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HOW DID PETER MATTHIESSEN DISCOVER MR. WATSON? • HUNTING THE BACKCOUNTRY FOR FOLK SONGS
WHY DO FLORIDA JOURNALISTS WRITE CRIME NOVELS?
PLUS: HARRY CREWS, AL BURT, ENID SHOMER, STETSON KENNEDY, BILL BELLEVILLE, GARY MORMINO,
PETER B. GALLAGHER, TIM DORSEY, AND MANY MORE GREAT FLORIDA WRITERS
WE STRUGGLE HERE at the Florida Humanities Council to define the humanities. Are they a set of academic disciplines, a methodology, the documentation of human experience? How can we express with urgency and clarity the profound impact that the humanities have on our ability to interpret our lives; to build understanding across cultures; to create dialogue, community, and civic engagement?

A recent report, “The Heart of the Matter,” attempts to define the role that the humanities play in our nation. Produced by a Commission of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at the request of a bipartisan group of members of Congress, the report was met with intense interest among many who feared that the humanities were taking a back seat to science, technology, engineering, and math.

The Commission, which includes former Supreme Court Justice David Souter, New York Times columnist David Brooks, singer-songwriter Emmylou Harris, and filmmaker George Lucas, argues that the humanities are essential to a democratic society and to our global economy:

As we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic—a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common.

It sounds lofty and abstract, but we see this every day in our work here at the Florida Humanities Council—teachers who gain insight and inspiration from one of our workshops, families experiencing the power of reading and discussing books during our PrimeTime programs, a community coming together to explore its heritage through our traveling Smithsonian exhibition program.

It can be difficult to capture and quantify these experiences, to articulate their impact on individuals and on society. But what we know with certainty is that democracy can only thrive when children understand the history and values upon which our country was founded and when citizens enjoy lifelong opportunities and civic engagement.

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.
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FORUM is looking back—and moving forward

By Barbara O’Reilley

Read about poets and warriors, heroes and hucksters, artists and singers, cowmen and Indians, and much more in this issue—a collection of highlights from FORUM’s quarter-century of telling Florida stories. In presenting this colorful retrospective, we are announcing our new online digital archive of past FORUMs.

You can now access more than 60 issues of FORUM, published since 1989. Just go to our website, FloridaHumanities.org, and click on “FORUM Archive.” Our partner in offering you this online resource is the wonderful Nelson Poynter Memorial Library at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, the campus where our offices are located.

“We’re delighted to join in a partnership with the Florida Humanities Council to make this rich resource available to the public,” said Carol Hixson, Dean of the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. “We will continue updating the FORUM archives over the years so that our students, all Floridians, and Internet users around the world will be able to access this unique archive of information about Florida.”

But there’s more: In addition to publishing our regular print edition of FORUM, we are also producing an enhanced electronic version of this issue. Go to FloridaHumanities.org to access this special multimedia edition. It provides extra resources and links that expand the magazine content. Here are a few examples for this issue:

- After reading Stetson Kennedy’s account of recording folk songs in backwoods Florida during the Depression, just click on a link to listen to many of the actual historical recordings made back then. Hear Kennedy’s co-worker, folklorist/novelist Zora Neale Hurston, sing songs of railroad workers and others.
- In addition to reading Joe Akerman’s article about Florida cowmen—America’s first cowboys—you can access numerous historical photos of them and hear interviews with Florida cattlemen.
- Read Peter B. Gallagher’s profile of Seminole Chief Jim Billie, then watch a video of Billie singing one of his signature songs, “Big Alligator,” and describing how his young son is learning the ways of the swamp.
- Read writer Enid Shomer’s poem “Into the Land of Flowers,” then listen to our radio interview with her.

We hope you enjoy our online multimedia FORUM as well as our print issue. Peruse articles about folk art, Everglades characters, Florida writers, the early days of tourism, the effect World War II had on our state, the decline of historic fishing villages, the power of our beautiful natural resources, the promises and complexities of the Florida Dream, and more.

So turn the page and enter a multidimensional Florida. Then go to FloridaHumanities.org and experience even more.

BARBARA O’REILLEY is editor of FORUM.
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During the Depression, Stetson Kennedy was part of a team that traveled throughout the state to collect cultural and statistical information about Florida. He called it a “treasure hunt.” This work, under the Florida Writers Project of the federal Works Progress Administration, resulted in the WPA Guide to Florida. He described the project’s parameters this way:

“I urged our hunters not to overlook any of the geography, climate, flora, fauna, peoples, and occupations to be found in Florida. Ethnically speaking, this meant documenting the predominant Cracker and African-American cultures, as well as major Latin (Cuban, Spanish, Italian), Jewish, Bahamian, Greek, and Arabic communities—and smaller pockets of Seminoles, Czechs, Slovaks, and others. Florida occupations that strongly affected folk culture and found expression in folk song included lumbering, turpentining, ranching, fishing, agriculture, citrus growing, railroading, phosphate mining, and tourism.”

Kennedy, who went on to become a human rights activist, prolific author, and cultural icon himself, died in 2011 at the age of 94. He describes the hunt for folk songs in the article excerpt at right:

In the 1930s, we traveled back roads the length and breadth of the Florida peninsula, toting a coffee-table-sized recording machine into turpentine camps and sawmills, into citrus groves and the Everglades, onto railroad tracks and aboard shrimp trawlers wherever Florida folks were working, living, and singing.

“The Thing,” as we called the machine, looked like a phonograph and cut with a sapphire needle directly onto a 12-inch acetate disk. Every time we shipped off another batch of disks to the Archive of American Folksong (now the American Folklife Center) at the Library of Congress, the newspapers would report, “Canned Florida Folk Songs Sent to Washington.” And now all you have to do is select a can from the website shelf, open it up, and enjoy!
The voices you hear singing, talking, laughing, joking, and telling tall tales are those of Floridians who have almost all gone to Beluthahatchee (an Afro-Seminole name for Happy Hunting Ground). As for the songs they sang and the tales they told, many are still to be heard, having been passed along as hand-me-downs from one generation to the next...

Happily, many of the folksongs recorded by the WPA have also been preserved in books...edited by the man who served as national director of the WPA’s folklore collecting, Dr. Benjamin Botkin, [who taught us] about the interrelationship between life and culture. A bit later on, another outstanding folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston, gave us a definition that will stand for all time: “Folklore is the boiled-down juice, or potlikker, of human living.”

Those were hard times back then, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. People sometimes referred to them as the “root-hog-or-die” days, meaning that if you didn’t keep grubbing you were a goner. Lots of folks were “hollerin’ hongry,” and longing for a little gravy on their grits. A black preacher on the Sea Islands prayed, “Hear us, Oh Lord, we’re down here gnawin’ on dry bones.”

And on New Year’s Eve, Florida Latins intoned, “Go bad year, so we can see if the coming one is better.”

All of us working on the WPA (except administrators) had to sign a Pauper’s Oath that we had no job, no money, no property, and no prospect of getting any of those things. I was still a student at the University of Florida when I applied and, being eminently qualified in all of the above respects, I got the job...

In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld a policy of strict racial segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson; this was not overturned until Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Blacks and whites could not even drink out of the same water fountain in the South of the 1930s while the Jim Crow laws were in effect. It was, therefore, a rare and exciting event when one day in 1938 the director of the Florida project, Dr. Carita Doggett Corse, called the editorial staff into her office and announced:

“Zora Neale Hurston, the Florida Negro novelist, has signed onto the project and will soon be paying us a visit. Zora has been feted by New York literary circles and is given to putting on certain airs, including the smoking of cigarettes in the presence of white people. We must all make allowances for Zora.”

So Zora came, and Zora smoked, and we made “allowances.” Although she already had two books to her credit, Hurston had taken the Pauper’s
Oath with alacrity, and—like me—she had been assigned the title of “Junior Interviewer.” But her pay was only $35.50 every two weeks, because according to the WPA wage scale, it cost $4.00 per month less to live in her all-black hometown of Eatonville than it did for me to live in Jacksonville, where our headquarters was located.

