

THE BORDERLANDS REVISITED

THE HISPANIC PRESENCE IN FLORIDA: YESTERDAY AND TODAY, 1513–1976. Edited by JOSÉ AGUSTÍN BALSEIRO. (Miami, Fla.: E. A. Seemann Publishing, Inc., 1977. Pp. 160. \$8.95)

THE ENTERPRISE OF FLORIDA: PEDRO MENÉNDEZ DE AVILÉS AND THE SPANISH CONQUEST OF 1565–1568. By EUGENE LYON. (Gainesville: The University Presses of Florida, 1976. Pp. 253. \$10.00.)

Leaving William Hickling Prescott and Washington Irving aside (not an easy pair to shove out of view, we must admit), one can discern the origins of Latin American studies in the nineteenth-century territorial accretions to the continental United States. Once we had absorbed Texas, Florida, New Mexico, Arizona, and California in the first half of the century, we proceeded to explore their history and cultures in the second; Hubert Howe Bancroft laid the foundations for Herbert Eugene Bolton, and Bolton inspired and presided over an explosion of research and interest in the Borderlands and beyond in the twentieth. There is probably not a practicing Latin American historian today who has not been taught or associated with a first-, second-, or third-generation Boltonian scholar, many of whom ultimately spread their interests far and wide from the old Spanish frontiers in North America. While Borderlands studies today represent only a relatively small element in the wide spectrum of Latin American studies, the old calling still strongly attracts many people—academic and otherwise—who continue to refine historical knowledge and clarify new dimensions of the Borderlands as they appear. Eugene Lyon's *Pedro Menéndez de Avilés* is an example of the former, while José Agustín Balseiro's *The Hispanic Presence in Florida* brings together a mixed bag of offerings.

Lyon's work is a superior study. If there is a central theme to this book it is that Pedro Menéndez's effort in the 1560s was not simply a reflexive and defensive action to oust the French and protect that sensitive northern flank of the Spanish Empire; it was a full-fledged effort to expand Spanish control, establish a major new colony for Spain, and bring to Menéndez the security and glory that he felt he truly merited. In support of this theory the author noted (p. 56) that Menéndez's contract for the conquest and population of Florida was drawn up and signed (15–20 March 1565) *before* the news of René de Laudonniere's successful expedition to the Florida coast reached Philip II at Madrid (30 March 1565). Jean Ribaut's earlier efforts in 1562–63 at Port Royal, South Carolina (Santa Elena) were known, but this attempted colony had been abandoned by 1564. The news of Fort Caroline added urgency and strength to the Menéndez expedition which ultimately ousted the French and led to the establishment of St. Augustine in 1565.

A secondary theme, woven into the text with great skill, might be entitled "The Business of Conquest; or How to Cajole the Tight Merchants of Seville into Advancing the Greatest Credit." Given the dramatic stage and the heroic charac-

ters involved in the major scenes to this story—the Matanzas Bay massacre representing the most electric moment—Lyon faced a formidable task in his goal of describing the economic undergirding that supported the grandstanding performers. Nevertheless, we are presented with a brilliant piece of historical homework based on long years of tedious research in the archives of the Old and New Worlds. Especially noteworthy is the detailed analysis of the royal and private expenses incurred in the preparation of the expedition, which incidentally revealed the strong personal and familial ties that bound so many of the expeditionaries and its sponsors together. Lyon also describes the almost constant haggling between Menéndez, the Crown, the Council of the Indies, the Casa de la Contratación, and the merchants of Seville (represented largely through the *consulado*, or merchants' guild) over contracts, debts, credits, and many problems of a similar variety. Indeed, the Adelantado of Florida and Captain-General of the Indies Fleet spent not a few nights in the jail of Seville, thrown in by the powerful commercial overlords of Andalucía. Only the repeated exhortations and finally direct orders from the Council and the Crown were able to spring the distinguished guest. Whatever the merits of these revelations, they do rather persuasively portray the almost complete willingness of the Spanish nobility to get involved fully in financial affairs, business deals, and other prosaic tasks that later generations would learn to despise as demeaning. This attitude was certainly not shared by the men who carved out the Empire in the sixteenth century.

