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MORAL LEADERSHIP

WHO BELONGS ON THE PEDESTAL?
IN CELEBRATION OF FLORIDA'S 150TH

If the Florida sesquicentennial has so far been a non-event, it may be because we Floridians cannot answer this basic question: what is it that should be commemorated and why is this important to us?

Historian Neil Harris has identified a new pattern in American commemoration: indifference to the literal event being celebrated. The great 1893 Chicago Exposition was created ostensibly to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Columbian Discovery. But the site and the concentration on the products of modern industrial civilization obscured the original purpose of the Exposition. Dr. Harris writes that the packaging of celebrations or commemorations has become so crucial and all-consuming that the packaged object—what we are actually celebrating and remembering—practically disappears.

Consider the last July 4 celebration in your home town. Did the celebration offer the opportunity to reconsider our American democracy, our constitution, our American Revolutionary War? July 4th has come to mean hamburgers, hot dogs, baked beans and a parade far more than reflection upon the founding of the United States. Many of our religious leaders would add that religious holidays, commemorations plus, have far more to do with commercial products than celebration of leaders and events.

Perhaps following the national trend, here in Florida we seem to be—as yet—largely indifferent to our own 150th anniversary of statehood. Is it because so few of us know and appreciate Florida history? Because so few of us identify ourselves as Floridians? Sociologist Robert Bellah warns us that we are “only able to understand ourselves and our future in constant conversation with our past.” Memory and hope belong together. Those of us who love and cherish Florida must pass on the story of Florida’s past. Our hopes for this state depend on stories, histories, that become a common heritage.

This issue of the Forum was designed to be the contribution of the Florida Humanities Council to the Florida sesquicentennial. In this issue, we look at five episodes in Florida history—movements rather than events—each with a contemporary twist. The lens for the original inquiry is moral leadership, how that was defined back during the Seminole Wars or the dawn of the environmental movement, and what it means now as our perspective has changed.

Part of our idea is to rescue “leadership” from a narrow behavioral definition—Zig Ziglar, packed auditoriums of self-actualization seekers and all that. We are not asking what leaders do, or how they do it, but why they do it. Using historical events and leaders gives us both an emotional distance and a historical vantage point which we can gauge the changing perceptions and the political consequences of moral leadership. We can argue the moral dilemmas of another era, and then, regaining our 20th century consciousness, assess their historical merit.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has generously underwritten this issue of the Forum. “Who Belongs on the Pedestal?” will be the basis of discussion at a number of public humanities programs, enabling us to bring the discussion of moral leadership to audiences of elected officials, business leaders, teachers and history scholars and enthusiasts.

This fall we will conduct a half-day workshop on moral leadership for the 120 members of the Florida House of Representatives; additional workshops are scheduled for the membership meetings of the Florida Historical Society, Leadership Florida and the Florida Association of Social Studies Teachers. Moral leadership will also be the topic of one of the ten seminars offered this summer at our Florida Center for Teachers.

Civic groups interested in arranging a discussion of moral leadership are invited to call our offices. A limited number of copies of Commemoration, a 1992 publication of the Florida Humanities Council, are available upon request. Commemoration contains essays by Neil Harris, Ray Browne and Michael Gannon and useful information to anyone thinking about, faced with, or planning in any way for a commemoration.

The last line of Garry Wills’ new treatise on leadership, Certain Trumpets, reads: “Tell me who your admired leaders are and you have bared your soul.” I hope that this exploration of moral leadership—forcing us to examine our own perceptions, values and beliefs—will be just as rewarding.

—Ann Henderson
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COVER: We celebrate our moral leaders in marble and bronze. Here, a traditional choice, Christopher Columbus on Bayshore Boulevard in Tampa. Photo by Chris Coxwell.
What is moral leadership? Whom do we consider an exemplary leader? Is our contemporary idea of moral leadership different from a traditional one? We asked several notable Floridians for their thoughts and three took up the challenge. They represent, respectively, a more-or-less liberal, conservative and religious perspective. More-or-less – because moral leadership is a highly personal topic. Each essayist opted to answer in terms of his own experience and special interests, rather than as spokesman for a pigeonholing label.

Andrew Jackson, memorialized in statuary in the Florida city that bears his name, Jacksonville.
Mr. President," she asked, "I want to study moral leadership. Can you tell me how to be a moral leader?" Students are wonderful. They ask profound questions as if there were simple answers.

"Tell me," I replied, "what do you think moral leadership is, how do you know it when you see it?"

"Oh, that's easy," she came back with all the certainty of the young, "moral leadership is doing the right thing and getting other people to do the right thing."

Actually, of course, leadership of any kind depends greatly on the agreement of leaders and their collaborators about where we go and why. Leadership rarely involves a situation where we say, "Gee I need a leader to stay the same, change nothing, and respond to nothing." For this, we need only quiet, not leadership. Instead, leadership happens because we need help, because we want to go somewhere else, we want to live in a different way, we want to resolve a crisis or capture an opportunity. Whatever it is, leadership means direction, it means finding a path and helping us all take that path even though it is difficult.

Sometimes, leadership is easy, the path is wide and smooth, obvious to all, and slopes downhill on a cool afternoon. Usually, leadership is hard, the path is narrow and rocky, hidden from most by boulders and shrubs, and runs on a ragged steep uphill climb during a hot muggy afternoon. Were it not so, we would not care much about leadership.

Leaders always respond to the will of the people they lead, and while we sometimes regret the directions that our leaders take, they could not lead if we did not agree, if we did not want that leadership. So that leadership requires our participation and is very often a reflection of our hearts and minds. When we find out our leaders have led us astray, we turn on them with particular fury because in our hearts we know that we too are at fault.

"OK, that's all fine," she said with the quick but polite irritation of the student who thinks the professor has missed the entire point of her question, "but what about MORAL leadership? Isn't that a different kind of leadership?"

Knowing that I came perilously close to losing my audience here, I gently tried the following, "No, all leadership is moral leadership."

Indignant, for I had failed completely to understand her question and help her with the project, she said, "Oh, no, some leadership is immoral and some leadership is moral, and what we have to do is determine which is which."

Of course all leadership is moral. When we ask questions about moral leadership we are really asking whether the morality of this or that group of leaders matches our own. In most strong vital societies we share a baseline moral code so that we can get through life in reasonable and predictable ways, doing the minimum harm to our fellow citizens and creating the maximum benefit for ourselves. This code exists for us, captured in many historic documents but most clearly in the guarantee that we may in our country be secure in our "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness."

"When we lose faith in this moral code, we then seek leaders who reflect our lost faith. They will persuade us that we need not worry about the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of anyone but ourselves, they will help us pursue our own opportunities at the expense of the opportunities of others, they will help us destroy our larger concerns while we enhance our individual benefits. These leaders seek to construct, on our behalf and at our insistence, a new moral code fundamentally different from our core moral code."

Really impatient with me now, my student snapped in exasperation, "Sure, maybe so, but those are immoral leaders and we shouldn't let them succeed!"

Knowing I had but one more shot in this battle for the hearts and minds of the next-generation, I took aim one final time. "My friend," I said, "moral leadership is the consequence of what you want to do, how you want to behave, and what morality you choose for yourself. The moral leaders will be the people you create to lead you in the directions you seek. If we have immoral leaders today, we have no one to blame but ourselves because they represent our ideas and attitudes, we create them, and were we not supportive of the values they promote, they could not lead us."

"So," she ended, "you're telling me that I'm responsible for moral leadership, that each individual creates the morality that invents moral leadership?"

"Right," I said. "You got it."

"Oh," she said. +

John V. Lombardi is the President of the University of Florida. He also is a historian, specializing in Latin America, and continues to teach regularly.
DISENTHRALLING OURSELVES FROM DOGMA

BY ROBERT E. BAUMAN

Christmas 1944 was not a joyful time for me or for America.

The nation was weary after four years of world war. In my own small world, a solitary child soon to be 8 years old, I worried about perceived threats beyond my comprehension and control.

Practice air raids in Washington, D.C., then my home, caused me habitually to glance skyward at the sound of a plane. Some nights I sat by the RCA shortwave radio, fascinated by the fury but not comprehending the filtered words of Hitler and Mussolini, aware my older brother was flying in a bomber somewhere over Italy with the objective of silencing these voices of hate.

My vaudeville musician-father tried to care for me and my frail mom, thin and bedridden, recuperating from yet another surgery for “ulcers,” stomach cancer that would claim her young life within a year. That was perhaps the most threatening part of my existence - why my mom, always so loving to me, was made to suffer so.

There was one bright spot in this melancholy holiday, an unexpected present from my favorite, vivacious Aunt Louise - a big-page book titled “Abraham Lincoln’s World” with lots of text and line drawings, almost etchings. Written by Ida Tarbell for young readers, but not condescendingly so, this was the life story of Abe Lincoln of Illinois, interwoven with historical events from February 12, 1809, to April 14, 1865, when John Wilkes Booth assassinated the Great Emancipator at Ford’s Theater.

Maybe it was childish vulnerability, perhaps I was searching for something solid to hold onto, but this man Lincoln and his accomplishments left me awestruck. I marveled that he had lived in this very city only 80 years before. The concept of history was new to me, and I re-read the book three times, even took out my Crayolas and carefully colored the pictures, as if that would breathe life into this new object of my admiration.

With only sketchy moral training as the child of indifferent Methodists, I found Abe Lincoln the embodiment of all that was right and good. He made me suddenly proud to be an American.

I was particularly impressed by a poignant picture of Lincoln freeing manacles from a supplicant black man’s wrists. But every page was filled with drama: Europe swept by the brutality of the French Revolution’s aftermath; an optimistic new America inevitably drifting toward fratricidal civil war. And here was this ungainly, gentle backwoods boy, who early lost his mother to “the milk sick,” overcoming all obstacles to become the leader who freed the slaves and saved the Union, only to die a dramatic martyr for his cause.

“If Abe Lincoln could do it,” was my youthful reasoning, “so can I!” A lonely little boy had found a life’s hero.

Within days of my reading, I concluded, I, too, would be a lawyer, a Republican, and go into politics, all of which I eventually did. My conversion to the Roman Catholic faith at the age of 14 only strengthened my early Lincolnesque conviction that moral absolutes were imperative.

So you can understand why I believe a political leader, to be worthy of the title, must be a moral leader in the sense of dedication to a virtuous cause.

In public life my own reputation was as a conservative who meant what he said, regardless of consequences. People knew, because I told them, that for me politics was a means of translating my stated beliefs into action. My message was simple: “Here is where I stand. If you agree, vote for me - if not, don’t.”