Three years earlier (in 1935), Hurston had taken folk musicologist Alan Lomax, the son of pioneer folk song collector John Lomax, on a Florida recording expedition that began in Eatonville. Because this was a time of strict segregation in the American South, it would have been extremely dangerous for a black woman and a white man to be seen traveling together. To avoid complications, Hurston painted Lomax’s face and hands black. “In the field, Zora was absolutely magnificent,” Lomax recalled in a chat with me a half-century later.

Although I was nominally Hurston’s boss, I didn’t see much of her except on field trips. Like many of our rural field workers, she worked out of her home and submitted material by mail. Sometimes weeks went by without a word from her.

“Anybody heard from Zora?” Corse would ask her editors. When no one replied, she would look at me and say, “Better write her a letter and jog her up.”

I would do as directed and by return mail we would receive a thick manila envelope postmarked Eatonville—the “mark of Zora” I called it—stuffed with the most fabulous folk treasure imaginable. We took her “potlikker” and sprinkled it liberally for seasoning all through the Florida Guide.

Hurston’s track record enabled her to wangle the Library of Congress recording machine as a loan to the Florida project. Our first stop with the machine was the Clara White Mission, a soup kitchen in Jacksonville’s black ghetto, where the “Negro Unit” of our project was housed.

The singing of spirituals was a prerequisite to being served. The chorus of the first one we recorded was: “Lord, I’m runnin’ / Tryin’ to make a hundred / Ninety-nine and a half won’t do!”

When I pushed the playback button after the first stanza (to make sure the recorder was recording but also as an infallible means of turning the most shy into ham actors), Eartha White, founder of the mission named for her mother, commanded: “Hold it right there. I want to offer up a little prayer.”

What she prayed was: “Dear Lord, this is Eartha White talkin’ to you again…I just want to thank you for giving mankind the intelligence to make such a marvelous machine, and a President like Franklin D. Roosevelt who cares about preserving the songs people sing.”

It being unthinkable in those days for white and black (much less if they were also male/female) to travel together, Corse hit upon the scheme of sending Hurston ahead as an advance scout to seek and find people with folksong repertoires. I would follow with the machine and staff photographer Robert Coole.

There being virtually no overnight accommodations for blacks, Hurston frequently had to sleep in her Chevy.

One such recording expedition took us to a large turpentine camp near Cross City. We gained access by telling the (heavily armed) owners we were looking for songs. We set up a nighttime recording session around a campfire. In between songs, I said to the “hands,” “Don’t you know they can’t make you work against your will?”

“They do do it,” was the answer.

“Then why don’t you leave and get out of it?”

“The onliest way out is to die out. If you tries to leave, they will kill you, and you will have to die, because they got peoples to bury you out in them woods.”

At this point several young men jumped up and disappeared into the underbrush to serve as sentries in case one of the white woods-riders were to show up. Sure enough, after a while one of the sentries rushed into the firelight urgently whispering, “Here come the Man! Sing somethin’, quick!”

This excerpt from the Fall 2005 issue of FORUM was adapted from essays originally published on the Library of Congress website, American Folklife Center. Stetson Kennedy’s many books include such titles as Palmetto Country, Southern Exposure, Jim Crow Guide to the U.S.A., and Grits and Grunts: Folkloric Key West.

To hear Zora Neale Hurston talking and singing songs she collected in rural Florida during the Depression, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
Stephen Foster never set foot in Florida, yet he composed the most famous Florida folk song of all time. Jimmy Buffett, the state’s most famous folksinger, is a native Mississippian who doesn’t even live in Key West anymore. Beloved Florida songwriter Don Grooms was a Cherokee Indian, born and buried in western North Carolina. And modern-day troubadour Raiford Starke is a native Virginian who combined state prison names to create a Florida outlaw image.

All are part of the colorful enigma that is both contemporary Florida folk music and the alligator stew of folks who compose and perform original Florida songs. Unlike Texas, which promotes a sound immediately marketable as Texas music, Florida’s own folk sound is a changeling flitting all over the musical map...

“There are Chicago-style blues bands playing Florida folk songs. There are reggae bands playing it. And everybody has their own idea what Florida folk music is or isn’t” said Ken Crawford, a former Florida Folk Festival director.

Bona fide Florida rock stars like Manatee County’s Dickey Betts, Gainesville’s Tom Petty, and Tarpon Springs’s Bertie Higgins, unplugged, could actually qualify as Florida folk musicians. “Everything I write is folk music,” says country-music icon John Anderson, a Lutz native whose acoustic guitar and fiddle-driven “Seminole Wind” first told a world audience about the destruction of the Florida Everglades. “They all start out as folk songs. Just a man and his guitar.”

Most people would agree that Florida folk music must be acoustic—or it becomes something else. Then again, when you hear Tampa songsmith Ronny Elliott’s recordings of “Jack’s St. Pete Blues” and “Elvis Presley Didn’t Like Tampa,” or Scotty Clark’s renditions of “Largo,” or Rock Bottom’s performance of “Gator Tail,” or the Liz Pennock/Dr. Blue recording of “Sting Ray Shuffle,” they all sound pretty darned Florida folk, even with the splash of drums and hint of electricity.
Long before western cowmen drove their endless herds over the Chisholm, the Goodnight, the Sedalia, or the Bozeman, Florida cowmen were trailing their cattle across the Suwannee, the St. Marys, the Apalachicola, and the Black rivers. Before western cattlemen clashed with the Comanche, the Cheyenne, and the Sioux over grazing rights, Florida’s rancheros and Cracker cowmen had challenged Florida Indians over the use of rangelands. But while the cowboy of the sage and mesquite has received his well-deserved plaudits from American admirers and historians, the Florida cowman has been all but overlooked.

It is ironic that the story of Florida’s frontier isn’t as well known as that of the Wild West, which has been romanticized in novels and Hollywood productions and become part of our national folklore. North America’s first vaqueros (cowboys—known in Florida as cowmen) appeared on our southeastern peninsula in the mid-1600s, years before others worked the great mission herds of California and drove those remarkable Texas longhorns through the western plains. Life on the wild Florida frontier was every bit as colorful, dramatic, and violent as that in the West—complete with cattle rustling, gun slinging, range wars, border disputes, long trail drives, cattle barons, and cow towns.

Relatively few people are aware that Florida was—and still is—one of the most important cattle states in the country, producing some of the best beef. Modern-day Florida is better known for its beaches, amusement parks, and retirement villages than for its 5.5 million acres of land still used as pasture for nearly a million brood cows at any one time.

Cowmen still ride the Florida countryside, using loud cracks of their 12-foot-long whips to herd cattle. Some of the whips are different now, made of nylon instead of braided cowhide or deerhide; but the spirit of the cowmen has not changed. Their love of working cattle is the same as it has been over the centuries in Florida.

The first working rancho in La Florida started operation in 1605 near the settlement of St. Augustine. Franciscan friars and Spanish rancheros established the first cattle and horse herds primarily with Andalusian livestock descended from those brought a hundred years before by Spanish conquistadors. During the 18th century, Indians became the most important stock raisers in Florida. And during the 20-year British occupation prior to the American Revolution, a number of British planters started cattle herds, particularly along the St. John’s River Valley.

But it was the pioneering Cracker cowman of 19th-century Territorial Florida who expanded cattle production, making it an important part of the state’s economy. By the 1830s, the operating patterns of Cracker ranching appear to have been established. Some of the earliest Cracker cowmen led a caravan existence, herders more than ranchers, and always seeking better rangeland. They moved steadily southward, as did the Indians, searching for new pastures.

The cattle raised during the 19th century came from the same Andalusian stock that was left to forage in the wild some 300 years before. This was a hardy breed—sometimes referred to as scrub, woods, native, or Cracker cows. Preconditioned in Spain by centuries of
environmental extremes and selective breeding, they were tougher than any other European stock. While other breeds vanished, the Spanish foundlings survived. These cattle were small, but reproduced rapidly in the wilderness; they soon spread over many parts of the peninsula and over parts of the Southeast.

The early Cracker pioneers had to be as tough as the cattle in order to survive on the Florida frontier. They had a labor-hard existence in a hot, subtropical wilderness fraught with panthers, wolves, bears, hordes of mosquitoes, and the occasional outbreak of Indian hostilities. Perhaps for this reason, they didn’t make the best of impressions on some observers: “...a rude, uneducated class,” wrote Bishop Whipple in 1853; dirty, ragged, and dusty, seated upon long-tailed and short-eared horses, with the deadly rifle in front...and the broad brim hat,” wrote John T. Sprague during the Second Seminole War 1835-1842. But others saw them differently: “...plain people in this area who lived simply and roughly but never wanted or went in debt...all had cattle, which represented a cash crop,” wrote Richard Daniel in the 1850s...

