out of Spanish America. Florencio also had some harsh words for Spanish Jesuits, reflecting some of the tensions between creole and peninsular Spaniards within

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42. DC, MSS 89151. An incomplete transcription is available as Corónica e historia religiosa de la Provincia de la Compañía de Jesús de México en Nueva España, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Imprenta del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1896). Another Jesuit history from the seventeenth century is housed in the AGN, which has been transcribed and published by Francisco González de Cosío, Relación breve de la venida de los de la Compañía de Jesús a la Nueva España, año de 1602 (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1945). The text has been attributed to Gaspar de Villarías (b. 1614), but Florencio does not appear to have been familiar with it. Dante Alberto Abrán-Baigorri provides an analysis of this work together with that of de Soto and Sánchez Baquero in “La construcción de la memoria histórica de la Compañía de Jesús en la Nueva España, siglos XVI-XVII” (MA thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007). For more on the life and history of Villarías, see Elsa Cecilia Frost, “El primer y anónimo cronista de la Compañía de Jesús,” Latinoamérica: Revista de estudios latinoamericanos 37 (2004): 145-157. Beyond Villarías, there is also a manuscript written by an anonymous Jesuit in 1676 that closely follows Pérez de Ribas. Although the archivist attributed it to Florencio, the handwriting is not his and he does not reference the work in any of his other historical writings. Fundación de la Provincia de México, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Sala Cervantes, MSS 22994.

43. For a transcription and study of the censored portion, see Dyck. For a transcription and study of the censored portion, see Jason Dyck, “La parte censurada de la Historia de la Provincia de Francisco de Florencio,” Estudios de Historia Novohispana 44, no. 1 (2011): 141-188.

44. Sánchez Baquero, Fundación de la Compañía, 23-33.

45. Pérez de Ribas, Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe entre gentes más bárbaras, y fieras del Nuevo Orbe (Madrid: Alonso de Faredes, 1649), 744-751.
southern part of the peninsula by Miami. By the summer of 1568 a new group of Jesuits arrived under the leadership of Juan Bautista de Segura (1529-1571). Five months after establishing a mission in the province of Añacán near Chesapeake Bay, Segura and his seven companions were all killed by a group of Powhatans. Florencia ends Book I by explaining how the remaining Jesuits in La Florida joined the newly formed Province of New Spain in 1572.46

Since the Jesuits of the La Florida missions were eventually united with their brethren in Mexico City, it only seems natural that their evangelical labour on the frontier of New Spain would be considered part of the early history of their religious province. The link connecting the two, however, is not as self-evident as it appears given the early provincial organization of the Society of Jesus in the New World. An anonymous Jesuit writing on the missions of Sinaloa in the second half of the seventeenth century makes this abundantly clear. In his Historia de Sinaloa he claims that the first Jesuits in the Americas came “one year before the apostolic Father Jerónimo Ruiz Portillo and seven of his companions left Spain to found the prestigious and holy Province of Lima in the kingdoms of Peru.”47 These words appear within the first chapter of two on the La Florida missions, which serve not only as a prelude to the Sinaloa missions but as a boast to Jesuit missionary precedence in the New World. While Jesuit sacred historians in Peru never placed great emphasis on La Florida in their provincial chronicles, some of them referenced the early connection between their province and what became the Vice-Province of La Florida.48 Unlike other highly imaginative claims to missionary precedence, Jesuits in Peru had institutional and historical grounds for theirs.

The Jesuit Province of Peru was established in 1567 in Lima, five years before the Jesuit Province of New Spain was founded in Mexico City. San Borja named Jerónimo Ruiz Portillo (1532-1589) the first provincial of Peru and the superior of the Jesuits in La Florida, which means that the first Jesuits were technically under the jurisdiction of the Province of Peru. By September of 1567 Portillo named Segura the vice-provincial of the Vice-Province of La Florida and, then by the end of 1570, he counselled his Padre General to place the region under the administration of another province given the difficulty of governing at such a large distance.49 In contrast to de Soto, Florencia both begins and ends Book I by emphasizing this point, specifically the fact that the Jesuits of the Vice-Province of La Florida were incorporated into the Province of New Spain. “[This is] what happened much later to the Vice-Provencias of the Philippines,” Florencia explains, “which is much farther away from New Spain than La Florida, and since it forms part of the continent it should be considered among those subject to it.”50

Like the anonymous Jesuit from Sinaloa, Florencia wanted to link the evangelical work of Jesuit missionaries in La Florida to their brethren across the frontier. He was particularly concerned with claiming the martyrs in the region for the Province of New Spain, something Pérez de Ribas does in his Historia de los triunfos de nuestra santa fe (1645) when he argues that divine providence used the deaths of Martínez and Segura to open “the road and the door for members of the Company [of Jesus] to preach the gospel and convert so many gentile nations, like the ones that are now


47 Historia de Sinaloa; in Bibliography of the Historical Society of the American Indian, Fondo Juventud, carpeta IX, doc. 7, f. 15v.

