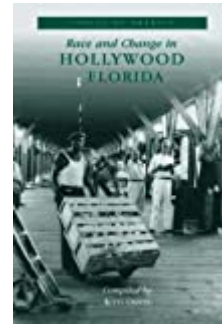


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



**Kitty Oliver.** *Race and Change in Hollywood, Florida.* Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003. 128 pp. \$18.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7385-0569-5.



**Reviewed by** Paul George (School of Social Science, Miami-Dade College)

**Published on** H-Florida (September, 2004)

Kitty Oliver, a longtime journalist for the *Miami Herald*, conducted, in the fall of 1999, an oral history project entitled "Migration Stories: Crossings of the Racial Divide," which examines the race-relations experiences of forty-two Hollywood residents of widely varying racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Together the subjects of these interviews have lived in Hollywood for seventy-five years. The project received support from a host of sources, including the Florida Humanities Council, the City of Hollywood, and the Broward County Library.

Carved out of a palmetto thicket and piney woods and dotted with a few farms, Hollywood by the Sea, as it was formally known (to distinguish it from its more famous counterpart on the west coast of the United States), was a 1920s boom-era community created by Joseph Young, one of that era's larger-than-life developers. During the boom, which reached its peak in 1925, no Broward city developed as rapidly as Hollywood, with its Mediterranean Revival cum Moorish-styled architecture, largely because of Young's plan and its implementation. When the boom collapsed in 1926, hard times set in for Hollywood and the rest of south Florida, as well as for other areas of the state. In subsequent decades, Hollywood grew slowly while losing much of its luster among Broward cities to Fort Lauderdale lying to the north of it. In recent decades, the spiraling growth of south Florida has

resulted in a wave of suburban development for Hollywood. Lately, the historic core of the city has come to life again and many new building projects, along with admirable restoration work on older structures, is underway. Consequently, Hollywood has become a much more exciting place than the previous era's bedroom community standing between the bustling municipalities of Fort Lauderdale and Miami. The increasing diversity of the population of Hollywood prompted *Money* magazine, in an article in the late 1990s, to announce that the city's black-white racial balance at that time represented what America would look like in the year 2022.

Many persons forget that south Florida was very much a part of the Deep South in terms of race until recent decades. Segregation was the norm and it was rigidly enforced in every municipality. What separates Hollywood from other Deep South communities outside of south Florida was the rich variety of backgrounds of its citizenry. Blacks from the Bahamas and the Caribbean settled there, as did many Jews and Hispanics. Many came north to Hollywood from Miami, which was, by the mid-20th century, hosting a wide array of newcomers from the Caribbean and other parts of the West Indies. Each interviewee had a fascinating story to tell to Kitty Oliver, who is an African American, and the stories invariably include accounts of discrimination. There

is, for example, Leonard Robbins, a decorated World War II pilot and a Harvard-educated attorney, recalling how difficult it was for him to find employment because of his religion. Robbins should not have been surprised by this state of affairs, however, since, as he recounted, the Ku Klux Klan, in the 1920s, rode through downtown Fort Lauderdale trying to intimidate blacks and anyone else not in agreement with their narrow definition of what constituted "Americanism." Ten years later, white Christians, as Robbins tells it, boycotted his father's clothing store, and even put up money for a competitor's store with the goal of putting him out of business.

Although born in Miami, Cyril Pinder, Sr., who is black, grew up in the Bahamas. At age twenty-one in 1943, he returned to southeast Florida, settling in Dania just north of Hollywood. One day soon after he had arrived, he boarded a bus and sat across from the driver thinking nothing of it, until a white man boarded the vehicle at a subsequent stop. When Pinder rejected the bus driver's demand that he vacate his seat ("God, Nigger, get on up, and let that white man sit down") and move to the back of the bus, the white rider pulled a .38 caliber pistol from a bag, put it to Pinder's face, and admonished him to move ("Boy, I said get on up"), which he did.

Marvin Merritt grew up in Liberia, a segregated black community in Hollywood, which was created by Joseph Young. Merritt noted that Liberia was a self-contained community in the 1930s, with little contact with the white community. He also noted that blacks were not allowed on Hollywood beach. For those African Americans who worked on the beach, "they was [sic] allowed to go, but they had a badge, and they had a man there on the bridge, that operated the bridge, and he would call their employers prior to them coming. And he would

okay for them to come." Dorothy McItyre grew up in Liberia also. Like many other residents of the segregated neighborhood, she was Bahamian. She and her family were not allowed to try on clothes in a white store, but could bring them home, and try them on there. If they did not fit, "Mama would take them back and get what we needed—which was stupid. We could have done anything to the clothes."

Jose "Pepe" Lopez, the executive director of the Latin Chamber of Commerce of Hollywood, was born in Havana, moved to Miami as a teenager, and to Broward County one decade later. In 1975, he joined the city of Hollywood Police Department. One of his sergeants joked with him soon after his appointment: "'God now I have a f*Cuban here, then a Negro. What are we going to do with this f\_Indian from the Seminole tribe?*' It was a joke and everybody laugh. We laugh [sic], too. If you don't laugh and say anything prior to review you fired."

There are nearly forty other stories with themes similar to the above. This study is important for several reasons: the oral histories were transcribed and are here for anyone to read and ruminate over; little of Hollywood's history has been told before, and the topics covered in this work have not been addressed until now; the stories herein are typical to a significant degree of any place in the American South in the first half—and even beyond—of the twentieth century as illustrations of segregation and discrimination based on race and ethnicity, and the harm they caused for their victims, but also to the community as a whole, especially, for the latter, in terms of economic and even psychic costs. For these reasons, Oliver's book is an important contribution to those studies treating the topic of race, ethnicity, and discrimination.

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**Citation:** Paul George. Review of Oliver, Kitty, *Race and Change in Hollywood, Florida*. H-Florida, H-Net Reviews. September, 2004.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9784>

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