Sunbelt Dreams and Altered States: A Social and Cultural History of Florida, 1950-2000

Gary R. Mormino

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Florida's Big Bang represents an astonishing and complex story, a state swelling from 2.7 million inhabitants in 1950 to 16 million only fifty years later. Demographically, Florida's transformation is nothing short of revolutionary. On the eve of World War II, Florida's population of 1.9 million ranked twenty-seventh nationally and last in the South, trailing even lowly South Carolina and Arkansas. America's twentieth most populous state in 1950, Florida has vaulted to America's fourth largest in 2000, and stands poised to overtake New York. Like shifting tectonic plates, the post-World War II decades witnessed one of the great population shifts in history. Millions of Americans residing in the North and Midwest migrated to the South and West. Millions of emigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia flocked to California, Texas, and Florida. Between 1970 and 1990, as America's population grew by 21 percent, the South surged by 40 percent, while Florida soared by 76 percent. In the

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last half century, while California and Texas tripled their populations, Florida advanced six-fold.[1]

Even more astonishing than Florida's demographic explosion was its sudden accessibility. Since the 1920s, Florida's image as an American Mediterranean and winter vacationland had been ingrained, yet few Americans dared move to the southernmost state. But World War II and post-war affluence functioned as a giant watershed, opening the Sunshine State to millions of Americans. When George Gallup asked Americans in 1945, "If you could live in any state in the nation, in which state would you like to live?" California and Florida polled first and second.[2]

The decades following 1950 changed Florida more than the previous four centuries, altering boundaries, reconfiguring landscapes, and casting new relationships. The march to and across Florida was irresistible and irrepressible, as orange groves became gated communities, small towns were transformed into cities, and big cities morphed into metropolises and megalopoles. Demographers and wordsmiths coined new terms to incorporate paradigm shifts and change: space age, climate control, growth management, retirement community, theme park, urban renewal, mobile home park, strip mall, unincorporated sprawl, wetlands, and Sunbelt.

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 Garden of Earthly Delights, a miasmic hell hole and tacky wasteland. Florida's post-World War II dreamscape stirred the imagination of Walt Disney and Dick Pope, Morris Lapidus and Philip Johnson, Elmore Leonard and John D. MacDonald. A powerful symbol of renewal and regeneration, Florida's dreamscape constantly shifts. Where once the land and climate were sufficiently inspiring to bewitch artists and travelers, now gated condomini-

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1.   T. Stanton Dietrich, *The Urbanization of Florida's Population: An Historical Perspective of County Growth, 1830-1970* (Gainesville, Fla., 1978), 1-11; Allen Morris, *The Florida Handbook, 1989-90* (Tallahassee, Fla.,1989), 562-63; Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Garden City, N.Y., 1970); Kirkpatrick Sales, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York, 1975); Jack T. Kirby, "The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (November 1983): 587-97.

2.   *St. Petersburg Times*, 20 January 1945.

ums, retirement communities, and theme parks constitute that firmament.[3]

Florida remains a state of enchanted reality and shattered dreams, of second chances and the trifecta at Gulfstream. It was here that Elias Disney lost his orange grove, voted for the socialist Eugene Debs, and uprooted his family to the Midwest. His son Walt redeemed the family name, transforming central Florida groves and ranches into a capitalist paradise.

Florida held no monopoly on American dreamstates, but compared to sunny rivals Hawaii and California, fantasies could be validated on the cheap. The developers of Port Charlotte, Spring Hill, and Lehigh Acres marketed Florida dreams not to the fabulously rich, but to veterans, retirees, and middling folk. The strategy worked: every single day since 1950, about seven hundred new persons have become new Florida residents. Here, the line between realities and illusions is easily blurred. A state of lottery sweepstakes and tropical resorts, Florida has attracted more than its timeshare of developers who sold land by the gallon and dreams for ten dollars down, ten dollars a month. In Florida, quipped Will Rogers, a lie told at breakfast could become the truth by lunch. A state of enchanted Februarys and cursed Septembers, Florida brokered the fantasies of Americans who lived vicariously through the exploits of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Philadelphia Athletics, and St. Louis Cardinals. Each spring, the playing fields of St. Petersburg, Fort Myers, and West Palm Beach beckoned baseball teams and loyalists. In crackerjack parks and wooden grandstands, fans shared a collective past and waited for a better future. Spring training encouraged "the stuff of dreams"; major league baseball packaged those dreams into profits and associations.

Spring training and fresh starts coincide with old age and second chances in the Sunshine State. In lyrical song and celluloid memory, the reconcilable idea of Florida as a place of death and renewal persists as a powerful metaphor. Fittingly, Florida's state song is "Old Folks at Home."

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3. Kevin Starr's writings remain the most influential in the field of "dreamstates"; *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York, 1973); idem, *Material Dreams: Southern California Through The 1920s* (New York, 1990). Raymond O. Arsenault has explored this theme in *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream, 1888-1950* (Norfolk, Va., 1988); idem, "Is There a Florida Dream?" *Forum: The Magazine of the Florida Humanities Council* 17 (summer 1994): 22-27; Alvin Tofler, *Future Shock* (New York, 1970).

