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Florida's Fudged Identity

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by Stephen J. Whitfield

To symbols where none intended," the warning that Samuel Beckett issued near the end of his second novel, would drive American Studies professors out of business and push them into an occupation of greater social benefit.¹ For it is the point of this essay to find some inadvertent symbols and to discern iconographic significance in the history of a state. Florida should make an especially promising subject because of its mythic status, tapping into the nation's definition of itself. Its saga appears to be more than a combination of geographic constraints and political boundaries and economic developments and demographic patterns. Its history also incorporates a mystique, which no state in the union needs but which a few states have nevertheless transmitted. Florida might well be such a rarity because it has claimed to be a kind of hologram of Paradise. a place where the most ancient, Edenic memories of the race are somehow re-invented in the form of contemporary fantasies.

Florida is therefore "a state of mind" as much as it is a "state of being."² Here is what John Muir recorded in his journal, having arrived in Fernandina soon after the Civil War and shortly before finding Yosemite: "I am now in the hot gardens of the sun, where the palm meets the pine, longed and prayed for and often visited in dreams." He felt "lonely to-night amid this multitude of . . . strange plants, strange winds blowing gently . . . and strange birds also, everything solid or spiritual

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^{1.} Samuel Beckett, Watt (London, 1963; reprint ed., Paris, 1953), 255.

Mark Derr, Some Kind of Paradise: A Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida (New York, 1989), 13; Maurice O'Sullivan, Jr., and Jack C. Lane, eds., Introduction to The Florida Reader: Visions of Paradise from 1530 to the Present (Sarasota, 1991), 11-13.

full of influences that I never felt, yet I thank the Lord with all my heart for his goodness in granting me admission to this magnificent realm." A few years later, in 1873, the journalist Edward King toured the former Confederacy for *Scribner's Monthly*. Spending his first night in Jacksonville, he found the ambience "slumbrous, voluptuous, round and graceful. Here beauty peeps from every door-yard. Mere existence is pleasure; exertion is a bore" – for some whites at least. "Through orange-groves and grand oaks thickly bordering the broad avenues gleams the wide current of the St. Johns river," King exulted. Yet his delight in such settings, one scholar observes, was always "coupled with a practical eye for their commercial development. . . . Repeatedly he notes the opportunity for economic progress," an early sign of a counter-myth in which a capitalist intrusion or an industrial machine in the garden disrupts so bucolic a scene.³

Already a century ago the myth of Florida was thus subjected to commercial challenge that would make the vision ambiguous. Consider the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who claimed that "no dreamland on earth can be more unearthly in its beauty and glory than the St. John's in April."⁴ Her awareness of the attraction of a natural order could thus be interpreted as an early sign of Florida hedonism, as release from the demands of her Puritan lineage. "Life itself is a pleasure when the sun shines warm," Mrs. Stowe wrote in 1872, "and I sit and dream and am happy and never want to go back north."⁵ Spending winters in Mandarin between 1868 and 1884, the family rented a cotton plantation as a site for their son Frederick to recuperate from his Civil War wounds. She also cherished the philanthropic hope to employ black laborers, a goal that produced only red ink. But living there spurred her to write Palmetto Leaves, among the first pieces of promotional literature for a state that she depicted as an

John Muir, A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf, ed. William F. Badè (Boston, 1916), 93; Edward King, The Great South, ed. W. Magruder Drake and Robert R. Jones (Baton Rouge, 1972), 380-81; King, "The Southern States of North America." in The Florida Reader. ed. O'Sullivan and Lane, 144-48; Anne Rowe, The Enchanted Country: Northern Writers in the South, 1865-1910 (Baton Rouge, 1978), xi, xiii-xiv.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, Palmetto-Leaves (Boston, 1873; reprint ed., Gainesville, 1968), 155; Jerrell Shofner, Florida Portrait: A Pictorial History of Florida (Sarasota, 1990), 126.

Quoted in Anne E. Rowe, The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination (Baton Rouge, 1986), 5.

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updated Eden. Although non-fiction, the book "resembles the popular local color fiction of the time in its elaborate attention to details of setting," Professor Anne E. Rowe has observed. The author of Uncle Tom's Cabin dropped the reformist appeal that made her famous (or notorious), though Florida was in fact considerably east of Eden; and at least some of the descendants of Adam and Eve had to toil with the sweat of their brow. But who? "The negro is the natural laborer of tropical regions. He is immensely strong; he thrives and flourishes physically under a temperature that exposes a white man to disease and death." Such was the confident assertion of "the little lady" whom Lincoln claimed had "made this big war." In its aftermath she opted for "a sense of complacency, which] pervades the discussions of flowers and orange groves, picnics and river tours."⁶ The moral blindness is hardly admirable; but it may be churlish to object to Stowe's contentment, putting her life in New England behind her, relaxing on her thirty acres of orange groves.

The myth was thus crystallized, and later observers would operate within the groove that was established after the Civil War. Making allowances for technological change, note the congruence of John Updike's wry and radiant exposition of the lure that northern Florida holds for a retired Toyota dealer who joins in the exodus south. Harry Angstrom "crosses the St. Marys River and a highway sign says WELCOME TO FLORIDA and the radio commercials are for Blue Cross, denture fixatives, pulmonary clinics. Jacksonville suddenly looms, an Oz of bluegreen skyscrapers, a city of dreams at the end of the pine-tree tunnel, gleaming glass boxes heaped around the tallest, the Baptist Hospital. You rise up onto bridges over the St. Johns River far below, and Jacksonville shines from a number of angles like a jewel being turned in your hand." Updike's Pulitzer Prize-winning prose completes the scene: "All around him, floating like misplaced boats, are big white campers and vans. Winnebagos and Starcrafts, Pathfinders and Dolphins, homes on wheels, the husband at the helm, his elbow out the window, the wife at home behind him, making the bed. From all . . . states these caravans come to Florida, wearing even Colorado's green mountain profile and Maine's gesturing red lobster. . . . Harry descends deeper into Florida, glad to be back among the palms

^{6.} Rowe, Enchanted Country, 17-18; Stowe, Palmetto-Leaves, 283-84.