48 One example is the Historia general de la Compañía de Jesús en la Provincia del Perú. Crónica anónima de 1600 que trata del establecimiento y misiones de la Compañía de Jesús en los países de habla española en la América meridional, ed. F. Mateos (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas e Instituto Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, 1944), 1:122. More than three hundred years later Rubén Vargas Ugarte began his history of the Jesuits in Peru with the La Florida missions, Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en el Perú (Burgos: Imprenta de Aldecoa, 1958), 27-41.


Christians in the province of Sinaloa.” The Jesuit martyrs of La Florida became important symbols of missionary heroism in New Spain and throughout the Catholic world. Florencia, in a departure from de Soto, gave them universal weight by referring to Tertullian’s (ca. 155-ca. 240) maxim that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. This move allowed him to conclude that the “fathers of San Francisco,” who began to establish their own missions in La Florida in 1573, had “gather[ed] together the fruit of those [Jesuits] who spilt their blood.” Despite being late comers to the mission field in Spanish America, the Jesuits still claimed to be trail blazers in certain areas. This boast provided them with provincial pride, which was inseparable for Jesuit creoles like Florencia from their pride in place.

The Fertility of the Frontier

While the Jesuits did not have official plans to return to La Florida, they were expanding into other northern regions of New Spain like Baja California. They knew that the destruction of Franciscan missions in La Florida could have a domino effect on all missions across the frontier. They were also aware that much more was at stake than just their evangelical enterprise. Florencia was deeply troubled with the state of the empire during the reign of Carlos II (1665-1700), for under his rule Spain experienced financial woes and a series of military losses to other European powers. He commented on some of these wars in correspondence while stationed in Seville, but he was far more concerned with how imperial policies were influencing the overall defense of New Spain. As mentioned earlier, in the censored portion of his provincial chronicle Florencia takes a critical look at the Spanish crown’s administration of American silver. Concentrating on the activity of pirates in the Caribbean, he references a fleet captured in 1628 off the coast of Havana and the 1683 sacking of Veracruz. It was events like these, according to Florencia, that “have placed the power of Spain in the state that we lament today.” While scholars continue to debate whether Spain was in decline in the seventeenth century, for creoles like Florencia it was real and they felt that it was directly related to their overall protection from other imperial powers in the Atlantic.

One of their major concerns was the vulnerability of La Florida given that Saint Augustine was the sole military garrison guarding the frontier in the region. It was originally founded by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565 to deal with French encroachment after the Huguenots erected Fort Caroline near present-day Jacksonville. Throughout the 1600s it had to deal with many other advances. The Carolinians founded Charles Towne in 1670 and they began to cause problems for colonists in La Florida, inspiring the Spanish to erect its stone Castillo de San Marcos. But English intrusions were only made worse when they formed alliances with hostile indigenous groups on the edges of Spanish rule. Other Indians in La Florida—especially on Franciscan missions—were unhappy with Spanish rule, and like the Pueblo Indians in the revolt of 1680, the Guales staged several of their own throughout the ensuing decade. During this same time the soldiers of Saint Augustine also had to deal with pirate attacks and they were surely concerned with the imperial aspirations of the French. René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle (1643-1687) sailed down the Mississippi River and arrived at the northern part of the Gulf of Mexico in 1685, making the defense of La Florida a major priority for viceregal authorities in Mexico City.

To deal with these larger threats, Andrés de Pez y Malzárraga (1657-1723), a Spanish naval captain, urged colonial officials and the crown to abandon Saint Augustine in favour of the Bay of Pensacola. While the former part of his plan was rejected, his call to fortify the gulf coast from foreign intruders was supported by the viceroy and ultimately adapted by Carlos II. In the spring of 1693 Gaspar de la Cerda Silva Sandoval y Mendoza, Conde de Galve (1655-1697) sent Pez with two ships to Pensacola Bay to survey its coast and explore the possibility of colonization. Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700), a creole polymath and confidant of the viceroy, sailed with Pez as the official cosmographer of the expedition. He mapped the region and recorded his findings in several unpublished accounts, providing an optimistic view of the harbour and surrounding countryside.