In the Maryland State Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, I was described variously as “bright, caustic, opinionated, brash, abrupt” - a person certain of his views and often intolerant of those who differed. Unlike my hero, Lincoln, rarely did I temper my chosen course with mercy or compassion.

A natural conceit allows us to refashion events of the past in light of our own experience.

Looking back, I am not at all sure Abe Lincoln would be classified a conservative now, most probably not a radical of the “New Right.” His Republicanism, at least in part, grew out of personal opposition to slavery, although he was also a sophisticated lawyer, well paid by western railroads to represent their interests. Although he reluctantly employed the full power of government, sacrificing civil liberties to save the union, he also counseled moderation towards the rebellion, welcoming back the fallen sister states of the Confederacy.

Had he lived, Lincoln might have been what we now call a moderate or even a liberal, a post-war pragmatic politician, seeking the greater good without strict adherence to established dogma.

In the last third of this century as conservatism has regained ascendance in America, two strains of thought have predominated within its ranks. One conviction, the traditionalist view, championed by my long-time friend William F. Buckley, Jr. and his National Review magazine founded in 1956, holds political control of government is to be employed to impose moral absolutes expressed in law. Leaders are meant to be moralists, if not paragons. Risking over-simplification, this concept perhaps may be short-handed in the contemporary phrase, “family values.”

A second, libertarian view, is that abstract government, beyond the preservation of peace and order, should have little or no role in imposing morality. Leaders can still suggest and provide example, but this approach gives the individual max-
imum freedom of choice, ideally coupled with acceptance of personal responsibility, allowing each to determine his or her own moral fate.

In my own thinking, I have moved, not to say progressed, from traditionalist to libertarian on this issue of moral leadership, largely as a result of the personal crisis associated with my hard-fought acceptance of my own homosexuality.

A child of my generation, for most of my life I rejected the horrible possibility of my being gay. Then a decade ago I reluctantly accepted my lot, but only as one would an incurable illness, a cross to bear. Thankfully, now I have overcome the crushing weight of a moral leadership that taught me I was an intrinsically evil person. I have come to accept my sexuality as a valid part of my God-given human nature.

This tortuous personal journey taught me, if nothing else, that moral and political leaders, however absolute their momentary beliefs may seem, can be very wrong. That in the zeal to impose what a leader thinks is right, the wicked tyranny of wrong morality may be imposed. What is claimed as unquestionable dogma, rarely is.

It also taught me that however weak a leader, right principles transcend human frailty, that failure of one should not discredit the other.

At the risk of sounding absolutist, I believe Abraham Lincoln, an adherent of no formal religion, was morally right in one very important sense. We, as individuals and as a people, must, as Lincoln advised, “disenthrall ourselves from the dogmas of the quiet past. We must think anew and act anew.”

We will always need such leaders to remind us of truth, of what is right and proper. If that is moral leadership, pray God give America more.

Robert E. Bauman is an author, lecturer and attorney, who lives in St. Pete Beach. He is a former member of Congress and author of “The Gentleman from Maryland: The Conscience of a Gay Conservative.”
A moral leader leads not by coercion or manipulation but only by moral authority—leadership defined not by style but by substance—not by words but by deeds. We draw inspiration from the moral action of the great woman, Mother Theresa. Because of her actions, she exercises moral authority when she talks. So too do other moral leaders of our time: the Pope, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dr. Billy Graham, and, as a matter of fact, my grandmother, who moved to Miami in 1945 and lived out her years there. She was a bit-player in the great drama that brought into being in South Florida one of the world’s great communities of Judaism. But for me, she embodies what it means to lead by example.

My grandmother was one of those Jews for whom the way of Torah defined the path of life. Through her example, I saw in a single moment the entire history of Israel the holy people. My grandmother knew what counts, when to argue, when not. Challenged by the rabbi of our temple, advocate of Reform in its most vigorous formulation, that keeping the dietary laws involved violating the American Constitution, she did not answer; she did not think the argument important. Even if she lost the argument, she still would keep the law. When I celebrated my becoming a bar mitzvah, on the festival of the rejoicing of the Torah in 1945, when the Torah-scroll was carried about the sanctuary, the Reform congregation remained seated, as was their custom. She stood up, all by herself among hundreds of people sitting down—silently, without comment—as was her custom. Hers is an example of moral authority. Fifty years later, I remember what she did. I also recall her silence when dignity demanded. She coerced no one. She impressed me.

Now, if I ask myself, what distinguishes moral authority from mere authoritarianism, and how do I tell whom I should try to emulate, as against whom I may merely obey—I turn to Scripture. There I find the answer. Moral authority is uncertain but serene, obedient and not craven; it celebrates humility over arrogance, the wisdom of age over the impetuosity of youth, and above all, ambition over careerism. Authoritarians dream of splendid careers, moral authority reflects upon fulfilling long-held, worthy ambition. Authority values fame; sagacity aspires to achievement. Authority possesses opinions; moral wisdom asks for evidence.

Let me give a concrete example from Scripture of the way in which God acknowledges moral authority, showing respect for the humility of ambition—a mark of modesty but aspira-
tion—and punishing the arrogance of mere careerism—a sign of self-importance above all. The contrast here is between Aaron’s and Aaron’s sons’ conduct on the day on which Israel’s service of God gets underway: the consecration of the altar. What to notice in the narrative is simple: Aaron’s offering and God’s response; Aaron’s sons’ actions and God’s response. God does the same thing in both chapters but with vastly different result. First comes Aaron’s actions, always responding to God’s commands set forth by Moses:

“And it came to pass on the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel, and he said to Aaron, Take a bull calf for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering, both without blemish, and offer them before the Lord. And say to the people of Israel, Take a male goat for a sin-offering and a calf and a lamb...And they brought what Moses commanded before the tent of meeting; and all the congregation stood near and stood before the Lord. And Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do; and the glory of the Lord will appear to you. Then Moses said to Aaron, Draw near to the altar and offer your sin-offering and your burnt-offering and make atonement for yourself and for the people and bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded.” Lev. 9:1-7

“Then Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin-offering and the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting; and when the people came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. And fire came forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings. And when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.” Lev. 9:22-24

Here is the story of a humble man who does as he is told. Notice, no one tells Aaron to bring fire to the altar. So he doesn’t. No one asks for incense, so he leaves it out. Don’t miss the serene faith of Aaron either: having laid the meat on the cold altar, he asked for no sign that God would accept the offering—except the blessing that he as a priest would bestow. Only later does “the glory of the Lord” appear, manifested as fire from Heaven. God’s act of uncoerced grace responds. Faith is natural to the condition of the virtuous person.

The next lines draw the contrast between careerism and the ambition. Aaron brought no flame to the altar. But his sons did. Aaron did not embellish the offering with the spice of incense. But his sons did. Aaron did what God commanded: nothing less and nothing more than what God commanded. His sons did what God had not commanded, and that means, and can only mean, they did what they felt like doing. The Scripture describes what happens:

“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came forth from the presence of the Lord and devoured them and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, This is what the Lord has said, I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. Lev. 10:1-7

The father seeks achievement and hopes for grace. The sons thirst after public recognition—“incense over and above the offering, my what a good idea!”—and implicitly make their own judgment on their father and uncle, who have left the ark cold and still. Aaron’s sons add to the rite, not just incense but unholy fire. The act marks those who presented it as disobedient, arrogant, insolent, self-important and self-aggrandizing. God explains: “I will show myself holy among those who are near me.” To be near God is to obey, doing not more nor less than God’s stated will.

The two young men aspire to the office held by the elders—but not the responsibility, which they can scarcely envision. Seeing only the trappings of power but grasping nothing of the tasks, they are drawn to their little conspiracy. Here is arrogance. Here is naked careerism. Here is youth humiliating age. Why did they do what they did? Ostensibly to correct the failure of their father, to provide what Aaron forgot—old age indeed! How now does Aaron respond? A man of surpassing humility, he will no doubt blame himself. He must have sinned; for only in that way can he explain this catastrophe; he is punished for his own failing: “And Aaron held his peace.” His silence marked that true act of sanctification, the acceptance of the justice of God’s decree. Here again, silence, humility, and steadfastness—these define the moral leader.

What differentiates moral authority from mere practical leadership—let alone clever manipulation of public opinion—is the combination of serenity and humility shown by Aaron: “I don’t know whether this is right, but it’s the best I can do, and I’ll stand by it.” I think, in this context, of Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atom bomb, to start the Marshall Plan, to found NATO, to mount the Berlin airlift, to recognize the state of Israel, and to fight a limited war in Korea. We now know that, from the start, his policies met the challenge of the Cold War. In retrospect they leave no room for choice: he did the right thing, time and again. But he did not know that; he only knew what in his limited wisdom was required; that he did, without fanfare. That is why the source of his moral authority derived from his character and conscience. Like Aaron, he knew what he knew, but, more than that, he also knew what he did not know. And therein lies the lesson—especially for us professors to remember. +

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Opponents Andrew Jackson and Osceola are shown against a backdrop of scenes of the Seminole Wars.
frequently cited aphorism stipulates that history is written by winners; its corollary holds that rarely are both sides in a conflict perceived as holding equally defensible moral positions. In an interesting twist on these dictums, most historians of the Florida Indian wars have conceded the moral high ground exclusively to Seminoles and their famous leader, Osceola. Conversely, the United States and Andrew Jackson are these days portrayed as unprincipled, merciless and greed-driven aggressors. However, close reassessment of that period reveals a dramatic confrontation between two charismatic leaders, each representing valid moral imperatives of their respective cultures.

The Second Seminole War (1835-1842) generated a sustained application of Anglo-American military force to dislodge Seminole Indians from the Florida Territory. In a larger sense it also culminated the national effort to relocate all Native Americans living east of the Mississippi River. Federal authorities first negotiated and enforced removal treaties with northern tribes; then the Cherokees, Creeks and other southern tribes were sent along their “Trail of Tears” to the West. Finally, attention turned to the most recalcitrant of the tribes: the Seminoles. Our government justified its long and costly campaign on the premise that Seminoles failed to comply with the Treaty of Fort Gibson (1833). The document – which their chiefs signed but later repudiated as being coerced – agreed that the tribe would leave Florida within three years and relocate to Indian Territory in current day Oklahoma.

The Seminoles, refusing to be bound by a questionable treaty, resisted forced expulsion from their Florida homeland. Greatly outnumbered by American forces, the tribe fought a classic guerrilla war. They abandoned their towns and fields and lived off the land; as masters of the terrain they employed hit-and-run tactics, seldom engaging in pitched battle against superior firepower. Inexorably, though, superior numbers and logistics wore down Indian resistance, and in the end the United States prevailed in this war of attrition; virtually all Seminoles were either killed or captured and deported to the Indian Territory. Nevertheless, a small tribal remnant would remain in Florida following the third and final Seminole War of 1855-1858.