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Florida's vaunted climate, embellished by public relations, provided a siren's song. Like forward scouts, clusters of senior citizens first appeared in St. Petersburg, Lake Worth, and Miami Beach in the 1940s. Few contemporaries realized the portents. Never in human history would so many people live so long in places so far removed from their birth. The figures numbed even the boldest soothsayer. In 1940, about one in fifteen Floridians had celebrated a sixty-fifth birthday; by the end of the century, the proportion had grown to one in five. Floridians aged seventy and older now outnumber the total inhabitants of the Sunshine State on the eve of World War II. As late as 1950, Floridians' median age (28.8) was still younger than the rest of America. By 2000, Florida's median age (39.3) is four years older than the average American.[4]

Before Florida became the setting for the 1980s sit-com *Golden Girls* and the retirement home for the neurotic parents of *Seinfeld*, there first had to be a seismic mindshift in the way Americans thought about aging. In an older world steeped in the Protestant Work Ethic, the likelihood of "retirement" in Florida was as socially unimaginable as it was morally abhorrent. In the decades after World War II, Americans reaped the rewards of medical research and technological wizardry, shattering demographic barriers and redefining old age. Revolutions in health care and geriatrics, the promise of pension plans and Social Security, and the affordability of air conditioning and ranch houses made retirement possible in Florida. In hues of silver and gray, retirees poured into the state in the 1950s, reinventing Miami Beach and St. Petersburg and inventing Cape Coral and Century Village. Retirement now meant more than simply quitting work. By the 1990s, one could expect to live seven thousand days between age sixty-five and death.[5]

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4. 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 Miller and George Pozzetta (Westport, Conn., 1988), 168-169; 2000 Census; *Census of Population: 1950*, II, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 10, Florida (Washington, D.C., 1952), 27-29; *Florida Statistical Abstract, 1999* (Gainesville, Fla., 1999), 18.

5. The literature on aging in America is rich and growing. See especially Thomas R. Cole, *The Journey of Life: A Cultural History of Aging in America* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992); David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York, 1978); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore, Md., 1978); William Graebner, *A History of Retirement* (New Haven, Conn., 1980); Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York, 1994).

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Growing old in Florida depended largely upon being sold on Florida. Selling Florida became a big business. The names Del Webb and H. Irvin Levy may lack the cachet of the Levitt brothers, but they helped popularize Sun City and Century Village, immensely successful retirement communities. In Sunday newspaper supplements, on the concourse of New York's Grand Central Station, and on "free" excursions to Golden Gate Estates, Americans learned about Florida on the installment plan.[6]

The presence of so many elderly in Florida has inspired pundits to ponder the meaning of it all. Political parties, universities, and corporations devote vast resources attempting to divine the behavior of senior citizens. The elderly vote early and often, making senior clout even more intimidating than their numbers. Predicting the future of old age in Florida is as daunting as interpreting a Palm Beach County ballot. Florida serves as a bellwether, a sort of gray dawn. The Florida of today is the America of tomorrow. But contemporary America, a multicultural nation with a large bulge of baby boomers who have brashly announced that they do not intend to age quietly, will shape tomorrow's Florida.

In Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), the sorcerer's apprentice lacked the power to halt the legions of bucket-toting brooms and the castle is flooded with water. Yen Sid (Disney spelled backward!), the wise but stern sorcerer, restores the calm. No one in Florida has figured out how to similarly master growth or decide whether it should slow down.

Growth and development have exacted a grievous toll upon Florida's wildlife and natural habitat. Reconciling that growth with environmental responsibility poses a daunting challenge to Floridians, who have witnessed the straightening of rivers, decline of the manatee, and near extinction of the panther and Key deer. The demise of the Everglades has resulted in one of America's most glaring environmental tragedies.

Like medieval King Canute, who ordered his throne carried to the edge of the sea and commanded the waters to retreat, Floridians wanted to "improve" Florida. In its natural state, Florida

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6. David E. Dodrill, *Selling the Dream: The Gulf American Corporation and the Building of Cape Coral Florida* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1993); Christopher Linsin, "More than Amenity Alone: A Social History of the Century Villages, 1968-1992" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1997), 3-4, 95-99; Frances Fitzgerald, *City on a Hill: A Journey Through Contemporary American Cultures* (New York, 1986), 203-43.

may appear poorly designed: meandering rivers, shifting coast-
lines, and shore-hugging mangroves. Malleable, accessible, and
seemingly inexhaustible, the Florida landscape can become any-
thing that humans want it to be. Hot was made cool, and wet
became dry. What private enterprise would not finance or could
not fathom, the federal government audaciously attempted.
Monuments of futility, the "new" Kissimmee River and the aban-
doned cross-state barge canal were born of Florida fantasies and
Washington realities.