Sigüenza y Góngora and borrowed manuscripts from his personal library, so the two of them most likely discussed his trip to La Florida and the overall state of the Spanish empire. But regardless of whether Sigüenza y Góngora influenced Florencia's description of La Florida, Book I of his Historia de la Provincia needs to be read in light of the events of the 1680s and the 1690s. His history of the La Florida missions is more than an edifying account of their missionary sacrifices on the edges of empire: it is a call to strengthen the frontier.

From a textual perspective, strengthening the Spanish presence in La Florida meant dealing with colonial stereotypes of the Indian, the original inhabitants of the land. During viceregal times "Indian" was a legal term that placed the vast diversity of indigenous people into one all-encompassing racial category to establish systems of taxation, rights, privileges, and duties. But "Indian" was also a rhetorical construct in colonial texts, a highly malleable one that was unstable and shifted according to the needs of the one employing it. For his part, Florencia imagined the native inhabitants of La Florida in much the same way as other colonial writers by interchangeably referring to them as Indians (indios), gentiles (gentiles), pagans (paganos), natives (naturales), and barbarians (bárbaros). He also based his understanding of them upon the synthesizing observations of José de Acosta in his Historia natural y moral de las Indias (1590), an important and widely-cited missionary text on American geography and indigenous customs. The Floridians, Chiriguans, Brazilians, and many other nations," according to Acosta, lived nomadically as free groups without kings or any form of organized government, occupying the lowest rung of his three-tiered classification of barbarians.

Acosta—and Florencia after him—homogenized the indigenous peoples of La Florida, assuming that they were all non-sedentary peoples. This description, however, only applies to certain Indians in the southern and central parts of modern-day Florida who lived off of hunting, gathering, and fishing. The northern regions, by contrast, were populated by sedentary peoples who, in the words of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566), were "intelligent and who lived in well-ordered and structured societies." These groups cultivated corn, beans, squash, and other crops; they formed villages with central plazas, temples, and council houses; and they developed complex political systems based upon local chiefdoms. The Spaniards placed most of their attention on these northern agriculturalists because of their proximity to Saint Augustine. They needed their food to survive as much as they were accustomed to co-opting caciques for access to tribute and labour. For these same reasons, the Jesuits and the Franciscans made few inroads into the southern parts of La Florida, preferring to concentrate their missionary efforts on the Guale, Timucua, and the Apalachee.

But regardless of where they came from and their level of sophistication, the Floridians acquired a reputation for being among the cruelest of the frontier. Las Casas tried to claim that they were "innocent and harmless natives," but colonial authors both before and after him saw things quite differently. The Spanish chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1478-1557) wrote that the Floridians were "a very austere and savage, belligerent, fierce, and untamed people." Several early explorers in the region came to similar conclusions and the martyrs of mendicant friars only fuelled images of unbridled barbarity. Several Jesuits followed these earlier descriptions, concluding that the Floridians simply had a penchant for brutality. Antonio Sedeño (1535-1595), the last Jesuit superior in La Florida, claims that "they were like beasts given over to their vices and sins," something the Jesuit historian Francesco Sacchini (1570-1625) echoes when he says that armed soldiers "restrained the natives as wild beasts." But most

57 Bartolomé de las Casas, Breve relación de la destrucción de las Indias [1542], ed. Andrés Saint-Lu (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1999), 154.
59 Las Casas, Breve relación de la destrucción de las Indias, 154.
61 Luis Jerónimo de Oré (1554-1630) wrote a short relation on missionary martyrdoms in La Florida, which he published around 1619. It was first republished as Relación histórica de la Florida escrita en el siglo XVII, ed. Anastasio López (Madrid: Imprenta de Ramona Velasco, Viuda de P. Pérez, 1851-1855), vol. 1.
62 'Pater Antonius Sedeño Fauri Francisco Borginii,' in Monumenta antequae
troubling for Florencia would have been what he read in the *Historia de las cosas más dignas*, for de Soto asserts that La Florida was "inhabited not by men but by wild and cruel savages." 63

