

Publishing in Paradise

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“To undergo (to feel, to experience) *Florida* through text requires us to collaborate.” G. Ulmer

In her attempt to save Florida from its own beauty, Marjory Stoneman Douglas describes our state as a “great pointed paw,” a striding sea-bound animal, thrusting south out of the United States “within one degree of the tropics.” If geography is destiny, then this warm, lush, peculiar peninsula deserves better. When Douglas published *River of Grass* in 1947, she was just beginning to understand how ironically entangled Florida is in its own ruin. The constructed idea of Florida as a space of lush vegetation, endless beaches, and strange animals emerged as soon as Europeans made first contact. Much later, these exotic and self limiting geographic qualities transformed Florida into a place that is ‘other’ to the U.S., a popular destination to vacation, to retire, to hide, or start over. To accommodate the visitors and transplants who ‘know’ what

Florida looks like before they get here, we build over the very beauty they come to see.

Here at *Journal of Florida Studies* we want to return Florida to its own voice - contradictory, messy, hybrid, and vibrant. We intend to have an ongoing conversation about Florida that unpacks the worn out – and hazardous – conceits about our state. That conversation will necessarily be interdisciplinary because Florida is a complicated place, not easily understood and appreciated by one field of study. In our pages scientists will talk to poets; sociologists will argue with historians, and musicians will collaborate with photographers. *JFS* comes out of a group of Florida scholars housed at various universities and colleges in the east central part of the state. We began as a writing group – the Center for Interdisciplinary Writing and Research – that encouraged a mix of scholars and artists to share and critique work that we hoped to publish. That collaborative experience sold us on the value of the interdisciplinary conversation.

This inaugural issue was designed to be invitational and peer reviewed, featuring twelve members of our illustrious advisory

board who generously agreed to serve and to write for the first issue. From the social sciences, Roy Baumeister explores the issue of free will, while Stanley Smith measures the economic impact of the brutal 2004 hurricane season. Historians David Tegeder and Steven Noll continue their groundbreaking work on the cross Florida barge canal, focusing in this issue on the Rodman Reservoir controversy. Robert Zieger looks at the progress African Americans did or did not make in the wake of WWI. From the world of letters, Bill Belleville takes us behind the scenes during the filming of the PBS documentary “In Marjorie’s Wake.” Gregory Ulmer asks his readers to explore a potentially devastating ecological event in north Florida using the concept of *electracy* – a process akin to “thinking without a banister.” Colette Bancroft reviews Peter Mattheissen’s retelling of his Watson trilogy, a fascinating true story about a self-made Floridian executed by his neighbors in the late nineteenth century. Our lone, but impressive physical scientist, Nobel Prize laureate, Harry Kroto shares some of the important work he’s done in chemistry and pedagogy at FSU since relocating there from Great Britain. From the arts, we have one perfect poem each from William Logan and David

Kirby, and twenty-seven strong black and white photographs from Gary Monroe.

Despite this eclectic mix, certain themes began to emerge. Not knowing exactly what to expect from these scholars and artists, we were pleasantly surprised by the number of first person narratives. Baumeister, Belleville, Ulmer, and Kroto all chose a reflective personal voice to describe their work and their ideas. Given the fact that these four scholars are giants in their fields and have all published widely, we were delighted to hear them describe their research in such personal terms. Another theme is the land itself. Inevitably when we talk about Florida, we talk about the fragility of our landscape. Belleville, Ulmer, Noll and Tegeder challenge our thinking about what it means to balance growth and ecology. From the ill-advised cross Florida barge canal project to the Cabot-Koppers Superfund site accident, Florida suffers from the fallout of overdevelopment. These examples should teach us to plan and build better, yet out of control growth continues. As Smith suggests, even the 2004 hurricane season did little to halt long-term population growth in this state. Art tells us the same story. In a visually stunning slide show, Monroe’s photographs show us what

happens when acres of central Florida ranch land is turned into a theme park then turned into a ruin.

So the conversation about the idea and the place that is Florida begins. We dedicate the first issue to a formidable Floridian and engaging conversationalist, Stetson Kennedy, who died this summer near Jacksonville, the city of his birth, as we were putting together our first issue. His long and productive life was completely interdisciplinary: Kennedy was a journalist, folklorist, environmentalist, social crusader for civil rights, government agent, collaborator with John Paul Sartre and Woody Guthrie, and a one-time gubernatorial candidate. Kennedy's breadth of interest and his love for this state inspire us to remember Florida's heritage and to guard its future.