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*Florida's Wacky History and Why You Should Care*



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JOURNALIST, PALM BEACH POST

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*Florida's Wacky History  
& Why You Should Care*

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# Biographical Note

As anyone here can attest, living in Florida is a unique experience. Documenting just how unusual it is has been one of the intellectual projects of Eliot Kleinberg, author, journalist, and Florida native. Born in Coral Gables, Kleinberg has gone on to become an aficionado of all things Floridian and the author of eight books on the state, including *Weird Florida* and *Weird Florida II: In a State of Shock*.

A scoop-breaking broadcast and print journalist, Kleinberg pursued a career as a radio and television reporter and editor from 1979 to 1984 in Miami and at the Cable News Network. He was a reporter for *The Dallas Morning News* from 1984 until 1987, when he returned to Florida. He now works for the *Palm Beach Post*, specializing in weather and hurricanes, state and local history, the environment, and the space program. He has been a key player in major breaking stories, including the 1996 ValuJet crash, the 2000 presidential election, and Florida aspects of the 2001 terrorist attacks and anthrax crisis. He also has assembled several major investigative reports and projects.

Kleinberg's educational background also has Florida roots — he earned two degrees from the University of Florida. His other books include *Black Cloud*, a horrifying look at the great 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane, which particularly devastated black Floridians; *Florida Fun Facts: 1,001 Fun Questions and Answers* about Florida, “the ultimate trivia challenge”; *War in Paradise*, a collection of true stories about Florida in World War II; *Florida Hurricane and Disaster*, his father's memoir of the family's ordeal in Hurricane Andrew; and *The Historical Traveler's Guide to Florida*, of which one reviewer wrote, “Be prepared to be astonished, amused, and sickened at the same time!”

# Florida's Wacky History & Why You Should Care

by Eliot Kleinberg

*Journalist, Palm Beach Post*

I like to talk about Florida history.

The way I'm able to get my bosses to let me write about Florida history, because after all, the newspaper is in the business of putting today's news in tomorrow's newspaper, is that I explain to them that the average Floridian has been here 10 minutes, so anything we tell them is news.

I don't have to tell you that, especially up in Palm Beach County, I've spoken to entire groups where not one person in the room has been here for more than 10 years. Then I ask, "How many of you are Florida natives?" And they squirm and say, "Well, that's a trick question." Well, it's not really a trick question.

Just as we Florida natives can't claim to be the only true Floridians -- although I have a wonderful bumper sticker that says, "Welcome to Florida. Now go home" -- my dad's from the Bronx, my mom's from Chicago, and my wife's from Indiana, so it's a good thing no one put up a gate back when or I wouldn't be here.

Having said that, people who live in Florida cannot abrogate, or waive, or push away, the responsibility of being a Floridian.

Journalists are not supposed to have opinions, and if we have them, we're supposed to keep them to ourselves, although that never stopped the TV people. So I have an opinion on something, but please don't tell anyone. I believe the biggest problem facing Florida in the generation to come is not schools, or roads, or water, or any of that. It's that Florida is full of people who are from somewhere else, and many of them don't feel like they're Floridians.

I was talking to a lady, and she said, "I'm a New Yorker retired to Florida." I said, "How long have you been here?" She said, "Twenty-seven years." I said, "When are you going to un-pack?"

The people call the radio sports shows. They say, "You South Florida sports fans don't support your team. I went to the Dolphins game and we Pittsburgh fans filled half the stadium." And the host says, "Sir, how long have you lived down here?" And he says, "Thirty years." So the host says, "OK, in your opinion exactly who constitutes a South Florida sports fan?" Because if it's just people who

were born here, that's nine people.

The only way sports would work down here is if people who didn't grow up here went. Because that's how Florida is. If the only Marlins fans were people who grew up in Florida, there'd be 3,000 people there, which is about what it usually was, except when the Yankees came to town.

