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***Florida, Mapping the Sunshine State through History: Rare and Unusual Maps from the Library of Congress* by Vincent Virga and E. Lynne Wright**

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BOOK REVIEWS

Florida, Mapping the Sunshine State through History: Rare and Unusual Maps from the Library of Congress. By Vincent Virga and E. Lynne Wright. (Guilford, Conn.: Globe Pequot Press, 2011. x, 117 pp. Foreword by Vincent Virga, introduction, color illustrations, acknowledgments, notes, about the authors. \$24.95, cloth.)

This beautifully produced volume of maps dating from the late 1500s to the late 1900s and the accompanying narrative provide a striking panorama of Florida's extensive recorded history. Indeed, beginning with the arrival of Ponce de Leon in 1513, the authors note, "Florida has the longest documented history of any state in the United States," and this history is "bound up intimately with its geography" (1). This is the eighth book in a series, "Mapping States through History," that will ultimately include all fifty states, the "first series to assemble—in full color, state by state—an in-depth collection of historically significant maps" (book jacket). Vincent Virga, the series editor, aims "to thrust us all into a new intimacy with the American experience . . . via word *and* image" (viii).

The series "grows from the relatively recent shift in consciousness about the physical, mental, and spiritual relevance of maps in understanding our lives on Earth," Virga writes (viii). For Americans, he believes, maps used as a primary source can convey "what each succeeding generation in its pursuit of happiness accomplished" and—without hiding the "dark side" of the country's history—strengthen the positive aspects of its national identity and values: the ability to "remedy our mistakes, to adjust to changing circumstances, to debate, and then move on in new directions that seem better for all" (ix–x).

Wright's narrative successfully compresses Florida's history into a handful of brief chapters. She covers the basic course of events in efficient, textbook-like prose, but also conveys deep sorrow about travesties of justice and massacres that have punctuated the troubled relations between whites, Indians, and blacks in Florida. Her particular strength in women's history is also apparent. Above all, she writes with urgency about the development of Florida's infrastructure and real estate and its impact on the natural environment. The main weakness of the book is the brevity of the captions. Virga asserts that a map is "a first-person, visual narrative crammed with very particular insights to the process of social history" (viii), but the captions do almost nothing to explain the richly detailed portrayals of landscape and settlement in these particular maps. Readers are left to decipher most of the features on their own, and many of the maps are not large enough in this format to make that possible.

(Fortunately, the book includes a Notes section at the end with a Library of Congress call number for each map, enabling the reader to order a reproduction or view the map online at the Library of Congress website).

Perhaps Virga and Wright simply needed more time to look at each map and point out a few salient details for the reader, a task that might have also required additional research or the help of experts in each historical period. As it is, the book falls short of a laudable goal for the series, which Virga lays out in the introduction: to allow the reader to experience a map “as a true cultural landscape” (vii). Oddly, the book ends with a map from 1990, which, more than twenty years later, makes the book feel culturally out-of-date. Part of the book’s impact is seeing the techniques and art of cartography evolve over more than four hundred years, along with Florida’s physical development. A satellite or other computer-generated map of the state might have been included, to bring the story into the digital age.

Nonetheless, for anyone interested in maps and American history, and especially for readers with a connection to Florida and Tampa Bay, the book is a visual feast and highly informative. The maps show the earliest European contacts and exploration, including Hernando de Soto’s path to the Mississippi; they focus on areas of urban growth, including Pensacola, St. Augustine, Tampa, Key West, Jacksonville, Orlando, Tallahassee, Miami, and the large beach resorts; and they display the dramatic expansion of infrastructure—especially railroads—connecting these destinations across the state.

The book describes the achievements of visionary businessmen, politicians, and developers, including William D. Chipley, Henry B. Plant, Henry Flagler, and Vicente Martinez Ybor, even as it spotlights the role of Marjory Stoneman Douglas in sounding the alarm about threats to the natural environment. Ultimately, the authors celebrate the Sunshine State—“the Land of Flowers,” as Ponce de Leon named it—in all its extraordinary natural beauty and abundance. With all of its coastline and beaches, bays, lagoons, rivers, lakes, and springs, they note, “there is not much, geographically speaking, that residents of the Florida peninsula don’t have to brag about” (book jacket).

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