and white roofs and tropical thinness, the clouds blue on gray on white on blue, as if the great skymaker is working here with lighter materials."⁷ Both the natural environment and the social setting have thus conspired to provide "Florida's continuous advertisement for itself, the advertisement and the product being one."⁸

Yet it is central to the argument of this essay that this Edenic myth has been ersatz. The self-definition of Florida has been fudged, and has not been quite authentic enough to impose itself on the national imagination as effectively as has the other end of the Sunbelt. Kevin Starr's three-volume extension of the myth-and-symbol school to twentieth-century California, for example, has no counterpart for Florida, which is still so wide open a field that ambitious graduate students attracted to its cultural history could win the accolade of the show biz cynic who responded to the news of Elvis Presley's early death as follows: "good career move."⁹ Florida has not been fully able to tell its own story. Though the most ancient state in the Union in terms of European settlement, it is a latecomer in drawing attention to its idea of itself, more of a novelty item even than California, where certain trends are not so much finalized- the West as terminus- as become sneak previews of phenomena much noticed in Florida, which has become a kind of Golden State manqué. California is the original version; it is part of Florida's fate to be an imitation, making apt the choice of the mockingbird as the state bird in 1927. If California has been the state of the second chance, a third may be what Florida represents.

It was, for example, described in John Gunther's classic *Inside U. S. A.* as having "by far the longest seaboard of any American state" (now except for Alaska), giving Florida "a kind of ocean culture." With 1,150 miles of general shoreline, seawater is never more than sixty miles away from any spot in Florida.¹⁰ Its beaches may not have offered the surfing possibilities of the Pacific, but other opportunities that the state provided also

^{7.} John Updike, Rabbit at Rest (New York, 1990), 457-58.

^{8.} John Rothchild, Up for Grabs: A Trip Through Time and Space in the Sunshine State (New York, 1985), 70.

^{9.} Quoted in Albert Goldman, Elvis (New York, 1981), 581.

John Gunther, Inside U. S. A. (New York, 1947), 727; Alex Shoumatoff, Florida Ramble (New York, 1974), 21; Charlton W. Tebeau, A History of Florida (Coral Gables, 1971), 4.

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failed to resonate in popular music, which has been enriched instead by The Beach Boys, whose anthems of fun, fun, fun in the sun over endless summers are firmly rooted in the West Coast. Jan & Dean's portrait of a "little old lady from Pasadena" is more easily recognized than Freddie Cannon's praise of his "Tallahassee lassie." The California Sound became famous; a Florida Sound never emerged. Though Florida is below even the Deep South, its southern reverberations are less deep for black music as well. Gladys Knight and the Pips' "Midnight Train to Georgia" would sound less soulful were its conductor to announce stops below Waycross or Brunswick; and Otis Redding, though raised in Macon, Georgia, seems to be invoking San Francisco (rather than Tampa) when he is "two thousand miles from home," "Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay." The banks of the Suwannee River, which Stephen Foster spelled Swanee for the "Old Folks at Home," were immortalized in the nineteenth century by a Pennsylvanian, and in the twentieth century by both George Gershwin of New York and Al Jolson, born in Lithuania- none of them native sons who might have endowed these ballads with authenticity. Florida seems neither completely southern, nor chic enough, to set off the right echoes.

The diversity and contradictions of California do not rob residents with necessarily partial claims of being Californian of their legitimacy- claims that both a Ronald Reagan and a Jerry Brown might effectively advance. California is a variation of the West, but Florida seems much more than or quite *different* from the rest of the South. Tourism is a bigger industry in Florida than agriculture, and no southern state has a greater urban concentration- nor a lower percentage of blacks. To be sure one journalist who arrived in the state capital found it "slumbrous" - an impression reinforced by the parking attendant who advised him: "Just don't forget to set your watch back thirty years."11 Nor are the languors limited to the Panhandle. "I used to think of Miami as primarily a Mafia bastion and a Jewish burial ground in Deep South resort trappings," another itinerant journalist realized in 1980, "but it is actually a modern border town where black people live in an impoverished Southern past as the future takes place around them."¹² Yet this four-

^{11.} Shoumatoff, Florida Ramble, 144.

^{12.} Stanley Crouch, "The Failure of Tantrum Politics," in Notes of a Hanging

hundred-mile peninsula stretches from "the redneck Riviera" of Fort Walton Beach to the Old World shtetl of Miami Beach, where its bubbes (grandmothers) manage to co-exist with "Bubba" down the road. The stereotypes of southern provenance get fudged where citrus groves and cattle ranches dot the landscape, lowering the expectation that, if you're black, you should be out back picking cotton (or at least growing rice or tobacco).

Such diversity, which collides with the customary homogeneity of the populace that once chose to live and die in Dixie, has meant that "Florida is spiritually unclaimed. On this higher level, it does not seem to exist," John Rothchild has argued: and in one sense he is right. He could find "no harmonic abstraction, no stereotype such as the cowboy," though cattle has been a major industry, or "the Yankee trader, the trapper, the woodsman, the planter- no hero of history around which the population can rally. Perhaps it is the inevitable result of the invention of a past by the public relations departments. . . . Texas has its ugly differences of opinion, but Texas has Tex-Mex; Florida has vet to develop a Flo-Cube."¹³ The state's residents cannot savor either a common cuisine or a common past. An indistinct future can therefore be hypothesized, rendering dubious the claim of two knowledgeable historians that, despite the advent of the superhighways and shopping malls, "the state has managed to maintain its mystique as a land apart, differentiating itself from the general placelessness of the Sunbelt phenomenon."14

Even the distinctive term for white Floridians, "cracker," applies loosely to poor southern whites in general, and is something of an etymological enigma. What did it once mean? It seems to have originated in North Britain and was applied to

Judge: Essays and Reviews, 1979-1989 (New York, 1990), 59; David Colburn and Richard Scher, "Florida Politics in the Twentieth Century," in *Florida's Politics and Government*, ed. Manning J. Dauer, 2nd ed. (Gainesville, 1984), 35, 41, 42, 48; Manning J. Dauer, "Florida: The Different State," in *The Changing Politics of the South*, ed. William C. Havard (Baton Rouge, 1972), 92, 95, 102, 164.