The Second Seminole War’s significance transcended its purely military dimensions. Rather, it brought into sharp focus several issues that had begun to occupy the body politics’ interest during the third decade of the nineteenth century. They constituted essential elements of what came to be known as “Jacksonian Democracy.” The first of these was nationalism. Since the end of the American Revolution in 1783, the young nation had struggled to define its position in the world community. Acquisition of the
Florida Territory from Spain through the Adams-Onis Treaty (1819) realized a long-sought goal of securing America's southern border on the Gulf Coast. Thomas Jefferson had begun negotiations toward this end in 1802 but settled for the Louisiana Territory instead; the strip called West Florida was secured following the War of 1812. Now the entire peninsula was in American hands; but could it ever be secure as long as the Seminole Indians, notorious for their pro-British sentiments and trading relations with Cuba, remained? Thus the dual demands of national pride and security appeared to dictate removal of the native people.

A related issue was that of national expansion. A new dogma accepted by Americans, later called "Manifest Destiny," postulated that our destiny as a people was to occupy and develop all land on the North American continent. Deeply embedded in this was a presumption of white moral superiority over the savage Indians. This intoxicating doctrine, a subtle melding of religious, economic, political, and racist sentiments, appealed to an aggressive, ambitious and land-hungry populace. In that context the Indian tribes, because they occupied vast amounts of territory but used it inefficiently by white standards, stood in the way of preordained progress.

The final element in this antebellum American litany was the sanctity of private property—including slaves. To the southern frontier democrat of this period, fulfillment of the American dream meant the availability of cheap land and slaves with which to work it. Therefore the existence of an enclave of free blacks in Florida was perceived as both a haven for runaway slaves and, should red and black ally, a potential threat to peace on the border. Early in the 18th century, Spain began attracting runaway slaves to Florida from the British colonies with a liberal policy of granting them freedom. Eventually a community of free blacks helped defend St. Augustine. Even those blacks who were held as slaves by the Seminoles enjoyed a relationship more akin to medieval vassalage than plantation bondage. Intermarriage between Indians and blacks was not uncommon, and many were accepted into tribal membership.

When Florida became an American possession, the question was immediately raised about the status of "Seminole Negroes." Were they to be considered tribal members and thus immune from capture, or, as many Southerners insisted, runaways or their progeny and thus subject to re-enslavement? This catapulted the Florida situation squarely into the growing national debate over abolition. Among the other southern tribes that held blacks as slaves, there was no question that they were chattel property. The Seminoles, however, had fashioned a unique, more humane relationship with the Negro. Southerners could not tolerate its existence; abolitionists would not allow its destruction.

No individual better typified the volatile, intertwined and often contradictory elements of the American ethos in this era than the man who gave it his name, the seventh president of the United States, Andrew Jackson. The biographer Robert Remini has identified him as "A Hero for an Age." Jackson was born in backcountry South Carolina in 1767 and became a self-made man of the frontier. Orphaned as a youth, he studied the law and later gained notable success as a jurist, land speculator, plantation owner and politician...
who represented Tennessee in Congress. Even though Jackson acquired great personal wealth, he always considered himself a man of the people and unfailingly claimed to represent the majority’s will. That translated into ardent support of nationalism, expansionism, and slavery. Jackson’s political ambitions were national in scope, and his sights were set on the presidency. He believed that military exploits offered the best opportunity for recognition, so he left Congress and became commanding general of the Tennessee Militia.

Jackson judged correctly; he soon gained fame as an Indian fighter. In 1814 he led a mixed force of several thousand Tennessee Volunteers and friendly Cherokee Indians against the “Red Stick” Creeks, so-called because of their red war clubs, who had initiated a religious and cultural conflict with pro-American Creeks. Surrounding states feared the fighting would spill over from Indian territory, so what was essentially a civil war within the Creek Nation provided the pretext for United States intervention. At the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in Alabama, Jackson’s forces decimated the Red Sticks and broke their revolt. Soon after, the General exacted a land cession in excess of 20 million acres from the Creek Nation as reparations. Jackson then moved his force westward to prepare for the Battle of New Orleans and his date with destiny.

Meanwhile, a thousand defeated Red Stick Creeks and their families went to join kindred Seminoles in Spanish Florida. When hostilities erupted between the Seminoles and settlers living along the Georgia border, the government again sent General Jackson to punish the hostiles. His march across north Florida in 1818, now identified as the First Seminole War, led to the destruction of Indian towns, a pitched battle with Seminoles and blacks, the trial and execution of two British citizens accused of being agents to the Indians, and eventual seizure of the Spanish commander in Pensacola. Although the Monroe administration hastily recalled its commander and apologized to Spain for his invasion of its territory, Andrew Jackson remained a national hero. Moreover, his precipitous action had convinced the Spanish government that it could not defend its colonial possession and led to the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. In an ironic postscript, when Florida became a United States possession in 1821, Jackson served three months as the first territorial governor. Even though he spent totally less than a year in Florida, “Old Hickory” left an indelible imprint on its history. Certainly his policies as president would have a disastrous impact on its Indian population.

When Jackson assumed the presidency in 1829, he immediately acted to make Indian removal federal policy. He made two salient arguments for removal. First, all past treaties not withstanding, the tribes had no permanent legal title to lands that they occupied. As a result these lands should fall under state or federal jurisdiction and eventually be redistributed. This position met with strong opposition from the tribes and their political supporters—northern churches, missionary groups, and abolitionists. As a show of good faith and to facilitate removal, the government would purchase tribal lands, provide them with lands in the Indian Territory, and underwrite the expenses of moving them

IN DEFIANCE, OSCEOLA SHREDS A TREATY THAT CALLED FOR REMOVING THE SEMINOLES FROM FLORIDA.
Jackson’s second argument held that if Indian culture was to survive, the Indians must be moved away from the corrupting influences of encroaching white society. Among historians, F. P. Prucha has given greatest credence to the argument that Jacksonian removal policy was at least partially grounded in a humanitarian concern for the Indian’s culture. “Jackson,” he wrote “was genuinely concerned for the well-being of Indians and for their civilization. Although his critics would scoff at the idea of placing him on the roll of the humanitarians, his assertions—both public and private—add up to a consistent belief that the Indians were capable of accepting white civilization, the hope they would eventually do so, and repeated efforts to take measures that would make the change possible and even speed it along.” A critical observer might find this less an attempt to preserve Indian culture than preparation for their eventual assimilation. Even so, given Jackson’s record of close personal relationships with friendly Indians—including adopting an orphaned Creek boy to raise as his son—Prucha’s analysis should not be summarily dismissed.

Following prolonged and bitter debate, the Congress passed the Indian Removal act, and Jackson signed it into law on May 28, 1830. Most tribes reluctantly accepted their treaties and prepared for removal. The Cherokees and their northern allies—churches, missionary groups and abolitionists—challenged the removal policy in the Supreme Court. The Seminoles would oppose it on the battlefield.

Among those dispirited Red Stick Creeks who migrated to Florida was an Indian youngster, then about nine years of age, whose adult name would be Osceola. His mother was a mixed-blood Creek woman and his father an English trader, William Powell, who later abandoned the family. One maternal uncle, Peter McQueen, was a prophet in the nativistic religious revitalization movement that fomented the Creek civil war. The Red Stick prophets, virulently opposed to the growing American cultural influence among their people, called for a return to the traditional religious heritage. They preached that only by renouncing the white man’s religion and material culture could balance and harmony be restored to Indian life. This world view was instilled into young Osceola along with a love of the land in which his family made their home, free from outside interference. Although he undoubtedly understood some English and had been exposed to non-Indian influences, Osceola, too, rejected white values—possibly in part a reaction against his father.

Osceola was not a chief of the Seminoles. His lineage, youth, and lack of military experience prevented him from assuming political leadership, even within his own town. Moreover, the Creek-style system of independent towns (actually small chiefdoms), perpetuated by the Seminoles, militated against any type of strong centralized leadership. However, in the political upheavals of the 1830s, traditional leadership roles would change dramatically. Osceola possessed a number of attributes that made him a war leader of the Seminoles and brought him to the attention of the American authorities. He was a strikingly handsome individual who always dressed in
unique finery and had a flair for the dramatic. A passionate and persuasive speaker, Osceola possessed that intangible quality of “presence”, which natural leaders seem to exhibit. His activities became magnified in the press and military reports, which identified him as a leading instigator of the Florida Indian resistance to removal.

Osceola’s reputation exceeded his modest military feats; moreover, he was active in the resistance for only two years. There were other equally successful Seminole leaders such as Coacooche (Wildcat), Halpatter Tusuenuggee (Alligator), Holata Mico (Billy Bowlegs), and the old medicine man Arpeika (Sam Jones); yet undeniably it is Osceola whom we identify as the Seminole’s moral leader. This raises an interesting question: how does one recognize moral leadership in a culture different from one’s own? In Osceola’s case a great deal of the recognition was conferred posthumously. He was captured under a flag of truce in 1837 and died at a federal prison in Charleston on January 31, 1838. Thereafter vocal northern critics of the Florida war transformed Osceola into a larger-than-life figure. Much was made of his strong denunciation of the removal treaty, the duplicity involved in his capture, his black familial relationships, and the fact that there was no dearth of militia units from southern slave states involved in pursuing the war. In short, he became a symbol of the Indian and Negro struggle for freedom. This was powerful imagery in the late ante-bellum period.

To a degree this was a reprise of the treatment accorded the Shawnee leader Tecumseh following his death in the War of 1812. Having failed in his attempt to form a pan-Indian alliance to thwart white westward expansion, Tecumseh was elevated to the status of a worthy foe whom Americans could take pride in having vanquished. Exaggerated written accounts created a legendary hero, and families named their sons after him. Ultimately even his portraits became Anglicized, eliminating the pierced septum and nose ring that Shawnee warriors wore. Likewise, George Catlin’s famous portrait of Osceola is the most flattering, emphasizing his finely chiseled, almost European features, elegant dress, etc. When compared to other contemporary Osceola portraits, historian Patricia Wickman calls it “clean and dramatic.” Thus in death both Indian leaders were made less savage, less frightening, and more acceptable as American heroes.

In 1845, the year of Andrew Jackson’s death, Florida was admitted to the Union and the old president claimed ultimate victory over his Indian opponent—but could he? Both men were exemplars of their culture’s values, and each stood his ground. Nevertheless, in succeeding decades Osceola’s stature as a culture hero has grown while Jackson’s reputation increasingly suffers from the odium of Indian Removal; such are the vagaries of history.