These pioneers also caught wild horses, which became key to herding and ranching...Frenchman Francis de Castelma, who traveled in Florida in 1837, described the “Florida horse” this way: “It is called generally Indian pony and is small, long haired and bright-eyed, lively, stubborn, and as wild as the Indians themselves; it has a wonderful endurance of fatigue and hardship; it has a singular instinct in finding its way in the dense woods.” Over the years, the horses became known as Cracker ponies or “marshtackies.”

Dogs also became essential to the work of Florida cowmen. There were several breeds of cow dogs, but most were mixed-blooded...The dogs and the horses helped find and round up cows that were foraging in the deep woods, snake-infested marshes, and dense brush.

There were no fences, so the different herds sometimes mixed. Ownership was determined by the cows’ brands and distinctive ear-crops. Rustlers took advantage of the open range and altered or duplicated brands in order to claim cattle that didn’t belong to them...

The lynch law was invoked in dealing with horse thieves. Fights were commonplace, and differences were often settled with guns and knives. Gun dueling was as common among cowmen in Florida as among those on the Western Frontier. In 1832, the problem of dueling in Florida was so bad that the Territorial Council voted on a law that would have made it illegal. The dilemma of trying to impose law in a lawless territory is illustrated by a clause that was written into and then struck from the Territorial Constitution in 1838-39: It “would have rendered any man ineligible to a position of honor or involvement under the government who was a duelist, a bank director, or a minister of God.”

JOE A. AKERMAN, JR., who died in 2011, taught history at North Florida Community College in Madison for 38 years. His books include Florida Cowman: A History of Florida Cattle Raising and Jacob Summerlin: King of the Crackers.

Cracker cowmen still ride the Florida range, as they have done for centuries.
Take a whimsical stroll back through time, to old Havana. Walk among the street vendors, along the Malecón (sea wall), and near the bars and cabarets. Meet an eccentric old poet and some costumed carnival celebrants, neighborhood characters, and lottery-ticket hawkers.

Your fun-loving guides are middle-aged twin sisters wearing form-fitting sundresses, and a young man with a blond pompadour. You’re taking their playful tour of 1950s Havana by viewing their art—images painted on canvas and supplemented with attached wire, papier mâché, and other objects that combine to make three-dimensional scenes.

Meet the artists: Haydee and Sahara Scull and Haydee’s son, Michael. They are among the many talented folk artists in South Florida’s Cuban community. While the Sculls depict humorous street scenes that the sisters recall from hours of sitting on their Havana balcony, some of the other Cuban-American artists carve wooden sculptures of Cuban life in South Florida, create items used in religious practices, and tailor traditional clothing. All of them reflect the cross-cultural experiences that make Cuban-American folklife unique.

The Scull sisters, both formally trained in art, began creating their three-dimensional painting style after arriving in Miami (Haydee and her children in 1969, and Sahara in 1973). In Giselle Batido’s book Cubantime: A Celebration of Cuban Life in America, Haydee Scull recalls, “When we came on the Freedom Flights, we discovered a new world, a new horizon that gave us everything we needed to develop the most unlikely ideas, like the bottom of the sea or the stratosphere. Our art is everything that’s new.”

Many Cuban Americans dwell fondly on these scenes of old Havana, which stir memories of their former lives and provide a platform from which to teach their children about their collective past...

By dressing in highly colorful and somewhat exaggerated clothing styles evocative of 1950s Havana, the sisters present themselves as a part of the artistic world they have created.

By Gary Monroe

The Highwaymen: Painting along the road to success

Summer 2003 FORUM

Folk Culture: Eclectic and Unexpected—Just like Florida

In the late 1950s, several black teenagers in Fort Pierce taught themselves to paint Florida scenes. It was a moneymaking venture, a way they hoped to make a living, a better way than toiling in the citrus groves or doing the other menial labor available at that time to African Americans. They painted fast and, just as quickly, sold their framed oils from the trunks of cars, mainly on highways along the state’s East Coast. A fertile market existed for affordable and original art about Florida as families established themselves during the state’s postwar population boom. This artistic enterprise went strong for 25 years, until the culture shifted and tastes changed.

Who could have guessed that, decades later, these entrepreneurs would be considered the visual artists of their time and place? Who could have known that they would leave a testimonial in the form of perhaps 200,000 oil paintings that would become the markers for the tropical version of the American Dream?

Some 40 years after they started their venture, this loosely organized and nameless association of what grew to be 25 men and one woman became known as the Highwaymen...

[Their story] begins in the mid-1950s, when young Alfred Hair took painting lessons from A.E. Backus, a prominent white regionalist painter. Florida’s tropical beauty provided Backus ample inspiration; his time-tested aesthetic yielded paradisiacal images. Owning a Backus canvas was tantamount to claiming the land.

But Hair read the images differently; to him they provided a means to escape a bleak future and become wealthy. He decided to devise a way to use his painting skills to make money. Another African-American painter named Harold Newton likely served as a role model, showing Hair how this could be done. Newton, a natural-born artist, sold his paintings door-to-door while Hair was still in school. Newton painted in the manner of Backus, rivaling the esteemed artist...

When Hair was preparing to graduate from high school, he left Backus’s studio and gathered a few of his friends. He suggested they join in a creative effort that might help them all rise above the inferior status to which “Negroes” were relegated at that time. By teaching them the conventional painting formulas that he had learned, he gave the others a way out of “Blacktown.”

Hair devised a system to mass-produce paintings and thereby be able to sell them relatively cheaply. This involved working on multiple boards—developing certain areas in phases—to minimize labor and material, and hence maximize profits...

By shedding the established modes in favor of mass production, he and his associates developed a fresh form of landscape painting.

Gary Monroe is author of The Highwaymen: Florida’s African-American Landscape Painters.
When I was about 17, my father, my brother and I were starting up [Florida’s] west coast in his boat and as we went by the Ten Thousand Islands region my father told me about a big old white house sitting in the mangroves. Nothing else around it. A big strong white house. That house was taken down after Hurricane Donna. The National Park Service said it had been so damaged that it was a menace. They just used the hurricane damage as an excuse. That house was very, very strongly built. Anyway, that was Ed Watson’s famous house where terrible deeds took place. Just before he was killed by his neighbors, three people were murdered there.

Watson did not do it. It was actually his foreman who did the killing. The dispute was, “Did Watson order it? Was it done under his direction, or was it not?” That question has never been successfully resolved. So here we are considering the relationship between fact and legend in Florida history.

I didn’t want this book to be just a suspense story. I was much more interested in the psychological makeup of the people who killed Mr. Watson and their feelings as opposed to those who felt that he should not have been killed. So I set the execution up as a kind of myth and then work back to it at the end of the book...

When I first heard the story, I was intrigued by a man being executed by his neighbors. The neighbors were not outlaws, but peace-loving, hard-working people. And Mr. Watson was, by all accounts, very popular: a very good husband, a very good father, a very good provider. He wasn’t some sort of stunted serial killer. He was quite a guy. That attracted me. The Watson story is a very strong one. The deeper one gets into it the stronger it gets.

[How many people has Watson been accused of murdering?] The highest number I have ever heard is 55 or 57. It’s hard to know. No one survived to tell. No one ever saw him kill. There is a mathematical possibility that he, in fact, killed no one. Based on what I know, there are seven deaths from which it is very hard to separate him. Let’s put it that way, about seven. That is enough...

He is an American character. He is also a very classic 19th-century character. There were many people like him. Some ran small republics in South America. They were very ruthless. A little bit like in medieval days, or Renaissance Italy, or places like that. If people were in your way, you took care of them.

