Tampa Bay History

Volume 25 | Issue 1 Article 9

1-1-2011

Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism by Tracy J. Revels

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Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism. By Tracy J. Revels. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. x, 192 pp. Foreword by Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino, B&W photographs and illustrations, acknowledgments, notes, selected readings, index. $26.95, cloth.)

"Florida is tourism," historian Tracy J. Revels proclaims. "There is little to no hope of reclaiming any other identity for Florida; America would never relinquish its favorite toy" (1). Today, however, there is serious concern that the state might not be able to "live up to the reputation it has nurtured as a sunshine paradise" (149). Countless traditional attractions such as Cypress Gardens have closed their doors, and many others are struggling. Infrastructure is neglected and crumbling. The unique natural environment that enticed so many visitors to Florida is endangered. Conflicts stemming from debates about tourism wrack many communities. Although tourists still stream into the Sunshine State, not everyone benefits equally from the influx. As a result, this "sunshine paradise," Revels contends, "will survive only with great love and care" (152). To "make peace with tourism" and come to terms with "our state, our image, and our distorted illusionary culture," she insists, Floridians must understand the state's extensive history of tourism (4, 151).

In *Sunshine Paradise*, an engaging and concise study, Revels traces this history, exploring shifts in tourism and the forces propelling these changes. As a third-generation Floridian, Revels is also concerned with the "cultural problems" and questions about identity arising from the state's dependence on tourism (3). "What exactly does it mean to be a Floridian? Are native Floridians also Southerners?" (3–4) If Florida is not part of the South or the Sunbelt, then what is it? Florida, as Revels demonstrates, defies easy categorization, but rather has a long history of being "a constantly evolving land of fantasy and illusion" typically defined by outsiders but with residents also "complicit" in their promotion of "the gaudy, the inauthentic, and the impermanent" (4). Although archaeological evidence indicates that "tourism has existed in Florida since its beginnings," and Juan Ponce de Leon is often touted as "Florida's first tourist," Revels maintains that "modern tourism in Florida began with Americanization," and she focuses on the forms it has taken in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries (5, 8).

Revels skillfully weaves existing scholarship on Florida tourism with evidence gathered from Florida ephemera, visitors' firsthand accounts, newspapers, and magazines. *Sunshine Paradise* is organized into eight chapters and proceeds chronologically. The first major group of tourists she considers are the wealthy visitors tormented by a "graveyard cough" (tuberculosis) who traveled to Florida in the early nineteenth century seeking relief in the state's "salubrious air" (6). Subsequent chapters explore Florida's transformation from "a Southern sanitarium to a tropical playground" that attracted sportsmen, Gilded Age tycoons, and tin-can tourists (23). *Sunshine Paradise* also features a chapter on tourism during the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II. The work concludes with an analysis of the modern,

post–World War II "gaudy age of tourism," the theme-park era, and current efforts to lure Gen X and Gen Y travelers pursuing "novelty and freedom" (118, 47).

In each chapter, Revels is also careful to examine tensions between tourists and residents. She explains, for example, that in nineteenth-century Florida, "invalids were obnoxious to the healthy, and the healthy were frequently the bane of the indisposed" (14). Revels also emphasizes how Florida tourism affected minorities such as Jews and African Americans, who were denied access to hotels and tourist destinations but who played essential, though often overlooked, roles in Florida's tourism industry. Similarly, tourism presented Seminoles, such as Willie Willie, who set up the Musa Isle Village and Trading Post, "with both the dangers and opportunities of cultural exploitation" (74).

Revels's study is not a triumphalist account—while many tourists felt satisfied with their visits to Florida, others felt "hoodwinked" and misled; theme parks brought millions of visitors to Florida, but "highways snarled, lakes fouled, and property taxes shot into the stratosphere" (13, 127). One of *Sunshine Paradise*'s strengths is its balanced depiction of the good, the bad, and the ugly of Florida tourism.

There is much to praise in this study, but some readers might question the author's depiction of Florida race relations and her claim that Florida's Jim Crow laws "were not as harsh as the rest of the South's" (104). This criticism aside, *Sunshine Paradise* is an excellent addition to the University Press of Florida's "Florida History and Culture" series. Revels's work will likely be a foundational text in Florida history courses, and will also appeal to a broad audience interested in Florida, tourism, and marketing.

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Salvaging the Real Florida: Lost and Found in the State of Dreams. By Bill Belleville. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011. 292 pp. Introduction. B&W photographs, maps, epilogue, acknowledgments. $24.95, cloth.)

Anyone who has read Bill Belleville's *River of Lakes: A Journey on Florida's St. Johns River* (2001) or his *Losing It All to Sprawl: How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape* (2005) is familiar with the lament in his writer's voice. He justifies that lament with the evidence he serves up, the clear-eyed vision he has for Florida, and the passion that issues from his words. His writing is poetic and his musing that of a nature-loving troubadour. His latest book reaffirms that his poetic work belongs with a class of Florida writers that includes Al Burt (too often forgotten), Archie Carr, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Sidney Lanier, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and William Bartram.