All this raises two intriguing issues: what are the attributes and responsibilities of moral leadership, and have these changed during the course of Florida history? To the first, I would answer there appear to be universals of moral leadership that transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries. Certainly leadership implies commitment to a specific world view, to those social, ethical, and religious values that constitute the “good life” for a given people. The extent to which one personifies the belief system of a people and refuses to compromise principles—even at the risk of personal safety—empowers an individual to exercise moral leadership.

In the nineteenth century Andrew Jackson was widely hailed as a hero to frontier Floridians; there was little concern that his accomplishments were largely achieved at the expense of Native Americans. By the late twentieth century, primarily as a result of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam experience, there had been a significant shift in our national consciousness regarding minorities. In an effort to assure guilt, national icons like Jackson were demythologized and an ideology of victimization emerged. Many naively sought in Indian history and culture the social cohesiveness and ecological balance missing in American society, and leaders like Osceola became paragons of moral leadership. In truth, both American president and Seminole warrior were products of their period; that we now exalt one over the other is more a reflection of contemporary societal values than any putative worth of the individuals.

Today, Florida is again experiencing “culture wars,” certainly not as violent as the confrontation between Jackson and Osceola but equally significant to the state’s future as a multicultural society. Anglos, Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, and a multitude of others seek acknowledgment and authentication of their value systems within the larger society. Ours is a large and demographically complex state, and any claim to moral leadership in present day Florida would require, at the very least, an understanding and acceptance of these differences. Perhaps we will derive a lesson from the tragic destruction of an embryonic multi-ethnic experiment 160 years ago and strive to develop a mutual tolerance for the varied moral imperatives of our cultures.
JOSE MARTI CREDITED WOMEN LIKE PAULINA PEDROSO OF YBOR CITY AND ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE KEY WEST WOMAN'S CLUB WITH PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CUBAN INDEPENDENCE. IN THE BACKGROUND, SCENES FROM 19TH CENTURY CUBAN LIFE.
leadership, argues Garry Wills, operates at many levels and in many guises and exists to achieve a goal. By the very nature of things, a people’s desire to reach a shared goal requires leadership. Leaders articulate the goal, provide direction, and mobilize the population. But few leaders are capable of doing everything required to reach a defined goal. In the case of the Cuban independence struggle, a variety of leaders appeared who offered different leadership skills. The primary articulator of the rationale for a Cuban nation was José Martí. Other leaders such as Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo, and Calixto Gracia emerged to provide the military capability. And then there were community leaders, grass-roots leaders, in the Cuban exile centers of the United States who mobilized people and created a nationalist culture in their communities, neighborhoods, and homes.

Though it is Martí and the others who have rightly received the overwhelming attention by historians as powerful personalities and leaders, it is not possible to properly analyze their successes without understanding the communities that provided them with a constituency and political legitimacy. Indeed, it was not incidental that these leaders looked to the communities for their legitimacy as nationalist leaders. When José Martí arrived in Florida in 1891, he declared that everything was already done. He did not mean that the necessary political framework to mobilize Cubans was in place, but rather that the obvious nationalist fervor needed to build a movement was present. Without this enthusiasm and commitment, a nationalist political movement could not have been possible.

The exile struggle against Spain initially reflected the activities of a relatively few individuals working in cities like Philadelphia, New York, and New Orleans during the 1820s through the 1850s. But with the outbreak of the Ten Years War on October 10, 1868, thousands of Cubans fled the island for political reasons, and many other thousands sought work, especially in the cigar factories; they created vibrant communities. From the outset, rebel leaders recognized that these communities represented a valuable foundation for the struggle against Spain, but before the centers could become effective politically, they had to be organized and mobilized. Indeed, one task of the exile leadership was to create communities with a strong nationalist consciousness, capable of mobilizing resources to confront Spanish authority in Cuba.

From the time of the outbreak of the Ten Years War in 1868 until the defeat of Spain in 1898, Cubans in Florida created social and political clubs, schools, work places, celebrations and newspapers that had as one of their primary functions the promotion of a nationalist discourse and an activist tradition. Many Cubans arrived in these centers with already devel-
opened nationalist sentiments and a clear commitment to Cuban independence, but most arrivals to these essentially working-class communities were interested primarily in jobs. Though perhaps not initially interested in the dominant political issues of the community, these workers immediately came into contact with the nationalist discourse. Indeed, nationalist culture dominated the communities, and most Cubans, whether they arrived sooner or later, gave that position their allegiance.

Among the leaders who promoted and nurtured the nationalism in these centers were Cuban women of all classes and races; they played a very specific and crucial leadership role at the grassroots. Women had for many years been engaged in the task of creating a nationalist culture and consciousness in their communities, which prepared the centers for Martí’s political movement. Though women participated fully with men in this era of Cuban nation-building, their role was not the same as that of men. The division of labor among men and women in creating the national project reflected the gender role divisions normally found in Cuban culture. In the United States too, women did not yet vote or enjoy full citizenship but nonetheless found ways to be active and effective, as one feminist scholar puts it, within those “free spaces” in public life available to them.

Under the accepted norms, women did not generally aspire to community-wide leadership, either as political organizers or propagandists. This role was reserved for men who generally defined the broad directions of ideology and action as heads of the local revolutionary organizations and as newspaper editors and contributors. Nevertheless, women’s commitment to the grassroots tasks became indispensable to the Cuban separatist movement. If it was men who decided policy, it was women who found ways to incorporate those decisions into the day-to-day lives of families, neighborhoods, and communities. Whether it was the community-wide decision to support Cuban rebels-in-arms on campaign under the leadership of Calixto García in the 1870s, or to raise funds and recruit men for an expedition to Cuba led by Gómez and Maceo in 1884, or to welcome and protect Martí in 1894, communities had to educate, organize, and mobilize to make it real. In addition to undertaking these tasks, women took the nationalist culture into their homes, raising children with a consciousness about Cuba, bridging the generations, and preparing children born in Key West in 1870 to participate in the war against Spain fifteen years later.

One aspect of community social organization which gave women the opportunity to mobilize the grassroots was that most did not work outside the home for wages. In Key West, for example, only about 10% of women worked for wages outside the home in 1870, though this increased substantially by 1890, when it is estimated, women comprised up to one-quarter of all cigar makers in some Tampa factories.

Nevertheless, most women enjoyed a flexibility in their daily routines that allowed them to dedicate countless hours to the work of promoting and supporting the nationalist cause. They hosted visiting political leaders, organized parades, banquets, raffles, picnics, and collected contributions for specific projects. The contributions of women to the revolutionary fervor and organization that eventually inspired the war against Spain has not yet been fully appreciated, but it is clear that women played a central role in making these things happen.

Though the leadership role of women has not been highlighted in the history books, writers and publishers of the day, including Martí, understood their crucial contributions. During 1897 and 1898, Cubans in Key West published La Revista de Cayo Hueso, one of the last Cuban periodicals published in the United States during the nineteenth century. Each issue highlighted Cuban women in Key West, sometimes as individuals, at other times as patriot activists, and even within their local communal organizations. The central role of Cuban emigre women in promoting their homeland’s independence was explicitly recognized and celebrated by the magazine’s male editors at the time.

The individual who perhaps first launched this tradition of women’s involvement in separatist activities was Emilia Casanova de Villaverde. The daughter of a wealthy creole, Casanova traveled to New York in 1852 with her father and decided to remain to begin her education. She became involved in the anti-Spanish activities of Cuban exiles and met writer and activist Cirilo Villaverde, a supporter and aide of Narciso López, a martyred leader of separatist colonizing missions to
Cuba. She and Villaverde married, and she remained in exile with her husband for the remainder of her days.

After years of commitment to Cuban independence and abolition of slavery, Casanova de Villaverde, sitting in the parlor of her New York home, celebrated upon hearing the news that rebels had risen against Spain on October 10, 1868. “There is the revolution; it is welcome,” she declared and kissed her mother and father and sisters. “We are now free! Long live independence!” she shouted much to the chagrin of an elderly Spanish aristocrat visiting from Cuba. 

By January she had established La Liga de las Hijas de Cuba, the first woman’s political society organized inside or outside of Cuba in support of the separatist cause. In March Las Hijas de Cuba organized a theatre production and from the proceeds presented the Cuban revolutionary agent in New York with $4,000 for the war effort. During the next years Casanova de Villaverde remained active. She wrote the President and lobbied in the U.S. Congress asking for United States’ recognition of the Cuban republic, which would allow Cubans to openly send supplies to the rebel forces. She also maintained an extensive correspondence across the Americas seeking support for Cuba, and still found time, with the other women of the Liga, to raise funds for the revolution through concerts, bazaars, raffles, and sales of bonds issued by the government-in-arms. This focus and enthusiasm succeeded in inspiring women in other emigré centers like Key West, New Orleans, and Philadelphia to undertake similar activities, creating a tradition of action that lasted until the end of the century.

In April 1878, news arrived in Key West that the insurgents had signed the Pact of Zanjón, ending the insurgency against Spain. Immediately, General Maceo denounced the pact from his encampment in Cuba and announced his intention to continue the fight. The response in Key West was immediate; a new rebel organization formed as well as a nationalist newspaper, El Yara. By the end of the year, some 40 Key West women, led by Clara Camus de Poyo, Celia and América Poyo, Rosario Lamadriz, Ernestina Agüero de Sánchez, and Luisa P. Figueredo, all wives and daughters of local nationalist activists, met and formed the Club Hijas de la Libertad in support of the new revolutionary initiative. Though the uprising, known as the Guerra Chiquita, lasted only a few months, the women’s club
remained active in Key West until Spain's defeat in Cuba in 1898.

Among other things each November 27 the Hijas organized the annual commemoration to the medical students executed in Havana in 1871 for their anti-Spanish activities. The dedication of Celia Poyo, daughter of the prominent Key West nationalist activist, José Dolores Poyo, was highlighted in one memoir. As the observer remembered, she was the club's last president before its dissolution in 1898, and she was a good example of the enthusiasm with which the women promoted the cause: "When November arrived, she put everything aside and with selflessness, faith and perseverance, overcoming all obstacles of working with institutions, and always before us at the San Carlos Institute, accompanied by her noble sisters on the solemn evening of the TWENTY-SEVENTH OF NOVEMBER, she appeared, presiding over the commemorative celebration of that mournful event."