PETER MATTHIESSEN, 86, won the 2008 National Book Award for Fiction for his book, Shadow Country, a reworking of his three Florida frontier novels inspired by the life of the notorious Edgar J. Watson.
EXCERPT FROM

Meet the outlaws, poets, and old men of the sea on Florida’s Last Frontier

Fall 2009 FORUM
The Everglades: Life at the Edge

By Peter B. Gallagher

There are no surveyed geographic boundaries for the Cracker psyche known as Florida’s Last Frontier. It’s an extreme Southwest Florida mangrove mentality, in a land where more endangered people, plants, and animals exist than any other region of the state. You have hermits, outlaws, old men of the sea, good honest people who want to be left alone, gator wrestlers, poets, poachers, all manner of ne’er-do-wells, scofflaws, and mentals mixed in with millionaires, CEOs, and MIAs—and you can’t tell any of them apart. You don’t mess with Red the Bartender, Miss Wild Hog, or the Swamp Buggy Queen. You don’t stare at short people wearing Harley jackets. And most of all you don’t forget that anything less than freedom to survive on the sacred lands and waters down here is called “government intervention.”

Like in the 1980s when the Everglades Loop Road was paved. It was 26 wild and muddy one-lane miles of ungraded lime rock, swamp washouts, and sunning gators through the heart of the glades, beginning at Joe Lord’s gas station, a wayfaring oasis on the Tamiami Trail. For years Joe cursed the government for laying the asphalt “so folks from Michigan can see the swamp without getting wet.” He repeatedly warned: “Next thing you know they’ll put a Grand Canyon in here like they did in Colorado.” The government later shut his station down for code violations.

On a recent afternoon in Everglades City, just inside the flapping screen front of Leebo’s Rock Bottom Bar, ancient mariner Floyd Brown, his bony hand protecting a cup of whiskey on the counter, talks about these precious hardscrabble badlands as a paradise. But he allows that living down here is not for everyone. “Life is purty rough,” he says in the local accent. “Gov’ment’s always aft’rus, but we been livin’ a free way a life. Hit’s really a type a paradise. Just t’hell ain’t for ev’ryone.”

Floyd’s great uncle was the beloved local hero Totch Brown, a brackish coastal pioneer who hunted alligator and fish, poling the nearby Ten Thousand Islands for five decades before he was nabbed smuggling pot when the whole frontier got busted in the early ’80s.

Totch, who died in 1996, was one of 256 men from Southwest Florida—net fishermen and crabbers, charter boat captains and guides, hunters and gatherers, struggling to make a subsistence living, lured into crime by the promise of wealth, intent on harming no one but the government that had regulated their historic livelihoods obsolete. Good ole boys gone bad.

All of them served time on various federal charges, and those still alive are back on the mangroves, still trying to make a living in the area. That chapter in local history explains why the folks drinking in Leebo’s bar explode in coughs and laughter when Floyd Brown abruptly sticks up his hand to block someone from taking his photograph. “No! I’m a wannit man by the FBI!” he says. His reaction is pure instinct, just like sailing by the stars on a cloudy night and thinking like a snook when the tide’s going out. But after a split second he changes his mind: “No, wait! That’s right, I’m off t’list now. Hell, go ‘head.”

PETER B. GALLAGHER, Florida folksinger and Special Projects Writer for the Seminole Tribe of Florida, writes often about the Everglades and other aspects of South Florida’s “last frontier.”
EXCERPT FROM

After 166 years, a button reveals warrior’s spirit

Winter 2001 FORUM
Archaeology—Digging into Florida’s Past

BY BRENT R. WEISMAN

“Look what I found!”

When you are supervising an enthusiastic crew of volunteer archaeologists, these are not unusual words to hear... As I lay down my shovel and approached the group I heard the word “button,” and soon held in my hand what was indeed a button, dumped on the screen in a bucket-load of dirt from the nearby excavation unit. Brass, solid, with the large letters U.S. boldly stamped on its front, eagle above and wreath below, this was a button from an Army “greatcoat,” the heavy flannel overcoats worn by soldiers in the Second Seminole War.

It was the greatcoats worn by the ill-fated men of Major Dade’s command on the chilly morning of December 28, 1835, that prevented them from reaching their cartridge boxes during the surprise attack by Seminole warriors on the Fort King Road, at a spot less than 10 miles away from the orange grove where we now stood. Greatcoat buttons are prized finds at the sites of military forts and can even turn up at battlefields. But we were not digging at a fort or battlefield. We were at the location of what I hoped was a large Seminole Indian village dating to the Seminole War era, 1835–1842.

Combined forces of U.S. Army and militia had been sent to Florida with congressional approval to round up the Seminoles and their black allies. Their objective: Remove the Indians to Indian Territory out West, return the blacks to slavery, using any force necessary. Their goal: Open up the Florida peninsula for farmers, homesteaders, towns, cities, and commerce. The military men and the Seminole Indians were enemies and faced each other in combat as the Seminoles fought back to keep their homeland.

But why would we find a military button in a Seminole Indian village?...

What if Seminole warriors had gone into combat during the Second Seminole War dressed in captured U.S. Army uniforms? If so, were the uniforms worn as symbols of defiance, dramatic visual trophies from earlier kills? Were they removed from the dead of Dade’s command for example, or from those killed when Gen. Duncan Clinch briefly fought on the Withlacoochee’s banks in January, 1836? Or did they serve a tactical function to confuse an already bewildered foe? Or both?

Here was a deliberate attempt to send a message with no hidden meaning: Do you know whom you are dealing with? We are the Seminoles! We wear your suits into battle! Eyewitness military accounts provide historical confirmation of Seminole warriors dressed in Army blues. The brass button found in an old Seminole village in the hills above Lake Tsala Apopka helps tell the story...

On a sandy ridge above a central Florida lake more than 160 years ago, a person whose name history has long forgotten stood gazing out across the tops of the tall pines shrouding the ridge top, lost in thought, perhaps pondering an uncertain future, as the setting orange sun dissolved into the slate-gray waters of the lake. This person might have been a warrior, recently returned from battle, a sky-blue army coat draped across his shoulders. We will never know for sure. Nameless, yes. Invisible, no. Archaeology says that this person was a Seminole.

BRENT R. WEISMAN is a professor of anthropology at the University of South Florida.
When Jim Billie was born on the grounds of the Dania Chimp Farm, the Seminole Indians were a damned and forgotten people. In the mid-’40s they were a downtrodden curiosity, a single generation past being hunted with dogs and shot on sight.

The impenetrable mysteries of the swamp saved Florida’s first people from the first explorers—and saved their descendants from the U.S. Cavalry. The toll was cultural devastation, racial alienation, and human isolation. No longer fierce, pride beaten down, they emerged from the swamps and glades to a world of airplanes, cars, light bulbs, and radios. They became curiosities in thatched-hut swamp ghettos along the Tamiami Trail or, like Jim Billie’s family, “real Indians at work and play,” conducting their lives on display in the back corner of a garish tourist trap in full view of ticket-buying voyeurs of the strange: endangered species behind ropes, featured along with monkeys and alligators. Eyes down, sad, ashamed, they were subjects for photos tacked up on restaurant walls.

There was something about that Jim Billie, though, the elders said. The boy was into everything. Every Seminole could catch alligators, but he could rassle ’em. Tourists threw pennies at other Indians, but dimes at Jim Billie. He stood out...

When Jim Billie went to Vietnam, it reminded him of home. He looked at helicopters and saw buzzards; he gazed at the killing fields and saw the Big Cypress Swamp; he saw his grandpa in the eyes of an old Viet Cong. A voice told him at night: “The old ways must survive.” He came back to Florida to make that happen.

His people elected Jim Billie their chief five times. In 22 years, he took a bleeding tribal treasury that had never seen a smudge of black and built it into a $650 million annual budget. He constructed entire neighborhoods, a school, a museum, and the first casinos Indian country had ever seen. He began throwing money and lawyers at legislators and rulemakers. He gave every Indian who wanted one a job, an education, and a monthly dividend. Today his people have houses, cars, vacations, and hope. He refused toxic dumps, landfills, and fighter-plane maneuvers over his lands. He strengthened the concept of sovereignty for every Indian in the Americas. He played his guitar and sang his Seminole songs on stages around the world.

The government termed him uncooperative, and the same people looking for bin Laden trailed Jim Billie for a decade. His phone calls, his receipts, his liaisons, his songs—all were examined for a sign of weakness. They never charged him with even a parking violation. But he blinked, and an alligator took his finger. He paused, and greed caught him from behind. Thrown out of office by the leaders he handpicked to share the load, the most famous American Indian of modern times is now building chickees for a living in the hot Florida sun.

