From Charlesfort to Jamestown: French and English Imperial Efforts in Early American History

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From Charlesfort to Jamestown: French and English Imperial Efforts in Early American History

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Between 1562 and 1565, French Protestants made several attempts to fortify and claim the southeastern coast of North America, or La Florida. These attempts failed and have been largely forgotten. However, these French activities were deeply connected to English settlement efforts that occurred in the same region soon after, efforts that are commonly viewed as the beginning of modern America. As such, they are part of a complex and important historical narrative. European powers created and adapted languages of power to create new imperial communications, and these events in Florida played a significant role in that development. Through examining the interconnectivity of these colonial forays, this essay will examine how French and English imperial efforts in the second half of the sixteenth century both reflected and shaped inter-imperial relations and conceptions of enacted sovereignty.
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Introduction

In the summer of 1562, Captain Jean Ribault stood somewhere on what is now the South Carolina coast and gave a stirring speech to the men under his command as they were facing “the greatest opportunity that you will ever have to advance yourselves and your honor.” These men were part of the first French attempt to establish a lasting presence in North America, an effort to set up a stronghold on the Florida coast to challenge Spanish claims over the area. Ribault invoked the example of many Romans who “triumphed by their own work rather than by greatness of their parentage” and helped Rome come to rule the world. And, in a rousing conclusion, Ribault implored his men to “remember that for this you will always be revered as those who were the first to live in this strange land…I promise you to bring your names so forcefully to the ears of the king and the princes that your fame shall hereafter shine inextinguishably in the heart of France.”¹ Starting with this expedition, Europeans became a constant presence on the Atlantic coast of the continent. Or, as congressman-turned-historian Charles Bennett writes, “Thus began the permanent settlement by Europeans within the present limits of the United States.”² Yet the settlement at Charlesfort was abandoned, destroyed, and largely forgotten for centuries.

Spain viewed the southeastern coast of North America as under Spanish imperial possession, but neither France nor England accepted this claim. Between

² Bennett, “Introduction” in Three Voyages; René Laudonnière, Charles E. Bennett, ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), xvi.
1561 and 1565, French-sponsored attempts to settle on the coast of what they called “Terra Florida” floundered and failed. These attempts were geographically divided into two main efforts: the first on what is now Parris Island in South Carolina where soldiers and sailors established Charlesfort. The second effort occurred near present-day Jacksonville, Florida and consisted of a larger group of men and, eventually, some women and children at a fortification named Fort Caroline. Both of these attempts suffered strain and disorder, often due to dependence on France for reinforcements which, when slow in coming, caused a reliance on local Native Americans that lead to frayed relations and, often, violence. Charlesfort failed due to lack of reinforcements, while Fort Caroline lasted long enough to be destroyed in a Spanish attack. Similarly, the first significant English effort to establish a presence in North America, at Roanoke in 1585 failed due to lack of reinforcement from England, and both Roanoke and Jamestown existed in perpetual fear of Spanish attack. In The Jamestown Project, historian Karen Kupperman argued that “Laudonnière’s colony endured the classic experiences of early colonization: a breakdown of order and purpose in the men, who found life in America far different from their expectations; the onset of debilitating diseases, which attacked the commander among others; and worsening relations with the Timucuans, who resisted pressure to provide the French with food.”

Charlesfort and Fort Caroline set the mold, in some ways, for the classic narrative arc that historians have come to expect from these early colonial ventures.

American founding myths loom large in the national imagination, usually starting with the “Lost Colony” of Roanoke, moving through Jamestown and to the

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Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. Americans often remain unaware of earlier colonial activities in the same areas, while American historians have traditionally limited their study to within the parameters of this common narrative. In recent generations, the discipline of Early American History has expanded forwards and backwards across time, stretched across the Atlantic and even to the Pacific, opened to theoretical discussions on the concepts of empire, race, gender, and colonization, and made vast strides towards including Native Americans, and African Americans, in these new perspectives. American history is no longer confined to the continent of America or to the powerful men who have been credited with creating the United States. But often, discussion of American history has been divided by empire and language. English, French, and Spanish efforts on the North American continent remain, often, in separate texts.

These lingering separations have led to lasting misconceptions about American history. Ideas batted about in academia flow into popular histories and school systems, ideally bringing new perspectives and ideas to Americans’ self-perceptions. But, because American historians largely research and publish in English, these stories remain limited to the activities of the English, and therefore only starting, at best, in the 1580s. The Spanish and the French were in the area that became the United States, and in surprisingly large numbers, years before the English arrived. The legendary “Lost Colony” of Roanoke regularly appears in American popular culture, a combination myth and ghost story yet American imaginations are not similarly captured by the accounts of Spanish shipwrecks scattering gold from Florida to the Carolinas or the tales of Spanish survivors of these disasters.
disappearing into the continent, living with the Indians they encounter. Spanish expeditions, led by men such as Coronado and de Soto, did not lead to Spanish settlement in North America, but their interactions with the Native Americans, especially the violent clashes, left a decided imprint on the Spanish idea of America and Native American ideas of Europeans. Bennett argues that, due to the spectacular failures of many of these expeditions, Spanish leaders considered cutting off any imperial efforts north of Mexico but changed their minds when they heard of the 1562 French expedition. The English soon followed, perhaps desiring not to be left behind completely, especially as accounts of expeditions in America became widely published in England towards the end of the 16th century.

In *The Jamestown Project*, historian Karen Kupperman examined these pre-Jamestown colonial attempts as they reflected and shaped European actions up to and through 1607. In discussing the many colorful characters in each of these dramas, Kupperman emphasized the "tangled world in which these actors moved," drawing out the careers of many who moved between the Americas, Africa, and the metropole frequently, men whose lives often included unclear allegiance, surprising alliances, and, most notably, remarkable adaptability. According to Kupperman's analysis, "the

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4 Roanoke has been heavily mythologized in popular culture. In the past few years, for example, versions of legends based on the lost colonists at Roanoke have appeared on two popular television shows based on magic and folklore: Supernatural and Sleepy Hollow; Stories of such shipwrecks appear in both Jean Ribault and René Goulaine de Laudonnière's accounts of their expeditions. Karen Kupperman also includes many examples in *The Jamestown Project*, discussing how the "fate...of the thousands shipwrecked or otherwise marooned on American shores, is unrecorded, presumably those who survived melted into Indian Life." Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 88.

5 Bennett, "Introduction" in *Three Voyages*, xvi.

6 For more information on English awareness of these expeditions, see Peter C. Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise: An Elizabethan Obsession for an English America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
ability to read cues in the environment and respond to changing circumstances marked those who succeeded; presumably the countless unknown others who are lost to history were either unlucky or slow to adapt.”

Legal scholar Lauren Benton drew similar conclusions, but on a much larger and less personal scale. She argued that empires “composed a fabric that was full of holes, stitched together out of pieces, a tangle of strings.” Those engaged in imperial projects, then, had to navigate these tangles and had to build lives out of this daunting confusion. Because of the inherently tangled nature of such enterprises, any attempts to sever these actions from those that occur later at Roanoke and Jamestown must be artificial, and the reoccurring connections between the empires and lives of those involved show just how false that long-standing divide has been.

The actions of the French, English, and Spanish surrounding the French settlements of Charlesfort and Fort Caroline show to what extent the actors of each empire were keenly aware of these complex jurisdictions. In the context of imperial expansion, competition defined inter-imperial attitudes. When one power gained control over the land or influence among the natives, others could either force them out, possibly at great expense, or hope that these gains did not last. Influence meant more resources, which in turn would be used to gain more territory and more influence. France, England, and Spain watched each other very closely, seeing every incremental gain for one as a blow to the others. Using the concept Benton articulates as “legal posturing,” the people involved in these ventures tried to create and express

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sovereignty through specific, often ceremonial, acts. Patricia Seed further analyzed how the logic behind different forms of posturing, specifically ceremonies, was rarely articulated by those involved, as they assumed the meaning was understood. Therefore, much of this essay will be devoted to explaining and articulating various examples of legal posturing and the possible motives behind them. Of course, we cannot know the direct intent of any action. Yet, through focusing on accounts produced by each of these actors and seeing how they framed or explained their behavior, we can begin to glimpse some of their probable logic. Furthermore, through examining the actual as well as perceived overlap between French and English colonial efforts in this time and place, this essay will provide further support for Benton’s idea of tangled empires, and better articulate how these particular ventures should not be forced apart in further study. Looked at together, the events on the coast of La Florida between 1560 and 1607 reveal stunning overlaps and parallels and prove how tangled and unsure imperial sovereignty was at this point in American history, and how different European imperial actors perceived, expressed, and attempted to create control in the midst of these tangled events. Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and Jamestown have traditionally been viewed as separate projects but were in fact deeply connected through geography, people, and goals. More than that, these colonial efforts share a role in the complex development of the nascent international language and law of imperial sovereignty and in the ever-shifting international diplomacy between European powers in the second half of the sixteenth century.

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In the 1560s, Admiral de Coligny, a powerful Huguenot leader, sought to establish a permanent French presence in Florida. He found support in Catherine de Medici, the Queen Mother who ruled as regent for her young son Charles IX. France had not yet devolved into internal religious war but tensions were high between Catholics and Protestants. Catherine sought to ensure peace and a stable kingdom for her son through moderation, with moderate Protestant Coligny as an ally. Coligny hoped that uniting against Spain could override any religious divisions within France. On February 18, 1562, he had achieved his wish when a fleet under the command of Jean Ribault departed France with the stated goal of receiving “rich and inestimable commodities as other nations have don, by taking in hand such farre navegacions, both to the honnour and praise of theire Kinges and prynces, and to the increase of great proffite and use of their comon wealthes.” Ribault’s ships reached Florida in late April, finding the St. John’s River on May 1st and naming it the River of May. He placed a stone column featuring the royal coat of arms on a bluff overlooking the river, announcing to anyone familiar with that symbol exactly who this land now belonged to. Heading north, and naming rivers after those he knew in France, Ribault eventually reached the body of water now called Port Royal Sound.

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10 For a helpful summary of religious conflict in sixteenth-century France, see Mack P. Holt, The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). This text was originally published in 1995 and a second edition in 2005. For discussions of Catherine de Medici’s moderation and relationship with Coligny, see chapters 1 and 2.


an estuary in Beaufort County, South Carolina. There, Ribault raised another column.

Leaving only twenty-six men behind, on June 11, Ribault returned to France with the majority of his force, including his lieutenant René de Goulaine de Laudonnière. There, he hoped to gather support, supplies, and reinforcements. The small group left behind built and named Charlesfort. Due to a lack of their own food supplies, this group leaned heavily on trade with the local Native Americans. This persistent reliance stressed the Indians' resources and taxed their goodwill, while the relations inside Charlesfort deteriorated into chaos, mutiny, and murder. The men rebelled against their appointed leader, Captain Albert de la Pierria, for his strictness, eventually killing him after he banished one of the soldiers. Finally, after over a year of waiting for reinforcements from France that never came, a small group of survivors constructed a makeshift boat to return to France. Despite starvation and at least one incidence of cannibalism during the voyage, the men were picked up by an English ship and eventually returned to France.¹³

When they returned to France, Ribault, Laudonnière, and their men found a country in the midst of the first French War of Religion that began in March 1562. Ribault himself fought with Protestant rebels against the government siege of Dieppe.¹⁴ After the city fell, he traveled to England, both to avoid punishment and to garner support for a return voyage from Queen Elizabeth I. As a powerful Protestant ruler, she seemed to be Ribault's best hope for aid. Intrigued by the possibilities of Florida, Queen Elizabeth gave her approval, and preparations began to send a small

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¹³ The most complete timeline of these events can be found in the introduction to Charles E. Bennett's translation of Three Voyages, xiii-xviii.
²⁵ Boucher, France and the American Tropics to 1700, 48.
fleet. However, the English did not seem to trust Ribault, and Ribault displayed unease at working with England instead of France. He was arrested while trying to find a way back to France with several of his men. His men were bailed out to assist the British expedition, which ended up not in Florida, but in the Bay of Biscay when their commander, Thomas Stukeley, decided he would rather raid Spanish fleets than sail across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{15} For several years, Ribault remained imprisoned. Most of the survivors of Charlesfort were also imprisoned in Britain, despite French efforts to gain Ribault’s and their return.\textsuperscript{16} Somewhere between his imprisonment and a later return to Florida, Ribault wrote his account of the 1562 expedition.\textsuperscript{17}