The well-known story of the establishment of Spanish Florida is told ably: Ribaut and Menéndez racing across the Atlantic to America; the founding of St. Augustine; the destruction of Fort Caroline, etc. Even describing these episodes Lyon focuses on the practical problems that Menéndez faced—a hurricane en route, desertion, shipwreck, and the constant nuisance of obtaining cash and credit. On the Spanish elimination of the French at Matanzas Bay, Lyon regrettably has little to add by way of explaining Menéndez's ambiguous promises to the French who surrendered and were then put to the sword (pp. 125–26). It might have been enlightening to hear Lyon's interpretation of this strange butchery that reeked of Old World rivalries played out on the sands of the pristine New World.

My first note on Balseiro's introduction to *The Hispanic Presence in Florida* reads "this is a rambling, romantic string of vignettes, memories, poems and historical snitches loosely bound by the theme of Florida." The description is just as apt for the book and its contents which range from a delightful string of folktales to polemics on Castro's Cuba. Interspersed are a candidly scatological statement of one colonial's thoughts on life in St. Augustine, an erotic poem, and a prediction of Miami's economic status in the year 2000.

The production of this volume was catalyzed by the Bicentennial spirit that triggered an avalanche of works on everything you wanted to know about Revolutionary America and more. Balseiro lamented that "Little or nothing is known by Americans in general of her [Spain's] important participation in the aid for independence of the first republic of the New World." This represents a bit of exaggeration (hyperbole being the hallmark of Bicentennial literature)

since historians have always possessed a strong inkling that Spain participated in the war along with France. Nonetheless, the publication of new monographs and collections of documents by the Spanish government certainly can be counted upon as an asset to scholarly knowledge that surely owes its inspiration to the Bicentennial spirit.* Balseiro's introduction furthermore affords us a different view of the American experience—one from the Hispanic-American perspective. This then is the theme that unifies the work, for every contributor presents a different tile in the Florida mosaic of culture and history, and the Hispanic presence in Florida has indeed been long and enduring.

Vicente Morga's essay on Ponce de León, William M. Straight's on medicine in the colonial period, and Charles Arnade's on Florida during the Revolution are all good historical tracts based on a thorough knowledge of the authors' chosen subjects. Morga's article is largely extracted from his *Juan Ponce de León* (San Juan, P.R., 1959) and presents a useful, albeit disjointed, collection of facts and incidents relating to Ponce de León and his times. Straight's short exegesis on medicine basically contends that the frontier nature of St. Augustine for most of its history under Spain prevented the establishment of any decent medical facilities. Indeed, slaves and prisoners were most often the caretakers in the small, understaffed clinics supported by alms, small subsidies from the Crown, and regular deductions from the garrison's salaries (the earliest form of social security in America?). In fact, the wretched conditions in the colony prompted one long-suffering governor, Juan Márquez Cabrera, to abandon Florida in 1680 for Havana in search of decent physicians and more accommodating priests (apparently no priest in St. Augustine would confess the cantankerous governor). His famous remark upon being warned of his perilous decision in the eyes of the Crown: "S—t on St. Augustine; the King and Queen can go to hell!" Obviously the Florida envisioned by Pedro Menéndez over a century earlier had not panned out in the eyes of one Spaniard at least.

Arnade reviews the highlights of the revolutionary period. Notwithstanding the significance of the able campaign that captured West Florida for Spain, the war was won or lost in the thirteen rebellious colonies to the north. In East Florida the only event of any occasion throughout the entire period was the arrival of a group of patriot prisoners. However, they were no ordinary prisoners. They included three signers of the Declaration of Independence and other men from the upper tier of South Carolina society who had been captured after the disastrous reverse at Charleston. They stayed in St. Augustine for approximately a year and stirred up some intrigue. However, few rebellious sentiments surfaced in this colony so far removed from the pains that had shaken the colonies to the north into a revolutionary ferment.

*See the *Documentos relativos a la independencia de Norteamérica existentes en archivos españoles* 1 (part 1 and 2), 3 (part 1 and 2), 5 (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1976); Luis Ángel García Melero, *La independencia de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica a través de la prensa española* ("Gaceta de Madrid" y "Mercurio Histórico y Político"), *Los precedentes, 1763–1776* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1976); Elena Sánchez-Fabrés Mirat, *Situación histórica de las Floridas en la segunda mitad del siglo xviii, 1783–1819: los problemas de una región de frontera* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 1976).