Like a bull gator, with only eyes and snout above the waterline, he waits to make his move. There is more to come, and every Seminole Indian knows it.

PETER B. GALLAGHER is Special Projects Writer for the Seminole Tribe of Florida. Jim Billie was re-elected chief of the Tribe in 2011, garnering 60 percent of the vote, and remains chief today. He previously served as chief from 1979 to 2001.
The Okefenokee Swamp is a blessing, a curse, a stink, and a wild fragrance that heats the blood and lifts the heart. The Okefenokee’s black water—black until you hold up a glass to the light and find it pristine, utterly clear—is home to at least 50 varieties of fish. This immense wilderness—666 square miles, some of it very nearly impenetrable—gives refuge to deer, bears, wildcats, otters, raccoons, and alligators. White and golden lilies, cypress, and tupelo trees mark the interior of the swamp with splashes of color.

This strange, lovely, and deadly place was where I went as a boy with my Uncle Cooter to help him work his trotlines, run his traps, haul his fishing seines, and cast his nets for crawfish...

One day tied up under a blackgum tree, my uncle cocked his head and asked, “Where you reckon all this water goes to, son?”

I thought on it a minute and said what seemed obvious: “No wheres.”

“No wheres! Is that what you said?”

His eyebrows raised and his eyes opened wide in what even I could tell was mock astonishment. “If it don’t go no where, just sets here…” he reached over the shallow draft boat and scooped up a palmful of water, “how come it ain’t got no scum? Water ain’t running’s gone turn bad. Is that right or is that wrong?”

He knew I knew that was right, so I didn’t answer, only sat watching as he reached into the bib of his overall for a can of Prince Albert tobacco and slowly fashioned himself a cigarette.

“To the sea, son, to the sea. Ever bit of water you ever seen on land is going or trying to go—to the sea.” He licked his cigarette and fired it up. “And sooner or later, one way or the other, all the water from all the land goes down to the sea. It may have to go up and turn into rain two or three times, and it may have to slake many a righteous thirst of both man and beast, but by and by it will mingle with the sea and become salty before it becomes sweet again…

“Suwannee River’ll take this water our boat’s floating on right now and pour it into the Gulf of Mexico. That Suwannee! It’s rivers that’s bigger but none prettier. I sawmilled over in that part of the country when I was a young buck. Lemme tell you about that river…”

Uncle Cooter’s been dead these past 30 years and I’ve grown long in the tooth and thin in the shank, but the Suwannee River still breaks free of the Swamp near Fargo, Georgia, then drops due south, its broad, shining expanse carrying no industrial traffic, veers west through White Springs, Florida, and flows on to the Gulf, the 240 miles of the river bordered right down to the water with trees that have never had an ax in them, opening at long and random intervals onto very little but very old communities and onto fish camps, where a man can fish all day or talk all day or do utterly nothing all day.

HARRY CREWS, who taught creative writing at the University of Florida for many years, wrote 16 novels between 1968 and 2006. He died in 2012.
Here, near the 120-foot-deep bottom of this limestone chasm, I am as aware as I have ever been of the pervasive power and magic of water. All but invisible, it arises from a slot in the rock, flailing me like a rag doll with its energy.

If underground water is the veins and capillaries that sustain our Florida physiography, then I am squarely inside a natural incision, a place where the liquid transports itself to the surface, where science meets myth and culture head on...

Looking closely in the soft rock around me, I see subliminal clues to the prehistoric sea that accrued to form first the platform, and then the crust of Florida. The hints are fossilized shells, still ribbed like a cockle, or cupped round like a clam. They are welded together by the dust of Eocene coral, whale skull, oceanic sand—an assemblage of calcium turned white as bone.

Even the manatees are a reminder of this oceanic genesis. I have encountered them underwater before, have seen the residual but distinct toenails on their front flippers, visual evidence of their own long and convoluted genetic journey, from sea to land, and then back again.

But if the fossils and the manatees are an aide-memoire to the core fiber of both people and place, the most urgent reminder is the fierce upwelling itself. Isotopes of water have been dated in Florida springs. And although a water molecule seldom stays in the atmosphere for more than 10 days, when hidden in the dark fissures and bedding planes in the rock, it may remain so for up to 9,000 years or more. It is inescapable. The water that pushes and shoves me around in the throat of Blue had once fallen on uplands as rain millennia ago, had fallen on and around the earliest native Americans who lived here. They drank it, bathed in it, were nurtured by it.

How did they regard it? Of the Timucua—here along the St. Johns for at least 4,000 years before the Europeans arrived—we know at least shards of their language. They had five different words for trust, six for virtue. But there was only one root word for water. Dew, rainfall, pond, river, lake, lagoon. It is all ibi. Perhaps it differed in context or pronunciation or modification. Nonetheless, it is ibi going in, and ibi coming back out. Ibi, a liquid god that rendered this once-arid sandbar and savanna luxuriant, that made it a jungle, warm, wet, and wildly productive.

The Timucua had a reverence for water, as they did for all of nature. Their deities were woven into it, not separate from it, not safely contained to a one-hour sermon, one day a week. Ibi held fish and snails, fed wildlife, watered crops, floated dugouts, gave life. In storms and in drownings, it also took life away.

BILL BELLEVILLE is a Florida writer specializing in nature and conservation topics. He is the author of six books, including Losing It All to Sprawl: How Progress Ate my Cracker Landscape and Salvaging the Real Florida: Lost and Found in the State of Dreams.
FORUM wins top honors for magazine excellence

FORUM received three first-place “Charlie Awards” and two second-place awards in the 2013 Florida Magazine Association competition.

The Summer 2012 issue, which featured Florida Book Award winners and author Patrick Smith’s “Discovery of an Unforgettable Florida,” won first place for special theme or show issue; the Spring 2013 issue featuring environmental photographer Carlton Ward’s “Journey to the Heart of Florida” won first place for best in-depth reporting; the FORUM series “My Favorite Florida Place” won first place for best department; and the Fall 2012 feature on Florida’s indigenous people, “What Was the View from the Shore,” won second place for best in-depth reporting.

In addition to these individual honors, FORUM won second-place in its magazine category for best overall writing.

Seeking nominations for top Florida writing award

The deadline to nominate authors for the 2014 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing is Dec. 16, 2013. This award honors a living Florida author for “a distinguished body of work” that has had a major influence on Floridians.

Nominations may be made by publishers, agents, booksellers, or colleagues knowledgeable about the author’s accomplishments and influence. Visit FloridaHumanities.org for more information.

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To learn about our grants, which fund community-generated humanities projects, go to our website, FloridaHumanities.org.

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You might also like our special Viva Florida package: the limited-edition poster signed by artist Christopher Still, two FORUM magazines featuring 500 years of Spanish heritage and Florida before the European conquest, and a special CD of 25 short “history moments” about early Florida. All for $45.

To order, go to FloridaHumanities.org.

Let’s stay in touch!

Update your contact information on our website, FloridaHumanities.org.
Calendar: FloridaHumanities.org

Here are some highlights of the hundreds of free public events we sponsor around the state. Dates and times are subject to change, and new events are continually added. For complete, up-to-date listings, go to FloridaHumanities.org.

PENSACOLA—OCT. 15 at 6:30 p.m., Pensacola Cultural Center: Retired college instructor Ora Wills discusses the book *Images in Black*, the publications of the African-American Heritage Society, and works of other Northwest Florida writers in documenting the historical and cultural contributions of African Americans.

MIA MI SPRINGS—NOV. 3 at 3 p.m., Rebeca Sosa Theater: Florida icons Henry Flagler, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas step out of the past and onto the stage to discuss their visions for Florida in “Dreamers & Schemers: An Evening with Great Floridians.” November programs also scheduled in Kissimmee and Vero Beach.

SAFETY HARBOR—NOV. 21 at 6 p.m., Safety Harbor Public Library: Hear the story of the real first Thanksgiving, which was in St. Augustine in 1565—and enjoy family activities that give a glimpse into the lives of European explorers and Florida native people.

PORT ST. JOE—NOV. 22 at 2 p.m., Corinne Costin Gibson Memorial/Gulf County Library: Learn about the work of beloved Florida author Patrick Smith, who wrote *A Land Remembered*. His son Rick Smith presents a video, photos, artwork, music, and sound effects along with a video cameo by the author.

