

Juan ponce de leon essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Juan Ponce de Leon y Figueroa (1474 – July 1521) was a Spanish explorer. He became the first Governor of Puerto Rico by appointment of the Spanish crown. He led the first European expedition to Florida, which he named. He is associated with the legend of the Fountain of Youth, reputed to be in Florida. He was born in the village of Santervas de Campos in the northern part of what is now the Spanish province of Valladolid. Although early historians placed his birth in 1460, more recent evidence shows he was likely born in 1474.

His family genealogy is extremely confusing and poorly documented. There is no consensus on who his parents were but it seems that he was a member of a distinguished and influential noble family. His relatives included Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, the Marquess of Cadiz and a celebrated figure in the Moorish wars. Ponce de Leon was also related to another notable family, Nunez de Guzman, and as a young man he served as squire to Pedro Nunez de Guzman, Knight Commander of the Order of Calatrava.

A big contemporary chronicler, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes, states that Ponce de Leon became an experienced soldier fighting in the Spanish campaigns that defeated the Moors in Granada and completed the re-conquest of Spain in 1492. Arrival in the New World (Puerto Rico) Chief Agueybana greeting Juan Ponce de Leon The fleet reached the Caribbean in November 1493, and visited several islands before arriving at their primary destination in Hispaniola. In particular they anchored on the coast of a large island the natives called Boriquen but would eventually become known as Puerto Rico.

This was Ponce de Leon's first glimpse of the place that would play a major role in his future. Around this same time, Ponce de Leon married Leonora, the daughter of an innkeeper. They had three daughters, Juana, Isabel and Maria; and one son, Luis. He built a large stone house for his growing family—a house that still stands today near the city of Caparra. As provincial governor, Ponce de Leon had occasion to meet with the Tainos who visited his province from neighboring Puerto Rico. They told him stories of a fertile land with much gold to be found in the many rivers.

Inspired by the possibility of riches, Ponce de Leon requested and received permission from Ovando to explore the island. His first reconnaissance of the island is usually dated to 1508 but there is evidence that he had made a previous exploration as early as 1506. This earlier trip was done quietly because the Spanish crown had commissioned Vicente Yanez Pinzon to settle the island in 1505. Pinzon did not fulfill his commission and it expired in 1507, leaving the way clear for Ponce de Leon.

His earlier exploration had confirmed the presence of gold and gave him a good understanding of the geography of the island. In 1508, Ferdinand II of Aragon gave permission to Ponce de Leon for the first official expedition to the island, which the Spanish then called San Juan Bautista. This expedition, consisting of about 50 men in one ship, left Hispaniola on June 12, 1508 and eventually anchored in San Juan Bay, near today's city of San Juan. Ponce de Leon searched inland until he found a suitable site about two miles from the bay.

Here he erected a storehouse and a fortified house, creating the first settlement in Puerto Rico, Caparra. Although a few crops were planted, they spent most of their time and energy searching for gold. By early 1509 Ponce de Leon decided to return to Hispaniola. His expedition had collected a good quantity of the precious metal but was running low on food and supplies. The expedition was deemed a great success and Ovando appointed Ponce de Leon governor of San Juan Bautista. This appointment was later confirmed by Ferdinand II on August 14, 1509.

He was instructed to extend the settlement of the island and continue mining for gold. The new governor returned to the island as instructed, bringing with him his wife and children. Back on his island, Ponce de Leon parceled out the native Tainos amongst himself and other settlers using a system of forced labor known as *encomienda*. The Indians were put to work growing food crops and mining for gold. Many of the Spaniards treated the Tainos very harshly and newly introduced diseases like smallpox and measles took a severe toll on the local population.

By June 1511 the Tainos were pushed to a short-lived rebellion, which was forcibly put down by Ponce de Leon and a small force of troops armed with crossbows and arquebuses. Even as Ponce de Leon was settling the island of San Juan, significant changes were taking place in the politics and government of the Spanish West Indies. On July 10, 1509, Diego Colon, the son of Christopher Columbus, arrived in Hispaniola as acting Viceroy, replacing Nicolas de Ovando. For several years Diego Colon had been waging a legal battle over his rights to inherit the titles and privileges granted to his father.

The Crown regretted the sweeping powers that had been granted to Columbus and his heirs and sought to establish more direct control in the New World. In spite of the Crown's opposition, Colon prevailed in court and Ferdinand was required to appoint him Viceroy. Although the courts had ordered that Ponce de Leon should remain in office, Colon circumvented this directive on October 28, 1509 by appointing Juan Ceron chief justice and Miguel Diaz chief constable of the island, effectively overriding the authority of the governor.

This situation prevailed until March 2, 1510 when Ferdinand issued orders reaffirming Ponce de Leon's position as governor. Ponce de Leon then had Ceron and Diaz arrested and sent back to Spain. The political struggle between Colon and Ponce de Leon continued in this manner for the next few years. Ponce de Leon had influential supporters in Spain and Ferdinand regarded him as a loyal servant. However, Colon's position as Viceroy made him a powerful opponent and eventually it became clear that Ponce de Leon's position on San Juan was not tenable.

Finally, on November 28, 1511, Ceron returned from Spain and was officially re-instated as governor. Fountain of Youth According to a popular legend, Ponce de Leon discovered Florida while searching for the Fountain of Youth. Though stories of vitality-restoring waters were known on both sides of the Atlantic long before Ponce de Leon, the story of his searching for them was not attached to him until after his death. In his *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* of 1535, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes wrote that Ponce de Leon was looking for the waters of Bimini to cure his aging.

A similar account appears in Francisco Lopez de Gomara's *Historia General de las Indias* of 1551. Then in 1575, Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda, a shipwreck survivor who had lived with the Native Americans of Florida for 17 years, published his memoir in which he locates the waters in Florida, and says that Ponce de Leon was supposed to have looked for them there.

Though Fontaneda doubted that de Leon had really gone to Florida looking for the waters, the account was included in the *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos* of Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas of 1615.

Most historians hold that the search for gold and the expansion of the Spanish Empire were far more imperative than the any potential search for the fountain. Between voyages Upon his return to Puerto Rico, Ponce de Leon found the island in turmoil. A party of Caribs from a neighboring island had attacked the settlement of Caparra, killed several Spaniards and burned it to the ground. Ponce de Leon's own home was destroyed and his family narrowly escaped. Colon used the attack as a pretext for renewing hostilities against the local Taino tribes.

The explorer suspected that Colon was working to further undermine his position on the island and perhaps even to take his claims for the newly discovered Florida. Last voyage to Florida In 1521 Ponce de Leon organized a colonizing expedition on two ships. It consisted of some 200 men, including priests, farmers and artisans, 50 horses and other domestic animals, and farming implements. The expedition landed on the southwest coast of Florida, in the vicinity of Caloosahatchee River or Charlotte Harbor.

The colonists were soon attacked by Calusa braves and Ponce de Leon was injured when an arrow poisoned with the sap of the Manchineel tree struck his thigh. After this attack, he and the colonists sailed to Havana, Cuba, where he soon died of the wound. He was buried in Puerto Rico, in the crypt of San Jose Church from 1559 to 1836, when his remains were exhumed and later transferred to the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista. | | | | | Ruins of Juan Ponce de Leon’s residence at Caparra Juan Ponce de Leon March 17, 2011. Historical Process of PR.