After the Edict of Amboise ended the war in 1563, Coligny sought to organize a trip to bring relief to Charlesfort as soon as possible as he was unaware of their departure. With Ribault unavailable, command passed to Laudonnière. Somewhere between the time the relief voyage was organized and the time it departed, their mission changed and a return voyage went ahead without the motivation of a rescue. One of the men who later mutinied and left Fort Caroline, Stefano de Rojomonte, was interviewed by Spanish officials and he claimed that the survivors of Charlesfort had reached France a month before the 1564 expedition’s departure, and “that one of them had come in the said armada and that others had been taken prisoner on account of the

\textsuperscript{15} Kupperman includes an amusing and comprehensive discussion of Sir Thomas Stukeley in \textit{The Jamestown Project}, 45-50.
\textsuperscript{16} For further discussion of Ribault’s imprisonment, see McGrath, \textit{The French in Early Florida}, chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{17} This document has slightly unclear origins. An English version published in 1563 claimed to be a translation of a French version, but no French version has been confirmed. For the full discussion, see H. P. Biggar’s notes in \textit{The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida}, 48-52.
death of Captain Albert."\textsuperscript{18} It seems likely that at least one of the men from Charlesfort was on this second voyage, especially as Laudonnière discusses the opinions of those who were at Charlesfort when he picks the location for Fort Caroline. This voyage was much larger than the first, consisting of three hundred men (and one woman, a maid to Laudonnière).\textsuperscript{19} Instead of hurrying to Charlesfort, Laudonnière chose the River of May for his base, agreeing with the assessment of the survivors from Charlesfort that this land was superior. There, his men built Fort Caroline, near modern-day Jacksonville, where they remained for "two Sommers and one whole Winter."\textsuperscript{20}

Despite a lengthier stay, this project faced numerous troubles. Repeatedly, Laudonnière had to deal with insurrections and insubordination; on one occasion, he ended up imprisoned in a ship’s hold while other of his ships were stolen by mutineers intent on gaining riches by attacking Spanish ships throughout the Indies. Laudonnière and the settlement persisted, some of the mutineers even returning only to be executed. However, the people of Fort Caroline eventually faced starvation. Like at Charlesfort, the French at Fort Caroline depended on the local Native Americans, the Timucuans, for food, and this relationship soured. Desperate, they prepared ships to leave. Despite minor relief from the arrival of English privateer Captain John Hawkins, who traded them some food, they still planned to abandon the fort. Yet, in late August 1565, Ribault arrived with a fleet, bringing the much-needed

\textsuperscript{18} "Deposition of Stefano de Rojomonte" in \textit{Laudonniere and Fort Caroline: History and Documents}, Charles E. Bennett, ed. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), 97.
\textsuperscript{19} Kupperman, \textit{The Jamestown Project}, 79-80.
\textsuperscript{20} Laudonnière, \textit{A notable historie}, 18.
workforce and supplies. He brought nearly 600 people in all, sailors as well as women and children, planning to settle beyond the fortification. Almost immediately after Ribault came the Spanish. They destroyed the fort and killed most of the men, including Ribault. Laudonnière and others managed to escape home and tell of what happened.\(^{21}\) Other Frenchmen also published accounts of the Spanish attack, several of which were translated into English.\(^{22}\) These accounts likely contributed to English desire to settle, as well as general English and French attitudes towards Spanish colonization based on the Black Legend, the idea that the Spanish were uniquely cruel, which several of these French accounts could have served to bolster. After the destruction of Fort Caroline, French officials abandoned plans of establishing French outposts in the region.

Between 1578 and 1590, British leaders made several attempts to establish a foothold in North America. English explorers had been involved in the Americas, but the English government wanted to start a permanent, if small, population to establish a claim that would be recognized by other European powers, a goal likely influenced by wide English awareness of French activities in Florida.\(^{23}\) Sir Humphrey Gilbert was one of the earliest advocates for English colonization and he and his half-brother, Sir Walter Ralegh, significantly shaped early English imperial ventures in the Americas. In 1578, with an official patent, Gilbert set out for the Caribbean and the

\(^{21}\) More detailed summaries of these events can be found in Bennett’s introduction to *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline: History and Documents*, 3-59; and Bennett’s translation of *Three Voyages*, xiii-xxii.

\(^{22}\) For a thorough discussion of all of these accounts, see “Appendix: A Note on the Sources” in McGrath, *The French in Early Florida*.

southeastern coast of North America, but bad storms turned back the voyage. Ralegh participated in Gilbert’s second attempt in 1583, which landed in Newfoundland. Illness and unrest led this attempt to collapse when all present refused to stay through the coming harsh winter, and Gilbert’s ship was lost at sea on the return voyage. After these failures, Ralegh was awarded a patent in succession to Gilbert’s. He set his sights further south on the coast, towards Florida. In 1584, a reconnaissance mission traveled to and from the Outer Banks along what is now North Carolina, and brought back two famous Algonquians, Manteo and Wanchese, to England.²⁴

In 1585, Elizabeth I offered support for another expedition, knighting Ralegh, authorizing the naming of Virginia after herself, and allowing Ralegh the use of one of her ships. This expedition traveled through the Caribbean, engaging in a series of confusing and unfriendly interactions with Spanish authorities. They then sailed up the Florida coast to the Outer Banks and Roanoke Island by the end of July.²⁵ By mid August, it had been decided that most vessels would return to England for further supplies, especially as some had been lost in the voyage. Ralph Lane was put in charge at the fort where he planned to support himself and his men off of the land. Relationships with the Native Americans deteriorated until Lane attacked and killed

²⁴ Quinn provides a solid summary of these events in David B. Quinn, *North America From Earliest Discovery to First Settlements*, especially Chapters 13 and 18. This essay will focus specifically on English efforts in southeastern North America, although simultaneous activity was occurring in Ireland and towards what is now eastern Canada. This is partially because of the more developed scholarship on these attempts, as well as the parallels apparent with the French activity in Florida.

Chief Wingina.\textsuperscript{26} Lane planned to establish a chain of outposts leading up to the Chesapeake, wishing to settle the bulk of the English force on that grand bay. Sir Francis Drake launched an expedition against Spanish possessions around this time, part of a series of coordinated moves against Spain that included the establishment of a permanent English presence in North America to serve as a base for ships.\textsuperscript{27} Drake reached Roanoke, where he planned to leave supplies, until a hurricane wrecked some of his ships. Drake and Lane decided to abandon the project, and in summer of 1586, returned to England.

In the meantime, a relief expedition had formed in England under Ralegh. Getting a late start, this fleet left in April 1586 and arrived to find that the men they had come to reinforce were gone. This fleet eventually left a small group of men and returned again to England. The next expedition left in 1587, led by John White, who had sailed with the 1586 fleet, and consisted of one hundred ten people, including families. This expedition stopped in Roanoke to pick up that small group of men only to find them gone, but the pilot refused to carry to people any further and insisted they stay on Roanoke instead of carrying on to the Chesapeake as planned. White’s daughter, Eleanor, gave birth to Virginia Dare, the first English child in America, a figure who would later assume mythic status. White led an expedition back to England in late 1587 to gather reinforcements and return. Yet by early 1588, England was back at war with Spain. White managed to secure two small ships that only made

\textsuperscript{26} For further discussion of interactions between the English at Roanoke and the tribes in the area, see Michael Leroy Oberg, \textit{The Head in Edward Nugent’s Hand: Roanoke’s Forgotten Indians} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Oberg argues that the colony truly failed because Native Americans who had initially welcomed them turned against the English.

\textsuperscript{27} Quinn, \textit{The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590}, Vol. 1, 248-251.
it as far as Madeira before being attacked by French outlaws and having to return to England. Finally, in 1590, White sailed to Roanoke, arriving to find the fort deserted, with no signs of where the people may have gone. These missing Englishmen and women became the famous lost colonists of Roanoke.²⁸

The English government raised another voyage in 1607, commanded by Captain Christopher Newport. This fleet that reached Virginia in April 1607. Six men were named to a governing council, including Captain John Smith. Newport returned to England with a report in which the council pushed for England to quickly supply more aid lest they be forced to abandon the effort. By the end of summer, one councilor had been deposed and two were dead. The English leaned heavily on the Indians for food and supplies, but were also continuously baffled by these people, unsure of their friendship or ill intentions. The English faced a winter without enough food to get them through and tension grew between the men and their leaders. The fort was stricken by illness and hunger, and many men died, their numbers shrinking from one hundred five to thirty-eight in six months. England realized a need for further investment in this colonial attempt, and issued a new charter in 1609, sending a much larger fleet that included women to the settlement. A massive storm came up, causing two ships, including the one carrying the intended governor and the charter, to wreck in Bermuda. The three others made it to the Chesapeake, but barely.

By May 1610, those in Bermuda managed to construct ships and sail to

²⁸ For more detailed summaries, see Quinn, The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590, Vol. I and II; Quinn, Set Fair for Roanoke: Voyages and Colonies 1584-1606 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Roanoke: The Abandoned Colony, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). This is by no means an exhaustive list, but these books provide a solid grounding in the discussions around Roanoke.
Virginia, only to find a settlement in ruins at the end of the so-called “starving time.” Smith had been injured and sent home, while a drought and harsh conditions further increased tension over food between the English and Native Americans. This escalated into ongoing war that led to the English never leaving their fortification. The ships from Bermuda did not have enough supplies for everyone, and the decision was made to abandon the entire effort. However, as the ragged fleet sailed down the James River on June 7, 1610, they encountered an English fleet with four hundred men and a year’s worth of supplies. Jamestown had been saved, although those who had lived through the horrific starving time may have been less than thrilled to stay. With continued English investment, Jamestown managed to persist, becoming the first permanent English settlement in America.29

Beyond the many parallel events, the French and English efforts to claim a small part of North America occurred both geographically and chronologically near each other. Both imperial efforts were aimed at undercutting the Spanish, both through claiming territory the Spanish believed was theirs and through establishing a stronghold from which their own ships could attack the Spanish treasure fleet that regularly sailed home with the Gulf Stream current that sweeps up the Atlantic coast.30 All of these fortifications, from Charlesfort to Jamestown, were built in fear.

29 For a more thorough summary of these events see Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, Chapters 7 and 8.
30 The word imperial is fraught, but, for my purposes, it is the best way to briefly describe the set of goals outlined in many of the personal and official documents of the time, as it hints at a wide range of ideologies, from the economic to the religious to the personal. As Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan suggest “Imperial formations are not steady states, but states of becoming.” Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, “Imperial Formations” in Imperial Formations, ed. Stoler et al. (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 9. In that way, “imperial” suggests how those behind such ventures were concerned not with what was,
of Spanish as well as Native American attacks, and tensions with Spain contributed to several colonies’ downfall. Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, and Jamestown all went through mutinies, and Laudonnière and John Smith both published their own version of these tumultuous events in an effort to justify their actions and secure their legacy. Due to their similar geographic locations, all of these efforts were deeply affected by hurricanes and by food shortages in southeastern North America that researchers have now connected to record drought conditions.31

England and France were also deeply politically connected at this time. Each wanted to diminish Spanish power, and hoped to reap enough riches from the Americas to become an equal to the now vast Spanish Empire. Protestant England often rallied behind religious rhetoric, worrying about entire continents of people being exposed to the wrong version of Christianity. As a Catholic country, French rulers were less concerned about this. However, as the Charlesfort and Fort Caroline expeditions were largely composed of and led by Protestants, these efforts were even more deeply connected with England.32 Ribault ended up in England trying to garner support, and only an English version of his account survives. Laudonnière’s account was first published in French in 1586, but was translated by Richard Hakluyt, with a dedication to Sir Walter Ralegh and his attempts to establish an English presence on

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31 For a discussion of this drought, see Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, 169-170.
32 Neither Laudonnière nor Ribault mention religion as a significant motivating factor in these settlements. Religion seemed to serve as more of a tie with England than part of the larger plan for each effort.
the “selfe same cost neere adjoyning” in 1587. Individuals from all of these projects have a disquieting tendency to show up in other places, making these colonial ventures feel somewhat like a script with a surprisingly small and interconnected cast of characters. As an example, young Frances Drake served under John Hawkins on the expedition that brought relief, and Frances Drake later rescued the first round of Roanoke settlers from suffering a fate similar to those at Charlesfort.