Ready for a Florida adventure?

Join us next spring as we explore two historic coastal communities

MARCH 14–16, 2014: APALACHICOLA
During our scholar-led weekend, we’ll learn about this old port town’s colorful history and its current challenges, browse its picturesque streets, experience its authentic working waterfront, and savor mouthwatering seafood fresh off the boat.

APRIL 11–13, 2014: FERNANDINA BEACH, AMELIA ISLAND
We’ll hear from scholars about the “Isle of Eight Flags”—a magnet for entrepreneurs, pirates, revolutionaries, and slave traders—while we enjoy this charming island community of Victorian-era homes, gorgeous beaches, and great food.
They worked hard and did what they had to do. They had no choice. A generation of Floridians grew up in the Depression, briefly tasted the sweet relief of recovery, then sacrificed it to fight a world war. They grew up learning to scrimp and reuse and barter; they fished and crabbled and picked oranges and worked odd jobs and borrowed and helped each other. Their lives were commandeered by a war that upheaved Florida almost as dramatically as Europe. They married early in heady, romantic, and uncertain days. They fought. Some died.

When they came home they found their mostly rural, small-town state changed forever. So they built a new life and a new state. Surely this generation of Floridians saw more, did more, suffered more, and achieved more than any of this century. Whether decorated hero or everyday citizen, every Floridian who lived through those days has a story to tell...

Florida’s wartime generation came home eager to make up for lost time. With tuition and books paid under the GI Bill, and an extra allowance for being married, vets jammed Florida’s schools. The Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee became Florida State University in 1947. Enrollment in the state’s public universities tripled between 1945 and 1950. The GI Bill, allowing veterans to buy a home with no money down, led to an unprecedented boom in housing construction. Many grateful cities donated lots. By 1950, an amazing 40 percent of Florida’s housing stock was less than 10 years old.

Florida inherited a network of military bases and highways. Between the growing Cold War defense industry and the conversion of bases to airports, hospitals, and prisons—and, in the case of Sebring, even a racetrack—fears of demobilization were soon allayed. One of the most important postwar events was the military’s acquisition of a sparsely populated area along the Atlantic coast for a missile-proving ground named Cape Canaveral.

Postwar victory seemed at hand over the mosquito—with a chemical that had first been applied in the jungles of the South Pacific, called DDT. Advances in air-conditioning made Florida summers more bearable than ever. Transportation and technology accelerated the urbanization of Florida. Several smaller counties experienced sharp drops between 1940 and 1950: Dixie County, 44 percent; Gilchrist, 18 percent; Glades, 20 percent; Lafayette, 22 percent. The percentage of Floridians living in urban areas, the Census Bureau found, rose from 29 percent to 46 percent.

But perhaps the greatest legacy of World War II was that it exposed Florida to the vast cross-pollination of millions who passed through the state. In a Gallup Poll at the end of the war, for the first time, Americans ranked Florida as the place they would most like to live if they moved. They came to the state to sun themselves, to play, and ultimately to live. The postwar explosion had begun.

Howard Troxler is a retired newspaper columnist who wrote for the Tampa Tribune and the St. Petersburg Times (now the Tampa Bay Times).
EXCERPT FROM

The Skirted Soldiers—How the WACs came to Daytona Beach and saved the town

Fall 1999 FORUM

WAR! How World War II changed the face of Florida

By Gordon Patterson

In the first year of the war, as gas rationing kept tourists at home, Daytona Beach's economy went into a swoon and the city teetered on the edge of insolvency. Once bustling hotels and restaurants stood empty at peak season. “It was like a water faucet being cut off,” recalled Daytona Beach car dealer Saxton Lloyd. And bringing the reality of war frighteningly close to the city’s famous beaches, German U-boats, like bloodthirsty sharks, prowled just offshore in the Atlantic. ”It was,” recalled Lloyd, “a dreadful, depressing time.”

Then, in 1942, relief came from an unexpected source when the recently created Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps, or the WACs, established a training facility in Daytona Beach. Between October 1942 and March 1944, more than 20,000 WAC recruits passed through town, and their modest monthly pay checks helped pump nearly $5 million a month into Daytona Beach’s depressed economy...

How the War Department in Washington came to choose Daytona Beach as a WAC training site is the story of political pressure from a highly unusual source being applied to the highest level of government. [After lobbying efforts by local business leaders apparently failed, another local campaign was launched.] It involved Mary Bethune, the black educator who established the Daytona Beach Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls, which became Bethune Cookman College.

Eileen Butts, who served as chairman of the Bethune Cookman Advisory Board during the war years, asked Mrs. Bethune to use her Washington contacts to win the WAC depot for Daytona Beach... then watched in stunned silence as the president of Bethune Cookman “took down her telephone receiver and telephoned Franklin Delano Roosevelt as coolly as possible.” Apparently the president liked what he heard. “He gave her all encouragement,” recalled Butts. “Mrs. Bethune thanked us for coming and told us she would keep in touch.”

A few weeks later, Butts received a call from Bethune. “My darling (Mrs. Bethune always called me that),” Butts said, “you will get your wish. The WACs are coming to Daytona Beach.”

GORDON PATTERSON, a professor at the Florida Institute of Technology, specializes in environmental history and modern European intellectual history, with an interest in the history of Florida and science and technology.
In the prologue to his influential *Ideas of Order* (1935), Wallace Stevens attempts to describe why he fled the seductive “ever-freshened Keys” for the “leafless...wintry slime” of Connecticut. Entitled “Farewell to Florida,” this elegiac account of the poet’s final return from Key West to life as an insurance executive in Hartford contrasts a turbulent, vital, ever-changing Florida with the cold, orderly North.

Such extravagant complexity, verging on chaos, has always characterized Florida’s physical environment—and its literary landscape as well. In today’s Florida, for example, Cuban-American poets mingle with the authors of Cracker cowboy stories at the Miami Book Fair, while Southern Gothic novelists from Tampa and Tallahassee regularly vie for bookshelf space with writers of Florida noir and Space Coast science fiction.

This rich collision of writing and culture is nothing new. By the time the British founded Jamestown in 1607, we Floridians already had an extraordinary collection of poems and narratives, myths and adventure stories. Unlike the literary history of Virginia, however, no single strand of language, culture, or values knits our literature neatly together. While much of our earliest literature is in Spanish, for example, like the remarkable 16th-century poems of Bartolomé de Flores, Juan de Castellanos, and Fray Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo, one of our finest early works is an English book by a French naval captain. Jean Ribaut’s exuberant *The Whole and True Discoverie of Terra Florida* (1563) describes the French Huguenot expedition he had led the previous year. And even after almost two and a half centuries of Spanish and British rule, along with the increasingly powerful influence of the new, relentlessly English-speaking United States to its north, the first novel about Florida appeared in French, François-René de Chateaubriand’s *Atala* (1801).

Perhaps more than any other single characteristic, this ability to embrace radically different traditions without forcing them to assimilate defines our literary history. The year after Wallace Stevens made his first trip to Florida in 1916, the elegantly patrician William Dean Howells fondly recalled *A Trip to St. Augustine* while Ring Lardner’s *Gullible’s Travels* satirized our winter pretensions in his distinctive urban vernacular. As Stevens was shaping his allusively symbolic poems about Key West, Pulitzer Prize—winner Stephen Vincent Benét described the journey of his Minorcan ancestors to New Smyrna in his poetic novel *Spanish Bayonets* (1926); James Weldon Johnson recreated the sermons he had heard as a child in his native Jacksonville in *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927); Zane Grey took time from writing westerns to focus on fishing off Long Key; and John Dos Passos used his experimental styles to explore the Florida land boom in *The Big Money* (1936). Dos Passos introduced Ernest Hemingway and his spare understatement to the Keys, soon to be followed by the Bohemian Elizabeth Bishop. At the same time, Zora Neale Hurston was capturing the African-American voices of her childhood world of Eatonville and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings the Cracker voices of her adopted Cross Creek.

These writers merely suggest the surface of our literary history during one brief window of time. Throughout our history, Florida has always experienced a vigorous competition of voices attempting to define its distinctive qualities.

