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***Finest Kind* by Ben Green**

Carolyn Ellis

University of South Florida

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Finest Kind. By Ben Green. Macon, Georgia. 1985. Mercer University Press. Photographs. Notes. Pp. 261. Cloth. \$19.95

Ben Green blends “living histories,” newspaper stories, and personal insights to describe Cortez, a fishing village of 500 people located on Sarasota Bay. In the unique position of being an informed native and an academician, Green takes readers into the hearts and minds, the work and family lives of these fisher folk; then steps back to analyze the history of the community, its current state, and its future prospects. His goal is three-fold: to leave a verbal and pictorial record of the joys and sorrows, memories and dreams, values and ideas of these people and their community over the last century; to document the struggles between Cortez and those drug smugglers, sport fishermen, law makers, and developers, who have and still want to change it for their own self interest; and to raise moral and political questions about whether our nation or the state of Florida can afford to lose the traditions still embodied in the few communities, like Cortez, that remain.

If Cortez residents and others are moved by this book to do something to protect Cortez, so much the better. Green writes with “unashamed subjectivity” about his love for Cortez people and his passion for preserving Cortez from those who would want to change it. Do not read this book and then visit Cortez as a tourist, Green implores his readers. For if Cortez does not disappear under blacktop and high-rise condominiums at the hands of developers, the next battle will be with tourists who will want to turn Cortez into a quaint museum community for their own pleasure.

Green’s light, lively prose acquaints readers with the lives of each of the twenty extended families in Cortez. He introduces his legendary grandfather, “Tink” Fulford, who lived to fish. He describes a young woman who risked her life fighting drug smugglers. In between these two, we meet the women in charge of domestic chores, decision-making, and child rearing. We go out on mullet catches with the men. We view the community through the eyes of the children and watch as they discover automobiles, dating, and “going to town.”

Through these lives and voices, Green describes the changes in the last century: the hurricane of 1921 and the disappearance of mullet; the internal combustion engine which allowed for expanded markets with long-haul trucking and fishing from outboard motor boats; increased competition, price cutting by the shippers and packers, and eventually the introduction of union organization; the automobile which pulled young people into Bradenton and had a lasting influence on the isolation and solitude of Cortez; and drug smuggling operations some years later which dramatically transformed the quiet and cohesive community Cortez had once been. Add more Northern retirees, developers’ control of local politicians and the passage of anti-netting legislation, increasing numbers of bulldozers and condominiums, and the destruction was almost complete. By the early 1980s, the combined effects of sport fishing, dredge-and-fill operations, sewage and industrial waste pollution, seawalls, and the violent destruction of wetlands almost eliminated the town's critical resource—fish.

Ben Green believes that Cortez is a microcosm of Florida’s future. He seems pessimistic that the Florida legislature or Manatee County commissioners will limit growth or that Cortez residents will develop a plan for saving their village. If he is right, then he and like-minded

residents are hoping for another great hurricane to convince the condo dwellers that this is not a good place to live. Quite a drastic solution, with drastic effects for even the Cortez residents.

Ben Green is a wonderful interviewer and story teller. I share his passion for the preservation of isolated enclaves in America. As a social scientist, I missed an attempt at objectivity, documented sources, and a bibliography suggesting other communities with similar conflicts. But, then, that was not what Ben Green set out to do.

Carolyn Ellis