These connections form an intricate web, which will be discussed at greater length throughout this essay. Some scholars have made significant headway in charting these complex interactions and reappearing figures. English-language scholarship has been remarkably silent about the French exploits in Florida, although several French scholars have done impressive work on the subject. The most noteworthy of these is Frank Lestringant, the author of several large tomes discussing the Huguenot experience in the New World in depth, as well as engaging with more conceptual issues such as the idea of the savage and the European obsession with cannibal legends. Philip P. Boucher has the most similar focus of any English-language scholars. In 2008, he published *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of discontent?*, a work based on the premise that “knowledge of the

intertwined history of France and the American Tropics is far from common, and yet is a subject that deserves more scholarly and public awareness."35 His work, including his publication of an online bibliography for *France and the American Tropics*, contributed significantly to advancing the field. However, few scholars have followed Boucher’s lines of inquiry, and fewer still have integrated French attempts with the activities of others in the same time and place.

In English-language scholarship, small numbers of giants dominate both the study of Roanoke and the study of Charlesfort and Fort Caroline. David Beers Quinn turned his attention from Irish history to English colonial ventures in general and published several definitive works in the study of early English colonial efforts in North America. In 1955, he published *The Roanoke Voyages 1584-1590: Documents to Illustrate the English Voyages to North America under the Patent Granted to Walter Raleigh in 1584* which a review praised: “the old standard collections of sources of Raleigh’s Virginia are completely superseded by this definitive edition.”36 This was a two-volume work, published along with the Hakluyt Society, and it laid the groundwork for much of the scholarship that came after. He also wrote several large-scale works covering European explorers in the Americas from the Norse through early English colonial efforts and helped to establish the field of Atlantic

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History. He edited a document collection called *New American World: A Documentary History of North America to 1612*, the second volume of which was entitled *Major Spanish Searches in North America. Franco-Spanish Clash in Florida. The Beginnings of Spanish Florida*. This work remains less well known than his research on English colonization, but he remains one of the few scholars to contribute significant work in both fields, though few have followed his example.

In the study of French colonial ventures in Florida, none has had so large an impact as Charles E. Bennett. A Florida congressman, Bennett trained as a lawmaker, not a historian. However, he spent many years translating and compiling documents about Charlesfort and Fort Caroline. He published *Laudonniere & Fort Caroline: History and Documents* in 1964 (the 400th anniversary of Laudonnière’s fleet sailing to Florida) and a translation of Laudonnière’s account, entitled *Three Voyages* in 1975, both republished in 2001. He called his first collection “the result of thirty years of interest and study.” These works brought French accounts of these efforts to an American audience for the first time and remain definitive translations, especially as no American historian has published a competitive collection. Bennett’s motivations, however, owed more to Florida pride and patriotism than pure historical interest, framing Laudonnière and Ribault as proto-pilgrims, men striving for religious freedom and modernity, men who “helped turn the tide of history in the right

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Bennett’s interpretation then taps into larger discussions of the role of these stories in building an American national mythology, issues that will be discussed at depth in the following pages. Others have built on Bennett’s work to assemble more scholarly examinations of the French in Florida. John T. McGrath published *The French in Early Florida: In the Eye of the Hurricane* in 2000 to “[provide] a badly needed accurate reconstruction of these events” and “cast light upon how these events affected long term historical developments.”

McGrath provided a solid basis for further inquiry and analysis of these events, including an appendix discussing the various surviving accounts of Fort Caroline and the flaws and merits of each.

Bennett, Boucher, and McGrath sought to present understudied episodes in the history of American colonization and spent most of their work establishing the narrative of these events as well as their significance in American and European history. It would, then, fall to the scholars who came after to put these imperial efforts in conversation with those sponsored by Spain and England. While progress has been made in understanding each of these imperial ventures separately, no one has examined the myriad ways in which each effort was connected to every other. There are serious practical reasons for this. Each of these scholars came from a background in either the French or English Atlantic, and others that study the Spanish Atlantic have their own specific expertise. British and Spanish imperial studies are both vast fields, each with its own canon and debates that can take years to master. Study of French activity in North America, at least below Canada, is not as well established in

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English scholarship but does have its own deep roots. To perform a study of Charlesfort through Jamestown that would come close to satisfying scholars across these various fields would require solid grasp of a vast amount of material. It is hard to be comfortable enough in all of these languages to give documents from each European source an equally deep reading, as an established academic would likely be expected to do. Archives are constructed nationally, and research trips can already be prohibitively expensive. Not to mention the time scholars would need to spend sorting through all of these archives and the massive amount of works produced by scholars of the English, French, and Spanish Atlantics. Synthetic analyses of these different areas could be the capstone of a career spent painstakingly building such broad expertise, but no one has achieved this yet.

Some scholars, notably Paul Hoffman, Karen Kupperman, and, to an extent, Quinn, have begun the work of putting English, French, and Spanish actions in the Americas and in Europe between 1560 and 1610 in conversation with each other. Hoffman produced several books that show how focusing on the Spanish perspective in these events helps to link them all together including *Spain and the Roanoke Voyages* in 1987, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century* in 1990, and *Florida's Frontiers* in 2002. He contributed significantly to the scholarship that wished to connect imperial missions and ideas often seen as separate, and therefore to necessarily complicate views of Early American History. His focus on Florida and the Spanish involvement in the area clearly highlights the connections between all of these projects, as both England and France, as well as the men in their service, so consistently defined themselves, at
least partially, through their opposition to Spain.

Another way to look at these colonial efforts together is to present the history of a man who did exactly that: Richard Hakluyt. Peter Mancall’s *Hakluyt’s Promise: An Elizabethan Obsession for an English America* put Hakluyt firmly within his British historical context, comparing him with others publishing similar accounts around the same time. Hakluyt was a truly prolific writer who published Ribault’s account and translated and published Laudonnière’s as part of an effort to convince English leaders, as well as the general public, that missions to the Americas were worthwhile. Hakluyt’s writing offers a way to better understand British attitudes towards others’ attempts in the Americas and his work becomes a powerful argument for the deep interconnectivity of all of these events.

Karen Kupperman’s *The Jamestown* begins to connect some of these narratives, performing important analysis. This book began with the idea that Jamestown, with all its disasters and grim legends, was “the creation story from hell” and that, as a nation, Americans selected the more palatable popular version of the Mayflower story as their true beginnings. Kupperman sought to put Jamestown in a much larger international context, trying to show the readers how Jamestown was in part the product of situations and tensions established in the 16th century through interactions in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East. Through this view, Jamestown becomes just one in a series of struggles for power between England, Spain, and France. Kupperman performed the essential work of showing how tangled and interconnected imperial forces, ideas, and actors were at this point

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so, while this text does not go into great depth about Charlesfort and Fort Caroline, it adds to the framework necessary to better understand these events. *The Jamestown Project* shows how historians can make Early American History truly international, expanding outward to examine a seemingly endless web of connections and complications. Following her example, this essay will combine Kupperman’s analysis of interconnectivity with Benton’s discussion of the incomplete and ever-shifting reality of imperial sovereignty, using the examples of Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, and Roanoke to highlight connections between imperial powers as well as the shifting nature of ideas around imperial control and relations between imperial powers.

This analysis will rely on several different accounts to show how the events and narratives surrounding Charlesfort and Fort Caroline should be viewed as part of the same history as Roanoke and Jamestown, and how these connected events help illuminate the tangled nature of legality and allegiance in this time and place. One major goal of these exploratory efforts was to report information back to the metropole to allow for more successful American ventures. All those involved in each of these efforts were keenly aware of the importance of information, none more so than the leaders. Kupperman claims that “the most important and influential English report of America’s resources and people came out of the earliest colony, Roanoke,” the combined effort of Manteo, Thomas Harriot, and John White first published for investors in 1588, then published for a wider audience by Richard Hakluyt in 1588’s *Principal Navigations.* Yet several English versions of French accounts predate that publication.

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42 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project,* 144.
Ribault published his account, *The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida*, in 1563 in England. Other accounts of Charlesfort and Fort Caroline soon followed. An optimistic letter from a young man at Fort Caroline was published in 1564 and another from a captain in 1565, but both were published only in French pamphlets. After the brutal Spanish attack of Fort Caroline, one of the survivors, an elderly carpenter named Nicholas Le Challeux, wrote an account that was published in 1566, and proved so popular that it was reprinted in four French editions and an English translation. Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, another survivor, published an account in Latin in 1591 that did not have an English translation until 1875. Both of these survivors’ accounts have been deemed unreliable by many scholars, especially as neither author distinguished between what he saw and what he heard. Laudonnière’s account was not published for a wide audience until 1586 when Richard Hakluyt encountered the document during his stay in Paris. Hakluyt completed an English translation for publication in London in 1587, a move that Mancall argues was deliberately timed to spread encouraging news about the Americas to encourage English settlement. No reports had arrived from Roanoke since 1585 and “that silence could have been interpreted by potential colonists as a sign of failure in America. Hakluyt’s burden, then, was to spin Laudonnière’s account to provide new information for colonization.” Because of its central role in the career of both Laudonnière and Hakluyt, and its publication in the midst of the Roanoke voyages, Laudonnière’s account will form the backbone of this essay’s analysis, with other

43 For a discussion of these sources, see their introductions in Bennett, *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline: History and Documents*, 65-75.
44 For a discussion of this, see McGrath, *The French in Early Florida*, 6, 172-173;
accounts supplementing his. Bennett praised Laudonnière’s account as the most accurate, yet others have acknowledged its problematic nature as he repeatedly constructed the narrative so as to vindicate himself from unpleasant rumors being spread. However, the relative accuracy of Laudonnière’s account remains separate from its value as a source that reveals his intent, the problems he encountered as a leader, and his opinions on his interactions with the Spanish and the English. The way he frames the events often tells more about the complex nature of these inter-imperial interactions than the events themselves. Furthermore, with the added source of Hakluyt’s translation, one can see an English attempt to reinterpret the French expedition for their own goals.

Many official English documents from this period have been published repeatedly over the years. Quinn gathered such sources related to Roanoke and these, especially the frequent correspondence between English officials concerned with France and Spain’s actions in America and elsewhere, will be used to show connections between these imperial efforts as well as how English officials conceived of French (and Spanish) claims to Florida. Of course, Quinn carefully selected these documents so they do not represent a total cross-section of English diplomatic concerns at the time, yet, failing a trip to English archives, these collections provide an invaluable starting point. Recently, a wide variety of government documents from the Tudor era through the eighteenth century have been digitized and are available

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46 Most analysis will be based on Bennett’s translation of Laudonnière’s account in Three Voyages. However, Hakluyt’s translation will also be used as a separate source, and in comparison to Bennett’s to highlight useful differences between the two.

47 For further discussion of the merits and faults of Laudonnière’s account, see McGrath, The French in Early Florida, 172-173.
through State Papers Online. For the purposes of this essay, analysis of English official documents will be limited to those that clearly overlap with French activity around Charlesfort and Fort Caroline, but a broader and deeper analysis of conceptions of imperial sovereignty over America could easily be undertaken with the same resources and would undoubtedly be very fruitful.

These French and English accounts will be supplemented by those of Spanish officials, notorious for their record keeping. Pedro Menéndez and Monique de Rojas, agents of Spain, produced official documents of their actions in Florida, documents intended for their commanders and potentially those even higher up the chain. Ribault’s account was published in English, but for Laudonnière, Menéndez, and de Rojas, I will be using translations. Although this presents challenges in interpretation, there are translations that have been widely cited and acknowledged as acceptable, so I defer to their expertise in the relevant languages. These Spanish accounts show how Spanish officials occasionally lumped France and England together, especially French Protestants, as well as their concerns about these settlements. The Spanish perspective reveals overarching links between Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and, to a lesser extent, Jamestown and therefore offers an invaluable additional perspective.