Maurice O’Sullivan is Kenneth Curry Professor of Literature at Rollins College.
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“What’s the deal with Florida?”

That’s probably the most frequent question I and my fellow local writers get asked when we venture out of state on the book tour. People want to know why novels from the Sunshine State—particularly the mysteries—are so whacked out. Is it the writers? The heat? The stress of a rapidly growing, crime-ridden, deceptively glamorous polyglot locale?

Another top question: How come so many of the state’s writers come from newspapers? It is indeed an impressive journalistic roll call. Carl Hiaasen, Edna Buchanan, Dave Barry, Randy Wayne White, S.V. Date, Paul Levine, Jonathon King.

If you look carefully, the second question pretty much answers the first. That’s the dirty little secret. To borrow from Barry: We’re not making this stuff up.

This closeness to reality is either the source of the success, or the beginning of all the trouble. The absolutely best stories are the ones you shouldn’t use: the most insane things the criminals and the average idiots on the street actually do. You must resist temptation and reject them or you’ll be accused of penning bad fiction. As Mark Twain said, “Truth is stranger than fiction because fiction has to make sense.” And in a piece on the Florida genre for the New York Times, Hiaasen called these stories “too true to be good.”

Crazy behavior erupts all over the country, and I was beginning to think I was just getting a disproportionate sense of Florida’s share because I was the night metro editor of the Tampa Tribune. Every story and potential story came across my desk: the dispatches from our police reporters, the Associated Press wire from across the state, the local jail records—and all night long, the police scanner going in the background, sirens and out-of-breath officers in hot pursuit.

Meanwhile, I was an unpublished author working on my first book (jotting down ideas in a notebook I kept stashed in a desk drawer at work). It was going to be a comic tale of wanderlust, road-tripping around my home state, visiting all the most beautiful and historic sites the state had to offer.

But what it would not be was a crime book or a mystery. That had been done too many times before; and besides, the competition already out there was way too intimidating. No, it would be picaresque, full of free-association, a coming-of-age saga. Maybe even a modern Don Quixote or a tropical Jack Kerouac or one of those books where reviewers use the word zeitgeist.

It wasn’t working.

So I’m staring at my computer screen in the newsroom one night reading about a guy high on crack who ordered up a limousine to rob a bank, and that’s when it hit me like a bolt of lightning on the road to Damascus. The book has to be about crime. There was no way around it. Sure, the field was crowded, but this wasn’t a contrived decision. This was what I was, what I knew. And besides, a crazy satire about Florida without crime? Now that would be bad fiction.

TIM DORSEY is author of Florida Roadkill, Hammerhead Ranch Motel, Orange Crush, Triggerfish Twist, and many other novels.
from its founding as an imperial outpost to its modern identity as a tourist empire, Florida has evoked contrasting and compelling images of the sacred and profane: a Fountain of Youth and a Garden of Earthly Delights; a miasmic hell hole and a concrete, cultural wasteland. As a powerful symbol of renewal and regeneration, Florida’s dreamscape is constantly shifting.

Where once the land and climate bewitched tourists and travel writers, today retirement communities, urban sprawl, and theme parks occupy that firmament.

In Florida the line between reality and illusion is easily blurred. A state of last chances, lottery sweepstakes, and fantasy resorts, Florida has attracted more than its timeshare of mountebanks, binder boys, and developers selling land by the gallon and dreams for ten dollars down. Named for flowers and garlanded with sunshine, Florida launched real estate promotion and tourism into big business, brokering the dreams of millions of Americans seeking renewal.

In 1945, Florida held out a well-deserved reward and respite for war-weary Americans. A George Gallup poll confirmed what every Detroit autoworker or New York stockbroker already knew: California and Florida were America’s favorite tourist destinations. If Americans were identified by what they thought, they were also defined by what they bought. A postwar dreamlist included marriage, a house, a car, and a vacation.

Contrary to popular myth, theme parks dotted the state before Disney, but the theme was Florida. Prosperity’s wake lifted not only the luxury yachts docked at Miami’s Pier 5, but Evinrude bass boats on Lake Apopka and glass-bottomed vessels at Silver Springs. As charming and understated as it was later brash and universal, tourism sanctioned fun and profit in an era when consumption was replacing production as a national template. Tourism had changed remarkably little since the 1920s when the popularity of the automobile, the completion of major travel arteries, and national prosperity combined to promote vacations as a democratic right and republican virtue.

Mid-century tourism exemplified pluckish capitalism and puckish fun. In St. Petersburg George Turner purchased an unusual tract of land in 1903. Turner grew tropical fruits and orchids, but discovered his most lucrative crop was Yankees, who wished to stroll along the paths and gawk at the tropical foliage and rock formations of his Sunken...
Silver Springs, east of Ocala, one of the state’s earliest destinations for travelers, gained fame after the Civil War for its crystal waters. In 1909 an Ocala businessman purchased 80 acres surrounding the springs for a few thousand dollars...[By the mid-1920s] aggressive advertising and highway construction helped transform Silver Springs into a popular destination.

Soon, the flood of tourists spawned a kind of commercial creativity that survives to this day. There was Newton Perry, the former lifeguard at Silver Springs, who stumbled upon a natural wonderland along U.S. 19. In 1947, Perry opened Weeki Wachee in Hernando County to the public...[At both sites, it was the primacy of nature that drew tourists.] But at another famous attraction, Cypress Gardens, it was the flamboyance and showmanship of its promoter, Richard Pope...On January 2, 1936, the “Swami of the Swamp” opened Cypress Gardens to 136 customers who paid 25 cents admission; by 1950, Cypress Gardens’ gift shop sold more Kodak film than any retail center in America...

[In 1938] Marineland opened on A1A between St. Augustine and Daytona Beach, perfectly located to snag Gold Coast-bound travelers, [drawing a half-million customers annually by the early 1950s]...Between 1950 and 1970, Miami and Miami Beach held sway as the Sunshine State’s favorite adult tourist destinations. Tourists sped down U.S. 1 and Route 27 with the single-minded pursuit of a day at the Flamingo Race Track and an evening at the Sans-Souci...

Tourism, then as now, offered a window into regional, ethnic, and racial guideposts and customs. In general, Midwesterners enjoyed the wholesome ambience of Florida’s west coast, while northeasterners preferred the east coast. Southerners maintained a long love affair with the Florida panhandle, frequenting hotels and cabins from Pensacola to Panama City. American Jews, in particular, were drawn to Florida’s Gold Coast.

To African Americans, Florida was still Dixieland. Tourism defined Florida, but it also divided Floridians... By the 1950s a handful of black resorts had been created: Paradise Springs near Silver Springs and Virginia Beach in Miami...Florida’s most popular and renowned black tourist spot, however, was American Beach, located on the south end of Amelia Island.

GARY R. MORMINO, professor emeritus of history and co-founder of the Florida Studies Department at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, is scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council. His books include Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams.
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Re-enactment
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10 am

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August 16, 2014
10 am

1565 – 1763
First Spanish Period

1774
William Bartram Visits Payne’s Prairie

1783 – 1821
Second Spanish Period

1817
Arredondo Grant
1817 – 1818
First Seminole War over cattle rustling

1824
Alachua County formed on December 29

1825
Bellamy Road constructed from St. Augustine to Tallahassee

1835 – 1842
Second Seminole War:
General Edmond P. Gaines participated,
as did Osceola and Micanopy

1845
Florida becomes a state

1853 – 1858
Third Seminole War

1853
Boulware Springs Meeting: County seat moved to Gainesville area

Postcards shown are a selection from the Matheson Museum’s Mark V. Barrow Archives of over 20,000 postcards

2014 Calendar of Events
Subject to Change

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www.mathesonmuseum.org
American pioneers settled along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts more than 100 years ago when Florida was still a frontier state. Their small fishing communities were isolated—surrounded only by the unspoiled beauty of mangrove-lined bays and estuaries, sea grass marshes that stretched for miles, or white sandy beaches on barrier islands. It was an idyllic life for those who remember it. “It was heaven on earth!” said a fisherman from Cortez, one of the Gulf Coast villages.

Over the years these families built a tradition of small-scale net fishing primarily in bays and estuaries and near-shore waters. They also raised vegetable gardens or traded fish with local farmers. They became tight-knit communities with close ties to their environment and landscape. The tradition of fishing became more than just an occupation; to them, it became a lifestyle.

