

1-1-2009

Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration
edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss

David Tegeder
Santa Fe College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

Tegeder, David (2009) "*Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration* edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol23/iss1/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

same semi-annual retreat a few years later.

This record of daily life in coastal Florida provides insight into a changing landscape and society in transition as modern inventions began to transform a way of life. As a lifelong fisherman and hunter, Storter describes the transition from a subsistence lifestyle of the past to the more industrial and commercial means of livelihood of the present. Unfortunately, with this transition he must also describe the slow demise of the ecology and environment he so admired and loved.

Using his “primitive” artwork that goes beyond a merely stylistic portrayal of the environment, Rob depicts many aspects of daily life with exquisite detail. His drawings with written descriptions resemble the field notes of an ethnographer, as Storter detailed not only the landscape in which he lived but the culture as well. Drawings of plants and animals along with descriptions of their use and misuse provide a hint of the bountiful resources that were once a part of vast sea of grass. Whether in a drawing of a roseate spoonbill or of swimming away from an alligator, these depictions offer a priceless snapshot of the past.

The memoirs of Storter's second wife Marilea add a more complete picture of family life as she describes the necessities of providing for invalids and the sick, fetching groceries, making ketchup and canning tomatoes, or the perils of pregnancy and childbirth. Life in the Everglades was hard for both sexes, and the addition of Marilea's memoirs are integral to an understanding of families, friends, and the various roles of both females and males growing up in those times.

Few individuals have the foresight and ability to chronicle their daily lives with such talent and attention to detail. Some writers and artists spend many years learning to accomplish what Rob Storter has provided through his journals and artwork, and Floridians are lucky to have the benefit of his memories and drawings. Whether Storter's work represents formal or informal knowledge, it makes an immense contribution, with beauty and grace, to an understanding of both the Everglades and its culture during the early years of settlement in that harsh land.

MICHAEL JEPSON

NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office, St. Petersburg

Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration. Edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. xii, 286 pp. List of acronyms, foreword, acknowledgments, editors and contributors, index. \$69.95, cloth)

Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to the New Immigration offers an engaging collection of essays that explore the richness of Florida's labor history. Spanning an enormous breadth

of time, these nine chapters underscore the importance of ethnicity, race, class, and gender in understanding the most fundamental human experience—work. At the same time, they examine important issues that move beyond what used to be the perennial problem of exceptionalism in the literature of Florida's past, namely the Sunshine State's "place" in the broader patterns of southern and United States history. Florida's early history as both a slave state and a frontier region offers opportunities to study the changing nature of labor within a larger system of racial and social control on the periphery of the American South and, indeed, the larger Atlantic world. More recently, Florida's rapid growth and migration, ethnic diversity, and expanding tourist and service economy are more in keeping with the experience—or, as the case may be, coming experience—of other deindustrializing sunbelt states. From this perspective, these essays suggest that Florida stands at the center of an emerging interdisciplinary and comparative approach to labor history.

Three chapters examine life and labor in the difficult and exploitative environment of colonial and antebellum Florida. Tamara Spike's essay on Indian tribute labor under Spanish rule reveals how corn production not only dramatically changed Timucuan social, cultural, and religious practices, but also their diet and food production, which ultimately created a weaker, more sedentary population. Edward Baptist argues that much of Florida's antebellum history was far from a static world of plantation paternalism but instead a frontier experience of cotton and sugar slave labor camps that pushed African American workers beyond measure. And for those who escaped the bonds of servitude, Brent Weisman reveals the struggles of Black Seminoles, who were forced to negotiate "multiple worlds simultaneously" (66).

Workers in postbellum and early twentieth-century Florida faced similar hurdles as the worlds of race and labor became increasingly constrained. Mark Howard Long's piece on Henry Sanford's effort to create a citrus empire on the back of Swedish indentured labor provides a fascinating glimpse of an alternative solution to the "labor problem" following emancipation. Robert Cassanello takes a broader view, both temporally and geographically, examining how race and gender shaped the labor movement across the state in terms of legislation, private associations, and labor organizations from 1900 to 1920. And Thomas Castillo's article on chauffeuring in Miami reveals how new technology—in this case, the automobile—made work and racial segregation problematic as the popular tourist destination quickly divided into two cities, one white and one black, at the turn of the twentieth century. Far from challenging segregation, black drivers and community leaders had to embrace the color line to secure employment across town. While to some degree they redrew the line in their favor, black deference and accommodation ironically strengthened the emerging racial order.

The remaining essays explore the role of unionization, immigration, and the state in mid-twentieth-century labor relations. Alex Lichtenstein's work on the communist organization of shipyard, citrus, and cigar workers in the 1930s and 1940s illustrates many of the difficulties in trying to cross racial, ethnic, and gender

barriers. Those lines would only further harden during World War II, according to Cindy Hahamovitch, as the federal government assisted local growers in acquiring foreign, mostly Jamaican, farmworkers. Wartime “emergency measures,” however, became a permanent part of agricultural production in the 1950s as U.S. agricultural interests increasingly relied on temporary foreign workers, who were later replaced by undocumented illegal immigrants, as a solution to the perennial need for cheap labor. Finally, Melanie Shell-Weiss suggests the same pattern emerged as northern lingerie manufacturers migrated southward to Miami, and even farther to Puerto Rico. To lower the cost of doing business, corporations sought an almost exclusively female and Latin labor force. In many respects symbolizing the growing mobility of modern manufacturing, the industry, within a few short decades, moved farther offshore to become part of an international trend toward globalization.

Taken together, these essays offer not only an excellent overview of the current literature, but an introduction to new directions in the field of labor history. As the inaugural volume of the University Press of Florida’s series on working in the Americas, *Florida’s Working-Class Past* has established a high standard for future scholarship.

DAVID TEGEDER
Santa Fe College

If It Takes All Summer: Martin Luther King, the KKK, and States’ Rights in St. Augustine, 1964. By Dan R. Warren (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008. xii, 210 pp. Foreword by Morris Dees, Acknowledgments, introduction, B/W photographs, notes, index. \$29.95, cloth)

Memoirs of the civil rights movement have enticed readers since Martin Luther King Jr. published *Stride toward Freedom* in 1958. In recent years, interest in white southerners’ various perspectives has heightened with the publication of Timothy Tyson’s *Blood Done Sign My Name* and Bob Zellner’s *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek*, to name just two. *If It Takes All Summer* contributes to this conversation by detailing author Dan Warren’s activities related to and perspectives on the racial turmoil that preceded St. Augustine’s quadricentennial celebrations in 1964.

At age thirty-six, Warren was appointed state attorney for the Seventh Judicial Circuit (composed of Volusia, Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties), an office to which he was elected in his own right in 1962 and again in 1964. He filled another role in 1964, when Governor Farris Bryant designated Warren his “personal representative” in St. Augustine, a special position made possible by a legislative act in 1955 that gave the governor added powers “to deal with racial unrest” (82). In this situation, the exclusion of black people from the committee charged with planning