R. S. Bogg's piece, "Mosaic of Traditional Culture," and Rosa M. Abella's "The Cultural Presence of the Cuban Exile in Miami" share the word culture in their titles, but little else ties them together. Boggs has gathered a delightful string of folktales—Indian, Hispanic, and Anglo-American—while Abella's account is a tourist-guide, chamber-of-commerce approach to the accomplishments of the Cuban community in Miami. A stilted and unfelicitous translation of the original in Spanish did not help. Antonio Jorge's piece on the economy of Miami-Dade County focuses much more effectively on the economic contributions of the Cuban community to that great southern metropolis. Basically, "the population variable [i.e. growth], together with other economic factors, has produced growth in all areas of the economy" (p. 150). A continuation of this trend is predicted, especially as Miami's ties, the *enlaces* with the rest of Latin America, become more and more important as the century proceeds to its end.

Carlos Ripoll's interpretation of José Martí's attitude toward the basic documents of American government, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, is very instructive. Martí was the most perceptive Hispanic admirer and critic of American people and the country's institutions in the nineteenth century, and Ripoll captures well his unceasing respect and devotion to the principles—especially those committed to the preservation and extension of freedom—embodied into the Independence era documents. Ripoll sensibly keeps the reader aware that Martí viewed the United States through two distinct prisms, yet his admiration for the basic statements of the country's ideals never wavered.

The inclusion of an essay on José Martí seems perfectly appropriate and reflective of Borderlands studies today. The net is cast much wider and the techniques are multiple. Would Bolton—or any other of his generation for that matter—have recognized "regression analysis?" Some of the most advanced techniques available to social scientists in the realm of quantification have, for example, been used by Paul E. Hoffman in his study *Precedent, Patrimonialism and Parsimony: A History of the Defense of the Spanish West Indies, 1535–1585*, which will soon be published by Louisiana State University Press. Indeed, the term "borderlands" now has been supplanted in some cases by "frontier" studies, "Chicano" studies, "gulf" studies and other subdisciplines and categories employed to describe what happened or is happening in the southern corolla of the North American continent from Florida to California that once knelt before the Spanish sword and the Spanish faith. Minute specialization has atomized the field almost beyond recognition, although relatively recent works by such scholars as Abraham P. Nasatir, *Borderland in Retreat: From Spanish Louisiana to the Far Southwest* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1976), Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1975), and Janet Fireman, *The Spanish Royal Corps of Engineers in the Western Borderlands, 1764–1815: Instrument of Bourbon Reform* (Glendale, Cal., 1977) still preserve intact the unity of the historical borderlands, which began with Spain's presence in the sixteenth century and ended with her retreat in the nineteenth.

The relative increase of Hispanic or Spanish-speaking peoples in the United States has furthermore catalyzed a salutary renaissance in this field,

which languished in the forties and fifties. It is perhaps ironic that the forces of modernization and homogenesis (hurried along by radio, television, and shared life styles such as the relatively sophisticated adoption of common political ideologies to the simple extension of the Coca Cola sect) have contributed more to the theme of a Greater America than all of the teaching and proselytizing done by Bolton and his colleagues in the 1920s and 1930s. The challenge is to extend our horizons to incorporate the many different peoples and cultures that contributed to and continue to swell and diversify the American experience in the hemispheric sense of the word. Elizabeth A. H. John's massive (over eight hundred pages) study, *Storms Brewed in Other Men's Worlds: The Confrontation of Indians, Spanish and French in the Southwest, 1540–1795* (College Station, Texas, 1975) displays a sensitive (and thoroughly documented) understanding of the polycultural frontier society that developed so fitfully in the American Southwest. Francis Jennings's *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1975) is a remarkable book by an ethnohistorian on the impact of the first Europeans on American Indians. Although largely set in New England, Jennings roams over the complete early American experience to firm up his interpretations, part of which compellingly indict European competition as one of the major causes of the Indian destruction.

The borders of the Borderlands have been irreversibly widened with benefits for all. While Spain receded in the nineteenth century, her progeny have arrived in the twentieth. Listen to the street language of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami. Plymouth Rock and the Puritan workers may indeed have been the cornerstones of this country, but pluralism and its preservation is an equally cherished principle. Borderlands studies, be they narrowly or widely conceived, are indispensable clarifiers of our past and future condition as a mixed people.

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