In *The Jamestown Project*, Kupperman claimed that “Laudonnière’s colony endured the classic experiences of early colonization: a breakdown of order and purpose in the men, who found life in America far different from their expectations; the onset of debilitating diseases, which attacked the commander among others; and worsening relations with the Timucuans, who resisted pressure to provide the French
Charlesfort and Fort Caroline model an apparently common tale. Spain had also sponsored attempts to settle in southeastern North America, attempts which all failed. According to Bennett, they had decided to abandon such efforts north of Mexico. Yet their efforts do not have the same romantic arc as the English and French efforts; Spain’s dominion of the Americas did not happen easily, but there was no doubt in the 1560s that Spain had such dominion. These failures were mere missteps. England and France had no toeholds in the Americas and were looking to challenge Spain’s authority, a showdown reminiscent of David and Goliath. While Spanish imperial actors were present, they worked with a very different set of tools and expectations than did the French and, later, the English. Before analyzing the narrative similarities and significance of these various colonial efforts, it is helpful to analyze the more straightforward ways in which efforts on the Atlantic coast from Florida through Virginia resembled each other. Of course, many of these shared goals were common among colonial efforts in general. However, as will be discussed later, ongoing discussions about sovereignty enacted in these specific spaces as well as the seemingly endless connections between the people involved in these early French and English efforts serve to further bind them together.

48 Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, 82.
49 Charles E. Bennett, Introduction, Three Voyages, xvi.
Chapter 1: Interconnectivity

For all the large and meaningful connections between these various colonial attempts, they were also linked in far more straightforward ways: through people and through place. From Jamestown in Virginia to Fort Caroline in Florida, these imperial outposts clustered along a specific stretch of the Atlantic coast, a stretch that was explored by many different groups of Europeans in this era. Perhaps most importantly, all of these settlement attempts were positioned to have easy access to the Gulf Stream and Spanish sailing routes. The role of privateering will be discussed more in depth in the following pages, but this geographical proximity to Spain’s treasure fleet was no accident. Although there were fewer Europeans in North America than in later years, this concentration of attention along the coast of southeastern North America led to many interesting encounters. Various Native American groups repeatedly encountered men from Spain, France, and England, and likely used collected knowledge of these men and their goals in their interactions with official imperial representatives. Men such as Guillaume Rouffin got caught up in a variety of imperial projects because of their knowledge of the area and of the people, knowledge that was highly prized. Groups of Europeans repeatedly encountered or narrowly missed each other, such as when Laudonnière’s fleet sailing to Florida in 1564 just missed the Spanish expedition sent to find and destroy what remained of Charlesfort on their return to Cuba.50

The gales that are still common along this coast affected the outcomes of multiple missions. Just as Ribault’s fleet was driven to sea by a hurricane, giving the Spanish the upper hand, John White’s attempt to return to Roanoke in 1590 was thwarted by a similar storm. Multiple sources mention a large number of Spanish shipwrecks along this coast, and Laudonnière encountered some survivors of just such an event living under the king of Calos, in what is now southern Florida. These men reported that the king they had lived under possessed great wealth, “enough gold and silver…to full to the brim a hole to the height of a man and as wide as a barrel” and that “the greatest part of these riches came out of Spanish ships which went down in these straits.” This king reportedly sacrificed a Spaniard every year at harvest time, apparently unconcerned about a lack of supply. Shipwrecks were common on this coast, leading to a well-recorded, if vague, population of “lost” Europeans years before Roanoke. These shipwrecks became romanticized tales in Europe with even Shakespeare penning a play inspired by the shipwrecks on the 1609 voyage to Jamestown; The Tempest. While most of the French settlers from Charlesfort and Fort Caroline are accounted for in the sources, Kupperman notes that the members of the “lost colony” of Roanoke “were only a fraction of the many people from abroad who melted into native populations in eastern North America.”

These events shared more than geography, as many figures overlap in the stories of Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and Jamestown. Some of the more obvious connections have been mentioned, such as the fact that Hakluyt dedicated a

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translation of Laudonnière’s account to Ralegh in the midst of the Roanoke voyages. Kupperman discusses this era of young men seeing opportunities for advancement all over the world, and how many men in the sixteenth century “ventured out to seek glory and status. In the process they sometimes caused havoc both for their own country and for others.” Sir Walter Ralegh and John Smith are archetypal examples of these adventurers, men who made their names through daring acts of exploration and leadership. Imperial officials pushed colonial efforts, but one cannot deny the impact of these gutsy men of fortune, many of whom have remained heroic figures in American legends from that time to the present.

As a sole figure, Francis Drake strikingly appears in both the French and English colonial attempts in the second half of the sixteenth century. In summer of 1564, Laudonnière and his men were preparing to leave. After suffering starvation and continued tension with the Timucuans, they were preparing to leave their post when they saw sails; "they were so overjoyed that they laughed and jumped around as if they were out of their minds." These sails belonged to English mariner and privateer John Hawkins, returning from a slave-trading voyage. He sailed along the Florida coast looking for water and, at some point, Hawkins decided to search out the French fort he had heard about. According to Laudonnière’s account, as well as the account by a John Sparke who sailed with Hawkins, a Frenchman aboard Hawkins’ vessel had sailed with Laudonnière in 1562 and helped the English find the River May. Sparke recalled the mutinies in Fort Caroline as well as the privation the men there had endured, and claimed that “God sent us thither for their succour” and

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54 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 44.
55 Laudonnière, *Three Voyages*, 141.
Hawkins “spared them out of his ship twenty barrels of meale…with divers other victuals and necessaries which he might conveniently spare: and to helpe them the better homewards, whither they were bound before our comming.”⁵⁶ Drake was Hawkins’s second cousin and sailed on this voyage, likely witnessing the French desperation, as well as their refusal to sail with Hawkins despite the offer Laudonnière records.⁵⁷ Decades later, Drake arrived at Roanoke after raiding St. Augustine, the settlement established to destroy Fort Caroline. Seeing the unhappy state of the English there, Drake then took the despondent settlers back to England, as Hawkins had offered to Laudonnière.⁵⁸

Sir William Stukeley was another of these daring men, a man who achieved notoriety in his own day that has not entirely lasted to the present. When Ribault, and Laudonnière with him, returned from Charlesfort to gather reinforcements, they found their country split by the first in a series of religious civil wars. Ribault went to

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⁵⁷ Laudonnière, Three Voyages, 143-144.
⁵⁸ Kupperman discusses another lost group at Roanoke: when Drake landed there and ended up taking the English settlers home, he left behind several hundred men and women he had picked up in the Caribbean; “These, who had apparently been promised their freedom, were enslaved Africans, natives of South America, and galley slaves, whose number included some Europeans as well as many identified as Moors. Drake’s intention was to leave some of these people in Roanoke to strengthen the settlement, and he had promised to return the Moors and Europeans to their own countries.” However, these people disappear from the record when Drake picks up the English settlers and they likely remained on the Outer Banks. Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, 96-97. This discussion also indicates a racial element in the long-standing American obsession with the lost Roanoke colonists, especially Virginia Dare, the first English child born in America.
England, both to escape fighting and to, hopefully, gather support for a relief mission. He did manage to garner support for an Anglo-French effort to relieve Charlesfort, with funds raised by Queen Elizabeth. Stukeley took over this venture, re-naming all five ships after his own family. Rumors had Stukeley as some sort of double agent and it seems he was feeding information to the Spanish ambassador in London, a man who distrusted Stukeley and assumed he was “bent rather on committing some great robbery than discovering new lands,” while turning to complain to the British government of this support to a French presence in lands claimed by Spain. Once in full command of his fleet, Stukeley did not sail for North America. Instead, he went to privateer in wars off the coast of Spain. When the men at Charlesfort did eventually decide to abandon their post, it was one of Stukeley’s ships that picked them up floating near the English coast. A sailor from Stukeley’s fleet had sailed on the voyage to Charlesfort and recognized the survivors. That coincidence seems almost scripted, involving men from different countries encountering each other in the Atlantic, yet the accounts of early colonization are riddled with such tales.

Stukeley was able to avoid punishment for acting against orders due, in part, to the zealous intervention of his cousin, Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Such events make these attempts seem less like heroic attempts to push into the wilderness and more like the impossibly tangled series of shifting alliances, goals, and characters that they were.

France and England sought to establish a presence on this coast, in part, to

60 Quoted in Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, 46.
61 Ibid, 46-47.
62 Ibid, 49.
underscored Spanish authority over the area. The locations each leader chose along the
Atlantic coast granted easy access to the Caribbean, as well as the route the Spanish
treasure fleet regularly sailed across the Atlantic. The Spanish frequently accused
other Europeans of privateering, raiding their ships either with or without the
permission of rival governments. In 1562, years before commanding the destruction
of whatever remained of Charlesfort, Philip II of Spain told the captain-general of his
Indies fleet, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, that “along the Indies sailing routes of some
French, English and Scotch corsair ships, seeking to steal what comes and goes from
there...these corsairs should, by rights, be hung as peace-breakers and robbers” and
ordered him “to proceed against them and punish them in conformity with justice,
executing it then upon the sea with all rigor.”63 In their accounts, neither Ribault nor
Laudonnière explicitly mentioned privateering as a goal. Laudonnière discussed the
raiding done by the men who mutinied against him and took ships to plunder the
Spanish near Cuba, but took great pains to separate himself from their actions. He
wrote that when these men asked to sail to Spanish lands to attempt to get much-
needed food, he “feared that under the pretext of searching for food they would
undertake some enterprise against subjects of the king of Spain, something that might
be properly laid at my feet, considering that on our departure from France the Queen
had expressly commanded me to do no wrong against the subjects of the king of
Spain nor anything by which he might conceive any unhappiness.”64 This passage
reveals the interesting position of French officials, who seem to have offered tacit
support to Laudonnière while simultaneously trying to avoid angering the Spanish.

63 Quoted in Lyon, “The Captives of Florida,” 2.
64 Laudonnière, Three Voyages, 98-99.
But, more significantly, this passage shows Laudonnière trying to address and deflect rumors that Fort Caroline was intended as a base for piracy.

Spanish accounts challenged Laudonnière's attempt to deny such charges. In 1564, Manrique de Rojas received orders to sail from Havana up the Florida coast to find, record, and destroy any markers of the French presence. His report extensively detailed his journey including an encounter with Guillaume Rouffin. Rouffin had been a teenager at Charlesfort and chose to remain behind rather than sail across the Atlantic on a makeshift vessel with no experienced navigator. The Spanish found him living among the Guale, and with that experience he became a valued interpreter between the Spanish and native groups. When de Rojas first met Rouffin, he pressed him for information about the French presence and intent at Charlesfort. According to de Rojas, Rouffin explained that the expedition "came directly to this coast of Florida...to discover whether it was a good location for going out into the Bahama Channel to capture the fleets from the Indies. This he knows because he heard it said by everyone and it was common knowledge."65 The Spanish already believed that this was the French goal, but Rouffin confirmed those fears. This evidence also suggested that Ribault and Laudonnière may have carefully left this purpose out of their accounts while discussing their privateering plans with their men. In this light, Laudonnière’s stringent denials of wrongdoing could be read as a deliberate performance that many French officials, and perhaps French citizens, would know better than to believe.

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Composed the next year, Menéndez’s report covers the Spanish attack on Fort Caroline, a raid he was commanded to make. He succinctly explained Spanish concerns regarding the French attempt: “if…the English, French, or any other nation should feel disposed to go and settle any part of Florida, it would be very damaging to these kingdoms, because on said coast of Florida and in said strait of the Bahamas, they could settle and fortify themselves in such a way, that they could have galleons and vessels of war to capture the fleets and other private vessels that come from the Indies.” As far as Spanish officials were concerned, it mattered little which rival power sought to establish forts on this coast. Any such attempt would carry the same risk. As expressed in the 1562 commands from Phillip II, any foreign European presence in these waters was seen as robbery and piracy and something to be crushed. Considering how much wealth Spanish ships regularly transported on this sea route, this concern made sense. It is almost inconceivable that French and English officials would not have considered this incredible boon when choosing the site of future colonial attempts, and this may well be the reason that Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and - to a lesser extent - Jamestown gathered along the same southern stretch of the Atlantic coast.