This activist tradition was also taken to the Cuban centers in Tampa, which were first founded in 1886. Carolina "La Patriota" Rodríguez, for example, moved to West Tampa in the 1890s, where she was known for her unconditional commitment to Cuban independence. Originally from Las Villas, Cuba, she had arrived in Key West in 1879 to work in the cigar industry as a tobacco stripper. She joined the Hijas de la Libertad and quickly became known, not only for her fund-raising activities in support of the revolution but also for the work she did among the needy emigres in Key West. Paulina strolled arm in arm with "el maestro," and in this way as a woman as well as a Cuban of color, publicly demonstrated her confidence in his leadership. The couple's commitment symbolized the nationalism that permeated the communities in Florida.

Perhaps the best-known woman to lend her support to Cuban independence was Paulina Pedroso, an Afro-Cubana originally from Pinar del Río, Cuba. She fled Havana to Key West during the Ten Years War and moved to Tampa in the late 1880s. She and her husband, Ruperto, ran a boarding house, where Martí stayed during his visits to Tampa. When Martí stayed with them, they flew the Cuban flag, and they made themselves personally responsible for his safety. Paulina strolled arm in arm with "el maestro," and in this way, as a woman as well as a Cuban of color, publicly demonstrated her confidence in his leadership. The couple's commitment symbolized the nationalism that permeated the communities in Florida.

While these women illustrate individual commitments, many women took similar initiatives. With the formation of the revolutionary organization, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC), in 1892, Cubans in all the exile centers formed clubs to promote the revolution. About seven women's clubs with their independent organizers and leaders emerged the first year. By 1897 some 49 women's clubs had formed, representing about 25% of the total clubs. In Key West, some 37% of the members of all clubs affiliated with the PRC were women. These clubs initially raised funds to promote the revolution and later supported the war effort. In addition to their organizing and mobilizing activities, these women helped widows, orphans, and the wounded. By the time the war ended, Cuban women had a long and distinguished leadership record of service to the cause of Cuban independence.

Despite their all-out involvement, established ideas about gender roles ensured that Cuban women would be only marginally involved in the running of the PRC. Each of the important exile communities had a local governing council of the PRC, the Cuerpo de Consejo, elected by the presidents...
and New York proceeded largely within the traditional scope. Women could not and did not aspire to the primary policy-making leadership roles within the nationalist movement, but they did organize and mobilize their communities in a way that transformed and maintained them as fervent Cuban nationalist centers that gave the primary leaders an effective constituency. Emilia Casanova de Villaverde, the Poyo women, Carolina “La Patriota,” Paulina Pedroso, and the hundreds, if not thousands, of other women who worked in the patriot societies created a nationalist culture that was lived daily, in the club meetings, at school, in celebrations, and even in the home. Children were raised with the idea of a Cuba libre, even though they had never set foot in Cuba.

Writing “De las damas cubanas,” in Patria (May 1892), José Martí observed “that the campaigns of a people are only weak, when they do not recruit the heart of the woman; but when the woman rallies and helps, when the woman, timid and quiet by nature, encourages and applauds, when the cultivated and virtuous woman consecrates the project with the honey of her love—the project is invincible.”

In his own eloquent and inimitable language and style, Martí revealed his understanding that the Cuban nationalist movement, carefully nurtured for thirty years in communities like Key West, Tampa, Jacksonville, and many other cities, could not have prospered without the absolute commitment and leadership of Cuban women. Within two-and-a-half years of Martí’s homage to Cuban women, the war of independence erupted, bringing to fruition the work of nationalist Cubans in the United States.
Governor LeRoy Collins and the Rev. C.K. Steele are silhouetted against a pair of segregated classrooms and a poor black neighborhood.
The opinions which men and groups hold of each other and the judgments which they pass upon their common problems are notoriously [self] interested and unobjective. These judgments...are biased...because there is no strong inclination to bring all relevant facts into view. While the ideological taint upon all social judgments is most apparent in the practical conflicts of politics, it is equally discernible, upon closer scrutiny, in even the most scientific observations of social scientists. The latter may be free of conscious bias or polemic intent. Yet every observer of the human scene is an agent in, as well as an observer of, the drama which he records.

We...look at history from some locus in history...[We are] engaged in its ideological conflicts, and [we] use [our] intellectual processes to justify [our] own ends.” Reinhold Niebuhr, “Ideology and the Scientific Method,” 1953.

This essay, to borrow Florida Humanities Council Director Ann Henderson’s delicious phrase, is a “cuss and discuss” effort in the public humanities. As a contribution to current discussions about moral leadership in Florida—particularly in the public and private sphere—it may well be controversial. It argues that our interpretation of the civil rights era is fundamentally flawed and informed by a method of mislabeling and misdiagnosis that legitimizes and continues the uncorrected discrimination against black Americans. It shows that America’s ongoing game plan is not to correct but continue the defects, deficits and disadvantages [these terms will be used interchangeably] that its laws and policies of racial discrimination created and maintained. It looks at the roles of three prominent Floridians in the civil rights era—Governor LeRoy Collins, Governor Claude Kirk and the Reverend C.K. Steele—through this lens of suspicion.

This essay argues too that white America is in denial—like the denial of the addict—about its controlling causality and culpability for these defects. A predictable denial tactic is a prominent trick play in the game plan; that is, heralding the civil rights crusade as “a clear cut victory—against great odds and for fundamentals of equality and human dignity,” as Forum editor Rick Edmonds put it in the last issue of this magazine. Instead, the limited gains of the era are better viewed as an exercise in the “illusion of equality” (to borrow a subtitle chapter heading from John Hope Franklin’s From Slavery to Freedom, 7th ed., 1994).

This essay relocates the debate about the moral leadership of political figures in the civil rights era and where each belongs on the scale of moral leadership. For instance, Collins’ superior moral leadership is often taken for granted and characteristically opposed to Kirk’s. Here, it represents a different variety of moral misleadership—thus blurring the conventional distinction between them.

Finally, this essay suggests a different methodology, a “look in the mirror” method, for decoding moral leadership—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This approach directs attention away from the object and...
its objective features—here the actions and attributes of Collins, Kirk, and Steele—to the subject, your and my response to their creeds and deeds, your and my self-interested strategies of survival and well-being. That is the critical variable of Reinhold Niebuhr’s biblical and prophetic realism and Carter G. Woodsen’s insightful concept of miseducation.

"The so-called modern education...does others so much more good than it does the Negro," Woodsen wrote in *The Miseducation of the Negro* in 1933 “because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker people.” What he identifies here is the omnipresent ideological tilt that is expressed when you and I, for instance, make a choice between rival leaders or when we rank those we label moral leaders.

The reliable testimony of Niebuhr’s biblical realism also reinforces the suspicion expressed in this essay. “Judgments in the field of history,” he reminds us, “are ultimately value judgments in...that they do not intend merely to designate the actions which lead to desired ends, but seek to give guidance on the desirability of ends...Human beings have a penchant for masking what they desire under the idea of the desirable...[confusing] what they desire and the desirable...[and thereby]...pretend[ing] a greater value for an act than merely its gratification of the desires of the agent...” [Emphasis added]

The most fruitful categories for understanding the civil rights era are protest and counter-protest. These counter actions include white efforts to thwart, to accommodate and absorb, to roll back the changes effected by black protest. The purpose of the counter action is to reestablish—in

changing form—the surplus and deficit of power and privilege that characterized American society before the black protest of the civil rights movement. In the interpretation I outline here, C.K. Steele represents protest, the response of Collins and Kirk, varieties of counter actions. The respective visions and strategies of the latter two are strategically linked to the nation’s objectives regarding the question of race.

As protest, the objectives and strategies of Steele and his contemporaries in the movement were to replace racial oppression—here white supremacy and its institutions and world view—with a new world order. Steele and others grounded their struggle on the very principles that the white founding fathers of America invoked in their liberation from Great Britain’s tyranny—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—rejecting only their philosophy and practice of counter-violence that was the heart and soul of the American Revolution.

The controlling value of the civil rights protest was the affirmation of blacks as co-equal centers of freedom, authority and value; their co-humanity; their equal humanity relative to whites. In this sense, the civil rights movement incarnated the logical, political, and moral priority of human rights over civil rights. For this reason, civil rights is an inaccurate and deceptive label that is too often used to direct attention away from what the Kerner report identified as the...
object of black protest in the late 1960s: white racism and white hypocrisy. Giving priority to civil rights presupposes a situation where human rights are already in place. Black protest affirmed this had not yet occurred; human rights were still a dream. Whites still held the master key to the original chains involved in defining blacks as property; and whites continued black enslavement through policies of indirect discrimination that did not establish a level playing field or correct for the defects, deficits and disadvantages still in place as a result of the discrimination that was never corrected.

To clarify this distinction and demonstrate the linkage between mislabeling and maintaining of oppressive social policies, let us analyze America’s history of uncorrected racial discrimination in education. Four periods are instructive: slavery, post-slavery, the 1954 Supreme Court decision, and today’s attack on affirmative action.

During slavery it was illegal to teach blacks to read and write, a policy that was tantamount to total exclusion. Can anyone question that this exclusionary policy created fundamental educational inequalities, (deficits) that gave whites an institutionally based advantage?

Moving to the post-slavery period we find a new strategy: the separate-but-equal doctrine that, at first glance, appears to be the demise of discrimination, upon closer scrutiny, is its disguise. Dismantling a structure, even reducing it to rubble, does not obliterate its effects; nor does inclusion terminate discrimination. Given a historical background of uncorrected deficits based on racial exclusion, it is childishly easy for the government to introduce policies and rules and standards that no longer use race but still exclude the population with the uncorrected deficit on the basis of that deficit. This is clearly the agenda behind the current zeal for dismantling affirmative action. The current game plan is presented as moral, just and appropriate because it is no longer based on race but now on merit.

An earlier Humanities Council “cuss and discuss” analysis of the Columbus quincentennial raised the fundamental issue of whether
CIVIL RIGHTS

LUNCH COUNTER SIT-INS LIKE THIS ONE IN TALLAHASSEE PROVOKED VARIOUS WHITE REACTIONS.

Columbus was saint or sinner, savior or Satan. We revisit the same sort of issue in our discussions of the moral leadership of the civil rights era. Lessons learned then are applicable now.

The critical variable culled from the debate on Columbus was our angle of reference, where we stood, whether our view was from the ship or the shore, that of the inhabitant or the invader. This conclusion entails other universal (not absolute) principles of human culture that should inform our discussion here, legitimization and labeling.

No matter what you and I do, we typically label it “good,” not “evil”. Our predisposition is to defend as OK whatever we do, where we do it, how we do it, when we do it, and why we do it. This legitimization reflex is always in the background, ready to authorize our actions, particularly when they are challenged.

