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James G. Cusick. *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. Figures + maps + notes + bibliography + index. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2648-0.

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One of the most overlooked events in early nineteenth century Florida history is the so-called “Patriot War” fought from 1812 to 1814. Frontiersmen from both sides of the tense Florida-Georgia border attempted by force of arms to seize Spanish East Florida and join it to the United States with little delay. While the filibustering enterprise ultimately failed, mostly due to the withdrawal of American military support from the rebels, the incident was not without consequences for both regions. Subsequent occurrences and forces would make the American annexation of all of Spanish Florida a reality by 1821. While historians like Rembert Patrick and more recently Joseph B. Smith have explored the Patriot War, James G. Cusick has finally produced an expertly researched account that puts this conflict in the greater context of Southern and borderlands history.

The new American republic entertained interest in both East and West Florida almost from the beginning, and leaders could hardly fail to see the peninsula’s strategic importance in relation to the Gulf of Mexico and the mouth of the Mississippi River. Attempts to purchase parts or the entire region from Madrid had floundered despite serious work from the representatives of the Jefferson Administration. Secretary of State and future president James Madison harbored an ardent desire to secure these vital lands from a weakening Spain and thus deny them to the most energetic and dangerous Great Britain. Madison’s expansionist foreign policy clearly manifested itself in 1810 with covert support for an uprising of American settlers in the Baton Rouge district of West Florida. The Virginian and his chief diplomat, James Monroe, did, however, undercut the revolutionaries thereby declaring that the United States already owned the area as a part of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase (a dubious claim) and

was now in the process of taking possession seven years later. The success of this ploy emboldened Madison and his men with the notion that the rest of Florida could be plucked just as easily and with only marginal justification. Cusick agrees with other historians of this era that the young United States was beginning to move away from negotiating with other countries to purchase lands to simply taking them by force as a part of its national fate. Indeed the prelude to manifest destiny can be found in the Floridas.[1]

By 1811, Congress passed an act authorizing the government to move on the rest of Florida without delay. General George Matthews, a well-known figure on the U.S.-Florida border, also received a commission issued by the Madison Administration to work toward this ultimate goal. Soon Matthews used his considerable contacts to line up support for a coup d’etat against Spanish authorities headquartered in Saint Augustine. He also recruited Georgians for the cause with promises of glory and generous land grants for veterans of the expedition. These “Patriots” believed they had a considerable amount of American military support in the form of naval vessels and regular army units. In a scenario strangely similar to the future Bay of Pigs operation, these insurgents felt secure in the thought that with American armed might behind them they could not fail.

Their invasion kicked off on March 17, 1812 when the Patriots’ little army, supported by U.S. Navy gunboats, captured the port of Fernandina and Amelia Island. Soon the rebel forces moved southward to Saint Augustine in hopes of taking the Ancient City quickly and thereby ending Spanish rule in East Florida. However the solid walls of the old Castillo de San Marcos and an

energetic defense by the Spanish and their allies stymied this effort and lead to a long frustrating siege. In short order however complaints about the obvious American involvement with the Patriots surfaced in Washington, and combined with growing tensions with the British to encourage critics to attack President Madison. As pressure grew Madison and Monroe decided to cut their loses and rescind Matthews' orders and order the removal of all land and sea forces back to American territory. The Patriots soon found themselves very alone and deep in an increasingly hostile country.

One of the most compelling sections of *The Other War of 1812* has to deal with the various interactions between Patriots, Spanish loyalists, Native Americans, and African Americans. East Florida had long been a safe haven for runaway slaves, and thus a major point of contention with its slaveholding neighbors across the international border. Also the long-standing Spanish practice of enlisting blacks into their local militia and providing them with weapons and training did little to calm Southern fears. Cusick chronicles the support African Americans gave their Spanish leaders when the time came to repel the Patriots, as well as their suffering as they faced possible re-enslavement at the hands of the marauding freebooters. Race indeed was an underlying factor in much of the Patriot War, and the author points out that it only fueled future conflict in the area.

Race certainly influenced how Florida's Native Americans reacted to the events of 1812 and beyond. The Seminoles, now calling the peninsula home, had no desire to see an American invasion put their tribal lands, their cattle, and their way of life at risk. As author Cusick points out it was not difficult for them to enter the battle on the Spanish side. After bitter fighting however the Patriot War did little to benefit the natives, as white settlers would eventually take advantage of wartime disruptions and penetrate deep into central Florida lands like those in the Alachua country. >From this frontier foothold Anglos would and did push the Seminoles farther down the Florida peninsula and in time see their defeat and removal westward. Of course the presence of Africans in the Seminole ranks and maroon settlements on their lands only heightened white desires to strike at them without hesitation or mercy.

As time dragged on military movements during the Patriot War slowed to raids, counter-raids, and dull camp life filled with hunger, disease, and death. Cusick de-

scribes it as a campaign turned to "stagnation, inactivity, and boredom, without even the excitement of a skirmish or an exchange to alleviate dull routine" (p. 194). Inactivity is always the enemy of good military order and caused many Patriot irregulars to loot and pillage the plantations and farms of friend and foe alike all up and down the Saint Johns River. With the outbreak of the greater War of 1812 in June the unpleasant campaign became little more than a sideshow to the widening war. By the spring of the following year a general retreat of rebels forces from East Florida began and within twelve months the Patriot group collapsed and quickly faded from historical memory.

Cusick concludes his study with the argument that the actions of the Patriot War prove that the War of 1812, contrary to some scholars, was indeed an aggressive conflict all about territorial gain. However, this idea would have come as no surprise to Southern "war hawks" like Henry Clay who stated in the fall of 1810 "my hope to see, ere long, the new United States (if you allow me the expression) embracing not only the old thirteen colonies, but the entire country west of the Mississippi, including East Florida..." [2]. The author does note the irony of how "the Patriot War accomplished one thing the War of 1812 failed to do- it brought new territory into the American confederation" (p. 296). The two-year struggle, in his view, set the stage for subsequent events that removed Florida from Spanish ownership and spawned conflicts with the Seminoles and their black allies well into the 1850s.

The Other War of 1812 retells an interesting tale of a seminal moment in both Florida and Southern history. Its research is solid, and it raises important questions about race, culture, and political ideology that both historians and lay readers will want to ponder. It rates a place on the thankfully growing list of essential Florida history titles.

Notes

[1]. For example see Robert A. Taylor, "Prelude to Manifest Destiny: The United States and West Florida, 1810-1811," *Gulf Coast Historical Review* Spring 1992, pp. 20-35.

[2]. Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), p. 66.

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