"So when you say, 'You South Florida sports fans,' you're talking about yourself. And when you say, 'You South Florida sports fans don't support your team,' you're talking about the former New Yorkers, and Pittsburghers, and Cubans, and Nicaraguans. Because if those people don't come out to the Marlins, there's nobody left."

So that's the problem. Florida is full of people that are from somewhere else, and I'm not saying they have to stop rooting for the Cubs or the Yankees, but what it means is that Florida is now their home and they have to care what happens to it.

And a lot of people pick on the retirees. They say the retirees are the problem because they are set in their ways. But that's not always the case. Some time in the last 10, 15 years, all these young people in the North found out that all these retirees needed chiropractors and pizza guys and accountants and insurance agents. So they started coming too.

And they brought their children with them or their children were born in Florida. Now here's the problem. They took those children, who were born in Florida, and they put them in Yankees caps. I would argue that's about more than just baseball. Because those children are our future. They are going to inherit Florida from us. You can't put them in a Yankees cap. They're going to be running Florida in 20 years. They've got to feel like they're Floridians.

There was a survey done by *Newsday*, the newspaper up in New York, on Long Island, about eight years ago. Of all the people leaving the two counties in Long Island -- I believe it's Nassau and Suffolk -- and leaving the state of New York, 25 percent were going to... Palm Beach County, Florida.

So you have these people that are coming down here, and they're putting their kids in a Yankees cap. But that kid's got to be a Floridian, or we're in big, big trouble.

Would anybody argue that Florida has the most complicated and difficult problems of any state in the country? And it would be hard enough to solve those problems if we were full of people who cared about what happened.

People say, "I paid for the Ohio Turnpike. Why should I pay for the roads here?" And then they want to know why it takes an hour to get from Hallandale to Aventura. Or they say, "I put my kid through the New Jersey public schools. Why should I pay for the schools here?" And they want to know why the cashier at the KMart can't make change.

So that's the problem we have. We're full of people who are from somewhere else and they don't necessarily care, or they don't care enough, about what happens to this place.

This is not just an abstraction. I'll give you a great example. In the year 2000, people in Palm Beach County -- and I apologize that I keep using Palm Beach County, it's just where I can get the data -- gave more money to the U.S. Senate campaign of Rudy Giuliani than they did to Bill McCollum, the guy running for the U.S. Senate Republican nomination from Florida.

Here's the problem with that. If Rudy Giuliani had won -- you might recall he had prostate cancer and had to drop out -- he would have gone to Washington and fought tooth and nail to take every dollar designated for Tri-Rail and make sure it went to the Long Island Railroad instead. And no one would have criticized him for that. That's why he would be going to Washington. To represent New Yorkers.

So why are you people that are now registered to vote in Florida paying money to help get a guy elected who's going to go to Washington and try to take every penny away from you? It's crazy. It makes no sense. But that's what they were doing. Because in their mindset, they're still New Yorkers. They're still Ohioans. They're still Pennsylvanians. And you can do both. You can still have a soft spot in your heart for wherever you came from; I'm still nostalgic for Miami. But you have to feel like where you live now is your home.

And a big part of that is understanding the history of the area. When you first started dating somebody, what's the first thing you wanted to know? You wanted to know a little bit about them. Where they came from. What their background is. You move to a new area, the first thing you want to do is learn their history.

Of course, you're not going to get it in Florida, not in the schools. Because in Florida they teach Florida history in the 4th grade. I have a 17 year old and a 15 year old. I remember when they were in the 4th grade. Forget it. Anything you tell them is out of their head in 15 minutes. Why they don't teach Florida history in the 11th grade, when the kids are old enough to retain it, and why it's not mandatory for every public 2-year and 4-year college in the state, and the private schools if we can put pressure on them, to teach Florida before you can get a degree, I don't know. But again, I'm not supposed to lobby. But you can lobby.

So people need to know about the state's history.

They need to know for three reasons. Like I said, because it's going to feel like it's more their home.