In King Canute's Florida, land and water retreated before ax,
machete, plow, steam shovel, and construction crane. Wildly con-
fident of their capacity to tame the land and drain the wetlands,
farmers, homesteaders, and developers left their imprint upon the
state. Like an avenging angel, however, nature has exacted a cruel
price for human hubris. Hurricanes Donna and Andrew and dev-
astating freezes, wildfires, and droughts have cost Floridians bil-
lions, while also exposing human flaws and arrogance. Such
natural calamities, however, have been complicated and magnified
by their insistence on developing barrier islands, the compulsion
to build on beaches and flood-prone coastal areas, and the prac-
tice of suppressing wildfire. Beach "renourishment" programs and
generous flood insurance policies subsidized at taxpayer expense
for some of Florida's wealthiest citizens pose further challenges to
the fragile ecosystems.[7]

Twentieth-century Florida witnessed a firestorm of change,
much of it technologically driven. The automobile helped to con-
quer "the tyranny of distance" and to "democratize" tourism.
Technology made possible the straightening of the Kissimmee
River, the drainage of the Everglades, and the very existence of

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7.   Scholars have written extensively on Florida's environmental follies and his-
tory. See Luther J. Carter, *The Florida Experience: Land and Water Policy in the
Growth State* (Baltimore, Md., 1974); Nelson M. Blake, *Land Into Water – Water
Into Land* (Tallahassee, Fla., 1980); John M. DeGrove, *Land Growth and Politics*
(Washington, D.C., 1984); Tom Ankersen, "Coping With Growth: The
Emergence of Environmental Policy in Florida" (M.A. thesis, University of
South Florida, 1983); Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *Voice of the River: An
Autobiography with John Rothchild* (Sarasota, Fla., 1987). For comparative per-
spectives and models of the new urban-environmental history, see Mike Davis,
Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster (New York, 1998);
idem, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (New York, 1990); Ted
Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (New
York, 2000).

Deltona. Liberal application of the pesticide DDT and the intro-
duction of air conditioning allowed Floridians to domesticate
nature—at a price. The Interstate Highway System brought intend-
ed consequences (nonstop travel and new jobs) but also unin-
tended results (urban sprawl and the decline of the downtown).
Ironically, the rage against nature has produced climate-controlled
malls and housing developments with dissociated names like Eagle
Lake, Sawgrass Mills, and Cypress Pointe.[8]

Civic, mechanical, and social engineers perfected an imperfect
Florida. Air conditioning lowered the temperature, DDT banished
the mosquito, and the bulldozer eliminated the mangrove.
Floridians, more than most Americans, are hooked on technology.
In a state where distances isolated people socially and physically,
the automobile and truck, the airport and interstate highway pro-
vided critical transportation links. In the case of instant cities, the
shopping mall made people forget the missing downtown link.

Reinventing Florida is an enduring cottage industry. Shifting
images and associations cast and recast Florida as a haven for the
elderly, the fruit and winter vegetable basket for North America, a
citadel and arsenal, and the crossroads for the Americas. No iden-
tity, however, conveys Florida's meaning to Americans and citizens
of the world more than its association as a vacation paradise.

Florida's persona as a tourist center was well established by
1950. The names Cypress Gardens, Weeki Wachee, and Miami
Beach conjured up magical allusions and illusions. But there was
nothing inevitable about marshland in Winter Haven, a natural
spring on the Gulf Coast, and a barrier island on Biscayne Bay
becoming vacation destinations. Tourism is not destiny. Beach
resorts and alligator farms, no less than paper mills and power
plants, involve human decisions. Investors in Winter Haven might
just as easily have drained Lake Eloise and planted sweet corn, as
happened at Lake Apopka and Zellwood. Instead, Dick Pope con-
verted wetlands and hammocks into Cypress Gardens.

The process of reinventing Florida was complex. No single
individual, no solitary corporation, possessed a blueprint to sell

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8. Raymond Arsenault, "The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air
    Conditioner and Southern Culture," *Journal of Southern History* 50 (November
    1984): 597-628; Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel
    Hill, N.C., 2000), 64-87; Evan P. Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to
    Ruin? The Interstate Highway System and the Fate of Starke, Florida," *Florida
    Historical Quarterly* 78 (spring 2000): 451-67.

Florida as a vacationland. Travel writers, chambers of commerce, advertising agencies, gasoline stations, poets, businesses, state and local governments all promoted Florida's image. The net effect was irresistible.

Between 1950 and 2000, one billion tourists (give or take a few hundred million) have visited the Sunshine State. Such a stunning accomplishment was made possible because of the convergence of myriad cultural, political, and economic developments. America's postwar affluence lifted millions of families into the middle classes and generated vast new sums of disposable income. The two-week paid vacation and the Ford station wagon symbolized the American way of life. Air conditioning allowed Floridians to have its sunshine and cool it, too, transforming a seasonal business into a 365 days-a-year enterprise. Millions of travel agents, car rental personnel, post card manufacturers, bellhops, maids, cooks, fast food workers, gardeners, concierges, motel owners, gas stations attendants, theme park employees, and corporate executives depend upon the health of Florida's tourist economy. Any business that generates over 650,000 jobs, that boasts five of America's top ten mega-theme parks, that annually lures forty million tourists to Orlando alone, deserves its companion noun—industry.[9]

Every tourist knows the way to Florida: when you hit the east coast, turn south. Imagine a map of the continental United States without the Florida peninsula. The mainland assumes the shape of a rough-edged box. But imagine again a map of the Caribbean basin and the southeastern United States. It becomes incomplete without the flying foot of peninsular Florida. Just where *does* Florida belong?