^{13.} Rothchild, Up for Grabs, 204-05.

Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino, "From Dixie to Dreamland: Demographic and Cultural Change in Florida, 1880-1980," in *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South*, ed. Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta (Boca Raton. 1989), 187.

the rural proletariat and then in the southern backcountry.¹⁵ Is the term positive or negative? "It depends on who says it and how it's used," according to Jim Bob Tinsley, a historian and folklorist. "I've heard people say they're proud to be Florida crackers. But when spoken in an insulting manner, I'd say it's a fighting word." A black laborer in Punta Gorda named Michael Hamm could have gotten two years in prison beyond the one year for which he was sentenced, because of ethnic harassment (under the state's Hate Crimes Act). In 1991 Hamm had warned a white policeman: "I'll shoot you white crackers." Had Hamm stopped before the final word (smile when you say that, Mister), he would have been charged with simple assault. Perhaps it was a case of mistaken identity, since the arresting officer was a Michigan native who had become a policeman in Punta Gorda only a year earlier. The charges were subsequently dropped.¹⁶

How can this fudged identity be explained? In the formulation of the imagery that might have shaped it, Florida has been hampered historically by a certain absence of writers who might have evoked its ambience as Jack London or Raymond Chandler or John Steinbeck managed to achieve for California. The case should not be overstated. Mrs. Stowe, the most formidable of all antebellum mythologizers, had intended to write a novel about Florida called Orange Blossoms but abandoned it.¹⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson was wintering in St. Augustine as early as the 1830s without affecting the centrality of Concord, and of New England in general, in the formation of his literary reputation. For "The Open Boat," Stephen Crane drew upon his brief experience in Jacksonville, from which he had intended to book passage to cover the revolution in Cuba in 1898. By then Crane had established a liaison with Cora Taylor, a prominent Jacksonville madam. In The American Scene Henry James describes the upper east coast of Florida, even though he had spent less than six days there. After 1916 Ring Lardner and his wife regularly win-

^{15.} Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa, 1988), xiv-xvi.

Larry Rohter, "Without Smiling, to Call Floridian a 'Cracker' May Be a Crime," New York Times, August 25, 1991; Linda Greenhouse, "Defining the Freedom to Hate While Punching," New York Times, December 7, 1992.
 John R. Adams, ed., Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Regional Sketches:

John R. Adams, ed., Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Regional Sketches: New England and Florida (New Haven, 1972); Mary B. Graff, Mandarin on the St. Johns (Gainesville, 1953), 44; Rowe, Enchanted Country, 20n.

tered near St. Petersburg, often with the famed sports writer Grantland Rice and his wife. But only a couple of Lardner's famous stories, "The Golden Honeymoon" and "Gullible's Travels," are set in Florida, a situation that cannot be held to blame for the neglect that this major writer has suffered. One problem with injecting Florida into myth and legend is that so few writers have spent much time there.¹⁸

Rediscovering the treasures of black and female literature has become so exigent that the Modern Language Association has considered splitting into three sections- British literature, American literature, and Zora Neale Hurston, who was born in Eatonville, Florida, in 1891, studied anthropology under Franz Boas at Columbia University, and actively participated in the Harlem Renaissance. Two decades after making Who's Who in *America* she was back in Florida working as a maid. The literary honors heaped upon her work have been mostly posthumous. Hurston died a pauper in Fort Pierce in 1960 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Other blacks, like the poet and novelist James Weldon Johnson of Jacksonville, had left the state long before. One of the canonic writers in another fashionable field. gay literature, lived in Key West from the height of his fame in 1949 until a year before his death in 1983. But none of Tennessee Williams's most haunting plays are set in Florida. "There are writers of consequence in Florida, but are they Florida writers?" Rothchild has wondered. The wildly imaginative Harry Crews, for instance, "is in Gainesville putting snakes in discarded Deep South washing machines," while Thomas McGuane, Jimmy Buffet's brother-in-law, "got onto drugs and fish and began to sound like a Florida writer, then went off" to Montana.¹⁹ Though a standard Penguin anthology like Ben Forkner and Patrick Samway's Stories of the Modern South (1982) includes twenty-five authors, none are Floridians.

The case for literary lacunae should not be exaggerated, however, since two Nobel laureates used Florida zip codes as their return addresses. The prose of both is punctuated with cosmopolitan locales. Ernest Hemingway lived in Key West for a dozen years, from 1928 until 1940, after returning from

William Randel, "Stephen Crane's Jacksonville," South Atlantic Quarterly 62 (Spring 1963), 268-74; Rowe, Idea of Florida, 5, 14, 46, 58, 82; Kevin McCarthy, ed., Introduction to Florida Stories (Gainesville, 1989), vii-viii.

^{19.} Rothchild, Up for Grabs, 205.

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Europe. Only one of his novels was set in America. To Have and Have Not (1937). Its protagonist was an ex-cop from Miami, a desperado who turns into a smuggler during the Great Depression; Harry Morgan personified the individualist, stoic heroism of the Hemingway code, though one critic delicately concedes that "To Have and Have Not falls short of being one of his best works." His most famous stories are set in Africa or Europe or "up in Michigan"; the late fiction, like The Old Man and the Sea or Islands in the Stream, takes place in the Caribbean. And though A Farewell to Arms was actually written in Key West, that setting occupies only a minor place in Hemingway's oeuvre.²⁰ Isaac Bashevis Singer and his wife first vacationed on Miami Beach in the winter of 1948 and moved there permanently after buying a condo in 1973. For him it was a case of double exposure, as he realized that "Jewishness had survived every atrocity of Hitler and his Nazis. . . . Here the sound of the Old World was as alive as ever. . . . And I could see that what I wrote in my stories about the shtetlach happened right here." While on Collins Avenue he heard the news in 1978 of the Nobel Prize, but only a small bouquet of his late tales (such as "Old Love," "A Party in Miami Beach," "Alone," "The Hotel") are set in Miami.²¹ Singer's world was distilled in memories of a past that only his unflagging imagination- more than his powers of observationcould activate.