Florencia never denied that the Floridians were barbarians, but he modified his brethren’s language—specifically de Soto’s—to emphasize their capacity for the Christian faith. By no means was he the first to defend the rationality of the Indians. In the early sixteenth century the mendicants had already had several heated discussions over the nature of indigenous peoples. As Patricia Seed points out, Spain’s political control in America rested upon their capacity for conversion to the Christian faith. 64 This is one of the reasons why Pope Paul III (1468-1549) declared Indians to be rational beings worthy of baptism in his papal bull *Sublimis Deus* (1537). But while most churchmen never seriously questioned Indian humanity after this point, by the end of the sixteenth century the initial optimism mendicant friars had of their spiritual potential had considerably waned. 65 In the early 1600s the Archbishop of Mexico, García Guerra (ca. 1560-1612), claimed that Indians were "weak" and had "little capacity" for the things of salvation. 66 His opinion was still shared by others near the end of the century, particularly by the Franciscan Agustín de Vetancurt (1620-1700), who stated that "due to their nature [Indians] are less capable than Spaniards in matters of the Christian faith." 67

Many Jesuits in the seventeenth century opposed such discouraging views of native converts. Several advocated for indigenous education by supporting their schools for caciques and by stressing native language studies over linguistic Hispanicization. A significant number even believed that cacicas were capable of living the chaste and disciplined life of enclosure alongside Spanish and creole nuns. These favourable views of Indian rationality were informed by theological emphases the Jesuits developed in the wake of the Council of Trent. Nicholas P. Cusmane explains that Jesuits in America followed Tridentine doctrines by opposing the pessimistic understanding of human nature espoused by reformers like Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564). They did not believe in natural perfectibility, but they did posit that humans—and hence "good pagans"—were capable of seeking out virtue through their own efforts. 68 Jesuits, then, often had a more positive judgement of Indians than other colonial officials and settlers. Daniel T. Reff explains that while "most Europeans believed that Indians and their cultures were fundamentally flawed rather than merely imperfect, the Jesuits assumed that Indian customs were fundamentally sound, albeit misguided." 69

Given their views of indigenous mores, Jesuits stressed their spiritual potential by punctuating their letters and Sacred histories with images of pious converts. During the baroque period "Mexican creolism acquired a distinctly Jesuit flavour," according to Peter B. Villella, "inasmuch as it increasingly emphasized the Indians’ capacity for reason." 70 Florencia follows suit in his version of the La Florida missions, making strategic changes to de Soto’s account to address his brethren’s gloomy picture of the Floridians. He begins with the death of Martínez, going to even greater lengths than de Soto to demonstrate that he was the protomartyr of the Indies. But to show that he had died in *odium fidei* (for hatred of the faith), he needed not only “barbarous” Indians but “barbarous” Indians who both understood and rejected the Christian gospel. Although few details surface in early Jesuit letters, de Soto piously imagines a conversation between Martínez and the cacique he claims was responsible for the Jesuit’s death. 71 In his account the cacique pretends to be interested in a brief explanation of Christian doctrine

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68 Cusmane, *Why Have You Come Here?*, 17-29, 44.
that Martínez offers him through an interpreter. After asking a few questions on the nature of the Trinity and the fall of humankind, the cacique, filled with rage, takes the Jesuit’s life. Florencia follows de Soto’s version in most details, but he stresses how Martínez recognized “the capacity of the cacique by his questions.”

Florencia made similar alterations to de Soto’s account of the Jesuit martyrs in the province of Ajacán. After Segura and his brethren had been killed by the Powhatans, de Soto explains how Alonso de Olmos, a Spanish boy who had accompanied the Jesuits, buried their bodies in the church they had built on their mission. Although Florencia cites the versions of other Jesuit historians, his retelling of the event is by and large the same as de Soto’s except for an important personal inclusion he places at the end of his account. Seeking to prove that the place where the Jesuits were buried was hallowed ground, Florencia recalls a conversation he had with Andrés González in Mexico City sometime in the 1640s. González was a ship captain from Saint Augustine, a “trustworthy man from La Florida” who, according to Florencia, most likely visited Ajacán personally or at least a place nearby. Florencia reasons even further that he was old enough to have known some of the soldiers who were still alive when Segura and his brethren were killed. “[T]he place where their holy bodies are buried,” he tries to explain based upon what he had heard from González, “was until that time venerated and reverenced by those barbarians, and they frequented [the site] in times of need.”