There will always be an angle of interpretation that can legitimize the morality of even the unpardonable crime. If you question that this is valid, simply identify any human action that has not been legitimized as morally correct in some context; you will fail. Hitler sought to legitimize the Jewish Holocaust. The African Holocaust, which cost even more lives, was also legitimized. Kirk stood at the school doorway to halt desegregation, and Collins took a stand for the opposite; but each legitimized his actions as moral, in opposition to others who were labeled immoral.

Legitimization operates primarily through another cultural universal: labeling. Words are labels, including such basic value words as good and bad, right and wrong. This means that moral leadership and its antonym are labels that you and I paste on to particular human actions and attributes. These actions and attributes reflect a self-interested choice of what we believe enhances our survival and well-being—that is the ultimate objective of whatever we do.

As an inspection of canned goods will show, a label is not a primary property or attribute of the object; rather it is something that you and I paste on or attach to the object. As such, it is removable and replaceable. Remove the label and the content of the can remains the same. Replacing it with the opposite or different label does nothing to the attributes of the object, though it may decisively change how we respond.

The primary purpose of labeling is to predispose or predetermine our response to control behavior. Labeling encourages you to respond to the object as if the label were an accurate descriptor or essential component of the object itself. To understand this mechanism, try this experiment. Take two unlabeled batteries; label one, Eveready, the other, Duracell. Note that in today’s technology, no battery is eveready. This is a lying label. But if you respond to the Eveready battery as if the label accurately describes what it is, which battery will you likely purchase? This understanding leads to the corollary that whoever has the power to label has the power to control economic, social, political reality—another lesson culled from the Columbus commemoration.

Note that the object, itself, never forces us to attach any particular label. Nor does the object pre-specify which of its properties or multiple angles of interpretation should dominate. The label thus expresses our interpretation, our angle of perception, our subjectivity—not the thing’s objective properties.

Our legitimizing and labeling operate within the binary logic of human existence. No matter what the context, you and I have two and only two choices. We will choose either to continue or preserve some feature of the present context or we will choose to change it. Choosing to do nothing
is a default decision to leave things as they are. There is no such thing as neutral moral leadership. Moral leadership either functions to continue the present tilt of our institutions or it becomes a form of protest to change it. This means that each of our actions and or products—our politics, our education, our religion, our definition of moral leadership—is reducible to a tilt one way or the other, for which our legitimizations and labels provide a moral sanction.

To cite Carter G. Woodsen again: "The so-called moral leadership...does others much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker people. The philosophy and ethics resulting from that 'moral' leadership have justified the continuation of that oppression." Woodsen affirms here that education and moral leadership are contextual. You cannot tell if something is education or miseducation, leadership, or misleadership until you determine whose survival and well-being needs are enhanced and whose is endangered.

In light of these principles, let us analyze moral leadership in the civil rights era and assess the character of our leadership today as we respond to the unlevel playing field that still confronts us. To determine Collins' stature as moral leader requires that we identify the tilt of his policies and programs, what he changed and why. David Colburn and Richard K. Scher conclude that "even though he managed to maintain moderate racial policies, he did not bring about significant school desegregation.... When he left office in 1961, only one school district (Dade County) was desegregated." And as Rick Edmonds' analysis of Collins strategy suggests, Collins is assigned the status of moral leader, not because his deeds and creed pass the closer scrutiny test but because of what he opposed: "Collins began by selling moderation to voters as a pragmatic economic matter. ‘Nothing will turn...investors away quicker than the prospect of finding (in Florida) communities...seething under the tension and turmoil of race hatred...’"

From this angle, black gains, if any, are the by-product, the trickle down, of a higher order imperative: satisfying the survival and well-being needs of the larger white community. This is the moral misleadership of changing the means but not the goal, of replacing an outmoded and ineffective mechanism of oppression with a more efficient updated model. In similar fashion, Lincoln's goal was to save the union, and his means was abolishing slavery. And De Klerk is dismantling apartheid to relieve the South African system of intolerable stress, not to change the status of South African blacks to true equality.

It may be objected that Collins was ahead of his times, and well-motivated and that he based his civil rights advocacy on strongly held religious beliefs. Our purpose here is less to dispute such judgments than to offer an alternative frame of analysis. Even though Collins did express sympathy in later speeches and writings for the unfinished business of equalizing the economic and educational attainment of black Americans, the effect of his leadership was to keep the system rolling along in a changed form. Similarly the contemporary consensus view of Kirk—or of more prominent segregationists like Governors George Wallace or Ross Barnett—is that they were rear-guard defenders of the morally intolerable, literally standing in the school house door to block progress. But as scholars of the non-violent civil rights movement including John Hope Franklin, David Colburn and David Garrow have all noted, the movement thrived on segregationist white counter protest and, paradoxically, was defused, on occasion, by accommodationists, who gave a little ground. Collins' supporters would classify him a progressive not an accommodationist. But from this writer's perspective—the equivalent of the shore for evaluating Columbus' leadership—that is a distinction without a difference, validated by the outcome of his and the nation's policies of corrected discrimination.

Given this understanding of what is at stake, we today will be convicted of moral misleadership if we fail to apply to Collins, to our assessment of him and ourselves the closer scrutiny that the U.S. Civil Rights Commission advocated: "The blatant racial and sexual discrimination that originated in our conveniently forgotten past...continues to manifest itself today in a complex interaction of attitudes and actions of individuals, organizations, and the network of social structures that make up our society. Past discrimination continues to have present effects. The task today is to identify these effects and (correct) the forms and dynamics of the discrimination that produced them."
SCIENTIST ART MARSHALL AND AUTHOR MARJORIE STONEMAN DOUGLAS EACH HAD A ROLE TO PLAY IN SOUNDING AN ALARM OVER THE POTENTIAL DESTRUCTION OF THE EVERGLADES.
In the halcyon days of the early 1970s, the Florida Environmental Movement crested on a wave of popularity. Slaying development dragons and pork barrel projects like the Everglades Jetport and Cross Florida Barge Canal was popular sport, and environmental leaders like Nathaniel Reed, a wealthy Hobe Sound Republican, Florida Audubon’s Charles Lee and Florida Defenders of the Environment’s Marjorie Carr emerged as fresh faces on the political scene. Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, the Grand Dame of the Everglades, whose whimsical literary call to arms, River of Grass, announced the Florida Everglades, “eleventh hour” in 1947, was already a legend.

In Washington and Tallahassee legislation poured out of the capitols with lofty mandates to make the nation’s waters “fishable and swimmable” within 10 years, to scour the air and to arrest the cause of species extinction “at whatever the cost.” Under the leadership of a young state senator from Miami named Bob Graham, Florida was being touted as one of the country’s leaders in curbing growth through controlled development and comprehensive, long-range planning. Grass-roots environmentalism flourished as the ranks of Florida Audubon, Florida Wildlife Federation, and Sierra Club swelled. Between 1968 and 1975 membership in Florida Audubon nearly tripled, from 6,500 to 21,000 members. Myriad smaller groups formed to combat local environmental ills.

Twenty-odd years later the environment has slipped to number seven in the issue popularity contest, a victim of uncertain times and preoccupations with crime, violence and the diminishing American Dream. Environmental groups are struggling to retain their memberships. A regional planning council report concluded that Florida’s highly touted comprehensive plans would “cap” the state’s growth at 91 million residents, while a state-sponsored survey concluded that Florida had become too tacky for tourists. Leaders like Lee have become battle-hardened Tallahassee insiders, while Marjorie Carr, equally battle-hardened but less inclined to “insider-trading,” fights the last little vestiges of the Barge Canal, her moral authority unquestioned. Litigation has joined lobbying and legislation as a dominant form of activism, as environmentalists try to defend the legislative aspirations of the 1970s. A Florida Trend article a few years back concluded that Florida environmentalism was in disarray, at odds with itself politically and philosophically.

Nowhere is there a better example of Florida’s environmental leadership crisis than in the subtropical fishbowl that is South Florida, where the Florida Everglades has dominated the state and national radar screen like no other issue in the short history of the contemporary environmental movement. In recent years, scores of environmentalists have taken up the Everglades cause celebre, would-be heirs to the
throne of moral leadership held by Marjorie Stoneman Douglas.

Like Ms. Carr's, Ms. Douglas' moral authority is unquestioned, her blessing indispensable to the popular perception of "Save the Everglades" proposals in South Florida. Florida's highest political leaders have received moral tongue lashings by Ms. Douglas, who even in her centenary proved she can still dish it out. When Senator Bob Graham, now Florida's senior statesman and a politician with a superb environmental record, came calling, he suffered the wrath of Douglas in an embarrassing rebuke. Douglas publicly chided the senator for his continued support of the sugar industry in Washington, the archvillain in the Everglades morality play. Another statesman and political leader with a strong environmental record in Washington, former U.S. Senator Lawton Chiles, rode into the governor's office on the backs of the environmentalists in 1990, promising to bring an end to the embarrassing litigation that had made the state agencies charged with Everglades protection into black-hat defendants. Governor Chiles strode into Federal District Court in Miami, confessed guilt and offered to "surrender his sword" in order to get on with the cleanup. With the blessing of most of the state's environmentalists, the litigation logjam was breached with a carefully crafted legislative compromise. The Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Everglades Protection Act became law in 1992.

In an era where lawyers and lawsuits dominated the environmental scene, Everglades leadership moved to the Courtroom in the 1990s when a feisty U.S. Attorney sidestepped his superiors and launched the litigation that raised the political stakes in the Everglades. Perhaps fearful that its political implications would alarm his superiors, Lehtinen sidestepped the Department of Justice's bureaucratic approval process. In an election year, the Bush Administration had little choice but to go along with the renegade U.S. Attorney or be viewed as "anti-Everglades." Virtually every major federal and state environmental group clamored to join the suit, which spawned no fewer than thirty-six separate but related cases.

The Everglades lawsuit lasted six years and left its participants burned out and bickering. Unlike the high profile Spotted Owl case in the Pacific Northwest, the Everglades suit did not result in dramatic injunctions and clearcut victories. Instead, it cycled back to the legislature, where new and impossibly complex compromise legislation replaced the Marjorie Stoneman Douglas Act. Indeed, even before the bill had passed, Ms. Douglas demanded that her
name be removed from the law. The Miami Herald characterized her action as the “political equivalent of a neutron bomb.” The eleventh-hour legislation codified a draft engineering document that calls for construction of several massive water treatment areas. These are an order of magnitude larger than the existing and experimental one they will replace.