Two other Nobel laureates, John Steinbeck and Czeslaw Milosz, made their homes in California; and the author of novels like *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* made its ambience indelible. He transcended the category of a local colorist or regionalist, as one contemporary who was once popular did not. Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings is the only Florida-based writer mentioned in *Media-Made Dixie*, Jack Temple Kirby's study of the South's white and black culture (extending from the Opry to Oprah). After moving from Washington, DC, to Cross Creek, south of Gainesville, Rawlings purchased a home and an orange grove and found her subject all around her. Her first novel, *South Moon Under*, came out three years before Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle. The Yearling* was not only the leading bestseller of 1938 but also won a Pulitzer Prize, a feat that *The Grapes of Wrath*

^{20.} Rowe, Idea of Florida, 93, 96, 106.

Isaac Bashevis Singer, Introduction to Richard Nagler, My Love Affair with Miami Beach (New York, 1991), v, vii, viii.

duplicated the following year. Rawlings's nostalgic *Cross Creek* was fourth on the 1942 non-fiction list, perhaps in anticipation of Steinbeck's wistful *Travels with Charley*. Professor Kirby has described her portrayal of "crackers" as "quaint and superstitious, but proud and independent" – attributes that neatly fit families like the Joads.²² But one writer made it all the way to Stockholm in 1962, while the reputation of the other, who died at Crescent Beach in 1953, almost sank into oblivion.

Three decades after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Edward R. Murrow updated and amplified that inspired epic of migrant farm workers in California when *CBS Reports* aired a documentary entitled *Harvest of Shame*. "This . . . has nothing to do with Johannesburg or Capetown," the broadcaster intoned in November 1960. "This is Florida. . . . These are citizens of the United States."²³ This outrage was articulated from New York rather than Florida. The sponsors of the program– Philip Morris cigarettes– dispatched two executives to the state to engage in damage control, an act of apologetics to which Steinbeck's publisher had not stooped. Yet the show did not have nearly as much impact as the Great Depression novel had exerted, and it became more notorious for the broadcaster's own clumsy effort at self-censorship, in trying to block its showing in Britain, than in the revelation of social and economic injustice.²⁴

California has loomed so large and so long on the nation's mythic landscape that Florida has been dwarfed, though the key to the disparity is not only scale. By 1993 Florida became the fourth most populous state, but its capital in Tallahassee has fewer residents than California houses convicts. The explanation for varied destiny, however, probably lies in destination: California is west, Florida is south. The difference matters if America is defined as a promised land, if its axial principle is identified as freedom. Florida then suffers by comparison. Its slave plantations spanned well over a century; California's relocation camps for Japanese-Americans were closed in three years.

^{22.} Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination*, revised ed. (Athens, 1986), 47-48.

^{23.} Gloria Jahoda, Florida: A Bicentennial History (New York, 1976), 166-70.

A. M. Sperber, Murrow: His Life and Times (New York, 1986), 594-95,603-04, 610-11, 628-31; Jacqueline Jones, The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present (New York, 1992), 168-69.

Though the history of both states is enmeshed in racial guilt, Florida had the highest rate of lynchings in the first two decades of this century of any state in the country. Nearly all the victims were black. Racial segregation was imposed by law, which California never did, and Jim Crow was abandoned only after it was declared unconstitutional. To be sure, not all of the state took racism as seriously as the rest of the Deep South; the policeman who picked up Sammy Davis, Jr., for example, for violating the nightly curfew on blacks walking outside on Miami Beach asked the entertainer for his autograph.²⁵ Such gestures rendered Jim Crow rather pointless.

Geography made Florida less stereotypically "southern" in another way. Though Los Angeles was Hispanic before Miami, Miami ranks first in the nation in its proportion of foreign-born. According to the 1990 census, over a million Hispanics live in Dade County- half of its population. Already right after World War II, Gunther observed that Florida "has a strong underlay of Spanish culture, and it is the only southern state with an Indian problem," in addition to what was then called its "Negro problem."²⁶ Yet it is California rather than Florida that, with more generosity and grandeur than any other state, suggested the pluralism that would legitimate diversity. Because California is the end of the West and faces the Pacific, the Asian continent is a distant seven time zones away. Because Florida is the bottom of the South and faces the Caribbean, a foreign country hovers only ninety miles away, and an entire continent is only a few hundred miles away, or a couple of hours by plane. By the 1960s more foreign visitors were arriving in Miami than in any other American airport except for John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City. Already by 1947 Inside U. S. A. had proclaimed that Miami had not only become "one of the great international airports of the world; it is the home base of Eastern Airlines, and during the war Pan American's local payroll was close to \$25 million a year."²⁷ Gunther had managed to find and single

Colburn and Scher, "Florida Politics in the Twentieth Century," 37; James Button, "Blacks," in Dauer, ed., *Florida's Politics and Government*, 286-93; Sammy Davis, Jr., and Jane and Burt Boyar, Yes I Can: The Story of Sammy Davis, Jr. (New York, 1966), 153, 157-58.

^{26.} Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Hanover, NH, 1990), 299; Gunther, *Inside U. S. A.*, 655.

^{27.} Derr, Some Kind of Paradise, 338; Gunther, Inside U. S. A., 729.

out two airline companies whose names and logos the next generation of Americans may be unable to recognize.