But in recent decades, these fishing families have become endangered species. Most of the fishing villages that once fringed the entire Florida peninsula are gone. The few that remain are struggling to keep some aspect of their tradition alive. “It’s the things you don’t see that are missed and get to your heart,” said one Florida fisherman. “When you go down to the docks, you don’t see the boats going by loaded with nets. You don’t see the men walking down the road on their way to the dock with their lunch box in their hand. You don’t see the nets being mended in the yard.”

The pressures on Florida fishing families have come from many directions: Increasingly strict regulations have eliminated some of their fishing rights; development has further encroached along the coast; marine ecosystems are suffering degradation; and rising property values and taxes have made waterfront living unaffordable to the working class.

All of these pressures are related to Florida’s population boom, which has continued seemingly unabated since the end of World War II, bringing more and more competition for land and other resources. Many of the newcomers in recent years are well-to-do Baby Boomers from the urban Northeast and Midwest who want to retire on the coast. Indeed, about 80 percent of Florida’s residents live within 15 miles of the shore. By 2020, an estimated 15 million people will live in Florida’s coastal counties.

The high price of real estate is squeezing the traditional residents out and bringing gentrification. The coast is becoming a rather exclusive place to reside and recreate. Pioneer homes and small “mom and pop” motels are being replaced with waterfront mansions and condominium developments. Working waterfronts are being replaced by cruise ship terminals, upscale hotels, expensive restaurants, and trendy shops.

Commercial fishermen and other working-class coastal residents not only are being displaced from their homes; but as fish houses, marinas, and docks disappear, they will have fewer places to gain access to the water. Many won’t even be able to afford to vacation along the coast.

MICHAEL JEPSON is an anthropologist and social scientist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries’ Southeast Regional Office in St. Petersburg.
EXCERPT FROM

Staying Connected to the Water
Summer 2006 FORUM
The Old Ways Are Vanishing Along the Coast

BY MICHELLE ZACKS

If you arrive in the late afternoon when the sun is getting serious about setting, the light is golden, the water is blue diamonds, and it is so pretty it hurts. Once over the bridge, a brown sign greets you: “Welcome to Cedar Key, #1 Producer of USA’s Farm Raised Clams.”

Now, instead of fishing, the main industry in Cedar Key is raising clams. It’s a different way of life that employs only a fraction of the fishermen who were put out of business, but claming has enabled the village to continue with an industry connected to the sea.

Clamming “keeps us connected to the water in a real way,” said Mike Hodges, a Cedar Key clam farmer and wholesaler. Rather than the town being “wall-to-wall condos and retirement homes and all anybody does is sit around on the beach and watch the sun go down, we really use the waters here. We don’t just look at them as a backdrop.”

Over the past 15 years, Cedar Key has become the top clam producer in a state that cultivates more hard clams than any other in the nation.

MICHELLE ZACKS, folklorist for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, collected oral histories from Florida commercial fishermen in 2002 and is working on a dissertation about the cultural world of mullet fishing in Southwest Florida.
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**The True History of the Sunshine State.**

T. D. Allman

Author and journalist T. D. Allman comes to Cocoa Village to discuss his latest work *Finding Florida: The True History of the Sunshine State.* Love it or not, everyone’s talking about it!
Florida begins in a trail of Caribbean keys and moves up to the mainland where pastel cities draw deeper-hued accents from subtropical vegetation, splashy things like orchids and poincianas and crotons. As it rises past the watery horizons of the Everglades and giant Lake Okeechobee, immense variety unfolds. Barrier islands on the coasts frame the peninsula; a great ridge up the middle provides interior spine as it evolves into the temperate zone, the north where great forests and gentle hills and bubbling springs and flowing rivers and sinkhole lakes make a different Florida. A left turn at the Big Bend reels out world-class Gulf beaches that put a resort ribbon on the underside of the agricultural Panhandle, the borderlands that are kissing kin to Alabama and Georgia.

Within all that, almost everything moves and shifts and circles and returns in patterns: migrating human populations, ocean tides, birds and marine life, extremes of wet and dry, humid summers with enormous bug populations and dry winters with snow-fleeing tourists. An overpowering sense of transience drags out raggedly and becomes a consistent pattern, in one way or another affecting all living things...

No one should be shocked that new Floridians for a long time feel that home remains where their hearts are, at the birthplace back in Michigan or New York or Georgia or Cuba, even while the body and mind explore a new life in a new location. The making of a new home requires more than a change of geography; it demands a new mindset, a new identification, a fresh commitment, an enthusiasm for working at it. The heart is reluctant.

When the state’s population quadruples in 30 years to somewhere in the neighborhood of 13 million, two-thirds of them from somewhere else, we have a guaranteed body supply but...we have more absentee hearts than absentee owners...[This] haunts us, yet enchants us. Because of it we have all these separate visions and separate standards, and so little community glue; the fundamentals that anchor a person and secure the heart get lost; unrecognized ties of identity and mutual interest discourage common solutions and encourage cynicism.

Floridians, new and old, need to take the vows of belonging. Our peculiar dream is alive and real, available to all, but we need to work at understanding this wonderfully different state. We need to hone our kinship with it more and dwell on our ownership of it less. We need, simply, to merge our sense of self and place.

AL BURT, who died in 2008, was a longtime columnist with the Miami Herald and a popular author. His books include Becalmed in the Mullet Latitudes and Tropic of Cracker.
POEM

Into the Land of Flowers
Fall/Winter 1993 FORUM

Making Florida Home

Where are you going? the relatives asked Grandma Min and Grandpa Alex in Baltimore. To a slab of sand with mosquitos and Indians? To pan gold from the swamps? They lit out for Florida anyway, valises and crockery crammed in their model-T. The year was nineteen twenty-six.

Immigrants from Europe, they’d survived six pogroms (though all her life Min’s grandiose carriage and pretensions were modeled on the royalty who sent the Slavic mobs). Paradise gleamed to the south: Florida’s fish free for the catching, golden fruits and opportunities, the fluted gold hem of its land, sun blaring like a saxophone in the sky. Tourists with florid faces needed beauticians and barbers, grand hairdos to match the sea’s marcelles. Alex laved them with a straight razor. Min modeled perms in her shop where dryers the hot pink of motel signs stirred the air. She reached for the gold ring at the ponies—ran numbers, a small black slab of a notebook always in her pocket. It was a sickness she passed on to my father. How many grand did she lose to that sport that held out hope then floored you with loss by less than a nose? In Florida they stayed—though their skin grew mottled with cancer from too much sun and their grand dream thinned to a balcony overlooking The Golden Shoe, a bar with drinks called “Thong Bikini” and “Sex on the Beach.” Their fishing holes slabbed over with cement, they hooked into condos, America’s laboratory of old age, those white stands of manmade flora. Land of Flowers, that’s what Florida means—the succulent gardenia with its rusty edge and creamy middle, the heat and hope that set them adrift like golden pollen with schemes illegal and grand.

My grandparents’ progeny spread through Florida like roots through concrete slab, like veins of gold. Gone since the sixties, they lie beneath this remodeled landscape, natives at last.

ENID SHOMER, author and poet, was awarded the 2013 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. This poem, a sestina, is reprinted from her book, Black Drum: Poems by Enid Shomer.
La Florida

Christopher Still’s visual poem to Florida on public display for the first time

This 16th-century-style triptych recalls the age of Spanish explorer Ponce de León, who landed on our peninsula’s eastern shore in 1513 and christened it “La Florida.” In composing this work to commemorate Florida’s 500th anniversary, artist Christopher Still traveled throughout Florida, Cuba, and Spain. His masterpiece includes symbols of our state’s unique history and natural beauty.

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Ever since tourists began coming to Florida in the 1800s, artists and craftspeople have created souvenir items inspired by Florida’s natural environment and lifestyle. Popular Florida symbols such as whimsical alligators, flamingoes, and palm trees often adorn these items and have come to shape the image of Florida in the public mind.

The Florida Kitsch collection of the Museum of Florida History includes well over 125 artifacts representing some of the most outstanding and unusual representations of the genre. In conjunction with the Museum’s exhibition, Florida’s History Shop offers an outstanding array of fun, funky and functional Floridiana for purchase.

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