Florida represents both the southernmost outcropping of North America and the northernmost edge of the Caribbean. Culturally and geographically, Miami and Key West share closer ties with Havana and Nassau than with Tallahassee and Pensacola.

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9. While the history of American tourism has generated spirited debate and books, the subject in Florida has received surprisingly light treatment. See Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York, 1999); Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.:, 1995); Susan G. Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Patsy West, *The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Eco-Tourism* (Gainesville, Fla., 1998); Gary R. Mormino, "Eden to Empire: Florida's Shifting Dreamscape," *Forum* 24 (spring 2001): 6-12; idem, "Trouble in Tourist Heaven," *Forum* 17 (summer 1994): 11-13.

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The peninsula has served as a bridge since Hernando de Soto, setting out from Cuba in 1539, declared Spanish dominion over *La Florida.* The Florida-Caribbean connection has ebbed and flowed, sending trade goods and travelers in times of peace, warriors and refugees in times of turmoil. As historian Michael Gannon reminds us, not until 2055 will the flag of the United States have flown over Florida as long as did the Spanish banner.[10]

Florida's Caribbean connection did not end when Spain withdrew in 1821 nor begin anew in 1959. Fidel Castro frequently lectures Cubans and hectors Americans that "the republic of Cuba is the daughter of the cigarmakers of Florida." A reading of Florida's past suggests that the present-day embargo of Cuba represents a historical aberration. Florida's ever-growing social and economic connections to the Caribbean and the Americas have resulted in a multicultural, fabulously diverse state.[11]

Streams of Hispanic immigrants have dramatically altered the demographic complexion of Florida. In 1950, the state's reputation as a haven for immigrants was valid only when compared to the rest of the South. Only one in twenty Floridians was foreign-born; modest numbers of elderly Russian Jews, Germans, Canadians, and Britons clustered in Miami and St. Petersburg. Ybor City was in decline, its Cuban cigarmakers retired, unemployed, and more likely residing outside the fading Latin enclave.[12]

Florida's ethnic pressure center shifted to Miami in the 1960s. An exile culture had been established decades earlier, as Cuban officials sought security and safety in troubled times. Throughout

10.   Michael V. Gannon, "The Columbus Quincentenary: What Will We Celebrate?" in *Spanish Pathways in Florida, 1492-1992,* ed. Ann Henderson and Gary Mormino (Sarasota, Fla., 1991), 331-32; Gary R. Mormino, "Peninsular Florida," in *Encyclopedia of American Social History,* 3 vols. (New York, 1993); 1050-60.

11.   Gerald E. Poyo, *"With All and for the Good of All": The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham, N.C., 1989); Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985* (Urbana, Ill., 1987); María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley, Calif., 1996); Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); Castro quoted in *Tampa Times,* 30 November 1955.

12.   Arsenault and Mormino, "From Dixie to Dreamland," 166; *Census of the Population: 1950,* II, *Characteristics of the Population,* pt. 10, Florida, 39, Table 24.

the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Cubans dominated the immigration debate, flooding south Florida in unprecedented numbers. Cuban cafés appeared at street corners, but Cuban banks, construction companies, and television stations also emerged. Beginning in the 1970s, large numbers of non-Cuban Hispanics and Caribbeans began to make homes in Florida. During the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Florida's Hispanic population soared, increasing 83 percent and 63 percent respectively. The 2000 census confirmed the stunning changes wrought by four decades of intense immigration. Non-Cuban Hispanics (chiefly Puerto Ricans and Mexicans) now outnumber Cubans. Florida's immigrant pulse is no longer confined to Dade County; rather, Hispanics and Asian immigrants can be found across the state. Osceola County, for instance, now has *twice* as many Hispanics (50,727) as it had total residents in 1970. The number of Hispanics residing in Florida (2.7 million) has surpassed the state's African-American population (2.3 million). Today, nearly one in five Floridians is foreign-born. Florida's fastest growing immigrant group is not Hispanic, however, but Asian. The number of Asians residing in Florida tripled in the 1960s, tripled again in the 1970s, and doubled in the 1980s. Census takers identified over 200,000 Asians (principally Filipinos, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Koreans) in 2000.[13]

From colonial St. Augustine to modern Jacksonville to post-modern Miami, Florida's cities have displayed a remarkable vitality, creating new visions of urban life on the edge. Since World War II, the process of urbanization and suburbanization has relentlessly covered the state. Cities in Florida have attracted an amazing diversity of migrants. When anthropologist Franz Boas asked Zora Neale Hurston where she wanted to study, she looked homeward. "Florida is a place that draws people," she explained simply.[14]

In Florida, urban influences have been disproportionate to their numbers. Two cities, however, have captivated students of American urban life: Orlando and Miami. Not long ago a citrus

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13. "Many Lands Give Florida Its Latin Flavor," *Miami Herald*, 28 July 2001; "Hispanics in South Florida," *Miami Herald*, 28 July 2001; "Census Sees Latin Quilt," *Orlando Sentinel*, 26 July 2001; "Florida Sees Huge Influx of Hispanics," (Fort Lauderdale) *Sun-Sentinel*, 28 March 2001; "Hispanics Change Image of Osceola," *Orlando Sentinel*, 19 October 2000; "Domestic Diversity Reshaping South Florida," *Miami Herald*, 29 July 2001; "Asian Numbers Surge in Florida," (Fort Lauderdale) *Sun-Sentinel*, 24 May 2001.
14. Zora Neal Hurston, *Mules and Men* (Bloomington, Ind.,1963), 1.