But it is even odder that Inside U. S. A. begins in California, to which the first four chapters are devoted; and though Gunther's hefty tome has room for separate chapters on Wyoming and Nevada and Oklahoma, no separate chapter is devoted to the second largest state east of the Mississippi River. Dade County alone is bigger than Rhode Island. Gunther offered the dubious grounds that "the singular characteristics of the great state of Florida are so well known that we can risk being brief." It is folded into a chapter on the Carolinas and Virginia because, despite its particularity, "the Peninsula State is very much part of the South," and because of the sheer longevity of its history ("there were 306 years between Ponce de Leon and proprietorship by the United States; St. Augustine is the oldest town in North America"). Gunther acknowledged the "variety" of Florida and, because of "a tremendous incursion from the North, . . . more vitality than any southern area, with the possible exception of Tennessee in the valley region." He argues that "Florida is a special case," which is hardly an argument for the absence of a separate chapter, and discerned "a considerable iealousy of California in the realms of citrus fruit and of the weather."28

If Californians have harbored few envious feelings or complexes about Florida, the reverse may not be true, because of a simple cultural rule: in modern America, the hip trumps the square. California has nurtured Johnny Carson and Marilyn Monroe; Florida was stuck with Arthur Godfrey and Anita Bryant. California had "the Chairman of the Board," Frank Sinatra; Florida had to be satisfied with "the Great One," Jackie Gleason. San Francisco had Allen Ginsberg, a pot-smoking anarchist, reciting "Howl" (1956) and getting busted. St. Petersburg served as the final home for Jack Kerouac, a drunkard and a Republican, writing in virtual isolation. One notable California Latino has been Cesar Chavez, organizer of the farm workers, who fasted for a more perfect union and once celebrated mass with Robert Kennedy. One notable Florida Latino has been Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo, a banker and a Republican, who enjoyed boating and golfing with Richard Nixon. California

^{28.} Gunther, Inside U. S. A., 655, 727, 728.

has Big Sur; Florida has Silver Springs. California has the sybarites of the Playboy Mansion; Florida has the water-skiiers of Cypress Gardens. California gave birth to the Black Panthers, stalking the state legislature to assert their right to bear arms. Florida has been home to the Gray Panthers, lobbying politicians for increased Social Security benefits. Even the flakiness of American cults produced a hip version in the Reverend Jim Jones, a square variety in L. Ron Hubbard. Or contrast the students at Berkeley with those at Fort Lauderdale. One locale helped invent the youth culture and remains one of the world's synapses of intellectual energy; every spring the other attracts young boors guzzling beers, which Connie Francis celebrated by tanning herself *Where the Boys Are* (1961).

Another source of the disparity has been the national pastime. Since the 1920s Florida has hosted the Grapefruit League and has remained the favorite site of baseball spring training. But during the regular season, the preferred sites have included Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and even Oakland. As late as 1992 not a single squad was playing major league baseball in Florida, which has had to await National League franchise expansion (Miami's Marlins). After leaving New York, the Giants played in San Francisco before they considered decamping to St. Petersburg. Florida made it possible– in Dylan Thomas's phrase– to "see the boys of summer in their ruin," with retirees like Ted Williams (once "the Kid" from San Diego) living there. But it was not until 1993 that one could see those athletes playing the game during the summer.²⁹

A major reason that Florida has been the dubbed version of California is the location of the film business in Hollywood. When Upton Sinclair ran for governor in 1934 on the EPIC ticket (End Poverty in California), his promise of a substantial tax hike on the studios and his notion of a new, state-run movie industry ignited such consternation and fear among the moguls that they threatened to move to Florida if the socialist firebrand were elected.³⁰ Sinclair lost, and the consequences can only be suggested here. But largely because the movies are in California, it serves as the original version of a fantasy life, a never-never land.

^{29.} Dylan Thomas, Collected Poems, 1934-1952 (New York, 1971), 1.

Greg Mitchell, "Thalberg: Father of the Attack Ad," New York Times, April 19, 1992.

William Randolph Hearst's striking castle at San Simeon is the real thing- "the way God probably would have done it," George Bernard Shaw said, "if He'd had the money." ³¹ Charles Foster Kane's "Xanadu" in Orson Welles's 1941 film is the facsimile. Hearst Castle may be eclectic, but at least its building materials and its art and its artifacts were brought over from Europe. "Xanadu," placed in Florida, was created in an RKO studio- in California, where the forbidding images of its towers and cavernous spaces were created. Yet oddly enough, Samuel Taylor Coleridge may have smoked his pipeful of opium and imagined Xanadu soon after reading William Bartram's eighteenth-century account of travelling through Florida, with its Isle of Palms, its "Alligator Hole," its "Manatee Spring," and its "crystal fountain," live oaks and magnolias. In the poet's dream the Oklawaha River may have become Kublai Khan's Alph, which ran, he said, "Through caverns measureless to man/ Down to a sunless sea." The latest wrinkle from the vicinity of Orlando seems to be an amusement park called Xanadu Home of the Future.³²

Billy Wilder's farcical masterpiece, *Some Like It Hot* (1959), is also set in Florida, where Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis are fleeing from Chicago mobsters led by George Raft; but the vacation spot where the all-female band is staying was actually filmed at the Hotel del Coronado, located along the Pacific near San Diego. The response in the mid 1980s from the vicinity of Orlando was to build the Grand Floridian Hotel, duplicating the look and Victorian seaside style of the idiosyncratic Coronado while rectifying its architectural mistakes.³³ The case is complicated with *Scarface*. The original Howard Hawks version (1932), starring Paul Muni and the ubiquitous George Raft, was conceived and shot in southern California but is set in Chicago. The Brian De Palma remake (1983), starring Al Pacino, was set in Miami, provoking its city commissioners to pass a resolution denouncing Universal Pictures for having the audacity to depict

Quoted in Phyllis Theroux, "No Place Like Home," New York Times Magazine, October 20, 1991.

Shoumatoff, Florida Ramble, 63-64; John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (Boston, 1930), 8-9, 356-70, 372, 513-16; Rothchild, Up for Grabs, 48.

