

# Hernando de Soto: Conquest of the American Southeast

A Document Based Lesson



Image Sources: <http://www.deviantart.com> (msierracg),  
<http://www.flickr.com>

- **The student will evaluate the development of Native American cultures and the impact of European exploration and settlement on the Native American cultures in Georgia.**
  - a. Describe the evolution of Native American cultures (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian) prior to European contact.
  - b. Evaluate the impact of European contact on Native American cultures; include Spanish missions along the barrier islands, and the explorations of Hernando DeSoto.
  - c. Explain reasons for European exploration and settlement of North America, with emphasis on the interests of the French, Spanish, and British in the southeastern area.

# Essential Question

1. What impact did Hernando De Soto have on the Chiefdoms of the late Mississippian period?

## Hernando de Soto: Conquest of the American Southeast

### Overview:

In the spring of 1540 an army of some 600 Spanish soldiers under the command of Hernando de Soto marched north from Florida into southwestern Georgia in search of riches. The impact of the Hernando de Soto expedition (which lasted from 1539 to 1543) was enormous. Not only did surviving Spanish chroniclers offer their first and last glimpse of pristine Native American chiefdoms across the interior southeastern United States, but also the accidental introduction of European plague diseases apparently resulted in massive epidemic population losses in these same regions.

The motives of the Spanish Conquistadors (like De Soto) and their patrons were prompted by a desire for: wealth, power, prestige, increasing opportunities for Spanish trade, spreading the Catholic religion to heathen natives, and building a Spanish Empire.

### The Documents:

1. **Document A:** The Maps
2. **Document B:** Letter to the King of Spain
3. **Document C:** Letter from Board of Magistrates
4. **Document D:** Letter to the Justice
5. **Document E:** De Soto's Village Statement
6. **Document F:** A Soldier's Account
7. **Document G:** Suffering of the Timucua
8. **Document H:** Tatham Mound
9. **Document I:** De Soto and Archaeology
10. **Document J:** The Death of Hernando de Soto



## Hernando de Soto in Georgia

The first European to explore the interior of what is now the state of Georgia was Hernando de Soto. In fact, De Soto entered the state on two occasions during the course of his expedition.

Hernando de Soto was born about the year 1500 in Extremadura, Spain. As a very young man he participated in the conquest of Panama and Nicaragua, and later he played a major role in the conquest of the Incas in Peru, where he became immensely wealthy. Not content with mere riches, De Soto wanted to be socially elevated to a marquis, the equal of the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro. He returned to Spain, and in 1537 Charles V granted him the right to explore and conquer La Florida, a territory whose only known borders at that time were the lower Atlantic coast and peninsular Florida. The nature and extent of the interior (present-day North America) were completely unknown at the time.

De Soto's fleet sighted the western coast of Florida near Tampa Bay on May 25, 1539. He landed about 600 men and about 220 horses, and from there he proceeded northward to present-day Tallahassee, where he and his men spent the winter of 1539-40 in the territory of the chiefdom of Apalachee.

On March 3, 1540, De Soto and his army departed from Apalachee and by day's end had reached just inside the southern border of what is now Georgia, a few miles south of present-day Cairo. When they reached the Flint River, they built a crude boat and ferried everyone to the western side of the river. From there they proceeded to the Chickasawhatchee Swamp, where they came to the chiefdom of Capachequi.

After spending six days in Capachequi, they resumed traveling northeast, proceeding up the western side of the Flint River to near present-day Montezuma, where they crossed to the eastern side of the river and came to the chiefdom of Toa on March 23. After a short stay, they continued on to the northeast until they came to the Ocmulgee River. On an island in this river they found an abandoned village, where meat had been left roasting on a *barbacoa*, a wooden frame suspended over a wood fire—the first recorded instance of barbecue in Georgia. They proceeded upstream a few miles until they came to the chiefdom of Ichisi, whose main town is thought to have been at the Lamar mound site at present-day Macon. Because the people of Ichisi met them peacefully, De Soto ordered that a wooden cross be set atop a mound in the town, and De Soto and his men tried to explain its significance to the Indians.