If the Floridians in Florencia’s provincial chronicle were capable of recognizing the sanctity of the burial ground of Jesuit martyrs, then clearly they were capable of becoming good Catholics. This is exactly what he seeks to highlight with two baptismal Villareal performed among the Tequesta, one a small girl and the other an aging cacica. Florencia carefully follows the details in de Soto’s account of these two females, but he adds two of his own commentaries to emphasize the role divine election played in their conversion. When referring to the baptism of the Indian girl, Florencia claims that Jesus Christ “had predestined her ab aeterno among so many reprobates!” And then after he had finished recounting the baptism of the cacica he declares that “in extraordinary ways [God] providentially looks after his chosen ones, and in the midst of the thorns of paganism, destined for the fire, he cuts two white lilies to place and transplant them in his celestial garden.” How could anyone deny the capacity of the Floridians if they were part of the elect?

Although Florencia provides a more hopeful picture of the Floridians than de Soto, he still had to address the eventual dissolution of the La Florida missions after only six years of evangelical labour. De Soto suggests that the Jesuits were forced to abandon La Florida because of the “incapacity, inconstancy, and savagery of the natives in these wide and vast provinces.” Florencia does not offer an alternative account, but he leaves “incapacity” out of his list of reasons. In this omission he was clearly concerned with both the historical reputation of the La Florida missions as a failure and changing policies in the metropolis that challenged Franciscan and Jesuit missionary practice. While they still continued to play important roles as “frontier institutions,” David J. Weber notes that in the late seventeenth century the Spanish crown began to doubt the “defensive function” of missions in both La Florida and New Mexico. He suggests that they started to rely more heavily upon soldiers because native rebellions had become extremely costly and had “rolled back the entire Spanish frontier.”

Jesuits supported the protective role of presidios in frontier regions, but similar to the mendicant friars, many of them also insisted that the Indians under their care needed to be shielded from Spanish influence. Florencia adds a telling commentary to de Soto’s narrative to explain why Segura had denied military protection in Ajacán: “[M]any times soldiers are more of an obstacle and impediment for missionaries than they are a security and peace, given the way they harass and mistreat the Indians.” Throughout his life Florencia was a promoter of missions, and his changes to de Soto’s history reflect years of experience recruiting missionaries in Seville and writing vitas about others in both northern New Spain and the Mariana Islands. He knew that finding willing volunteers

72 Florencia, Historia de la Provincia, 15.
73 Ibid., 53.
74 Ibid., 20-27.
75 Ibid., 27.
76 De Soto, Historia, ARSI, Mexicana 19, f. 26c.
77 Florencia, Historia de la Provincia, 65.
80 Florencia, Historia de la Provincia, 46.
and financial support for the “vineyard of the Lord” meant stressing favourable outcomes and the special role Jesuits played in expanding the empire, both of which were only plausible if natives were capable of conversion.

Beyond his call for continued Jesuit activity on the frontier, there was another important reason for Florencia to stress the capacity of the Floridians. Daniel S. Murphree notes that despite numerous expeditionary and colonizing failures in La Florida, several colonial writers still emphasized the natural environment and its overall potential for settlement. Viewing the land as a “mythical paradise” was a way for them to ignore their overall lack of success in the region. But for all of the glowing descriptions early explorers penned of La Florida, there were still many others who painted it as a barren wasteland of savages unfit for Spanish settlement. Another way to rationalize colonizing frustrations was to blame the Indians for the “land’s insufficiency,” which Murphree suggests was a recurring theme in colonial texts on La Florida that was usually more common during times of anxiety and turmoil for conquistadors and colonists. In other words, throughout the colonial era the presumed incapacity of the Floridians was often rhetorically linked to the supposed infertility of La Florida itself.

Although Juan Ponce de León (1474-1521) is said to have “discovered” La Florida in 1513 on the Easter of the Flowers, de Soto claims that it was “hyperbolically named this way, by fortune, in contrast to what it truly is, because it is a province exceedingly barren and dry, deprived of all provision of birds, meat, bread, fruit, [and] without foliage and any cultivation whatsoever.” This unfavourable assessment mirrors some of the things Jesuit missionaries said to their superiors in correspondence. Sedeño, for example, characterizes La Florida as one big sand bar that was “clearly the most miserable that up to this point has been discovered.” A few Franciscans shared similar views when they established their missions in La Florida because Juan de Torquemada (ca. 1562-1624)

mentions how many of his confirmeres “held the opinion that the land was poor.” It appears that not much had changed by the second half of the seventeenth century. The governor of Cuba, Francisco de Ledesma, stated in 1673 that it “is hard to get anyone to go to St. Augustine because of the horror with which Florida is painted.”