^{33.} Paul Goldberger, "25 Years of Unabashed Elitism," *New York Times*, February 2, 1992.

a Cuban as a cocaine dealer. The model for *Scarface* had of course been Al Capone, who settled in Florida in 1927 and was publicly blasted by the mayor of Miami Beach, John Newton Lummus, Jr., as "unwelcome." But as a realtor, the same J. N. Lummus helped find the newcomer from Cicero, Illinois, a mansion, which he left to become a famous guest of the Federal government in California's Alcatraz. Capone died in Miami.³⁴

Hollywood has often made Florida the sequel. The first part of Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather (1972) shows the Corleones breaking into show business on the West Coast, partly in California. In The Godfather, Part II (1974), they finally get involved in Florida (and Cuban) gambling casinos. Wilder's film noir, Double Indemnity (1944), was memorably set in James M. Cain's Los Angeles, with a sizzling blonde (Barbara Stanwyck) seducing a fall guy (Fred MacMurray) and getting him to murder her husband. Lawrence Kasdan's Body Heat (1981) has an even steamier blonde (Kathleen Turner) seducing a fall guv (William Hurt) and getting him to murder her husband, this time in the south Florida towns of "Miranda Beach" and "Pine Haven." Having gunned down the bad guys in the Wild West for a couple of decades, Gary Cooper starred in a "southern," set in Florida during the Seminole Wars in 1840, entitled Distant Drums (1951). If Davy Crockett were a model Westerner, dying at the Alamo, the name of Sonny Crockett on television's Miami Vice was undoubtedly intended to suggest both the tropical climate and the transposition of the Western into an urban locale like Miami, the very city where John Schlesinger's Midnight Cowboy (1961) ends- having begun with Joe Buck (Jon Voight) in Texas. Humphrey Bogart had already made his reputation in movies set on the other side of the continent, whether as Duke Mantee in The Petrified Forest (1936) or in High Sierra (1941) or as Sam Spade in The Maltese Falcon (1941), before joining Baby (Lauren Bacall) in Florida's Key Largo (1948). To Have and Have Not (1945) is unique in having given screen credits to two future Nobel laureates (with William Faulkner adapting Hemingway's work). But it does not count in this context, since Howard Hawks's film is set not in Key West but in Vichy-run Martinique.

Rothchild, Up for Grabs, 136, 180-01; John Kobler, Capone: The Life and World of Al Capone (New York, 1971), 220, 221; Shofner, Florida Portrait, 178.

Sam Spade's erstwhile partner Miles Archer bestowed his name on Lew Archer, the California detective who was created by Ross Macdonald in 1949, almost a generation ahead of Sarasota's John D. MacDonald, who came up with the Florida detective Travis McGee in 1964. Archer was featured in two dozen novels; while from his houseboat, the *Busted Flush*, on Bahia Mar in Fort Lauderdale, McGee solves crimes in twentyone volumes. Although MacDonald (the Floridian) was much honored (from the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière to the American Book Award), it was left to a reviewer on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review* to pronounce the oeuvre of Macdonald (the Californian) "the finest series of detective novels ever written by an American."³⁵

Speaking of crime, the best-known unindicted co-conspirator in American history moved from San Clemente in southern California to Key Biscayne, where Senator George Smathers's mansion was incorporated into the presidential compound early in 1969. The transfer was fitting, since Richard Nixon had won his congressional seat in 1946 in a bare-knuckle campaign that Claude D. Pepper later believed served as a model for Smathers's successful senatorial primary race against him in 1950- a campaign so savage that it even gave dirty politics a bad name. The bashing of "Red" Pepper was closely studied by Nixon before running that year for the Senate in California against Helen Gahagan Douglas.³⁶ Even California's Red Scare ran its course earlier and longer and deeper than Florida's Jack B. Tenney's Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities wreaked havoc on the careers of California teachers, trade unionists, and New Dealish state employees in the 1940s, a decade before the ugly mischief wrought by its Florida legislative counterpart. Headed by an ex-railroad conductor named Charley Johns, the Florida inquisition may have cost a dozen faculty members at the University of Florida their

^{35.} William Goldman, review of *The Goodbye Look*, in *New York Times Book Review*, June 1, 1969, 1.

^{36.} John Egerton, Shades of Gray: Dispatches from the Modern South (Baton Rouge, 1991), 157; Claude Denson Pepper, with Hays Gorey, Pepper: Eyewitness to a Century (San Diego, 1987), 197-210; Robert Sherrill, Gothic Politics in the Deep South: Stars of the New Confederacy (New York, 1968), 142-52; Garry Wills, Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man (Boston, 1970), 85.

jobs, while also validating the Marxist dictum that historical tragedy gets repeated as farce.³⁷

Despite friendship with both Nixon and John F. Kennedy, neither Smathers nor any other Florida politician achieved truly national stature, even as the size of the Florida delegation in Congress kept growing like kudzu in every decade. The state's politicians have been so bland and uncharismatic, so unable to capture anyone's imagination, that a comedian's remark after the 1984 campaign is applicable to them: "Whenever I saw Walter Mondale on television, I thought I had lost the color."³⁸ The dullness of Florida's political leadership may show how unsouthern a state it is. Perhaps Pepper came closest to arousing a national constituency, as the congressional champion of the aged. It is also true that Governor LeRoy Collins, the subject of a favorable Time cover story in 1955, was widely known, though his career ran aground in the maelstrom of civil rights. But a contrast with California may be instructive here as well. Fuller Warren, a Jacksonville attorney, was a moderate governor (1949-1953) whose interests and aims remained parochial.³⁹ Another square-jawed, very amiable, mildly progressive governor was his contemporary. The career of Earl Warren was to propel him far beyond the confines of Sacramento (1943-1953) and into the pantheon of constitutional liberalism. The variety of California does not impede the sense that its politicians may reflect some of the state's values. Yet Florida politicians lack the clear-cut image of representing a particular constituency.

Even the altered sense of community suggests that Florida is mimetic. Oakland's Gertrude Stein is supposed to have complained of her city: "When you get there, there isn't any there there." This lapidary remark may be increasingly applicable to many of the towns in both states. The city fathers of St. Petersburg have been so eager to shed its southern origins, according to Professor Raymond Arsenault, that "for better or

^{37.} David R. Colburn and Richard K. Scher, *Florida's Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Tallahassee, 1980), 253-54.

^{38.} Pat Paulsen quoted in Gerald Gardner, *The Mocking of the President: A History of Campaign Humor from Ike to Bush* (New York, 1989), 41.

Tom Wagy, Governor LeRoy Collins of Florida: Spokesman of the New South (Tuscaloosa, 1985), 2, 139, 143-44, 167, 175-76, 194-96, 203-04; David R. Colburn and Richard K. Scher, "Florida Gubernatorial Politics: The Fuller Warren Years," Florida Historical Quarterly 53 (April 1975), 389-408; Tebeau, History of Florida, 426-28, 430.

worse, it now belongs to the Sunbelt, a region where lack of tradition has become a tradition, and where communal feeling has more to do with a shared experience of migration and transience than with local history." If the nation's annals can be cast in the form of time-and-motion studies, there is something emblematic about Osceola County, where one out of every three residences is a mobile home.⁴⁰ Deracination and displacement mark the citizenry of the two states that share another feature besides sunshine and citrus. First in California, then in Florida, Walt Disney imprinted his own special sense of community.

