

Editor's Notebook

This April marks the 500TH anniversary of the arrival in Florida of the Spanish explorer and *conquistador*, Juan Ponce de León. This is a compelling point of departure for evaluating the long-term effects of Ponce de León's voyage; it is also an opportunity to examine the historical relationship of Spain with the Americas, and the Hispanic heritage of North America.

With the latter objective in mind, Bárbara C. Cruz presents a special set of articles dealing with the early exploration of the Americas and Hispanic American history. Pointing out that "teachers who have a deeper understanding of the Hispanic heritage of America...will be better able to meet the academic needs of all their students," she invites readers to use the articles and class activities as "a jumping off point to discuss the Hispanic presence in the United States." (6)

The opening articles offer a vivid and lively portrayal of the challenges of sixteenth-century cartography, and provide an excellent opportunity for students to learn how Europeans viewed the world at that time. Luis Martínez Fernández introduces us to the impressions held by Europeans of what lay on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. He observes that "contrary to the still repeated misconception that before 1492, Europeans believed the earth was flat, it had long been established that it was round," (7) and outlines the challenges faced by the cartographer Amerigo Vespucci as he sought to prove that the lands believed by Columbus to be the Indies were not part of Asia. Rodney Kite-Powell describes Spanish expeditions and colonization initiatives in La Florida, outlining the problems and competition that confronted them. In the midst of the turbulence, he records noteworthy attempts to survey the area and chart its coastline, bays and inlets, and highlights important maps by Alonso de Santa Cruz and Francisco María Celi.

Stephen J. Thornton points out that, in the standard account of U.S. History, "the main narrative starts and remains in the vicinity of the English colonies and the political tradition that emanated from them." (19) An alternative geography might start with early Spanish settlements in the Southwest, an area of the country whose historical importance has been underestimated.

The right children's literature can offer important support for lessons about Spanish exploration and the Hispanic heritage, and, as Jason L. O'Brien and Wolfram Verlaan make clear, "can also be a language support for English language learners." (28)

They recommend books and offer teaching suggestions that can be particularly useful for classes dealing with Spanish settlement, Latino culture in the U.S., and the contributions of distinguished Latinos and Latinas.

Bárbara C. Cruz examines one of the most unusual episodes of Hispanic immigration to the United States—"Operation Pedro Pan," which airlifted 14,000 children from Cuba to the United States in a political exodus after Fidel Castro came to power

in Cuba. Her account of this exodus invites young students to imagine what it must have been like to be one of the Pedro Pan children. The article includes a feature by Mario Minichino that offers important background information about the historical relationship between Cuba and Florida.

Outside the special section, Tiffany Middleton's "Looking at the Law" column offers a guide for reading and analyzing Supreme Court decisions, which are now easily accessible on the Internet, but which can appear intimidating to those who are unfamiliar with the format and citation systems of these decisions. She describes the typical processes by which a case can reach the Supreme Court, and urges readers to treat the Court's decisions as important "primary sources that tell stories." (35)

Li-Ching Ho and Tricia Seow highlight the fascinating potential of teaching geography through the study of Chinatowns. These urban enclaves are a gateway to studying the history and culture of Chinese communities, and their spatial arrangements can teach students about the economics and social institutions of those communities. The authors provide helpful resources and a transect study of land use patterns in Singapore's Chinatown.

Looking ahead to Women's History Month in March, Fred Risinger's Internet column recommends some excellent sites for readers interested in teaching about women's contributions to history, society, and culture. In addition to covering historical turning points, the sites offer opportunities for creative teaching on topics ranging from plays by women about women to biographies of outstanding female leaders in the fields of politics, science, health, and sports.

One of the most acclaimed historical films of recent times is Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*, which focuses on the sixteenth president's efforts to secure passage of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. David Wolfford's review examines ways in which the movie can supplement the study of the Civil War period, and offers helpful teaching tips and resources.

The contributions to this issue of *Social Education* emphasize the value of the kind of teaching that combines different social studies disciplines into a powerful education that provides students the skills that are necessary for effective citizenship in the 21st century. In the opening feature, derived from the presidential address delivered at the NCSS annual meeting in Seattle on November 16, 2012, NCSS President John Moore shares his early experiences as a social studies teacher and lists five major issues facing social studies at the present time: (1) Teaching 21st-century skills; (2) Integrating social studies with other core subjects; (3) Developing common state social studies standards; (4) Strengthening social studies in the K-6 core curriculum; and (5) Advocating for the social studies profession.

The editors welcome the comments of readers on any of the contributions to this issue at socialed@ncss.org. 