In almost an entire chapter of Book I, Florencia challenges these unflattering opinions of La Florida with a geographic description that was far more detailed and favourable than the brief survey de Soto offers in his narrative. He argues that de Soto and others with similar views “sinisterly interpret [La Florida] as an antiphrasis, saying that it suffers from infertility and that it lacks flowers and fruits; but being uncultivated is not the same as being infertile; one is the fault of the inhabitants and the other of the land.” To flesh out his point, Florencia notes how the indigenous inhabitants of the coast found that “the sea is so abundant” with fish that it was unnecessary to plant crops for their sustenance. Other Indians in the hinterland avoided farming by turning to livestock because they had “free access to meat in abundance.” Instead of blaming the Indians for the seeming lack of fertility, Florencia argues that they simply failed to properly exploit the bounty of the land. To bolster his claims he draws upon his personal experience, declaring that those who believe that the region is infertile “deceive themselves (se engañan) completely because this land is of the most fertile and fecund of all America, of which I am a witness, along with all others who have lived there.”

Turning to eyewitness testimony, as Rolena Adorno has demonstrated with the conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1495-ca. 1583), was a way to bolster one’s moral authority in the New World. But sacred historians also looked to other “authorities”

82 De Soto, Historia, ARSI, Mexicana 19, f. 3r. For a similar commentary on the name of La Florida, see Agustín Dávila Padilla, Historia de la fundación y discurso de la Provincia de Santiago de México, de la Orden de Predicadores, por las vidas de sus varones insignes, y casos notables de Nueva España (Madrid: Pedro Madrigal, 1699), 190.
83 “Pater Antonius Sedeño Patri Francisco Borgiae,” in Monumenta antiquae Floridæ, 424.
86 Florencia, Historia de la Provincia, 8.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 9.
89 Ibid.
90 Rolena Adorno, “The Discursive Encounter of Spain and America: The
to provide legitimacy to their own writings. In Florencia’s case, he, much like Sigüenza y Góngora, drew upon the work of the mestizo humanist El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), suggesting that “the truth concerning this sinister opinion [on the land] will be revealed (se desengañará) to the one who has read the Historia de la Florida.”

Garcilaso was born in Cuzco to an Incan princess and Spanish conquistador, but in his early twenties he travelled to Spain where he lived in Montilla and Cordoba writing about the history of America. After sifting through a series of relations and conversing with a few soldiers who had returned from La Florida, Garcilaso published a highly imaginative account of Hernando de Soto’s (ca. 1500-1542) 1539 expedition in the region. In his preface to La Florida del Inca (1605) he tries to convince the Spanish crown that the “bad name that this land has for being infertile and swampy” was unfounded, which is why he encourages “Spain to subdue and populate” La Florida “because it is a fertile land that is abundant with everything necessary for human life.”

Garcilaso’s inviting portrait suited Florencia’s needs perfectly. While the two were writing almost a century apart, they were both addressing imperial encroachment and the fortification of the frontier. They were both looking to present La Florida as an attractive destination for colonists. Similar to the mestizo historian, Florencia compares La Florida to Spain, stating that the earth brings forth “many fruits that those of the most abundant lands of Castile bear” and that there are “other fruits that are very seasoned, of good taste, and typical of the land that are not found in Castile.” He further explains that once people began to cultivate the fields of La Florida they yielded “all kinds of fruits from Spain” that are “so good that the Spaniards themselves put them before those of their own lands.” But he also believed that even without large scale cropping, the land was a generous provider to its inhabitants. Diego de Soto claims, for example, that Villarreal suffered for “many months of the year” without “any more than a little wild fruit, in small quantity, and other roots and herbs.”

Turning to an example from the surviving members of Hernando de Soto’s expedition, Florencia concludes, as Garcilaso had before him, that the fact that an army of almost eight hundred men had lacked nothing to eat in more than three years was “proof (and I include this objection in passing to those who observe without reason the infertility of the land) of the abundance of provisions that La Florida offers.”