From Ichisi they proceeded northeast to the Oconee River, where they found the chiefdoms of Altamaha, Ocute, and Patofa, with the chiefdom of Ocute being paramount. From Ocute they continued eastward, crossing the Savannah River several miles north of where Augusta now lies. They continued through present-day South Carolina and North Carolina before turning northward to cross the Appalachian mountains, entering the Tennessee Valley east of what is now Newport, Tennessee.

## Hernando de Soto in Georgia

Then, proceeding westward down the Tennessee Valley, they entered Georgia for the second time around July 15, 1540. On July 16 they came to the principal town of the chiefdom of Coosa at the Little Egypt archaeological site, now submerged beneath Carters Lake. Like the chief of Ocute, the chief of Coosa was a particularly powerful one, with influence over chiefdoms to the northeast as far as present-day Knoxville and Newport, Tennessee, and to the southwest as far as about Childersburg, Alabama. When De Soto and his army approached the capital town, the chief of Coosa was carried out on a palanquin borne upon the shoulders of his retainers, while other retainers walked along singing and playing flutes.

On August 20, 1540, De Soto and his army departed from the main town of Coosa and traveled to the south, crossing the Etowah River at the town of Itaba—the Etowah Mound site—and proceeding on to the chiefdom of Ulibahali at present-day Rome. They continued down the Coosa River to another town, perhaps Apica, possibly located at the King site in Foster's Bend. On September 5, 1540, they crossed into what is now the state of Alabama.

The expedition continued westward for another three years. During this time about half of the original army were killed by Indians or died of various causes, as did De Soto himself.

Three historical markers commemorate Hernando de Soto in Georgia: at the Carters Lake visitors' center near Ellijay, along the Riverwalk in Augusta, and at the tourism office in Milledgeville.

# The De Soto Painting



# Hook Exercise: The De Soto Painting

Image Source- <http://www.art-of-facts.blogspot.com>

## Questions:

1. This painting hangs in the Rotunda of the Capitol building in Washington D.C. What inaccuracies, if any exist in the painting? What symbols are present in the painting?

---

---

---

2. Should this picture be hanging in one of the most important buildings in the United States? The answer is yes. Defend this answer despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