The second is, it's a pretty cool history. The textbooks, written by Northerners, want you to believe that the modern history of America began at Plymouth Rock. Well, St. Augustine is 55 years older than Plymouth Rock. And even though much of history happened in the past century or so, a lot of cool things happened

in those years, didn't they? Like the wars, the depressions, the boom, everything.

And the third thing is, people say, "Well history doesn't really affect my everyday life. We all know that just isn't true. Every day there's a story in the paper that without the historical perspective -- this building they want to knock down, that Indian battlefield they want to put houses on. The historical perspective is important.

I'll give you one big example. Everyone remember the statewide vote a few years back to have the sugar farmers pay a penny a pound to clean up the sugar fields? Who knows what was there before the sugar fields? That's right. The Everglades went right to the south shore of Lake Okeechobee. And I dare say that where we're sitting was probably Everglades as well.

So the environmentalists said, "You sugar farmers drained the Everglades, and put in your sugar fields, and polluted for all those years. So you should pay."

Well, that's not true.

The guy who drained the Everglades, who was elected in 1900 on a promise to drain the Everglades, was Napoleon Bonaparte Broward. And for this act, which some consider an environmental catastrophe of biblical proportions, he got a county named for him, the one just up the road. And the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers helped him. And between them, they drained the Everglades. Not the sugar farmers. The first farmers around Lake Okeechobee were mom-and-pop growing things like green peppers. The sugar farms didn't show up until the 1930s.

So the sugar farmers said, "We'll pay some of it, but not all of it. And besides, all those years we were supposedly polluting, no one was telling us we were polluting." And the environmentalists said, "How big of an idiot do you have to be to not know you were polluting?"

Now, we could have had an intelligent debate. There's good points on both sides. The problem is, no one had that debate. Everybody voted on the basis of 30-second commercials, and frankly both sides produced commercials that were misleading. The environmentalists had the sugar farmers like the bad guy twisting his mustache and saying, "Oh boy, another day to destroy the Everglades." And the sugar farmers have ads that show mom and pop and the kids and if you put this tax on them, they'll be living in their car, even though we know about 90 percent of the sugar fields are owned by about nine families and they live out on Palm Beach, on the island. So both commercials were misleading. Both commercials were wrong. So when people went to the pools, they were misinformed. And we know a misinformed or uninformed or uneducated voter is in many ways worse than not voting at all. So it is important.

How many people thought that when they went to vote for Jeb Bush for reelection a couple of years ago, thought about the fact that, for the first time, Florida

would have a Republican governor and a Republican legislature in a state that in the 1940s you couldn't get a Republican elected dog catcher? Some people probably think it's terrible. Some probably think it's great. But how many people thought about that historical perspective when they went to vote?

So we know that history is important. We have to have the historical perspective to make intelligent decisions on the future.

So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you 500 years of Florida history in about 15 minutes. Then I'm going to give you a test. Just kidding on the test.

And I will tell you that a lot of the stuff you might have heard is probably wrong. Because you got it from Disney World, or some roadside stand, or some book written about Florida by some guy from Tennessee or New Jersey.

I remember a friend of mine, after I wrote about the great 1928 hurricane in Florida, said I should go to Louisiana and write about Katrina. I said, "There are many excellent writers in Louisiana who are far more qualified to write about that area than me, and I would never dare to write about a hurricane in Louisiana. And I don't think people from New Jersey or Tennessee should come down here and write a book about Florida. That's how you get stuff like the trivia book I picked up one day that said Palm Beach was in Broward County.

So there's a newspaper I don't want to mention, but it's published in Fort Lauderdale. And they sent a reporter to Boynton Beach, where Seminoles were talking to some kids at an elementary school. And the reporter started off, "The Seminoles, comma, who greeted Christopher Columbus when he arrived in Florida..." Well, of course, the whole sentence is wrong. Columbus never got closer than the islands, and the Seminoles are like many of you guys; they're snowbirds. They didn't show up until the late 1700s.