hub and central Florida crossroads, Orlando exploded with the coming of Walt Disney World in 1971. The opening of the Magic Kingdom, a seminal event in the history of popular culture, transformed American tourism and turned Orlando into one of America's most intriguing cities of the late twentieth century. Annually, over forty million tourists gravitate to the Orlando area, now a synergistic collection of theme parks, urban sprawl, and economic growth. The intellectual Arnold Toynbee called Miami not so much a creation as an eruption. "Miami," observed Joan Didion, "seemed not a city at all but a tale, a romance of the tropics, a kind of waking dream in which any possibility could and would be accommodated." Compelling and contrasting, Miami is Florida's City of Light and Darkness, evoking images of gaiety and spontaneity, Coconut Grove and Liberty City. Alternatingly irresistible and repugnant, Miami has utterly captivated the American public as few cities have. It remains the nation's playground, a city of spectacle and grandeur, but also a place of ghastly violence and social dislocation. Miami and Orlando both are claimed as home for the world's *glitteratti*: Madonna, Versace, Sylvester Stallone, O.J. Simpson, Rosie O'Donnell, Gloria Estefan, Shaquille O'Neal, Wesley Snipes, Tiger Woods, and Ricky Martin.[15]

If geography is destiny, Miami's fortune was well placed. Situated near the end of a subtropical peninsula, Miami was buffered from destructive freezes and extreme heat by Key Biscayne, the Gulf Stream, and the Atlantic Ocean. The Everglades, Dade County pine, and oolitic limestone provided room to grow and natural resources. Human agency enhanced Miami's natural advantages. Arthur Godfrey, Jackie Gleason, Carl Fisher, and the Mackle brothers sold Miami dreams.

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15. The multidisciplinary and popular literature dealing with Miami is stunning. See Helen Muir, *Miami U.S.A.* (Gainesville, Fla., 2000); David Rieff, *Going to Miami* (New York, 1987); Joan Didion, *Miami* (New York, 1987), 33; T.D. Allman, *Miami: City of the Future* (New York, 1987); Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville, Fla., 1997); Sheila L. Croucher, *Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Postmodern World* (Charlottesville, Va., 1997); Raymond A. Mohl, "Miami: The Ethnic Cauldron," in *Sunbelt Cities*, ed. Richard Bernard and Bradley Rice (Austin Tex., 1983), 59-99; idem, "Changing Economic Patterns in the Miami Metropolitan Area, 1940-1980," *Tequesta* 42 (1982): 63-74. Orlando lacks the historical scrutiny that Miami has attracted. See Jerrell H. Shofner, *Orlando: The City Beautiful* (Tulsa, Okla., 1984); Eve Bacon, *Orlando: A Centennial History*, 2 vols. (Chulota, Fla., 1977).

By 1950, Miami had already cultivated a special relationship as a winter playground for New Yorkers and a summer escape for Cubans. When the boys of summer played for the Brooklyn Dodgers and Fidel Castro was plotting a revolution in Oriente province, Miami had already established ties with Jewish retirees and Cuban vacationers. A mixture of the Catskills and Casablanca, Miami's early relationships with New York, retirees, and Cubans channeled millions of future residents, refugees, and tourists into south Florida.[16]

By 1950, Dade County reveled in its reputation as Florida's most recognizable, most exotic, and most alluring city. Dade County was home to the Orange Bowl and Parrot Jungle, the Latin Quarter and Hialeah Race Track, Key Biscayne and Brickell Avenue. Miami attracted more tourists than any other place in Florida. In 1950, the Magic City claimed 250,000 inhabitants, the largest city in the state. While Miami was fascinating in the 1950s, few regarded it as a leading American center. The future changed Miami's image and reputation. A speeded-up newsreel concentrates the energy and fury of Miami and Miami Beach's four decades of change: Little Havana, Calle Ocho, Cocowalk, boat people, race riots, Liberty City, *Miami Vice*, Arquitectonica, hip-hop, the Dolphins, Floribbean culture, South Beach. Miami has emerged as one of America's great cities, a hemispheric center of immigrants, banking, and capital. Today, Miami's significance is as unquestioned as it is compelling. The magnitude and speed of change strain the word metropolis. Miami is the capital of Florida's first megalopolis. A frantic energy dazzles and confounds. A place of contrasts, Miami precariously balances Third World poverty and First World luxury.

No public relations director was prepared for what followed New Year's Eve 1958. In staccato bursts, the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis, freedom flights, and Operation Peter Pan marked not only new chapters in the Cold War but in Miami's and Florida's histories. The year 1980 fundamentally changed Miami and Florida, neatly cleaving a distinct before and after chasm.