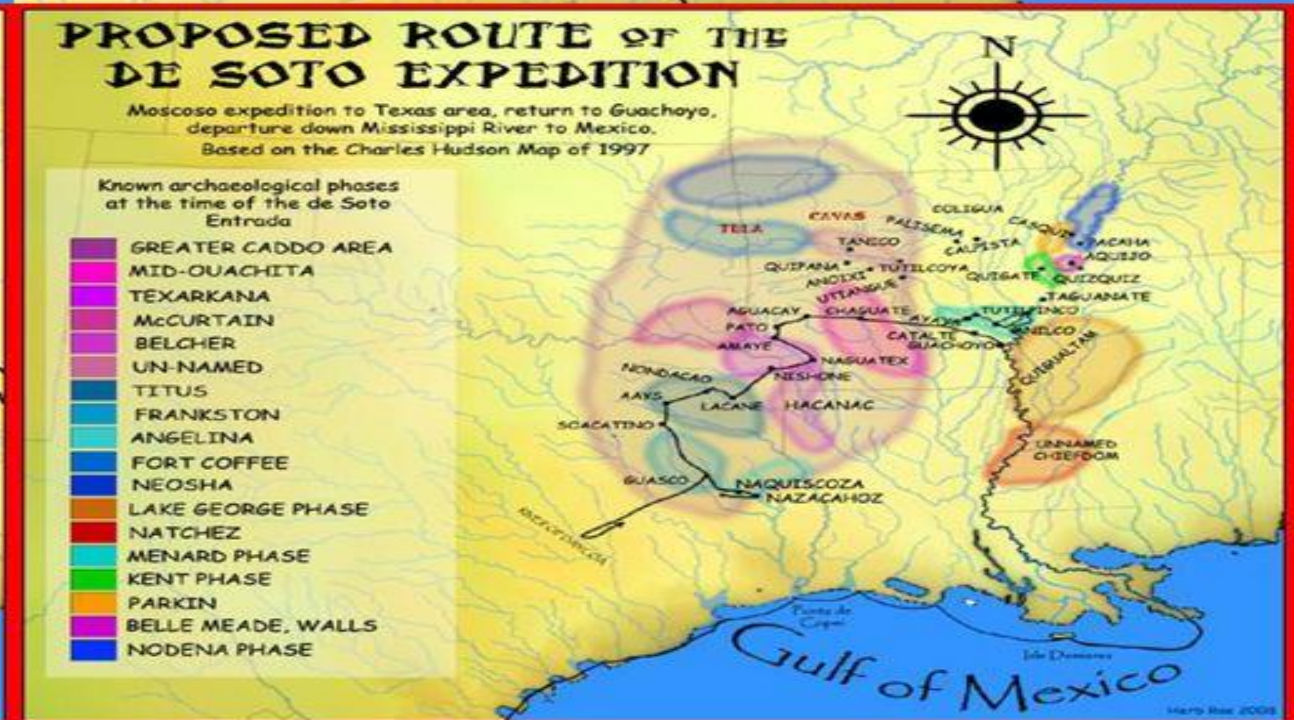
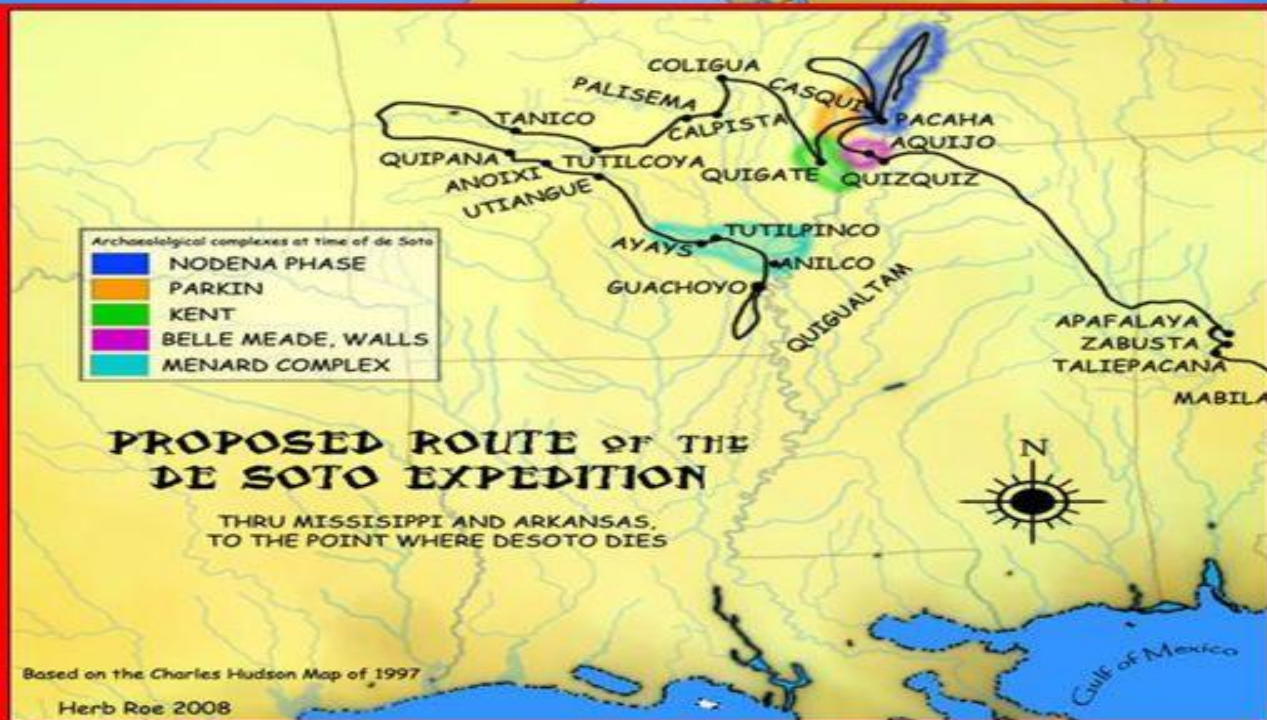