When Governor Chiles signed the bill into law in a ceremony at Everglades National Park, Friends of the Everglades, formed by Douglas in 1969, picketed the ceremony. When the Democrats took over the White House, Dexter Lehtinen left the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Within months he had reentered the fray, suing his former client, the United States, on behalf of the Miccosukee Indians, who may hold the greatest moral claim on the Everglades. Yet, like many politicians, Lehtinen’s claim to moral leadership remains ambiguous, mixed as it is with a generous portion of personal ambition and style. The lawsuit's results are similarly an open question likely to remain so for a generation. Perhaps Lehtinen is simply a victim of the times - where the term moral lawyer has become an oxymoron in the public perception. And the movement itself seems to have outgrown the slam-dunk wins of 25 years ago.

In addition to the emergence of the stereotyped “little old lady in tennis shoes” (grass-roots environmentalism has its roots in garden clubs) and statute-slinging lawyers, the environmental movement has spawned a generation of leaders from the scientific community. Many of them started by questioning the morality of their own discipline’s detachment from events that were leading to the demise of the subject of their study. Marjorie Carr’s Florida Defenders of the Environment in Gainesville may best exemplify this development. The group began in 1969, largely as a collection of highly regarded scientists who used their influence and their data to defeat the construction of the Cross Florida Barge Canal. To this day the Barge Canal fight is considered one of great triumphs of the environmental movement, and a model for legal and scientific objectivism in defense of the environment. Yet scientists have always appeared a little uncomfortable in the political arena, where ideas are often traded with little regard for their veracity, and the need for quick-fix solutions based on election cycles overcomes the tedious scientific preoccupation with certainty.

Scientists can plausibly lay claim to the moral high ground in environmental politics, in part because of their personal naivety, and also because of their proximity to the subject matter. For many scientists, environmental protection is more than simply another issue on the political plate. It is a life’s work where science spills over into lifestyle and philosophy. For these men and women, Aldo Leopold is their role model and a Sand County Almanac their bible.

In Florida, predecessors to the contemporary “biopoliticians” may be found in the state’s early naturalists: John Kunkel Small, Charles Torrey Simpson, and Thomas Barbour. While they lacked the sophisticated science to translate their observations into predictive models, or the constituency to translate their predictions to political action, they had plenty of moral fervor as they decreed the decimation of their life’s work at the hands of progress. Small, Simpson and Barbour rhapsodized about the natural beauty of the South Florida environment in the florid prose of the nineteenth century, while predicting its destruction with foreboding titles like From Eden to Sahara (Small, 1929) and That Vanishing Eden (Barbour, 1944). Simpson titled the final chapter of his 1932 narrative Florida Wildlife, In Memorium. Mrs. Douglas, a science journalist, sounded an alarm in this same tradition.

The emergence of politically active environmental leaders from within the scientific community coincided with the development of more sophisticated and holistic approaches to the biological sciences, found in the study of systems ecology, and more recently in the fields of emergy, landscape ecology and conservation biology. As the environmental sciences began to look at landscape and systems-level...
interactions they also grew more predictive and afforded scientists a “bully pulpit” from which to champion causes. No one embraced this mission with greater zeal than Art Marshall, who has become a legend in Everglades lore and the moral compass for many of the scientists and bureaucrats involved in today’s Everglades issues. When Marshall’s name is mentioned today, the terms most frequently used are “prophet” and “messiah,” the language of moral leadership.

Art Marshall began his career as a marine fisheries biologist in the Florida Keys. In 1960 he headed the Vero Beach office of the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife. In 1970 he left government for academia, where he researched and taught applied ecology, first at the University of Miami and later at the University of Florida. It was in academia that he began to apply theoretical tools to a lifetime of field research and to develop his controversial large-scale predictive models for the fate of ecosystems, especially those in South Florida. Marshall likened himself to a doctor, able to diagnose and treat whole ecosystems. “If you don’t synthesize knowledge, scientific journals become spare parts catalogues for machines that are never built,” Marshall said. “I am as good a diagnostician of ecosystems as any good medical diagnostician is of human beings, and I am not on a damn ego trip when I say that. Sometimes I wish I didn’t have the knowledge that I do, because I can get pretty damn glum.”

Nor did Marshall confine himself to ecosystems. Marshall believed his predictive models—which drew upon the emerging linkages between energy, economics and ecology—were equally valid for urban systems. During the early 1980s Marshall championed the controversial “rain machine” theory, which blames persistent South Florida drought on the drainage of interior wetlands. To this day, scientists debate its validity. Johnny Jones, the flamboyant Director of the Florida Wildlife Federation, referred to Marshall as a prophet. “He has been right every time when he has called the shots,” Jones told a Sports Illustrated writer. “The South Florida Water Management District has been light-years behind him in knowledge and understanding of the system. If Marshall had been wrong once, I might not have the faith I have in him, but he has been right, right, right, and the people and politicians had damn well better listen to what he says.” In 1979, Marshall was predicting the collapse of Florida Bay. In 1995, as a vast mat of algae chokes the Bay, it appears he may have been right again.

It was also during this period that Marshall became more politically active, seeking to move his ideas to action. In the late 1960s Marshall began decrying to anyone who would listen the constant draining, dredging and filling of South Florida wetlands, speaking at small gatherings of activists in their living rooms. He later served on the boards of two Water Management Districts and was regularly consulted by the state’s highest political leaders. In 1971, he was perhaps the most influential member of the Governor’s Conference on Water Management, a watershed event in Florida’s environmental history that for the first time challenged the goodness of growth. Much of the landmark legislation that emerged from the 1972 Florida legislature came out of the recommendations of the Water Management Conference.

Marshall’s doomsday anti-growth prophecying and unwillingness to compromise his scientific and philosophical principles in the political arena left him cynical and embittered near the end of his life. In a 1979 interview, he claimed that his University of Florida position had been sacrificed on the political altar. He accused Governor Reubin Askew, who in 1971 had appointed him as Chair of the Water Management Conference, of actively seeking his dismissal from the University of Florida for his vocal opposition to a controversial land sale in South Florida and for his increasingly heretical views on growth. Marshall vehemently fought the state’s proposed sale of the 40-square-mile tract known as the “Holey Land” in South Florida to private interests for thirteen dollars an acre. He contended that the old World War II bombing range was needed to re-flood some of the historic Everglades to buffer Everglades National Park from Lake Okeechobee’s water quality problems. Although Marshall won his vote, he claimed he lost his job.
to the wrath of Governor Askew, who had favored the sale. Yet the truth of Marshall’s claims remains dubious. None who remember both individuals attribute Marshall’s departure to a conspiracy on the part of a respected governor who had consistently sought Marshall’s advice. Nonetheless, Art Marshall did fall from political grace, and twenty years later, the Hole Land has become a key piece in the Everglades restoration jigsaw puzzle. Marshall’s reputation as a prophet has continued to grow.

Marshall’s legacy can be found throughout the State of Florida. He was a key protagonist in the efforts to stop the Cross Florida Barge Canal and the Everglades Jetport, perhaps the two most compelling national symbols of the strength of the environmental movement in the early 1970s. Original members of the cadre of scientists organized to fight the Barge Canal in the mid sixties credit Marshall for being a key behind-the-scenes strategist in the early years of the battle and for providing an example of the political power of scientist turned activist in the environmental arena. Marshall participated in the creation of the Big Cypress National Preserve and Biscayne Bay National Monument, and in the initial efforts to dechannelize the Kissimmee River. Many regard him as the vision behind Governor Graham’s “Save Our Everglades” program, the first political agenda to examine the Everglades on a systemic basis.

Re-established in North Florida, and nearing the end of his career, Marshall brought his heretical ideas of systems ecology and limits to growth to the newly formed St. Johns River Water Management District in Palatka, Florida. There he has been credited with reversing efforts to drain the Upper St. Johns River Valley that would have repeated the Everglades debacle. As a result, says Audubon’s Lee, there is a “little Everglades” at the headwaters of the St. Johns, perhaps the most fitting tribute to Marshall. Always the iconoclast, as Chairman of the District’s Governing Board, he actively lobbied against giving the Water Management Districts ad valorem taxing authority, believing such authority would only fuel more growth. He was not reappointed.

Art Marshall’s political prestige probably peaked in the early 1970s when his radical views on growth and the environment and those of the state’s political leadership briefly coincided. When the political winds shifted, Marshall’s political fortunes did too. As Florida and the nation drifted into economic recession in the middle of the decade, it became increasingly unpopular to question the goodness of growth. Marshall continued to do just that. And he paid the price.

Politically, Marshall became a martyr. Whether his martyrdom was real or a figment of an embittered imagination makes little difference. Both are a manifestation of personal sacrifice. Martyrdom may be the most difficult path to moral leadership, since it implies professional suicide. Marshall’s professional career ended years before he died in 1984. He had some success as a consultant, but there are few clients for consultants who are unwilling to compromise and whose ideas are years ahead of their time. Exiled in Interlachen, he entertained a fading dream of a campus-like think tank known as “Project Man” in the tiny North Florida town, dedicated to rational scientific inquiry and new approaches to environmental management. Yet, in death, as with most martyrs, Marshall’s professional reputation has continued to grow. The University he contends dismissed him has named an endowed chair in his honor, occupied now by a pre-eminent ecologist who is himself on the cutting edge of new forms of scientific management. That chair is probably a little more comfortable as a result of Marshall’s pioneering efforts. A National Wildlife Refuge in the Everglades now bears Marshall’s name.

Perhaps most importantly, Marshall has become the hero of a new generation of Everglades scientists and water managers, self-proclaimed “loyal heretics,” who have quietly worked from within their institutional constraints to realize Marshall’s vision of “the system.” Throughout the trying Everglades litigation—their agencies at war with one another, lawyers stifling their discourse, and environmentalists attacking from the fringes—a group of scientists quietly drew their inspiration from Art Marshall and conspired to realize his vision.

If being a moral leader implies a constancy of purpose, an unwillingness to compromise values to shifting political winds, and an ability to bring sometimes heretical ideas to fruition even at a personal and professional cost, then Art Marshall, perhaps more than anyone else in Florida’s environmental movement, deserves the right to join that select group.
A young Claude Pepper championed free fishing licenses for older Floridians; as a senior member of Congress he won bigger benefits of Medicare.
The Persistence of Claude Pepper

He Championed Unabashed Liberalism, Early and Late

By Maria D. Vesperi

“Liberalism, as I define it, obviously believes in democracy. It therefore has no room for racism, sexism, or ageism... Election analysts tell us that the white male vote in the South is lost to liberal candidates before the polls open, and the evidence is persuasive. But what may be true today need not be true tomorrow. Enlightenment comes. Attitudes change.”

Claude Pepper, 1987
from Pepper: Eyewitness to a Century

Historically and currently, in American society and in other cultures as well, the debates that stir the most controversy are usually linked to underlying questions about “rights.” It is no accident that these are often regarded as moral questions and that every answer aimed at silencing them once and for all claims to draw upon moral arguments as well. Consider, for instance, the question of whether each American has the right to health care, regardless of cost or prognosis. Those answering yes and no could both readily respond on moral grounds, with no prospect of reaching consensus.