In his collection of documents related to the Roanoke voyages, David Beers Quinn explained the discussions occurring in England in 1585. According to Quinn, officials were planning a series of moves against Spain, including establishing a fort to use as a base for privateering and launching Sir Francis Drake’s expedition to the

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Americas.\textsuperscript{67} Drake, a notorious privateer, was a well-known enemy to the Spanish and this expedition would consist of raids on Spanish ships and holdings. A letter from Richard Hakluyt to Sir Francis Walsingham, included in Quinn’s collection, stated in a postscript that “the rumor of Sir Walter Rawles fleet, and especially the preparation of Sir Francis Drake doth soe much vexe the Spaniard...therefore I cold wish that although Sir Frances Drakes iouney be stayed yet the rymor of his setting forward might be continued.”\textsuperscript{68} Hakluyt wrote this from France, referring to the Spanish ambassador there, Bernardino de Mendoza. He knew the threats such expeditions represented to Spanish interests and desired, at bare minimum, to circulate such rumors and make their rivals nervous. Ribault and Laudonnière must have been similarly aware of the Spanish concerns their voyages would stir. Spanish officials understandably viewed all of these efforts as a similar threat, as it perhaps does not matter so much which enemy takes your gold. When Spanish officials heard of an English presence on the Carolina coast, a fleet sailed from Saint Augustine to look for an English fort. However, this mission only searched the same parts of the coast the French had traveled when they settled Charlesfort, missing Roanoke by three hundred miles.\textsuperscript{69} Spanish officials continually linked English and French efforts in Florida, even when this assumption worked against them.

More than material gains, rival imperial powers sought information of Florida.


France and England both lagged behind Spain in terms of exploration and colonization. France had sponsored voyages, including that of Jacques Cartier and Giovanni da Verrazano under Francis I and had collected some knowledge about the Americas. Yet there was still no reliable European map of the Americas by 1568.70 Hakluyt devoted his career to spreading information to boost English imperial efforts, and he did this by never travelling further than Paris. He believed that translating and furthering the information was just as valuable as gathering it. Information about the Americas was hugely powerful and necessary if European powers wished to remain competitive. In their haste to collect information, officials often overlooked serious questions of accuracy. John Hawkins, an English sailor and privateer, left a hundred sailors in Mexico in 1568 (at their own request). Three of these men were later picked up on the east coast in Acadia and one, David Ingram, was interviewed by Hakluyt. According to Mancall, this account had so many flaws that contemporaries saw it as “riddled with fantasy,” yet, “before his account was called into question, his testimony was sought by the highest authorities in England.”71 Information was so valuable that even the mighty leapt after it without seeking a prudent pause.

Ribault began his account of Florida with a statement of purpose, similar to many others prefacing many similar accounts. He wrote that in 1562, “It pleased God to move your Grace [Admiral Coligny]” to send Ribault and his men to Florida:

To the ende that we might certifie you and make true reports of the temperature, fertilitie, portes, havens, rivers, and generally of all the commodities that might be founde and seen in that lande, and also to learn what people were there dwelling, which thing long tyme agon ye have desiered...that France might one

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70 Mancall, *Hakluyt's Promise*, 22.
71 Ibid, 155.
This expedition was, then, primarily a fact-finding mission. Ribault was intent on gathering knowledge that might further long-term settlement, such as the fertility of the land, as well as knowledge of “inestimable comodoties” that might allow France to increase its wealth and challenge Spain. Knowledge could not be separated from riches, in this and other accounts, as one could not compete to control a territory without knowing at least as much about it as your enemy. Therefore, such expeditions to the Americas became foundations for later authority.

Presenting the same expedition several years later, Laudonnière discussed Ribault’s main concerns from an alternate perspective. After exploring the coast from the River of May (future sight of Fort Caroline) to Port Royal, Ribault selected a group of men to stay behind, and then debated whether he should continue to explore or return to France. As Laudonnière reported, “Some said that he had reason to be content in view of the fact that he could do nothing more, reminding him that he had explored in six weeks more than the Spanish had done in two years in their New Spain, and that it would be the greatest service that could be done to the king if he would promptly return with news of his happy discoveries.”

Even several years removed from this debate, Laudonnière noted both that they had trumped the Spanish in exploring this territory and that reporting the information they gathered was incredibly important, as well as time-sensitive. This brief comment, seemingly an

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72 Ribault, *The whole & true discoverye of Terra Florida*, 53-54. Biggar assumes that the lord referenced in this opening is Coligny, and I have gone with that assumption.

aside, reveals both a pervasive sense of rivalry as well as a general awareness of why these kinds of expeditions mattered and why kings ordered them in the first place. Exploring and charting the land, especially the coast, had another useful purpose: mapping and naming the land meant one had power over it. Using the example of the French in Florida, Benton discusses how the rivers the French praised and named were seen as “possible avenues to rumored mines, wealtheier Indians, and valuable trade,” and by charting and giving these rivers French names, Ribault claimed authority over them.74

Hakluyt based his career on the English need to have information about the Americas, especially as they would not gather it themselves. He believed that was an essential way to support the furthering of Protestantism across the globe as well as bolster England as a nation. As Mancall explains it, after realizing as a young man what his life’s work should be, Hakluyt “tried to turn his obsession with America, nurtured during his student days, into a passion that would consume his nation.”75 Mancall also theorized that Hakluyt published his translation of Laudonnière’s account during a gap in the expected information from Roanoke. In the preface to this translation, Hakluyt dedicated the work to Sir Walter Ralegh. He noted the apparent uselessness of this translation, as Ralegh had spent time in France and therefore could have easily read the original account. Yet, though he dedicated the work to Ralegh, Hakluyt had another audience in mind. He explained, ostensibly to Ralegh, that this English translation should be directed to the men “which are to be employed in your

74 Benton, A Search for Sovereignty, 46.
75 Mancall, Hakluyt’s Promise, 22.
owne like enterprise.” This translation, then, was for Ralegh’s men or sponsors who would benefit from having the knowledge the French had gathered of this land, as well as knowledge of the mistakes that had ruined the French effort. However, Hakluyt’s career, as well as the general publication of this translation, suggests a far larger audience: the English public. Mancall argues this publication was an effort to generate positive spin. Through framing Laudonnière’s account as instructional, Hakluyt changed the mistakes and misfortunes into learning opportunities and recast the failed French attempt as a net positive for the English. Hakluyt had a keen awareness of the necessity of both public and official support for imperial efforts, and he used the information Laudonnière had gathered through exploration and trial and error to support his ultimate goal of English colonization of the Americas.

Information about the Americas, as invaluable as it was, too often came to officials very slowly or full of inaccuracies. Spanish officials were not able to investigate tales of a French presence at Fort Royal until 1564 when the French voyage to re-establish a presence in Florida was already underway. In May 1565, the English minister at Madrid, William Phayre, wrote to William Cecil, a chief advisor of Queen Elizabeth I. He discussed the Spanish expedition under Pedro Melendez headed to Florida to dislodge Villegaignon. Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, another prominent Huguenot naval officer, had led a French expedition to what is now Brazil to establish Antarctic France in 1555. This colonial effort was larger than

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76 Laudonnière, Hakluyt translation, Preface, [1].
either Charlesfort or Fort Caroline, including around 600 men, many of them prisoners. He returned to France in 1558 to participate in ongoing religious debates and the Portuguese destroyed the French fort in 1560. Somehow, English officials believed that Villegaignon also commanded the French in Florida, repeatedly citing his presence there in their letters. They were clearly operating off of faulty or outdated information. The presence of these unclear stories in diplomatic correspondence suggests the value of information about imperial activity in the Americas. Yet, despite discussing such information and expending effort to understand what was happening, Phayre used a name at least ten years and a continental shift out of date. In June of that same year, a Robert Hogan wrote to Robert Dudley, another key advisor of Queen Elizabeth’s, of more of Villegaignon’s supposed misadventures in Florida. Hogan had received “woorde that Villegailgon and all hys company of the Frenchmen that had taken Terry Floryda are kyllted and eaten [by] the people of the sayd Islands.” Men from Charlesfort trying to return to France had killed and eaten one of their comrades, but this kind of large-scale cannibalism does not appear in other records. And, again, Villegaignon shows up in these colonial ventures, but in the wrong decade and on the wrong continent. English officials were clearly on the lookout for information relevant to these French

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78 Boucher discusses Antarctic France in *France and the American Tropics to 1700*, 44-49. While a fascinating story in its own right, this expedition is less connected to English and Spanish efforts in the Americas as it involved territory claimed by Portugal. As such, this expedition does not fit into the scope of this essay, but analysis remains to be done on how this expedition may have affected French (and other) actions in North America.

attempts. It is unclear who mixed up the names, the English writers, their sources, or someone else, but clearly those in Europe did not have a clear and up-to-date idea of activities in the Americas. Given these examples, one can see how invaluable accurate and timely information would be, especially if imperial officials wanted to take action to counteract or prevent any gains made by their rivals.

These more recognizable connections, those of places and of people, show undeniable links between French and English imperial efforts in the mid-to-late sixteenth century. Historians cannot know exactly what those involved in these efforts knew about all of these connections, or what they thought if they knew. Men like Drake and Stukeley perfectly exemplify the shifting intricacies of imperial plans, hinting at deeper shared patterns between the French and English efforts discussed here. Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and Jamestown shared more than geography, more than characters. These events followed similar narrative patterns, establishing what Kupperman calls the classic tale of early colonization in America. More than that, accounts from these expeditions provide excellent examples of imperial agents keenly aware that “sovereignty was not a given...but would depend on recurring proofs.”80 The accounts of the French actions at Charlesfort and Fort Caroline reveal actors deeply concerned with an enacted loyalty to their sovereigns and others’ view of that loyalty, as well as the necessity to enact sovereignty in ways that would clearly convey the validity of French claims to Florida. Spain saw all privateering attempts as piracy, a direct challenge to their proclaimed authority. Through looking at these French and English imperial efforts together, as well as

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considering how each sought to position themselves in respect to Spain, a shared language of proof comes into view, a language based on common understandings of the value of history, the importance of physical symbols, and the role of beneficial interactions with Native Americans in validating European claims.
Chapter 2: Symbolic Language and Shifting Alliances

In a review *The French in Early Florida: In the Eye of the Hurricane* by John T. McGrath, Philip Boucher characterized Spanish control of the American southeast as "bombastic but hollow." While this was perhaps not intended as a serious analysis, it gets to the heart of the issue. France, Spain, and, later, England wanted to control this land and, at different points, claimed that they did. Yet each often possessed very little actual power in the areas in question, as demonstrated by the ways in which their expeditions and colonization attempts tended towards disaster. These claims of authority were, then, in many ways, "hollow." Yet each symbolic move carried great weight to those who enacted them, their intended audience, and the people whose lives were affected in very visceral ways by these actions. Using Lauren Benton's concept of "legal posturing" as a starting point, one can decipher the symbolic language used by various European officials to attempt to communicate their authority to other Europeans, attempts that sought to turn perceived authority into effective power.

Spain claimed dominion over Florida, yet did not act on the French presence at Charlesfort until after the settlement had been abandoned. Due to slow communication across the Atlantic, such knowledge delays were inevitable. Yet this reality lent a certain farcical feel to some of the expeditions. Hernando Manrique de Rojas was sent from Cuba to investigate and end the French venture at Port Royal, the

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location of Charlesfort. Yet, by the time he arrived, the only Frenchman in the area was Rouffin, the young man who stayed with the local Native Americas. According to the de Rojas’s report, “it is about fourteen months since [the Frenchmen] went away and no news of them has been received.”\(^{82}\) The officials were acting out a large drama on a large area of land, yet the Europeans present were few and far between, and, in the case of Rouffin, young and relatively unimportant. The Spanish carried Rouffin down the coast towards Havana just as Laudonnière’s ships sailed up it, exploring the coastline before deciding to settle at the River May.\(^{83}\) When the Spanish wanted to find and quash English attempts in Florida, they stuck to exploring the harbors used by the French, as discussed above. The fleet that Laudonnière commanded almost sailed to Florida as a rescue mission, only learning that Charlesfort survivors had returned to Europe roughly a month before their departure, while the relief voyage to Roanoke completely missed those they intended to relieve. Knowledge of others’ actions was usually out-of-date and attempts to act upon it did not always end well. This constructs an image of theoretical, more than actual, claims of control over these areas on all sides. Rhetoric and legal claims loomed large, but the realities involved a lot more chance and confusion than systematic expansion of power.