It might be argued that, upon its opening in Anaheim in 1955, Disneyland represented something local as well as universal, that the choice of Ronald Reagan to serve as host at the opening ceremonies represented a link to an industry integral to California. Walt Disney World in Orlando is instead an import from outside; and CEO Michael Eisner, though not a native of California, is no Floridian either, but a New Yorker living in Los Angeles. Main Street, the obligatory vestibule of the Magic Kingdom, is designed to evoke the village Midwest of the founder's childhood. The MGM and Universal Studios theme parks are also out of sync with any historic roots in Florida and are associated, quite obviously, with "the Coast." Nicknamed "Hollywood East." Orlando has recently become the site of Universal Studios' half-dozen sound stages and the biggest backlot outside Hollywood, while at Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park's Indiana Jones Epic Stunt Spectacular, "visitors pretend to be extras along with actors who pretend to be extras on sets that pretend to be sets." On the expansive 27,400 acres of Disney World, "the attractions . . . offer little of Florida," Mark Derr observes, "and no one seems to care." Disney World seems to emit a post-modernist aura of free-floating signifiers (or are they signs?); and though the sociological theorist Jean Baudrillard visited California (but not Florida) to write his post-Tocqueville treatise, Amérique (1986), he would undoubtedly have found simulacra where "the city [Orlando] and the park [Disney] are looking more like each other every day." As the world's leading commer-

Quoted in Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York, 1973), 1; Raymond Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream*, *1888-1950* (Norfolk, 1988), 313; Priscilla Painton, "Fantasy's Reality," *Time* (May 27, 1991), 54.

cial tourist attraction, Orlando is something quite new among boom towns. It "is growing at a staggering pace on the model of Disney World: it is a community that imitates an imitation of a community." Orlando is built upon transience, boasting of more hotel rooms than New York or Chicago or Los Angeles.⁴¹

The land for that community had been assembled as early as 1965 for an average of \$180 an acre, or about \$5,000,000. Construction was completed in 1971 under the auspices of the Reedy Creek Improvement District in order to avoid the tackiness that had spread through the immediate Anaheim area like an oil slick. Walt Disney World was therefore designed to rectify the mistakes not of an actual community but of another imitation-community. The 250,000,000 "guests" who have come to Walt Disney World have more than doubled the gate receipts of Disneyland in California. Those who, like Jean-Luc Godard in his surreal Weekend, see traffic congestion as an apocalyptic endgame might ponder late December 1986 when all motel rooms were reserved and filled on I-95 between Richmond and Savannah. On December 29 the attendance record for Disney World for a single day was set with 148,500 waiting in line. More people have annually visited Disney World, for example, than Britain, though junketeering P. J. O'Rourke was among the disenchanted pilgrims to this modern Mecca: "Epcot Center . . . has accomplished something I didn't think possible in today's world. They have created a land of make-believe that's worse than regular life. Unvarnished reality would be preferable. In fact, it might be fun." O'Rourke noted that the corridor up to the gates of Paradise was saturated with "a thousand Dairy Queens, RV parks, peewee golf establishments, and souvenir stands selling cypress knee clocks and shellacked blowfish." 42 So much for the effort to escape the commercial raunchiness around Anaheim.

^{41. &}quot;Fantasy's Reality," *Time*, 52, 55; Derr, *Some Kind of Paradise*, 376; Alexander Moore, "Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and the Playful Pilgrimage Center," *Anthropological Quarterly* 53 (October 1980), 211; Michael Sorkin, "See You in Disneyland," in *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Sorkin (New York, 1992), 205.

Derr, Some Kind of Paradise, 376-77, 381; Peter C. T. Elsworth, "Too Many People and Not Enough Places to Go," New York Times, May 26, 1991; P. J. O'Rourke, "Through Darkest America: Epcot Center," in Holidays in Hell (New York, 1988), 184-85.

Though such pitches have been made to an audience to which wiseguys like O'Rourke do not belong, others envision central Florida more ethereally as an antechamber to heaven. "So many terminally ill children have made a trip to Disney World [to fulfill] their last wish," Time magazine has reported, "that a foundation has established a permanent village nearby to accommodate them." Evangelists have also seen the potential of Orlando as a burned-over district, though the theological contortions that result would surprise the Church Fathers. "The spiritual person and the person who wants to have fun, it's the same thing. When you're in Disney, you have hope that things can be better. And when we know God, there's always hope for a better place, which is of course heaven," according to Tammy Faye Bakker, whose much-reduced New Covenant Ministries is implanted near Orlando, which is also where the evangelical Campus Crusade for Christ relocated its headquarters from San Bernardino, California.43

Promise and closure, inauguration and fulfillment, beginning and end- such combinations make the image of Florida paradoxical. Fresh starts are much of its appeal; among states with the highest proportion of plastic surgeons, Florida is second only to California.44 But Florida is also the finish line- the Fountain of Youth crumbling under the pressure of an inexorable mortality. With almost one in three residents getting Social Security checks, no state has a grander reputation of hospitality to the elderly. By the late 1980s the median age of Pasco County was fifty-five. Florida is not only "the Great American Escape," a bicentennial chronicler asserts, "it is also . . . the Great American Dumping Ground. It is where Mom and Pop go to die." 45 Some like it hot. It is the home stretch for "Ratso" Rizzo in Midnight Cowboy, Seymour Glass in J. D. Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," "Rabbit" Angstrom at rest, Charles Foster Kane muttering "Rosebud," for Kerouac and Hurston. It is the end of the line for the exhausted, the desperate, the burnt-out cases. To them attention must be paid, because "all their lives

^{43. &}quot;Fantasy's Reality," Time, 54, 58.

^{44. &}quot;Where the Plastic Surgeons Are," New York Times, February 23, 1992.

