



La Florida del Inca and the Struggle for Social Equality in Colonial Spanish America

Ph.D. Jonathan D. Steigman

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A cross-disciplinary view of an important De Soto chronicle.

Among the early Spanish chroniclers who contributed to popular images of the New World was the Amerindian-Spanish (mestizo) historian and literary writer, El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616). He authored several works, of which *La Florida del Inca* (1605) stands out as the best because of its unique Amerindian and European perspectives on the De Soto expedition (1539-1543). As the child of an Indian mother and a Spanish father, Garcilaso lived in both worlds--and saw value in each. Hailed throughout Europe for his excellent contemporary Renaissance writing style, his work was characterized as literary art. Garcilaso revealed the emotions, struggles, and conflicts experienced by those who participated in the historic and grandiose adventure in La Florida. Although criticized for some lapses in accuracy in his attempts to paint both the Spaniards and the Amerindians as noble participants in a world-changing event, his work remains the most accessible of all the chronicles.

In this volume, Jonathan Steigman explores El Inca's rationale and motivations in writing his chronicle. He suggests that El Inca was trying to influence events by influencing discourse; that he sought to create a discourse of tolerance and agrarianism, rather than the dominant European discourse of intolerance, persecution, and lust for wealth. Although El Inca's purposes went well beyond detailing the facts of De Soto's entrada, his skill as a writer and his dual understanding of the backgrounds of the participants enabled him to paint a more complete picture than most--putting a sympathetic human face on explorers and natives alike.

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