Countdown to Florida Territory

by Ben Gunter

Two hundred years ago, Florida became US Territory. What did that revolution mean for people who were living in Florida in 1821 – for the Spanish-speaking residents of Pensacola, for the free black citizens of St. Augustine, for the English-speaking immigrants along the St. Johns River, and for the Native Americans all over the peninsula? How did Florida’s seismic shift from Spanish province to US possession reshape the American Dream?

Theater with a Mission (TWAM) invites you to join an international Countdown, getting up close and personal with Florida Territory step by step all year long. In January, we are exploring the visionary, multicultural impact of the Treaty that set the terms for Florida changing hands. It was named the Adams-Onís Treaty, after the US Secretary of State (John Quincy Adams) and the Spanish Ambassador (Luis de Onís) who hammered out its provisions.

Come discover this Treaty’s inviting, inclusive view of Florida with us – a vision for America’s future that is summed up in Article 6:

“The Inhabitants of the Territories which His Catholic Majesty cedes to the United-States by this Treaty, shall be incorporated in the Union of the United-States, as soon as may be consistent with the principles of the Federal Constitution, and admitted to the enjoyment of all the privileges, rights and immunities of the Citizens of the United-States.”

That means that two hundred years ago, every free black, every Native American, and every person of Hispanic descent living in Florida became legally recognized US citizens. Florida becoming part of the United States made the USA officially multicultural.

How did this new vision of America come to birth? On TWAM’s website, [www.theaterwithamission.com](http://www.theaterwithamission.com), you will find short videos, extracts from historical documents, and dramatic scripts that tell you, in their own words, what the architects of the Florida Treaty hoped to achieve.

Through quotations lifted from his published *memorias*, you can hear Luis de Onís denounce US oppression of Native Americans and insist that Native Floridians must fare better. Through passages from his handwritten diary (now digitized by the Massachusetts Historical Society), you can hear John Quincy Adams explain why the day he signed the Adams-Onís Treaty was “perhaps the most important day of my life.”

Let these strongly-flavored extracts from Florida’s history whet your appetite, because there is more to come. In February, TWAM will host a virtual Loco for Love Festival, bringing you face to face with dueling, dancing, dining, and drama from Florida Territory. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tik Tok for breaking news about the international artists who will be joining TWAM to mark this revolutionary development in American history, and the prizes you can win for joining in the Countdown.

photo:

Spanish meets English in Florida

Carolina Merida (bottom left) and Samuel Castellanos (top left) as Ambassador Onís and his wife Cristina; Idy Codington (bottom right) and Ben Gunter (top right) as John Quincy Adams and Louisa Catherine Adams

Photo by Sydney Schuhmacher