While good soil and abundant crops were indeed important drawing cards for settlers, more than anything Florencia knew that bullion was the principal magnet attracting people to the Indies. Although mining was never profitable in La Florida, James Axtell notes that the “Floridians’ reworking of salvaged gold and silver led Spanish conquistadors and sailors to conclude that it was a land rich in precious metals, ripe for the picking.” Garcilaso fosters this image of mineral wealth in La Florida del Inca and Florencia follows suit in the Historia de la Provincia. “The fact that the Spaniards have not returned to this province nor made the efforts to discover mines of silver and gold is not a defect of the land,” the Jesuit strategically and patriotically reasons, “simply the time has not yet arrived in which God wants to make use of these treasures for the ends of his service and the profit of the Catholic Monarchy.”

These untold riches, like the ones in other mines across northern New Spain, were now at risk of being lost to the French and the English. As a chilling reminder of the danger, Florencia notes that it was “more than eighty years ago that the English populated” the very place where Segura and his companions had been buried.

The past clearly blurred into the present for Florencia, which is why it is telling that he stresses the suitability of several ports along the coast of La Florida and the island of Cuba. He claims that there are rich woodlands surrounding Saint Augustine, filled with the “best wood to craft ships” and “masts from pines as in Flanders.”

He also notes that Havana was home to “the best [port] that the
Spanish Monarchy has” and that in the province of Ajácan they are “very large, very capacious, and very secure from all winds.”\textsuperscript{102} Florencia did not live to see the day, but a new fort was established in Pensacola Bay by 1698, thanks in part to the work of Sigüenza y Góngora. But despite these efforts the British eventually wreaked havoc on Franciscan missions in the early part of the eighteenth century, putting an end to more than a century of evangelical labour. La Florida was lost to the British, regained for a time, and then eventually succeeded to the United States. Given its remoteness, frontier position, and later absorption into a newly forming country, the colonial history of La Florida has not always found a proper historiographic home. For creoles like Florencia and Sigüenza y Góngora, it was part of their patria and they described it with pride and argued for its protection.

Conclusion

Florencia was an eyewitness to the fertility of La Florida as a young boy, but he could not say the same thing for the La Florida missions. The Jesuits had left the region decades before he was born in Saint Augustine, forcing him to rely almost entirely on the work of de Soto to reconstruct his account of events from the late 1560s and early 1570s. Since the \textit{Historia de la Provincia} is a derivative source, scholars have ignored the text in studies on colonial Florida. Indeed, Florencia’s provincial chronicle is often dismissed because he is frequently depicted as a careless and credulous religious scholar who got his “facts” wrong because he was far too fixated on prodigious wonders. But as this study has shown, entirely dismissing the contents of the \textit{Historia de la Provincia} would be a grave mistake, for while it does not shed new light on the La Florida missions it still illuminates the historical memory of both Jesuits and creoles concerned with the overall state of the Spanish empire during a period of crisis in the late seventeenth century. Comparisons between Florencia’s \textit{Historia de la Provincia} and de Soto’s \textit{Historia de las cosas más dignas} highlight La Florida’s central yet vulnerable place within the Atlantic world as imperial tensions were rising.

The “strong sense” of crisis that creoles felt during the reign of Carlos II, according to Anna More, “lent a distinct aura of urgency to their writings.”\textsuperscript{103} The possibility of a shrinking frontier meant that La Florida played an important role in the creole imaginary, which is why texts like Florencia’s provincial chronicle need to be more fully considered in scholarship on creole patriotism. His peripheral role is somewhat surprising, not only because of his large corpus of writings but because Sigüenza y Góngora—hailed as a creole patriot \textit{par excellence}—crowned him as the “glory of our creole nation.”\textsuperscript{104} Florencia earned this title because he developed a grand vision of his patria in his sacred histories, one that was providentially blessed with fertile soil, miraculous shrines, and multiethnic saints. La Florida was a part of this vision, as it should be for scholars today looking to uncover how creoles understood their land and history during the baroque period. But in order to do this one needs to leave behind modern nationalities in the borderlands when studying the frontiers of colonial territories and identities. As the Mexican historian and philosopher Edmundo O’Gorman once said, “the Novohispano is no longer a Spaniard, but he is not yet Mexican.”\textsuperscript{105} In Florencia’s case, one needs to add that the Novohispano is not yet “American” either.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 22, 45.
\textsuperscript{104} Sigüenza y Góngora, \textit{Libra astronómica y filosófica}, 4.
\textsuperscript{105} Edmundo O’Gorman, \textit{Meditaciones sobre el criolloismo. Discurso de ingreso en la Academia Mexicana Correspondiente de la Española} (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios de Historia de México, Conimex, 1979), 31, n. 7.