^{45.} Jahoda, *Florida*, 182; Shoumatoff, *Florida Ramble*, 36; Carrie Teegardin, "Census Sees Florida as Two States in One," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 5, 1992.

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they had slaved at some kind of dull, heavy labor, behind desks and counters, in the fields and at tedious machines of all sorts. saving their pennies and dreaming of the leisure that would be theirs when they had enough. Finally the day came . . . where else should they go, but to . . . the land of sunshine and oranges?"⁴⁶ That question is posed in 1939 in *The Day of the* Locust, whose locale was California. But the question has been answered by the hordes of retirees and other immigrants to Florida, where three out of four residents are now packed onto 6 percent of the land, where four-fifths of the population are crammed into only fifteen of the state's sixty-seven counties.⁴⁷

Florida can be seen as a re-run of California in one final sense, for both states have become test sites of the national dilemma of how progress can be accommodated to paradise. The most vivid story of Florida may be little more than a repeat of the essential myth of California, which is a parable of the dangers lurking in development, or- to give a (Leo) Marxist angle on American Studies- an object lesson in putting the machine in the garden. How commerce can be reconciled with conservation, how population growth can co-exist with the natural order is the challenge that the histories of California- and Floridanow pose. "Progress" is bait that the populations of both states have swallowed, despite the fragility of the environmental structure in withstanding the relentless assault of the American way of life. The dreams of movement and mobility, of competitive capitalism and technological improvement are too intimately connected to the national experiment to be easily resisted. Florida is that saga in microcosm. Benjamin Franklin had pleaded with Europeans to come to a land of "a happy general mediocrity": and Professor Richard Hofstadter interpreted much of the sweep of American history as a fulfillment of such promotional schemes, as immigrants "were gulled into great expectations, stirred by some searing resentment or compelling idea1."⁴⁸

Nathanael West, The Day of the Locust (New York, 1975), 131. 46.

Derr, Some Kind of Paradise, 314; Colburn and Scher, "Florida Politics in 47.

<sup>the Twentieth Century," 41.
48. Benjamin Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America" (1782); in</sup> *The Political Thought of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Ralph L. Ketcham (Indianapolis, 1965), 336; Richard Hofstadter, America at 1750: A Social Portrait (New York, 1971), 16.

Those motives inspired a pattern of overdevelopment familiar to Californians and which has been eerily reproduced in Florida. After Dade County was invaded and pervaded with progress following the Second World War came the remorseless building up of Broward and Palm Beach counties, a cycle that the central Florida counties of Orange, Osceola, and Seminole have seemed determined to repeat. According to Derr, "the waves of development ripping across central Florida have consumed hundreds of thousands of acres of forests, fields, and orange groves . . . that once served to filter water recharging the Florida Aquifer." 49 Resources have been exploited, the asphalt and concrete poured on, the populace has swarmed in, and the effects have been- as one journalist has predicted-"more jai alai stadiums, dog tracks, snake farms, juicer plants, junior colleges, pet cemeteries, utopian retirement communities, health clubs, drive-ins, car dealerships, funeral chapels, barbecue pits, hamburger franchises, and amusement parks."⁵⁰ The wackiness of the land boom that the Marx Brothers satirized in their first big Broadway hit, The Cocoanuts (1925-1928), has become a fixture of the Florida experience.

Without minimizing the ecological problems of California, with its plagues ranging from fire to drought to smog to earthquakes, Florida environmentalists might argue for their own special challenges. Even conservationists as gallant and persistent as Marjory Stoneman Douglas of Miami, for example, are less able to mobilize support than in the Far West, where a California mountain range like the Sierra Nevada could convey the right wholesome image for an organization like the Sierra Club. which John Muir founded in San Francisco in 1892. Coalitions can be built more romantically and effectively around protecting forests or mountains than in behalf of swamps (or, to use the politically correct term, wetlands). The beauties of Yosemite could be appreciated more easily by hikers and backpackers and by presidents like Theodore Roosevelt than such uninviting terrain as the Everglades, which stirs a dedicated but far more uncertain constituency. It must also be acknowledged that Floridians have also confronted some manifestations of nature at their least agreeable, like the water hyacinth, the Asian walking

^{49.} Derr, Some Kind of Paradise, 385.

^{50.} Shoumatoff, Florida Ramble, 33.

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catfish, and the African tree snail, which are quite different from Smokey the Bear or the majestic redwoods. Moreover, the thrust of Florida history, it might be argued, has been to conquer the environment rather than adapt to it, to beat the heat and tempt tourists and settlers with the promise of new, developing, and developed communities. In a century of expansion so closely associated with the names of master builders like Flagler and Plant and Fisher, the ideal of economic growth has been largely uncontested. To champion ecological and aesthetic criteria as factors in making Florida habitable has been politically delicate.⁵¹

Readers of the Book of Genesis might respond in exculpation that quality control problems emerged with the first two human beings selected to inhabit Paradise; and readers of Kant know that "out of the crooked timber from which humanity is nothing can come out entirely straight."52 The made. philosopher died too early to see the real estate saleswomen in hot pants or the plaster flamingoes that would become more recognizable than egrets. The mythic space that Floridians have inhabited is therefore bound to be ambiguous, as the natural attractions that enraptured so many residents and transients are endangered, as the state shows increasing signs of becoming the tip of a wounded civilization. Such discontents may mean that the future is not what it used to be; but they were already recorded with acuity at the dawn of postbellum Florida. Describing a tour up the St. Johns River from the winter home that she had purachased in Mandarin, Harriet Beecher Stowe noted the beauty of "the wild, untouched banks . . . but the new settlements generally succeed in destroying all Nature's beauty, and give you only leafless, girdled trees, blackened stumps, and naked white sand, in return."⁵³ It is therefore prudent to conclude that the myth of Eden already contained within it the harbinger of the fall; the danger of dystopia already contaminated the state of nature.

^{51.} Rothchild, Up for Grabs, 104, 110, 114-15; Arsenault, St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 89.

^{52.} Quoted in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, 1991), xi.

^{53.} Stowe, Palmetto-Leaves, 257.