When putting down stakes, European leaders usually worried about defensibility of an area. Yet, while keeping watch for enemy ships on the horizon, Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and Jamestown were all undone by another threat: they were starving. Charlesfort serves as an effective example of what Kupperman called “the classic experiences of early colonization,” including an over-

\(^{82}\) de Rojas, “The Report of Manrique de Rojas,” 120.
reliance on Native Americans for food.\textsuperscript{84} With no plans for producing their own food, Laudonnière and his men relied on reinforcements from France or trade with the Timucuans, the Native Americans in the area. When reinforcements from France did not arrive when expected, the French position weakened further. In 1563, Ribault wrote “the living God hathe reserved this greate lande for the Kinges poore subjectes, aswell to then ende they might be made great over this poower people and rude nation.”\textsuperscript{85} According to him, God intended the French to have dominion over the land and the “poower people” who lived there. Yet, by 1565, Fort Caroline was desperate for food. They needed the Timucuans to trade with them and, according to Laudonnière, the Timucuans used this to their advantage, for “knowing our exceeding strange famin, sold us at so deere a price that for lesse then nothing they had gotten [from] us all the rest of our marchandise…our poore soldiers were constrained to go, & oftentimes (as I have seen) to give away the very shirtes from their backes to get one fish.”\textsuperscript{86} Here, the French appear more as beggars than rulers. Their plan of control and dominion, over both the land and the people, did not bear up when those hoping to be in charge could neither feed themselves off the land nor readily convince the people they claimed to rule to supply what they needed.

John Smith illustrates another example of European powerlessness in his account of Jamestown. In his writings, he discussed the merciful presence of Chief Powhatan’s young daughter who Smith referred to as Pocahontas. According to Smith, this young girl prevailed upon her father to provide food to the hungry

\textsuperscript{84} Kupperman, \textit{The Jamestown Project}, 82.
\textsuperscript{85} Ribault, \textit{The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida}, 56.
\textsuperscript{86} Laudonnière, \textit{A notable historie}, 43.
colonists at Jamestown. After the infamous incident in which he claims Pocahontas saved his life, Pocahontas made sure that he was “safely conducted to James towne, whre I found about eight and thirtie miserable poore and sicke creatures, to keepe possession of all those large territories of Virginia, such was the weaknesse of this poore Common-welath, as had the Salvages not ged us, we directly had starved.”

These men were not glorious conquerors, but pathetic starved individuals who desperately needed help. Smith wrote this account, in part, to boost his own reputation, and therefore stood to benefit from portraying the men under his command as useless. However, he also seemed to recognize the irony in such a pathetic group of men keeping “possession of all those large territories,” so this passage suggests that he readily acknowledged that the future of English dominion depended, at least in this moment, entirely on the goodwill of others. Smith, at this point in his own narrative, wielded no power and owed his life entirely to Pocahontas, her sway over her father, and the support the Powhatans offered.

European sovereignty over southeastern North America was a patchwork, a series of small strings, using Benton’s metaphor. Imperial sovereignty did not match lived experience, and words did not match actions or realities. Yet the imperial powers, and specifically their agents, did not act as if this were true. What may appear to modern scholars as empty, or even foolish, rhetoric of control had very real meanings to those who spoke, wrote, or marched under such orders and ideas. While Europeans competed for power and tried to demonstrate control, Benton argues that

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they “drew on a shared repertoire of Roman law” and geographic tropes. Imperial actors relied on such legal practices and shared knowledge “to project sovereignty into those spaces,” and actors in these Florida settlement attempts used that shared European language to attempt to convince others of their sovereignty. Elements of this shared language included a sense of history, common assumptions about geography and strategy, and rhetoric of helping the Native Americans. Accounts of colonization, then, reveal the use of these strategic languages to communicate with other Europeans and how this communication was part of a developing language and law around colonial possession.

In their attempts to enact authority and create a language of imperial possession that their rivals would understand, European powers heavily referenced the Roman empire. To sixteenth-century Europeans, evoking the Romans meant invoking the rule of law, civility, and the people who spread such civilization across the world. Anthony Pagden has studied this and claims that Rome “provided the ideologues of the colonial systems of Spain, Britain, and France with the language and political models they required” and, perhaps most significantly, “conferred an ethical purpose upon the entire community.” Pagden argues that Rome’s greatest export was its law and that it was a civilization designed for dissemination. In evoking Rome, then, European powers expressed their desire to have a similar civilizing influence across the globe. In his preface, Laudonnière argued that the motivations for most exploration and settlement can be reduced to desire for the

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resources for a better life, and desire to find a place to send the surplus population. But, he noted, “the Romans added another to these two principal reasons for foreign settlement. They were anxious to establish their laws, customs, and religion in the areas which they conquered.” This also connected to a much larger claim that will be discussed in the pages to follow: the benefit of exporting religion to the Native Americans. Here Laudonnière very consciously framed himself and these French expeditions as part of this grand tradition, confirming that this was an effort to better both France and the world. While English and Spanish explorers would likely have disagreed about who should be leading such a grand mission, they would have recognized the desire to emulate Rome and, in doing so, provide better opportunities for themselves and their countrymen.

The language of Rome also gave imperial powers a way to explain or challenge claims. When Spain claimed Florida and the Caribbean, they did so on the authority of the Treaty of Tordesillas, a document based on papal bulls and reinforced by papal approval. However, others, including the English, French, and Dutch, challenged this religious decree with an ancient Roman legal concept. They argued *res nullius*: land could not be claimed unless it was occupied or held by whoever put forth the claim. The Europeans did not consider the original inhabitants of the Americas to be using the land enough to count, so the land remained to be claimed by whoever established a presence and fortified or farmed it in a way fellow Europeans would recognize. This explains the French and English desire to place outposts at strategic geographic points, especially points that allow one to control the rivers

92 This concept is discussed in Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 10-20.
flowing to the interior of the continent. Through establishing a presence at the opening of a corridor, Europeans could argue the entire corridor was effectively claimed. However, without at least one fort or group of men on the ground, these claims could be refuted. When the Spanish learned of a French presence at Port Royal, they sent an expedition to find and destroy any remaining physical evidence of a French presence at Charlesfort. This episode will be discussed more in the following pages, but it shows how a physical presence in the place could be a powerful symbol of authority. The Spanish expended significant effort trying to remove evidence from the landscape that anyone other than them had had even a temporary presence in the region.

Perhaps building off of this idea, Europeans frequently cast back for historical stories and legends of their people in the Americas to establish a presence and therefore claim these contested spaces. History provided not only models for imperial sovereignty but also stories that could be used to establish claims of sovereignty. If a French or English expedition had sailed a coast first, had been the first European group to record observations and make use of an area, it rightly belonged to the country that sponsored the original voyage. Kupperman characterized British claims to North America as vague, based on the legend of a medieval Welsh prince who sailed to the Americas, “Madoc ap Owen Gwyneth,” as Hakluyt wrote it. According to the legend, as recorded by Hakluyt, this prince left his country to avoid ongoing internal strife around 1170, sailed to the Americas, and then returned to Wales to gather colonists with whom he sailed back west. This was proven in “very auncient
and auctentical Chronicles written in the welshe or brittish tongue."\(^{93}\) The Virginia Company claimed settlement rights on this basis, and colonists at Jamestown believed they had found people who spoke a language derived from Welsh. One man who spoke Welsh even attempted to serve as a translator, with presumably little success.\(^{94}\) This evocation of a hazy medieval legend may seem ridiculous to a modern reader, but it clearly carried weight to contemporary Englishmen as they repeatedly referenced this tale. Of course, one could debate the extent to which the Virginia Company actually believed this legend, but regardless of sincerity, it served as a foundation for ongoing attempts at colonization.

The French based their claim to sovereignty on the expeditions of Jacques Cartier and, especially, Giovanni Verrazano, both sponsored by Francis I. In his account, Laudonnière divided the Americas into New France, New Spain, and Peru. New France is so-called “because even as early as 1524 Jean Verrazano, a Florentine, was sent to these new lands by Francis I ... He landed there and explored the entire coast...he placed the flag there and the coat-of-arms of the king of France, so that even the Spanish when they came afterwards called the country French.”\(^{95}\) As evident by later Spanish actions, they did not agree with this claim. However, Laudonnière frames this voyage here as definitive. French flags were the first to fly here, therefore the land is and shall be French. Bennett argued that this claim to New France, the southern part of which was Florida, was “equally as good if not more valid than that

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\(^{94}\) These Welsh-speakers were actually the Siouan-speaking Monacans. Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 74.

\(^{95}\) Laudonnière, *Three Voyages*, 6-7.
of Spain.”

The French placed huge importance on the placement of a flag in 1524, so it follows they would continue to place more markers of their presence on the landscape to further establish their claim. Early in their exploration of the east coast of North America, Ribault and some of his men went ashore, “carring with us a piller or columne of hard stone, our kinges armes graven therin, to plaint and sett...at the entrye of the porte in some high place wher it might be easelly sene.” This first column was near the mouth of what is now the St. Johns River, or what they named the River May, and near where Laudonnière would later establish Fort Caroline. Ribault’s expedition planted a second column near the site of Charlesfort, “in a comoduus pleasaunt and high place, at the entrye of a faire great river.” By taking care to plant both columns on high grand, Ribault ensured their visibility and seeming domination of the landscape. Although these columns were not terribly large, by most accounts, their positions on high ground made it clear that they bore significance to be seen from afar. Furthermore, Ribault took care to put these markers in pleasant places, places he explicitly described as rich in natural resources, places France would want to control and populate. Also, by placing the columns at the mouths of rivers and entries of ports, Ribault claimed dominion over not just the coastline, but also the rivers themselves, and the land that might be accessed through them. In a time when many believed such rivers may lead to passages to the riches of Asia, these were grand and significant claims. Benton explains how rivers could act as “corridors of

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97 Ribault, The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida, 16.
98 Ribault, The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida, 95.
control,” explaining the importance of claiming the river mouth or harbor. The French named all the rivers they passed on this expedition, many for rivers in France, including the Sienne, Somme, and Loire. They recognized the significance of exploring and naming rivers in establishing sovereignty, and established the columns as physical markers of this dominion reinforced by documenting the new names they gave the places they claimed.

Spanish officials knew of the columns Ribault planted, and they dedicated great energy to getting rid of them. Philip II demanded that the governor of Cuba organize an expedition to remove these markers and destroy the French fort. The governor sent Manrique de Rojas, whose journey was carefully chronicled by “scriveners,” or the ubiquitous Spanish scribes. De Rojas’s specific orders were to gather information, but especially to “seek a stone column or marker bearing the arms of France...Having found it you will remove and destroy it, or, if it proves to be a thing that can be transported in the frigate you will bring it with you. This is to be done in the presence of witnesses, and of a scrivener.” This act needed to be witnessed, and the column returned as proof if possible, showing how important these seemingly purely symbolic acts were to those in charge of Cuba and other Spanish imperial projects. The governor could not trust a mission this important to an official account; he needed corroboration and physical evidence. De Rojas was also commanded to find the French fort, take prisoner any who remained there, and bring

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99 Benton, *A Search For Sovereignty*, 103. Spanish officials later expressed concern that Jamestown, located near a river that went far into the continent, posed a direct threat to Mexico. Rivers were both symbolically and practically powerful, and therefore assumed much importance in imperial discourse and planning. Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 155.

them and all of the stores and munitions within the fort back to Cuba. Then, he was to “[raze] the fort so completely that not trace of it shall remain.”  

Again, the need to return proof, if possible, remained paramount. The insistence on removing every trace of the fort is also telling. Although this could have been rhetoric, it shows that the goal of Spanish officials was not to render the fort useless or to remove the Frenchmen there, but to make it as if the fortification had never existed. They fought the French presence on every level, trying to eradicate the French physical presence so that future expeditions would not have more history on which to found themselves.

De Rojas’s mission, at first, had trouble locating the columns or the fort. He had the scriveners carefully record each landing that resulted in the location of neither. Finally, he heard tell of a Frenchman living with Indians in the area and found Rouffin. From him, de Rojas learned the location of the fort and one of the columns; the one Ribault had placed second, near Charlesfort. De Rojas and his men visited the fort. There, they “found nothing at all. Then the captain commanded that the building be set on fire and burned, and he ordered me, the scrivener, to certify in writing that the house was burned and destroyed. I, the said scrivener, hereby certify and declare that it was burned and destroyed in my presence.”