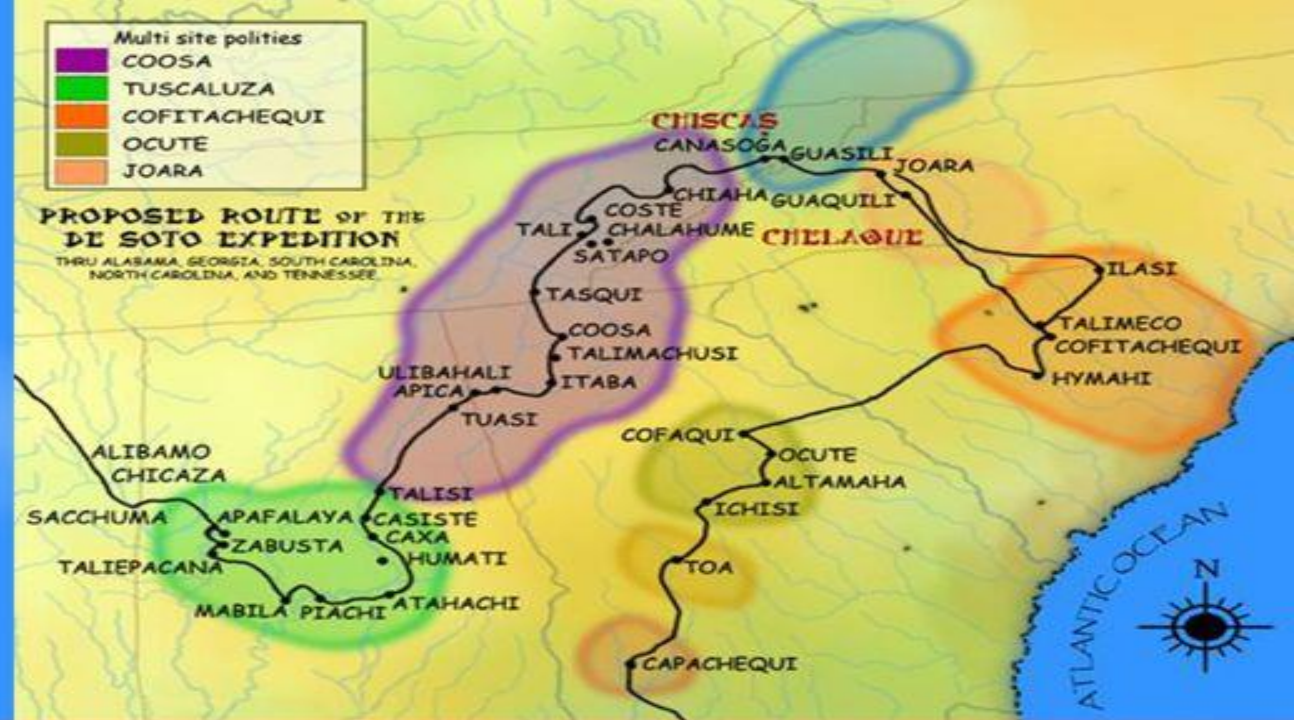
---