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16. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 432-44; Frank Sicius, "The Miami-Havana Connection: The First Seventy-Five Years," *Tequesta* 58 (1998): 5-46; Moore, *To the Golden Cities*, 1-52; 117-19; Stephen Whitfield, "Blood and Sand," *American Jewish History* 82 (1994): 73-96; Howard Kleinberg, *Miami Beach* (Miami, Fla., 1996), 52, 69-76, 117-19.

Once again, the impulse for change came from abroad. In April, Castro confounded Cubans and foreign policy experts by announcing that *gusanos* (critics of Castro or worms) could leave. The Cuban port city of Mariel became the focal point and namesake of the proceeding events. The Marielitos, in contrast to the previous emigrants, were blacker, poorer, and younger. Mariel set in motion a tumbleweed chain of reactions. Miamians anguished over the city's "decline" (the crime rate rose 66 percent in 1980), while "cocaine cowboys," *balseros* (boat people), a race riot, and drug money stigmatized south Florida as a society in chaos.[17]

Miami, Los Angeles, and New York are great American cities, but are also *the* great immigrant cities. Of the three, Miami has the highest percentage of its region's residents (60 percent) born abroad or the children of immigrants. More than half of the population of Miami speaks a language other than English at home. More than half of all the Cubans residing in the United States live within commuting distance of Miami. But Miami is no longer exclusively a Cuban immigrant city. Miami is the capital of Latin America. Revolutions in Nicaragua and Haiti, crises in Honduras and El Salvador, and instability everywhere brought new masses of Caribbeans, South and Central Americans, and Asians to Florida.[18]

If Miami is one of the world's most important cities, an international crossroads of travel, finance, and intrigue, Orlando is Florida's most influential city. Miami and Orlando are perfect opposites. Miami functions as Florida's Ellis Island and Queens, a gateway city. Orlando cannot escape Walt Disney's shadow. In a 1991 cover story in *Time* magazine, Priscilla Painton observed, "Orlando, the boomtown of the South is growing at a staggering pace on the model of Disney World; it is a community that imitates an imitation of a community."[19]

Orlando, too, is a product of its geography. Nature endowed central Florida with the world's most perfect combination of sandy

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17. A superb study of Miami in 1980 is Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993). The finest study of Miami from the perspective of Cuban Americans is García, *Havana U.S.A.*

18. "Cuban Presence To Grow Stronger," *Miami Herald*, 2 January 2000; "Census 2000: Florida Sees Huge Influx of Hispanics," (Fort Lauderdale) *Sun-Sentinel*, 28 March 2001; "U.S. Now More Diverse, Ethnically and Racially," *New York Times*, 1 April 2001; "Census Calls South Florida Most Diverse U.S. Region," *Miami Herald*, 16 October 1999.

19. Priscilla Painton, "Fantasy's Reality," *Time*, 27 May 1991, 52-59.

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soil, eternal sunshine, and spring-fed lakes for the cultivation of oranges. "Our number one crop is now Yankees," quipped Orange County's agricultural extension agent; "They're easier to zero in on and they don't freeze." Orlando's status as capital of the citrus belt, like its reputation as a tourist center, had less to do with wind and water than with will and capital. Sanford, Winter Garden, and Leesburg rivaled Orlando, but far-sighted leaders in that city ensured that all roads, a turnpike, an interstate highway funneled into Orlando. A city of 50,000 in 1950, Orlando expanded its economic base and boundaries substantially before Disney World opened, but the words metropolitan and Orlando were rarely used together. The population had doubled to 100,000 by 1970. More remarkably, Orange County's population trebled between 1950 and 1970, rising to 345,000. Aggressive recruitment of industry and corporations placed Orlando in the ranks of Florida's most dynamic places. Orlando's promise was lockset in 1970. The city prospered amidst a flourishing agricultural empire; new industries and businesses generated a diverse economic base; Interstate 4 and Orlando International Airport made the city accessible to travelers.[20]

Events of singular power and intensity altered the trajectories of Orlando and Miami, transforming cities, a state, and lifestyles. Castro's revolutionary triumph in 1959 and the opening of Walt Disney World in 1971 signify Genesis chapters for chroniclers of Miami and Orlando. Historical causation is almost always complex and multilayered, but in the cases of Miami and Orlando, Cuban exiles and Walt Disney World lend a certain birth myth quality to their histories.   When Mayor Carl T. Langford of Orlando exclaimed that the coming of Disney World was "the greatest thing that's happened since the city got its charter," he did not exaggerate. The impact of the Magic Kingdom has been so forceful, so profound, one is tempted to write the year 1971 followed by A.D.

20.   Ibid.; Shofner, *Orlando*, 122-23, 138, 149, 152, 155, 165, 166-67; Dietrich, *The Urbanization of Florida's Population*, 146-47, 172-75, 194-95; "Spreading From Disney World: A Spectacular Boom," *U.S. News & World Report* 72 (12 June 1972): 60-63; Jim Robinson and Mark Andrews, *Flashbacks: The Story of Central Florida's Past* (Orlando: Fla., 1995); Henry Swanson, *Countdown for Agriculture* (Orlando, Fla.); H. Bailey Thomson, "Orlando's Martin Andersen: The Power Behind the Boom," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79 (spring 2001): 492-516; agricultural extension agent quoted in "Nature and Humanity Conspire," *Washington Post*, 15 February 1985; Richard Fogelsong, *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 14-33.

