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### ***Pearl City Florida: A Black Community Remembers* by Arthur S. Evans, Jr., and David Lee**

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The book also features samples of Jones's writing style, including excerpts from his newspaper editorials and personal correspondence. If this work has a shortcoming, it is that most of the journalistic writing samples appear late in the book, in chapters dealing with Jones's years in New York and St. Louis. Early chapters include samples from his personal correspondence, but there are few examples of editorials from his Florida newspaper.

Like most good biographies, this book is more than just a collection of anecdotes wrapped around a central theme. It is a detailed essay on the interconnections of journalism and politics nearly a century ago, with hints of how that coupling laid the groundwork for the interdependence of the media and politics that exists today.

The true strength of the book is its colorful, anecdotal style. Graham does not just tell you; he shows you.

Randy Bobbitt

*Pearl City Florida: A Black Community Remembers*. By Arthur S. Evans, Jr., and David Lee. Boca Raton. Florida Atlantic University Press. 1990. Pp. xii, 162. Introduction. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Cloth. \$19.95.

Well conceived as an oral history and social scientific analysis, *Pearl City, Florida* deserves attention. Covering the period from World War I until the immediate post-World War II years, the book is an "autobiography" of a small black community, proximate to Boca Raton. The accounts of elderly people provide a useful history of everyday life and small-town black experience in Florida. Also, the book contains two useful maps of the Boca Raton area and some excellent illustrative photographs, including black workers in the fields, Pearl City houses, and a man capturing a sea turtle. However, both the historical context provided and the sociological discussion are sterile and add little to the core of the book.

The first person accounts open by relating how many blacks immigrated to Florida and to Boca Raton in the twenties and thirties. In Boca Raton opportunities were in agriculture for squatters, sharecroppers, or as laborers on truck farms. The descriptions of life on the large farms cover "shotgun houses," a "box cart" shower, the organization of work, the effects of weather and the seasons, and the conditions of field work, such as in the following:

When those beans are picked and the hamper's full, which is a bushel, there are men that come around to check it...Checking the hamper means that they press down on those beans and see if you have a solid hamper.... And when they mash the beans down to the correct amount they make you fill the hamper back up (21-22).

This passage reveals both the cleaned-up vernacular and the specifics revealed in the text.

Work in the off-season might be obtained at the Boca Raton Hotel and Club where blacks could be dishwashers or busboys, but not waiters or waitresses. New opportunities opened when the Army Air Corps built a base in the area in the early forties. Whatever form it took, whether



**Field hands on a farm near Boca Raton.**

Photograph from *Pearl City, Florida* by Arthur S. Evans, Jr., and David Lee.

farm labor, service work at the hotel or employment at the military base, the toil is described as part of the everyday personal stories of the people themselves. For instance, and here is another sense of the vernacular nature of the accounts, a man who learned carpentry and had built his own house had to give up his work because he “had high blood (sic). I had to come down off buildings...and went to doing landscaping” (30).

*Pearl City* uncovers everyday and community life, touching on food, recreation, illness (and medicine), death, housing, and black-white relations. Specific topics include the preparation of turtle meat, the use of smokehouses, the effectiveness of iceboxes, and the nature of home remedies. Residents also describe the availability of cheap land in Pearl City but their difficulty buying land elsewhere in the vicinity. The oral history is about Florida at a time when there was little development, but it also shows how development changed the land and the community.

The last two chapters offer an analysis. The first provides a history of black Americans after the Civil War, concentrating on black migration and especially the history of blacks in Florida. However, this material is not connected in any direct way to the oral history presented in the book and, worse, provides a conservative gloss on modern black history. The sociological analysis of the last chapter is sound scholarship, but still fails to integrate or connect itself to the oral history of Pearl City. Paradoxically, these last two chapters account for almost forty-five percent of the book which purports to be an oral history, an autobiography of a community.

David A. Bealmear