---

---







Based on the Charles Hudson Map of 1997

# The Maps

**Images Source-** <http://www.wikipedia.org>

## Questions:

1. From which island did De Soto set sail?  

---
2. Where did his expeditionary force land?  

---
3. Through which of Georgia's physiographic regions did the De Soto expedition travel?  

---
4. Through which other American states did the De Soto expedition travel?  

---
5. Where did the expedition end?  

---

# Letter to the King of Spain, From officers at Havana in the army of De Soto- 1539

- “We inform Your Majesty, that today, on the eve of departure, he has large vessels in port, two caravels and two brigantines, in all nine sail, having lost two since our arrival. He carries in them two hundred and thirty-seven horses, besides some of relief; three hundred and thirty foot, as well as those mounted; in all, five hundred and thirteen men, without the sailors. With these go more abundant subsistence than could have been gotten out of Spain for an armada. There are three thousand loads of cacabi, twenty-five hundred shoulders of bacon, and twenty-five hundred hanegas of maize: moreover, there are beasts on hoof for the settlement, and for the butcher, to be in readiness on the return of the vessels [from Florida], through which we are to receive large supplies. With this object, the Adelantado has bought many grazing farms, at the cost of much money, to be employed solely in affording us sustenance.”

**Source-** <http://www.floridahistory.com>

## **Questions:**

1. According to this account, how many ships did the De Soto expedition have? What kinds? \_\_\_\_\_
2. About how many men were went with De Soto on his expedition? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What did the men carry with them to help ensure their survival? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What evidence is present showing that the Spanish were planning for future settlements? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What did the Spanish bring that would provide a strategic advantage over Native Americans? \_\_\_\_\_

# Letter from the Board of Magistrates of Santiago de Cuba to De Soto- 1539

- “On the seventh day of June, of the present year, the Adelantado Don Hernando de Soto arrived at this port with five ships, bringing six hundred men for the conquest of Florida. He laid before us a provision bestowing on him the government of this Island, which we receive as favour. Being mindful that he goes to serve Your Majesty in the settlement of that country, his people have been entertained among the inhabitants of the place in the best manner possible, and he now makes ready for his departure. May our Lord guide him thither, and give the success most for His service and that of Your Highness...”

**Source-** <http://www.floridahistory.com>

## **Questions:**

1. What leadership role did De Soto and his men aspire to have in the New World? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What preparations had been made to fulfill this goal? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Whose favor did these Spanish conquerors seek? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How did De Soto's plan fit with what we know about the overall goals of the Spanish in the New World? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Letter of Hernando de Soto at Tampa Bay to the Justice and Board of Magistrates in Santiago de Cuba- 1539

- “May it please God that this be so; for of what these Indians say I believe nothing but what I see, and must well see; although they know, and have it for a saying, that if they lie to me it will cost them their lives.”

**Source-** <http://www.content.wisconsinhistory.org>

## **Questions:**

1. Why do you think that De Soto did not trust the Native Americans of the late Mississippian Period?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did De Soto mean when he said “must well see”? What is the context of that statement?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What would happen to the Native Americans if they lied to De Soto?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# De Soto's Village Statement

- “With the aid of God, we will enter your land against you with force, and will make war in every place, and by every means we can and are able”.
- “We will take you and your wives and children and make them slaves, and we will take your property, and will do you all the harm and evil we can”.

Source- Quote from *The Death March of De Soto* (video)  
Questions:

1. Why was De Soto motivated to use such harsh language laced with terrifying imagery? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Based on the statement, what was likely one of De Soto's major economic goals? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What can be inferred from De Soto's reference to religion? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you think De Soto's words were effective? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Account of Captain Gonzalo Silvestre (A Soldier on the Expedition)

- “The task was a very severe one because those [who went] would have to go back over almost 150 leagues of country inhabited by brave and cruel enemies, filled with large rivers, forests, swamps, and difficult passes, a crossing in which the whole army had been in great danger. This would be even greater now that only thirty lancers were going, and they would necessarily find the Indians better prepared than when the governor passed, and because of the injuries received, more angry and desirous of avenging them.”