(After Disney). Since its opening, Disney World has become the world's most successful commercial attraction. As a tourist shrine, the Magic Kingdom is rivaled only by Kyoto, Mecca, and the Vatican. More tourists have made pilgrimages to Orlando and Anaheim than there are Chinese. Both the presence of a Cuban exile community and the establishment of an extraordinarily successful amusement park triggered new explosions: the arrival of succeeding waves of expatriates, right-wing politics, and ethnic and racial tensions; land speculation and investment, the construction of new theme parks and hotels, and massive urban sprawl. Cubans in Miami and Disney World in Orlando transcended reality and became the icons of their respective cities. If Miami's kinetic energy and too-close-to-the-edge ethnic velocity frightened many Americans, Orlando's theme parks energized and dazed visitors with antiseptic, simulated fright and over-the-edge illusions.[21]

The Magic Kingdom may specialize in illusion and fantasy, but central Florida has had to confront the real urban consequences of hosting millions of tourists. In 1950, Metro Orlando (Orange, Seminole, Osceola, and Lake Counties) comprised a population of 185,579. On the eve of the opening of Disney World in 1971, the metro population had grown to 522,575. By 2000, Metro Orlando had surpassed 1.6 million inhabitants, ranking as the nation's twenty-eighth largest metro area, surpassing New Orleans, San Antonio, and Indianapolis. Since the 1980s, these four counties have added over 150 new residents every day. The area once teemed with orange groves, cattle ranches, and truck farms. The census skips over the forty million tourists who come annually, but their impact—strip malls, congested highways, and hotels—can be seen everywhere. Kissimmee once proclaimed itself the "Cow Capital of Florida"; today, it might be the motel and fast food capital of the world. In 1970, Metro Orlando had about 5,000 motel and hotel rooms, a number that grew to 24,000 by 1973, and over 80,000 today. Mayor Carl Langford, who welcomed Walt Disney, has retired and moved to North Carolina: "I spent 30 years of my

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21. Langford quoted in "Spreading From Disney World," 63;"Orlando Chalks Up Best Tourist Year in Decade," *Orlando Sentinel*, 6 February 1950; "Disney Creates a Magic Kingdom in Orlando" *Florida Trend* 25 (June 1983): 75-77; "The Invasion Continues," *Florida Trend* 35 (March 1993): 74-78; Davis, *Spectacular Nature*, 2; Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (New York, 1998).

life trying to get people to move down there [Orlando], and then they all did." Langford was not alone. "In a nation on the move, in a state of transplants," writes Jeff Kunerth, "Orlando is the capital of mobility. For every 100 residents in metropolitan Orlando, 59.7 have moved during the last five years." Many choose not to stay.[22]

Modern Florida is simply irresistible to writers and cultural critics. "In the 60's and 70's if you were listening to the national tuning fork, there was a sense that California was the state that was defining America," writes Michael Paterniti. "Right now the tuning fork points to Florida." From race riots in St. Petersburg to alien exotics in the Everglades, from Elián to ballot-chasing lawyers, Florida is a trendsetter. Cultural styles and bizarre sightings that once rolled to or began on the West Coast now slide southward to Florida. Florida combines Margaritaville and Future Shock. In his novel *Continental Drift*, Russell Banks explores this theme as readers follow the migration of Robert and Elaine Dubois from placid New England to central Florida to Miami. "We're not dead," Elaine insists, "It's this place [Catamount, New Hampshire] that's dead." Oleander Park, Florida, is anything but dead, having attracted an odd collection of gun nuts, racial bigots, and sex-starved migrants.[23]

Florida's excesses and surreal synchronicities have inspired a distinctive literary genre. What does late twentieth-century literature suggest about the nature of Florida? Typically, modern novelists depict Florida as a lost Utopia, a dystopian, overdeveloped land overrun by corporate theme parks, rapacious developers, and crazed drug lords. To save Old Florida, New Florida must be destroyed.

John D. MacDonald pioneered the modern Florida novel. A war veteran and a graduate of the Harvard School of Business, MacDonald moved to Florida in the late 1940s, eventually settling in Sarasota. *Condominium* was his sixty-sixth book. Many devoted

22.   Dietrich, *The Urbanization of Florida's Population*, 146-47, 172-75, 194-95; *Florida Statistical Abstract (1999)* (Gainesville, Fla., 1899), 6-8, 14-17; "Ranches Vanish Fast," *Orlando Sentinel*, 17 March 2002; Jeff Kunerth, "Few Stay Long in Central Florida," *Orlando Sentinel*, 20 March 2002; "Census Puts Orlando 28th," *Orlando Sentinel*, 2 April 2001.
23.   Robert Paterniti, "America in Extremis," *New York Times Magazine*, 21 April 2002, 6; Russell Banks, *Continental Drift* (New York, 1994), 29: for comparisons with California, see Stephen J. Whitfield, "Florida's Fudged Identity," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 71 (April 1993): 413-35.