Disagreements over rights highlight the profound variations in ethos, or world view, shared by significant numbers of people within the contemporary United States. Deadlocks of this nature are broken and the dialogue is moved forward to encompass new questions when moral leadership is exercised. Moral leaders are skilled at finding the common ground where values overlap and consensus can be reached. Short of that, they are often willing to occupy the territory alone.

The late Claude Denson Pepper was certainly one such leader. Born in Alabama in 1900, he moved to Perry, Florida, as a young lawyer in 1925. Pepper won a seat in the Florida House of Representatives in 1928; the first bill he introduced — and saw passed — exempted older Floridians from paying a license fee to fish with a rod and reel. Six decades later, as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, he loved to cite this early piece of legislation when critics suggested self-aggrandizement as his motive for promoting Medicare and a broad variety of social reforms.

“Some have said my interest derived from the fact that I was approaching elderly status myself, being sixty-two at the time I took my seat,” Pepper wrote in his 1987 autobiography. “Others have said that with retirees flocking to Florida, winning a reputation for legislation benefiting the elderly was simply good survival politics. The truth is that as a young boy I was taught to respect and be considerate of older people... But I believe the major reason I have become so involved with the elderly and their needs stems from my preoccupation with health matters.”

Pepper lost his bid for a second term in the Florida Legislature, in part for voting against a white-supremacist resolution that criticized the First Lady.

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The issue was a White House social for congressional wives, and the view from Tallahassee was clear: All but 13 of Florida’s state lawmakers agreed that Mrs. Hoover should have supported their apartheid ethos by excluding the wife of a newly-elected African American congressman from Illinois. Pepper campaigned for the U.S. Senate and lost in 1934 but won a vacancy seat in 1936 when both senators from Florida died in office.

As a new senator, Pepper helped draw national attention to the aged when he introduced the Senate version of the Townsend Plan. This was a Depression-era proposal that would have guaranteed each person age 65 or older an income floor of $200 per month. Social Security, a better idea, soon supplanted the Townsend Plan as the focus of Pepper’s strong support. Among his proposals for 1944 was the idea for a national “Old Folks Day.” In 1946 he introduced a bill calling for universal health care, although that term was not in use at the time. During his years in the Senate, Pepper was also a key figure in establishing the first six National Institutes of Health.

Pepper lost his seat on Capitol Hill in 1950, the victim of a mean campaign that hinted at communist sympathies and smeared him with the nickname “Red Pepper.” The mood was hysterical; Pepper was a graduate of Harvard Law School and his opponent, George Smathers, even made a remark about “Harvard crimson.” Pepper was also condemned for his strong support of labor laws and civil rights. “In addition,” he wrote later, “Florida doctors opposed me because I advocated what they saw fit to call ‘socialized medicine.’”

The 1950s did not begin gently for Pepper, who struggled in early 1951 to open a law office in Washington and another in Tallahassee. He wrote candidly of that time in his autobiography, noting that he had to borrow money to buy furniture and that paying customers were slow to seek him out. Even worse, his longtime law partner and close friend, Jim Clements, died within the first two months. By the next year, however, he had opened a third law office in Miami. By the mid-1950s his practice was quite successful, but his passion for politics continued. Unbowed during the McCarthy era, he defended the Fifth Amendment on television. “I longed to be in the Senate to do battle with McCarthy and all he represented,” he recalled in Pepper: Eyewitness to a Century.

Instead, Pepper was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1962, where he was assigned modest quarters befitting a freshman lawmaker. His reflection on this time was equally candid and equally revealing of his stature as a true moral leader: “Did I mind? Yes, a little, until I gave the matter some thought. I realized that it was entirely appropriate for The People’s House, as the House of Representatives has been known down through the years, to be less ostentatious than the more majestic Senate.” He set to work building a new power base, from which he spent more than another quarter-century vigorously championing health and social welfare issues. In the 1960s these included the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid and the creation of meals for the elderly programs. In the 1970s and 1980s, as the second chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging, Pepper drew attention to such issues as nursing home abuse, age discrimination in employment, and the need to support community- and home-based health care with federal dollars. To the end of his life, he continued as a high-profile and uncompromising advocate for the liberal interpretation of what government can and should do.

“...The language butchers have mangled the meaning of liberal beyond recognition. They must not be allowed to prevail.” Pepper wrote in his autobiography.

“By now, the reader has observed that I apply the label to myself unhesitatingly. It is crucial, therefore, that my own definition be expounded. If I were preaching a sermon on the subject, I believe I would take my text from Ovid: ‘Note too that a faithful study of the liberal arts humanizes character and permits it not to be cruel.’”

It is no accident that Claude Pepper saw health care and the aging of the population as overlapping arenas for the exercise of moral leadership. Indeed, the link between leaders and values is central to any discussion of Florida’s development as a state. Since the mid-19th century, Florida-bound migrants have responded to the...
call of leaders who knew how to isolate, promote and market elements of a shared world view. These early leaders were highly successful in their efforts, so successful that we take the association between Florida and retirement for granted. Claude Pepper’s leadership effort was, in some ways, a moral antidote to an earlier form of leadership, which was not always moral or ethical.

If large numbers of retirees began moving to Alaska, most of their friends and families would be curious about why. The state’s climate is physically challenging; the high cost of living poses fiscal hardships as well. The choice might be ridiculed as romantic, as a foolhardy, last-stand denial of aging, or simply dismissed as a symptom of too much Northern Exposure on TV.

Florida, by contrast, strikes many people as a “natural” place to grow old. Indeed, retirees are so endemic to the Sunshine State that the question of why they came here seems too obvious to ask. Plenty of sunshine and water, low maintenance, no need for deep roots — the requirements could just as easily fit a palm tree as a human being.

Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu would say that this question belongs to the “universe of the undiscovered.” Most customs in any community belong to this category; they reflect and support a larger ethos. To those who share an ethos, certain questions are literally unremarkable. Asking them poses serious challenges, for example: “Why can’t I register to vote?” “Why do men earn more?” “Why can’t I join this club?”

As Bourdieu and others have observed, the first reply is usually a dogmatic one: “Because you don’t own property.” “Because men are the breadwinners.” “Because no one like you has even

applied.” Violence and ostracism are also front-line strategies for avoiding such dialogues because questions of an ethos-shaking nature can be dangerous to the status quo. Those who respond run the risk highlighting the presence of deeper assumptions, such as: “You are not a full citizen.” “You should find a husband and stay home.” “You are different, you don’t understand, and your insistence on trying to join is perfect proof.” Once these assumptions are held up to scrutiny, the dialogue can shift and there is a chance that the ethos will eventually be modified.

Returning to the original question: Why is Florida a “natural” destination for retirees? The answer is, it isn’t. Older people were recruited to come here — urged, enticed, and sometimes swindled — by strong-willed entrepreneurs and other visionaries who understood how to exploit potentially conflicting values within the late-19th century American world view. Four core values of the American ethos are relevant in this context: the belief in an endless frontier, the value of personal independence, the primacy of entrepreneurship and the medicalization of old age.

The development of what is now St. Petersburg provides a good example. The area’s earliest national promoter was not a real estate developer but a physician, Dr. W.C. Van Bibber of Baltimore, Maryland. Van Bibber had been researching the ideal location for a “World Health City,” and he announced his conclusion, Pinellas Point, Florida, at the 1885 annual meeting of the American Medical Association. Entrepreneurs wasted little time in drumming up business for the “Health City.”

Prominent among them was Frank Davis, a Philadelphia book publisher who came to Florida in 1890 hoping to find relief for his rheumatism. Davis lived first in Tarpon Springs, where he took advantage of frontier conditions by building the first electric power plant, and then in St. Petersburg, where he built another. According to historian Ray Arsenault, even though his power plant failed to make money, he quickly became St. Petersburg’s most enthusiastic booster. Convinced that the town had unlimited potential, he launched a promotional campaign that dwarfed any other the area had seen. Taking full advantage of his Philadelphia publishing company, he printed and distributed thousands of broadsides and leaflets, many of which cited Dr. Van Bibber’s 1885 Health City report. In virtually every issue of the Medical Bulletin, a popular monthly read by thousands of doctors, Davis extolled the health-restoring virtues of St. Petersburg’s climate. Doctors were encouraged to send their patients on the next train, or to hop on the train themselves, since no one could fail to benefit from a visit to sunny Pinellas.

Arsenault marks the late 1880s as the end of St. Petersburg’s “pioneer era.” Social historians in the United States and Great Britain have noted that this was also the period when aging began to be viewed and treated as a medical problem rather than as the natural, inevitable conclusion of the life course. As this aspect of the ethos changed, so did the value of respect for the very old. This discussion from David Fischer’s Growing Old in America provides a clear illustration of what Bourdieu meant by the universe of the undiscovered: “The Puritans assumed that respect for age was an ordinary human impulse — even an instinct — ‘written in their hearts by nature.’ Veneration of the
aged was spoken of as natural and normal. Then as now, the strongest social habits were thought to be not cultural, but biological in their basis."

This view had been modified notably by the late 1800s. Patriarchs no longer controlled land and livelihood, as they had in Puritan times. Immigration, industrialization, and rapid advances in technology all contributed to an expanding ethos that did not automatically accord respect to the very old.

Widespread public acceptance of the medical model of old age made it seem increasingly reasonable, desirable, and "natural" to seek treatments and environments that might ameliorate the physical symptoms of aging. Florida was marketed as healthy, and many were primed to buy. While it was no longer a true frontier, the appeal of a fresh, independent start proved to be one of Florida's most enduring charms. If it seemed that almost everyone was out to make a dollar, so what? Entrepreneurship for its own sake was highly valued. Fortunes were made and lost and made again; the only thing that seemed unnatural was a failure to recognize and exploit the opportunities that a bountiful environment supplied.

By 1925, when Claude Pepper arrived fresh from Harvard Law School, Florida was already beginning to show signs of what would become its most intractable problems. Consider his 1987 reflections on the free fishing bill: "It sounds like a small matter today: it was not small then. There was no Social Security system; most older people had very little money, virtually none to spend on 'luxuries.'"

The constituents who attracted a young lawmaker's compassion were not wealthy retirees or influential campaign supporters. At that time, they did not even constitute a significant voting block, or perhaps they had just "gone fish-
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Osceola (shown here in a statue at Silver Springs Park) had reason to resist the Seminole dispersion. But Andrew Jackson had moral force on his side too. See story, page 10.