**Source-** <http://www.floridahistory.com>

## Questions:

1. Which geographical features in North America would prove difficult for the Spanish during their expedition? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How were the Native Americans of the late Mississippian Period described by Captain Gonzalo Silvestre? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why do you think that that Native Americans were so angry? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

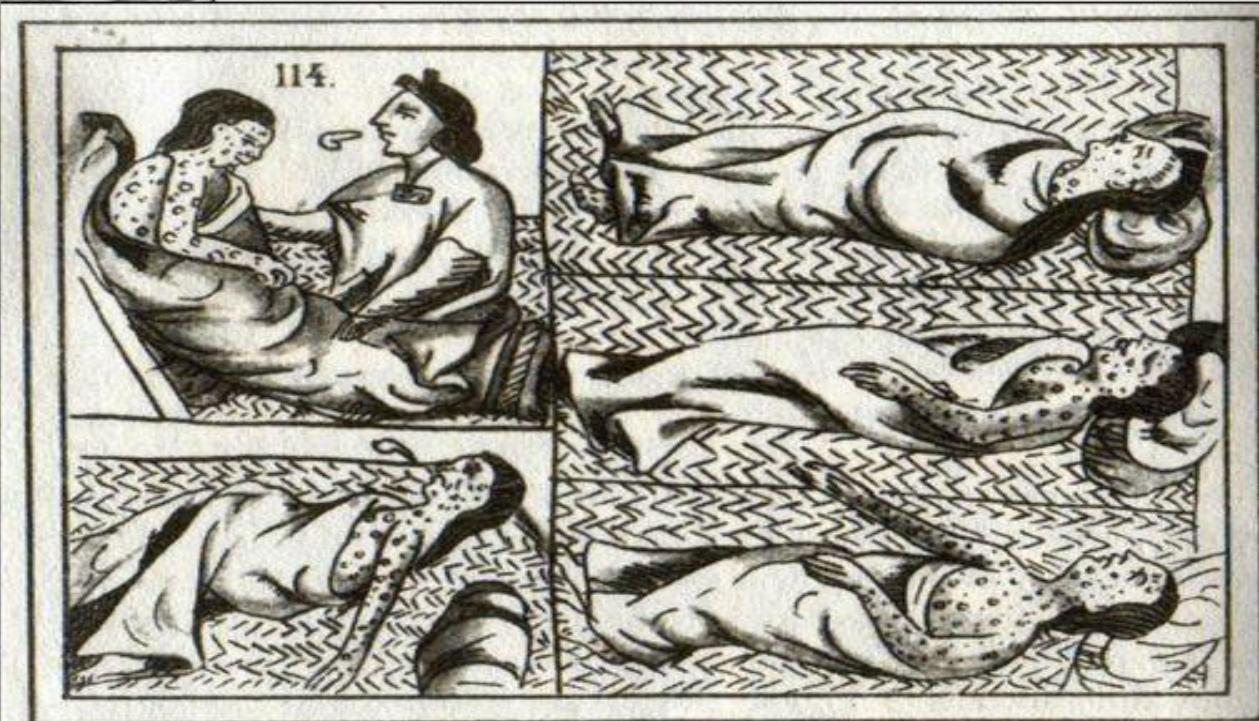
# The Suffering of the Timucua

## Image Sources-

<http://www.medsci.indiana.edu>,  
<http://www.executivehm.com>,  
<http://www.floridamemory.com>

## Questions:

1. Which major communicable diseases could the Timucua be suffering from? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How do the Timucua appear to be treating the illness? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How is the treatment significant? Do you think it worked? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What role do the women appear to have in the treatment of disease? \_\_\_\_\_







## The Death of Hernando de Soto

Image Source- <http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

### Questions:

1. In which major American river was De Soto's body likely submerged? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What imagery is present in the drawing? Why do you think the artist included this imagery? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is most surprising about the drawing? \_\_\_\_\_