Such thorough razing of the fort was a symbolic act and, as such, needed to be observed, recorded, and remembered to reach its full impact. Next, de Rojas and his men located the column near the site of the fort. “By order of the captain this marker was taken down and thrown to the ground. Thereupon the captain in the presence of me, the scrivener, had the stone marker put into the boat to be taken to the frigate and carried to the

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101 Ibid, 110.
Governor at Havana. This was done and witnessed.103 By throwing the column upon
the ground, de Rojas both acknowledged and sought to nullify the symbolic weight
and respect that the column was intended to convey by the French, a weight that
troubled the Spanish authorities. Upon his return to Havana, de Rojas presented to the
governor, “a stone marker bearing the arms of France, the inscription R., and four
Arabic numerals,” which “the Governor received in the presence of witnesses.”104 In
performing this ceremony in front of witnesses, de Rojas and his commanders were
making very clear that the French claim was invalid, and that they, in removing the
column, had symbolically, and perhaps therefore actually, destroyed it.

When Laudonnière led his second expedition to Florida in 1564, he found the
first column Ribault had planted, the one at the mouth of the River May that de Rojas
had missed. Laudonnière described how they found Indians, in his view, worshipping
this columns; it was “crowned with crownes of Bay,” with baskets of corn all around
its base; how it was “a thing which they made great account of.”105 By including this
description, Laudonnière reminded his audience that these symbols of French power
had lasted, even when the actual Frenchmen left. Furthermore, by depicting the
column as a near-religious object to the Native Americans, Laudonnière justified the
French presence in the area both through physical markers and through positive
relationships and deference from the Indians. As historian Patricia Seed interprets this
moment, it represented native consent to French rule.106 Laudonnière’s account

103 Ibid, 123.
105 Laudonnière, A notable historie, 20-20b.
106 Seed, Ceremonies of Possession, 58.
Jamestown emphasized how much the Powhatans and others in the area hated the Spanish. Europeans often used the perceived consent of the Native Americans to their presence as proof that their imperial efforts were more legitimate than those of others, especially the supposedly brutal Spanish. Europeans also claimed their presence was beneficial to the Native Americans, especially in terms of spreading religion. Religion loomed very large as a motivating factor the English and Protestant French expeditions in Florida between 1560 and 1610, as well as Spanish officials’ efforts to eradicate them.

While religion does not feature hugely in Ribault and Laudonnière’s accounts, historians have often assumed it was of the utmost importance to these men. Bennett praised how “four hundred years ago Laudonnière and hundreds of his French compatriots sought religious freedom on what became the shores of America.” He wrote from a place of patriotism and pride, hoping to prove that these Huguenots should be part of a Protestant American mythology. However, such connections have faded from more recent scholarship. In *France and the American Tropics*, Boucher suggests that Huguenots enjoyed enough status in France in 1562 that perhaps a religious refuge would not have been sufficient motivation for a journey. In January of 1562, Catherine de Medici issued the Edict of Saint-Germain, an edict of limited toleration towards Huguenots. This fell apart by March of that year when violence erupted at Vassy and the first civil war or First War of Religion began, but Ribault’s fleet left France in February. When they departed, coexistence may have seemed possible. Ribault also may have wanted to avoid emphasizing his Protestantism as,

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107 Bennett, “Preface” in *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline, History and Documents*. 56
even when it was officially tolerated, such beliefs could put his career and his life in jeopardy. By 1564, when Laudonnière’s voyage departed, France remained at peace, at least officially, and the royal court was in the midst of a tour of the kingdom to encourage trust and goodwill. Boucher does concede that in 1564, religious violence had increased in France, so perhaps a desire for a haven would be more probable. However, he makes clear that this is speculation: the sources remain largely silent on religious motivation, or the lack thereof, in the French sources.  

Ribault and Laudonnière both fought in religious wars in France after their return from Charlesfort and were likely devout men. However, they do not tie their urge to fortify French positions to Florida to religion, and modern scholars should hesitate before assuming a clear connection. Again, this silence about religion may have been a tactic of self-preservation. Yet without clear evidence of a direct religious motivation, scholars should be careful about assigning religious goals to these missions especially if they do so in an attempt to align these French expeditions more clearly with Plymouth and the New England Puritans.

While Ribault and Laudonnière avoided explicit discussion of their Protestant beliefs, conversion of the natives was a constant goal in accounts by imperial officials at this time. Various European leaders often argued that by bringing Christianity, especially the right kind of Christianity, and therefore bettering the lives of the natives, they deserved to rule an area more than others. Religion appears in Ribault’s list of reasons to explore the America’s, yet not explicitly in Laudonnière’s, where he

109 For an example of the invocation of this trope, see Ribault, *The whole & true discouerye of Terra Florida*, 54-55.
focuses on more material gains to France.\textsuperscript{110} Historian Laura Fishman agrees, arguing that Laudonnière was motivated more by a desire to fight Spain than by any religious conviction.\textsuperscript{111} Both Laudonnière and Ribault do include stories to emphasize how happy the Native Americans were to see them, as well as tales of Spanish cruelty to these same people. These French accounts still frame their authors as welcomed and wanted by the Native Americans and this would have acted as support for French claims to the area. As Pagden writes, an important part of the European love of Roman precedent was the idea that, for some people, conquest was beneficial. Cicero wrote of “barbarians,” arguing that ruling such people “is just precisely because servitude in such men is established for their welfare.”\textsuperscript{112} Whether or not French accounts explicitly emphasize religion, there is a sense of paternalism and support for the notion that the French would be better masters of this land and this people than the Spanish.

Ribault hoped for a time when the Native Americans would “have better acquaintance of us, and knowe that there is no suche creuelltye in us as in other people and nations, of whom they have beyn begilled under coulour of good faythe.”\textsuperscript{113} While not explicit, Ribault knew that this reference would remind his readers of rumors of Spanish cruelty to natives, rumors that Laudonnière sought to give credence to in his own account. Laudonnière recorded an encounter with an

\textsuperscript{110} Laudonnière’s main justifications are riches and the possibility of putting what he perceived as a surplus population in France to better use in the Americas. Laudonnière, \textit{Three Voyages}, 3-5.


\textsuperscript{112} Quoted in Pagden, \textit{Lords of All the World}, 20.

\textsuperscript{113} Ribault, \textit{The whole & true discoverye of Terra Florida}, 94.
Indian who ran away from his men and, when they caught him, was “so astonished at seeing us that he did not know how to behave. I understood afterwards that he feared that he had fallen into the hands of Spaniards. These had once captured him and had cut out his testicles, as he showed us.” However, Laudonnière and his man managed to calm this man’s fear, and he was “happy as he left us.” Laudonnière presented this dramatic tale of Spanish cruelty without much explanation, but it created for the reader an image of a brutal Spain, framing France as a better and kinder European power. By providing a concrete example of Ribault’s theory that the French were morally superior, Laudonnière supported the idea that the French deserved this power and would wield it better than the Spanish. English accounts from their expeditions to North America also repeatedly emphasized the hatred Native Americans felt towards the Spanish.115

Spanish accounts made very clear that Spanish dominion of the Americas would help the Indians because it would allow the Spanish to save their souls. Religion was a far more central feature in contemporary Spanish accounts of Florida than in either Ribault or Laudonnière’s works. Pedro Menéndez, the leader of the Spanish attack on Fort Caroline, described his goals in a letter addressed “To His Catholic Royal Majesty,” where he outlined his plans to stop any non-Spanish “vessels coming from the Indias” and to “Give them no quarter, and appropriate the coast and lands so that they can be the more easily turned out – that Your Majesty can send to spread the Gospel.” Menéndez told men at Fort Caroline who attempted to

114 Laudonnière, *Three Voyages*, 56.
surrender that if they handed over their arms, "I might do with them that which our Lord ordered. More than this he could not get from me, and that God did not expect more of me. Thus he returned and they came to deliver up their arms. I had their hands tied behind them and had them stabbed to death," sparing only sixteen workers, caulkers, mariners, and others he believed would be useful. Menéndez justified his cruelty and duplicity by stating "it seemed to me to punish them in this manner would be serving God, our Lord, and Your Majesty. Hereafter they will leave us free to plant the Gospel, enlighten the natives, and bring them to obedience and submission to Your Majesty." Ribault, encountering the Spanish after his ships were destroyed by a hurricane, offered to surrender to Menéndez in exchange for clemency, as France and Spain were not at war. Menéndez did not respond in kind, but by telling Ribault:

    How we had taken their Fort and hanged all those we found in it, because they had built it without Your Majesty’s permission and because they were scattering the odious Lutheran doctrine in these Provinces, and that I had [to make] war [with] fire and blood… against all those who came to sow this hateful doctrine; representing to him that I came by order of Your Majesty to place to Gospel in these parts and to enlighten the natives in all that the Holy Church of Rome says and does so as to save their souls. That I would not give them passage; rather would I follow them by sea and land until I had taken their lives. 

This long passage drips with disdain for the “Lutherans” or Huguenots, treating them as undeserving of even basic protocol of war. This presents a compelling example of the religious justification of Spanish colonization. More than citing the king’s authority, although that was significant to him, Menéndez justified the great effort, expense, and cruelty of the destruction of Fort Caroline through religious language.

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117 Menéndez, “Menéndez and Fort Caroline,” 135.
118 Ibid, 133-134. Brackets in this translation.
He meant to establish a place from which the Spanish could continue to spread Catholicism, and any who got in the way did not, in Menéndez’s view, deserve to live.119

In the preface for his translation of Laudonnière’s account, Hakluyt repeatedly referenced religious goals for colonization. He wrote about reports on Indians of North America, from which it could be “gathered that they will easily embrace the Gospell, forsaking their idolatrie” and phrased this as encouragement for Ralegh to continue this mission.120 Hakluyt framed the goals of those who engage in colonization, that “some seeke authoritie and places of commandement, others experience by seeing of the world, the most part worldly and transitory gaine, & that often times by dishonest and unlawfull meanes, the feswest number the glorie of God and the sauving of the soules of the poore & blinded infidels.”121 Yet he expressed faith that Ralegh will fall into the last and smallest category; “because divers honest and well disposed persons are entred already into this your business, and that I knowe you meane hereafter to sende some such good Churchmen thither, as may truely saie with the Apostle to the Sauages, We seeke not yours but you.”122 According to Hakluyt, very few had set out to explore America with truly good intentions. His emphasis on the rarity of this implies that he did not, even after taking care to translate Laudonnière’s account, see the French ventures as primarily religious.

119 There was intense contemporary debate over whether or not Menéndez slaughtered women and children, a debate that has not been totally resolved. For a discussion of primary source documents’ stance on the issue, and their relative reliability, see McGrath, The French in Early Florida, 171-184.
120 Hakluyt, Richard Hakluyt, "To the Right Worthie and Honorable Gentleman, Sir Walter Ralegh,” [4].
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
Hakluyt was trained in religion as well as geography, and encouraged colonization so avidly both for the good of England and to spread what he believed was the true religion across the globe.\textsuperscript{123} This also suggests a conviction that English rule would be good for the people in the Americas, freeing them from both Spanish and false gospels.

The question of religious weight also looms large in the Huguenot leaders’ interactions with England. France and England had not historically been allies up until this point, but Ribault and Laudonnière both work with and display a willingness to rely on English officials and mariners. Some of this may have been to bring down Spain, the agreed-upon common enemy. However, it cannot be insignificant that Ribault sought help from the most powerful Protestant country when he needed to resupply Charlesfort. Ribault had worked in England before, employed by Henry VIII and Edward VI as a sort of naval consultant, and was able to quickly navigate the English court to gain support. England had been supplying troops to the Protestant fighters in France, with whom Ribault had just served, so he reasonably hoped that England would be sympathetic to his Huguenot men left behind in Florida.\textsuperscript{124} Queen Elizabeth promised to support an Anglo-French attempt to resupply Charlesfort, personally contributing funds to the project and naming Thomas Stukeley as commander. In this episode, it seems that Protestantism may have provided a common interest that led Queen Elizabeth to work with Ribault. Elizabeth also likely saw a French venture in the colonies as a way to undercut Spanish authority. England

\textsuperscript{123} Mancall discusses this frequently in \textit{Hakluyt’s Promise}. See especially Chapters 1 and 3.
had not yet managed to lead a colonizing effort in 1562, and was more than a decade away from launching an expedition of their own. Supporting these Protestant Frenchmen, especially in such a seemingly tenuous venture, likely seemed as the lesser of two evils. As discussed above, Stukeley took command and used the fleet for privateering rather than rescue. However, this episode still, in Kupperman’s words, “exemplifies the tangled relationships, and the lack of clarity, in these early overseas exploits,” specifically the ways in which religion could further complicate relationships between imperial powers.

