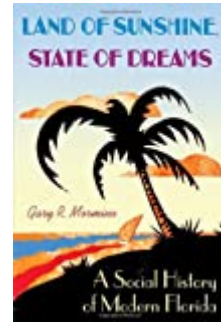


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Gary Mormino.** *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. xvii + 457 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2818-7.



**Reviewed by** Abel A. Bartley (Department of History, Clemson University)

**Published on** H-Florida (August, 2006)

## Wow, What a Ride?

Gary Mormino has put together an interesting and compelling look at the outstanding growth and unanticipated growth of Florida. He traces the pattern of development Florida took in its transformation from a backwater region of mosquitos, alligators, and Native Americans into one of the nation's fastest growing regions. Mormino ties his work together by constantly reminding the reader that Florida's astounding growth occurred predominantly during the last fifty years. He tracks the growth of the many groups that came to Florida to find their pots of gold or their fountain of youth. Mormino argues that immigration, migration and tourism worked together to transform Florida from a rural, predominantly white and African-American area into a multicultural urban region. Mormino argues that Florida evolved from a southern wasteland into a northern tourist oasis.

This book is ultimately a series of stories—stories of people, places, and things which worked together to make Florida the multicultural region it is today. Mormino looks at several aspects of the people and the communities they built in Florida. One of the most interesting stories is that of Jewish immigration, how it

occurred and why it became such an important part of Florida's development. He ties this story in with the work of Claude Pepper and his courageous struggle to protect the rights and privileges of the elderly, helping to transform this traditionally ignored group into one of the most powerful political forces in the country. He then changes gears and talks about the backlash against the elderly, including the many bumper stickers and other demonstrations of angst some people felt about the increasing numbers of elderly people flooding Florida's communities and highways.

In one of the strengths of this book, Mormino constantly ties the African-American story to that of Florida. The author goes beyond traditional notions of blacks and looks at other groups which came to the state and helped shaped race relations. Haitians, Barbadians, and other residents of the Caribbean are also part of the discourse of this text. Mormino does not paint Florida as a racial paradise; instead, he portrays a region, much like the rest of the south, where black labor was needed but black people were not welcomed. The book plays upon the well-worn but often repeated truth that integration, while

good for the country, nevertheless helped speed up the destruction of many sacred, African-American communities. Places like American Beach and Bethune Beach fell on hard times as African Americans gained access to predominantly white beaches once Jim Crow fell. Both of these regions have virtually succumbed to the pressure from wealthy land developers like Amelia Island which is threatening the area with encroachment.

The other two compelling parts of Florida's story, emphasized by this author, are the story of Disney World and the story of Cuban immigration. In the story of Walt Disney World, Mormino shows that Orlando beat out St Louis and several other sites for this experiment in family fun. Disney World is probably the most recognizable entity in Florida. Since its opening in 1971, Disney World has worked like a giant magnet attracting literally billions of tourists to the Central Florida area. Tourists from nearly every part of the globe have come to Florida to participate in the Disney experience. Disney has forced Florida to re-evaluate its social outlook by offering entertainment to nearly everyone. Despite protest from religious groups, the company has embraced gay and lesbian patrons who descend on the park for the yearly "Gay Day," organized through private travel organizations.

As the number of tourists have increased, so have the prices of Disney tickets. In 1975 you could get into a Disney park for \$5.25, today the tickets cost \$60.00. Disney has been an economic lightning rod, creating billions of dollars of revenue for the state, filling hotels, and selling food and gasoline. However, Disney World has been both a blessing and a curse for the Orlando area. Though Orlando has seen dramatic increases in the number of tourists, the Magic Kingdom has not created any economic miracles for the workers, many of whom are part-time employees making minimum wage. As a result, Orlando has one of the worse infrastructures in the state. The schools and other amenities are falling apart. The many engineers who have made Disney World a dream

land have not lent their expertise to helping Orlando deal with its sewage problems nor helped the city produce the large number of high paying jobs necessary for long-term economic stability. Also, the millions of people who visit Disney's theme parks create tons of waste and other garbage that is slowly ruining Florida's delicate environment.

Mormino also does a wonderful job of explaining the influence of Cubans on Florida's development. Mormino constantly reminds that reader that Florida has grown from a state of just over two million people in 1940 to over 15 million today. One of the most interesting aspects of Florida's remarkable growth has been the dramatic increase in the number of Hispanics. They have overtaken African Americans as the largest minority group in the state. This has all kinds of political and economic implications. Since the 1980s Mariel Boat Lift, Hispanics in Florida have been gradually gaining power. At more than 2.7 million residents they are a potent political force. Though mainly concentrated in southern Florida, they nevertheless have influence throughout the state. As their population has increased, they have become more accepted by the larger population.

Mormino's study of Florida is a good look at a state that seems to defy the southern norm. While states like Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana have developed attractions to entice tourists, they have not been able to match Florida's appeal. Mormino describes Florida as almost an everyman's land, which offers something for everyone. This is a good book which provides the readers with an interesting look at Florida's development over the last half century. This book is a must read for anyone who wants to know more about Florida's history. It is a powerful look at a state that is increasing in influence. The book is well written, scholarly sound, and intellectually stimulating. I highly recommend this book to every serious scholar of Florida history.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-florida>

**Citation:** Abel A. Bartley. Review of Mormino, Gary, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*. H-Florida, H-Net Reviews. August, 2006.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12147>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication,

originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).