readers think that it, among all his works, best exemplified the author's codes of ethics (and Florida's shortcomings). The novel connects all of the dots: compliant county commissioners bent upon growth at all costs; Golden Sands, a doomed high rise on Fiddler Key, an imaginary cay between Venice and Fort Myers; shady contractors peddling shoddy work; innocent dwellers anxious to enjoy the good life on the water; and a killer hurricane taking vengeance upon the innocent and guilty.[24]

Similarly, a new generation of writers has found in Florida a perfect subject, blending vivid imaginations with real-life themes. *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiaasen has achieved notoriety and fame as a novelist. In *Tourist Season,* his protagonist Skip Wiley masterminds a series of sensational murders in order to begin "the Fourth Great Seminole War." South Florida has become in the words of Wiley, a hard-charging journalist, "Newark with palm trees." To restore sanity, Wiley feeds a tourist to the crocodiles and kills a vacationing Shriner by stuffing a toy gator down his throat. His fez is found on the beach. "We're gonna empty out this entire state," he announces. "All the morons who thundered into Florida the past thirty years and made such a mess are gonna thunder right out again . . . the ones who don't die in the stampede." Wiley philosophizes: "What is Florida anyway? . . . An immense sunny toilet where millions of tourists flush their money and save the moment on Kodak film." The recipe for redemption is simple: "Scare away the tourists and pretty soon you scare away the developers. No more developers, no more bankers. No more bankers, no more lawyers . . . Now, tell me I'm crazy." Tim Dorsey shares journalistic credentials with Carl Hiaasen (the former with the *Tampa Tribune*) and an affection for the wackiness of Florida. His first novel, *Florida Roadkill,* drew upon the author's impressions of a Florida on and sometimes over the edge of reality. Whereas Hiaasen lampoons Miami, Dorsey targets Tampa and its quest for big city status. In the works of Edna Buchanan, the line between reality and fantasy is blurred in large part because the writer worked for decades as a crime reporter for the *Miami Herald.* "I love this place!" gurgles Buchanan. "We have it all: drug smuggling, money laundering, mass murder, the Mafia, deposed dictators, foreign fugitives, cocaine cowboys, street people, terrorists,

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24. John D. MacDonald, *Condominium* (New York, 1977).

bombings, grave robbers, exotic diseases, bizarre sects, bizarre sex, vast wealth, utter poverty, crazy politics, racial tensions, refugees and riots." Florida *Noir* has introduced some of literature's most interesting characters: In James Hall's *Buzz Cut*, a serial killer, Butler Jack, hijacks a luxury cruise ship in Biscayne Bay; in *Mile Zero*, Thomas Sánchez imagines a contract murder atop Key West's tallest landmark—the city dump! "Florida is powerfully attractive," writes Susan Orlean in her best seller, *The Orchid Thief.* Florida, she observes, "is less like a state than a sponge."[25]

The history of modern Florida compresses massive social change in an astonishingly brief span of time. In 1950, Florida's 2.7 million inhabitants were predominantly white, Protestant, and Southern-born. Florida's scant number of immigrants more likely came from Great Britain and Canada than Cuba and Mexico. The portrait of Florida emerging from the 2000 census reveals a more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse state than the South and the nation. Florida has joined Texas and California as the melting pot states of the Sunbelt. For at least a generation, Florida has grappled with the complexities of multiculturalism, immigration, aging, and developmental issues, issues facing all Americans in the next century. The Florida of today is the America of tomorrow. If so, believes Carl Hiaasen, the future will be "almost Toffleresque in its chaos." To paraphrase John Locke, "In the end, all the world will be Florida."[26]

Astrophysicist Fred Hoyle coined the expression "Big Bang" in the 1950s, ironically, to attack critics who believed that the universe began in an abrupt instant and evolved from that point. Today the debate by leading thinkers like Stephen Hawking involves not the *beginning* but the mass of the universe and questions of its limits. Will the universe expand forever, implode, or remain constant? The answer depends upon how one gauges the matter density of the universe.

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25. Tim Dorsey, *Florida Roadkill: A Novel* (New York, 1999); idem, *Triggerfish Twist* (New York, 2002); Thomas Sánchez, *Mile Zero* (New York, 1989); Carl Hiaasen, *Tourist Season* (New York, 1986), 24, 103-166; Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief* (New York, 1998),184; Marilyn Stasio, "Skulking Around in the Swamp," *New York Times*, 31 January 1999; Edna Buchanan, *Miami, It's Murder* (New York, 1994); idem, *Never Let Them See You Cry: More from Miami, America's Hottest Beat* (New York, 1992); idem, "Why I Love Miami," *Publishers Weekly* 240 (3 May 1993): 52; James W. Hall, *Buzz Cut* (New York, 1996).
26. Hiaasen quoted in Paterniti, "America in Extremis," 74.

So it is with modern Florida, a state not so much threatened by gravity, the force drawing objects to the center of the earth, but *gravitas*, the weight of character. Here, too, the debate rages. Can Florida continue to add unlimited numbers of new residents and tourists, condominiums and superhighways? Or will Florida collapse from the demands upon the land and infrastructure? Perhaps the issue for Floridians parallels the astrophysicists' debate. What *is* the proper balance, ratio, and limitations of growth and environment, population and land, freedom and community in the Sunshine State?