As Benton argued, attempts to establish sovereignty overseas inherently involved complex and shifting lines of legality, which often included unexpected and tenuous alliances. England, France, and Spain were constantly posturing and challenging each other, paying close attention to rival imperial efforts in order to undercut others’ power both in Europe and abroad. The actions of those in Florida were closely watched and discussed along with general diplomatic correspondence and intelligence. While officials at home tried to sort through information and figure out other countries’ plans in America, the men trying to establish themselves so far from the metropole learned out of necessity to search for support and allies beyond their own countrymen. Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, Roanoke, and Jamestown all suffered as a result of promised support being delayed and the people that composed each imperial effort had to scramble to survive. This led to uneasy alliances with other Europeans or, often, with Native Americans. John Smith writes of Jamestown’s

125 It could be argued that this contributed to the intent of the relief voyage, as attacking Spanish ships also helped weaken their imperial control.

126 Kupperman, The Jamestown Project, 45.
reliance on Pocahontas and the support of the Powhatans, while the supposedly vanished Roanoke colonists most likely melted into a nearby Native American community when their own countrymen never returned as promised. In these distant and desperate efforts, the normal rules could occasionally be suspended. As Benton explains, “The layering of overlapping, semi-sovereign authorities within empires generated a lump jurisdictional order, in which legal actors, even rogues...engaged in creative legal posturing.” These temporary alliances, then, can be seen as attempts to create order out of a disordered world of unclear sovereignty and legality; if normal rules did not necessarily stand, then one could establish new rules in order to survive and persevere in the larger goal of establishing sovereignty in a contested space. Yet, however necessary such temporary alliances may have been, evidence repeatedly emphasizes how very temporary they were. Leaders who allied with other Europeans or Native Americans usually returned their loyalty to their own country and countrymen as soon as the world was set right again and they had the option to make more purposeful choices instead of merely scrambling to survive. Temporary alliances formed in the Americas did not develop into new international relationships on a larger scale. As Ribault lobbied for support in England, the court still did not trust him and Ribault displayed unease at working with England instead of France. He was arrested while trying to find a way back to France with several of his men. His men were bailed out to assist the British expedition, which ended up not in Florida, but in the Bay of Biscay for several years. Ribault remained imprisoned. Most of the survivors of Charlesfort were also imprisoned in Britain, despite French efforts to

gain Ribault's and their return. Ribault's success in England remained limited, and he never completely shifted allegiances, despite fighting against the French government in 1562 at Dieppe. In the end, the main actors usually retained the loyalties they held at the outset of each expedition. At least, the sources show this. For those who traveled far enough to completely disconnect from their previous lives, we can only guess.

While actors on the ground maneuvered through overlapping lines of imperial sovereignty, imperial authorities devoted a fair amount of their energy to trying to gain a basic understanding of the actions happening overseas. English state papers reveal a deep concern with French activities in Florida at this period. Many of these letters switch from discussing the latest intrigues at the French or Spanish courts to discussing the latest rumors about Florida, showing how closely concerns about royal and noble actors and lineages connected with more modern-seeming concerns of imperial expansion and uncertain rivalry between European powers. In March of 1564, William Cecil received a letter that included a section of code. According to an apparently contemporary translation of this code, it read “the French doth make ready all they shippe they can” and expresses concern that these ships indicated a French desire to stir up trouble with England. However, the French apparently claimed “it is too go to Terra Florida.” The author recommended readying English ships just in case and, if the French proceeded as they claimed they would, those ships could go towards English expeditions. This letter indicates the complex calculations made

128 For further discussion of Ribault's imprisonment, see McGrath, The French in Early Florida, chapter 5.
129 William Phayre to Cecil, 2 June 1565, SP 70/78 f.117, The National Archives of the UK, 65
by imperial officials at this time. France readying ships read as a threat, but those ships sailing to Florida instead of England would constitute a significantly smaller threat. However, even if that were the case, the author seems to believe it prudent to have a similar fleet of English ships to put to good use. The rumors about French preparations are the only part of the letter in code, suggesting that the author did not want the French to know English discussions of their activities, perhaps in an attempt to maintain an appearance of trust between the two powers despite English support of Protestant Frenchmen. No matter the intent of using a code, it reveals that information about French fleets, including those that may sail towards Florida, constituted valuable and important intelligence.

Two letters to Cecil, from William Phayre in 1565, discusses English knowledge of Melendez’s expedition. The source of this knowledge is unclear, but Phayre, the English minister at Madrid, likely gleaned it from sources inside or close to the Spanish court. In the first, written in May, Phayre expresses concern for any English sailors in the area who would be deemed pirates by the Spanish. Hawkins had sailed through the area recently, and other English privateers likely continued to inhabit those waters. As discussed previously, Philip II considered all vessels that were not under Spanish command or approved by Spanish officials to be “peace-breakers and robbers.” In this instance, English and French goals were closely linked. If this Spanish expedition encountered vessels sponsored by either

130 William Phayre to Cecil, 12 May 1565.
131 Quoted in Lyon, “The Captives of Florida,” 2.
government, or commanded by citizens of either country, the men would be captured or executed. In June of that year, Phayre reported again attempts to clear the French from Florida. However, in both accounts he refers to the French leader as Villegaignon, echoing earlier confusions between French attempts in Brazil and Florida. Prominent diplomatic officials wrote, often, of gossip, carrying forth inaccurate assumptions in their correspondence. However, word was clearly circulating in the Spanish court of a plan to attack the French at Fort Caroline perhaps before Ribault even left France to reinforce the settlement. Each of these players attempted to circulate information and gain accurate intelligence to act upon. The careful movement of each of these players almost resembles an ocean-wide game of chess, although one where most of the pieces are obscured. Diplomats honed in on such rumors and actions, revealing the importance of actions in Florida to general international relations in Europe, especially those between France, Spain, and England.

Events on the southeastern coast of North America often unfolded rapidly, in ways unclear to those attempting to monitor goings on from back in Europe. Those involved in such events swirled around each other in a complex tangle of alliances, motivations, and authorities, trying to establish their own roles and legacies within this murk. Perhaps European uncertainties about some of these events contributed to their position largely on the sidelines of Early American History. More likely, Charlesfort and Fort Caroline’s lack of permanence led to a diminished legacy. However, through affecting the imperial efforts that became Roanoke and Jamestown, through helping to perpetuate and codify a symbolic language of sovereignty, and
through their effects on international and diplomatic relations, Charlesfort and Fort Caroline and all of the events surrounding their dramatic falls had a far greater impact on American History than many have traditionally assumed.
Conclusion

The series of decisions made in Europe and on the North American coast from 1561 through 1607 arguably had a wide-reaching impact on international events for centuries. As Lauren Benton argued, during European imperial expansion in the Americas sovereignty only existed in the ways it was repeatedly proven through various acts from ceremonies to exploration and mapping. The actions surrounding Charlesfort and Fort Caroline began a series of closely interconnected European displays of sovereignty in a relatively small geographical area, helping to codify a shared language of sovereignty that would echo through the following centuries. This influence was especially possible because of the intense interconnectivity of European discourse and actions regarding Florida between 1560 and the early seventeenth century, especially surrounding Charlesfort, Fort Caroline, and Roanoke. From simple interpersonal interactions through shared concepts of historical validity, overlapping, perforated, and debated layers of sovereignty were established and destroyed and negotiated on this stretch of coastline. Such negotiations happened throughout all historical imperial expansion. However, the geographically, politically, and symbolically linked actions discussed in this essay happened early in the development of imperial languages and as such arguably had a larger impact on international history than one would suspect from their small size and brief duration. If nothing else, these events deserve serious consideration in the construction of American historical narratives.

To the imperial actors in the late sixteenth century, history provided both
models of how to act and legitimization of imperial claims. Roman legal codes, medieval legends, and more recent actions served to create a common imperial language, one that each power understood even when they did not agree upon the interpretation. These dual functions of historical memory could be reduced to mere posturing, attempts to convince others to take one’s actions seriously. However, the repeated use of such symbolism suggests that it evoked a common feeling among Europeans at this time. History provided shorthand to facilitate communication about imperial goals. More than that, historical claims served as the basis for real actions that irrevocably shaped the futures of Native Americans, England, France, Spain, and the world at large. Studying such rhetoric can really impress upon historians the importance of critically analyzing perceptions of the past. Yet, in Early American History, past events are so tied up in national perceptions of self that they can be nearly impossible to analyze objectively.

In the events discussed above, men like John Smith and Sir Walter Ralegh jump out as examples of those who have been lauded throughout American history. However, in 1964, the four-hundredth anniversary of the French landing at Fort Caroline, Charles Bennett sought to add more men to that American pantheon. He put together *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline: History and Documents* to bring these oft-forgotten French exploits to light. In the preface, Bennett wrote of how most Americans had read about the “great explorers – Columbus, Vasco de Gama, Ponce de León, Magellan, Cortez, Pizarro, De Soto, the Cabots, Cartier, and Henry Hudson – but few history textbooks record the activities of Jean Ribault in Florida. Fewer still
give Laudonnière credit for leading French colonists to North America." Bennett wanted to ensure Ribault and Laudonnière’s places in the pantheon of American history, to make them names that most Americans would learn in school. Bennett argued that:

The Fort Caroline settlement set a new pattern for religious freedom in America – a pattern that was to be imitated until religious liberty and personal freedom became the great trademark of the United States. The beginnings of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States stemmed from the spirit of freedom exemplified by Laudonnière at Fort Caroline.

These Huguenot French are the proto-Pilgrims, according to Bennett, the real American origin story. As discussed above, Ribault and Laudonnière downplay religious motivation for their colonization attempts, but many modern Americans have seen them as part of a grand, Protestant, freedom-seeking tradition, a tradition inextricably linked the modern nation that exists in the same physical space.

Such mythologies are incredibly powerful, as exemplified by British attempts to use medieval legends to justify a claim to North America. Whether or not people wholeheartedly believe such mythologies, they have the power to shape future actions, to serve as foundations for huge ideas and movements. If, as argued above, Charlesfort and Fort Caroline should be added to the same historical narrative as Roanoke and Jamestown, one must be careful to avoid creating persuasive, if inaccurate, mythologies. Ribault and Laudonnière deserve to be known alongside Smith and Raleigh, but none of these men should be praised as uncomplicated heroes.

In expanding historical perceptions of the American past, historians must be careful

to maintain the same critical eye and not engage in too much spin in order to get
certain events recognized. Hakluyt built a career out of that kind of work, out of
framing the accounts of others to further his own goals and the betterment of his
country. Historians must remain open to additions to these national mythologies while
remaining wary of the power of such legends. Through following the accounts of
those involved in colonial ventures in the sixteenth century, historians can add
essential insight to Early American History, further revealing the intricate and messy
sovereignties different groups attempted to enact at different times, and how
performative legal maneuvers affected historical outcomes.

Kupperman framed Jamestown as “the creation story from hell,” a story that
Americans have deliberately avoided using as their origin myth. Charlesfort, Fort
Caroline, and Roanoke also fall into that category. These narratives show the same
patterns of ill-prepared men, abandoned by their countrymen and lacking the
promised support, who mutiny, damage relations with the Native Americans, and
even resort to cannibalism. If the survivors at Charlesfort had not been found by one
of Stukeley’s ships, they could have well disappeared just like the Roanoke colonists.
If the Spanish had attacked Jamestown, as many greatly feared, the accounts would
have looked remarkably like those from Charlesfort. Jamestown was reinforced in the
nick of time, but only after those living there had undergone incredible suffering set a
damaging precedent for interactions with Native Americans. Yet the English finally
poured enough resources into their colonies to have them succeed. Popular
imagination has sifted the bad out of these accounts, seeing the beginnings of a nation

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in these contests over sovereignty. But the hurricanes, the death, and the desperation
tell a compelling story of what almost was not, a story that can help historians better
understand tangled European relationships and their common language for enacted
sovereignty at this time. With this perspective, historians can continue to blur
arbitrary lines and forge a more comprehensive understanding of the many
fascinating people and actions that made up Early American History. All of this
messiness and uncertainty tells a more interesting and a more accurate tale than one
of preordained greatness, a tale that more Americans should learn.
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