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***Old South, New South, or Down South?: Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement*** edited by Irvin D. S. Winsboro

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Old South, New South, or Down South?: Florida and the Modern Civil Rights Movement.* Edited by Irvin D. S. Winsboro (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2009). viii, 206 pp. Preface and acknowledgments, introduction, afterword, contributors, index. \$24.95, paper)

Florida's civil rights historiography is something of a late bloomer. As recently as 1984, the field was literally barren. Not a single scholarly monograph on the subject had appeared in print, and there were only a handful of journal articles and graduate theses that even acknowledged the existence of a civil rights movement in the Sunshine State. Thankfully, this is no longer the case. During the past quarter century, a growing number of historians and political scientists have turned their attention to various aspects of the civil rights struggle in Florida, producing several fine books ranging from David Colburn's *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, 1877-1980* (1985) and James Button's *Blacks and Social Change* (1989) to Glenda Rabby's *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (1999) and Ben Green's *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore* (1999). We even have Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due's searing memoir, *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights* (2003), Ray Mohl's revealing *South of the South: Jewish Activists in the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960* (2004), and Michael D'Orso's harrowing *Like Judgment Day: The Ruin and Redemption of a Town Called Rosewood* (1996) to help us make our way through the thicket of history and memory related to the movement in Florida.

Individually and collectively, these books testify both to the bleak racial heritage of Florida and the continuing struggle to bring racial tolerance and equality to the state. No one familiar with this literature could characterize Florida as anything other than a southern state burdened with the same basic racial pathology and challenges as Deep South states such as Alabama and Mississippi. In terms of demography and migration, Florida may have experienced more diversity than its Deep South neighbors, and it may have developed its own distinctive subregional markers related to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. But its people have wrestled with essentially the same racist demons that have plagued the rest of the slavery-haunted, ex-Confederate South.

Irvin Winsboro's edited volume *Old South, New South, or Down South?* purports to be a sharply revisionist anthology of articles detailing the dark history of racism in Florida. The various articles in the volume do indeed provide evidence

of Florida's racialist past, and as such they are welcome additions to the growing literature on race and civil rights in the state. But the editor's revisionist claims are at odds with the reality of extant historiography. In the world of popular culture, it may still be fashionable to accept the misguided notion that Florida has been a land of racial moderation largely unconnected to the white-supremacist traditions and regimes of the Deep South. But this viewpoint has not held sway in the academic world for decades. The major source of the notion that Florida has been the land of the moderates is V. O. Key's classic *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, published in 1949 and long ago superseded by a shelf full of books on southern politics.

Despite its questionable framing, the collection includes several eye-opening and insightful essays: Leonard Lempel on the local civil rights movement in Daytona Beach; Connie Lester on Florida's independent black farmers; Amy Sasscer on Virgil Hawkins's attempt to desegregate the University of Florida law school; Irvin Winsboro on school desegregation in Lee County; and Gregory Bush on Virginia Key Beach and historic preservation. Abel Bartley's essay on Haydon Burns's 1964 gubernatorial primary campaign against Robert King High, a relatively liberal reformer from Miami, offers a useful narrative but comes to the strange conclusion that this contest confirmed Florida's status as an unreconstructed, racist state. The ardent segregationist Burns won, of course, but the fact that High waged a spirited campaign for a southern governorship in 1964, something that would have been all but impossible in Mississippi, Georgia, or Alabama at that time, suggests that there was a difference in degree, if not in kind, between Florida politics and the situation in the Deep South.

This lack of attention to nuance and irony is, I am afraid, symptomatic of an anthology designed to be revisionist. A far better approach would have allowed for a range of essays exploring the complex and sometimes contradictory aspects of race and regional culture. Forcing Florida history into one side or the other of an absolutist dichotomy inevitably limits the value of research and scholarship and retards the process of understanding. In a carefully crafted and useful afterword, Paul Ortiz urges us to "honor the known and still-to-be-discovered heroes and heroines of the Florida civil rights movement by redoubling our efforts to dig deep" (238). He is right: digging deeper and wider in the well of history will surely reveal enough challenging questions and tentative answers about race, culture, and politics to keep Florida historians busy for years to come.

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