And as somebody in the news business, I can tell you that once it gets in the paper, it's in there. Getting it out is like getting stains out.

So I'm going to give you Florida history, and I want you to think about three questions. Don't shout them out. Just think about them. Because I'm going to answer all three. And tell me if you think that every Floridian should know the answer to these three questions. Because I'll bet they know them about New York or Ohio or Pennsylvania.

They know who Peter Stuyvesant is. The guy in New York with the peg leg. And they know about Mrs. O'Leary and her cow. But they don't know who Henry Flagler is. Actually, many have heard of him but they didn't know anything about him. They just recognize the name. And I would argue that Mr. Flagler is a bigger part of their life now than Peter Stuyvesant, because Flagler shaped the place where they live NOW.

The questions are: Who owned Florida longer, Spain or the United States;

which side did Florida fight on in the American Revolution; and which side did Florida fight on in the Civil War?

So Juan Ponce de Leon lands in Florida. Looking for the Fountain of Youth, right?

No.

Mr. Ponce' – and by the way, his first name was not Ponce. If any of you are Hispanic, you must tear your hair every time you hear us gringos talk about Mr. “dee-lee-ahn.” His name was Juan Ponce' and he was from the Leon' region of Spain. Their crest was a lion. Leon'.

Mr. Ponce was not looking for the Fountain of Youth. That legend didn't show up until years later. He was a far more pragmatic guy. People knew there was something big north and west of Puerto Rico. They didn't know what. They didn't have satellites. So they didn't know.

But the king of Spain says to Ponce', “Whatever you find up there, I will make you governor, and you will get a cut of the commerce. Whatever they steal, gold and jewels -- which they had found in Central and South America but would end up not finding in Florida unless you count the Hard Rock casino – you get a cut of that booty. If they run the local Indians into slavery, you get a cut of that. For Ponce', that was real. Not some wild legend of a Fountain of Youth.

He lands in Florida. He sticks the cross in the sand. He sticks the flag of Spain in the sand. And he turns around and goes back to Puerto Rico. Why? Well you know the answer if you lost your power in one of those hurricanes. And you got a rip in your screen. Florida in 1513 did not have air conditioning. We all love our wetlands, but let's not forget what a wetland is. Florida was an inhospitable place. It was a land of swamps, and mosquitoes, and bugs, and these big things that they didn't know what the heck they were, so they called them “the lizard.” “El Lagarte.” Alligator.

And there were some people who were already here. Who foolishly believed that they owned the place. Actually they believed no one owned the place. The Europeans of course felt differently.

I have this great idea for a movie but I can't get past the opening scene. This guy in Wales is out plowing his field and these sails appear on the horizon and these ships pull up and Cherokees jump out and say, “We claim this land. Get out or die.” Because really, that's what happened, didn't it? Whether your family came to America a generation ago or centuries ago, we all, as Americans, have to share the responsibility for what was done to the native peoples of this continent.

When the Europeans first arrived in the early 1500s, there were as many as a half million indigenous people in Florida. Within two centuries, they were gone. Extinct. Wiped out. It's like the joke about the developer who cuts down all the oak trees and names the street Oak Street. We name our cities and neighborhoods

after Indian groups we drove into extinction. Tequesta. Jeaga. Hobe, Toucan, Calusa. Apalachee. Tocabaga. All gone.

What killed them? Right. European diseases, for which they had no defense. Which is not to say the Europeans didn't try pretty hard to kill them off as well.

So Ponce de Leon leaves. He goes back to Puerto Rico and the Spanish don't come back for a half century. What made them come back? Other Europeans. Specifically French. And Protestants at that. This was too horrible for the Spanish to contemplate.

So the Spanish went up to St. Augustine and established the city – oldest continuously occupied city in North America – and then they went up toward Jacksonville and found the Frenchmen and brought them back to St. Augustine to a place called “Matanzas Inlet” – “matanzas” is Spanish for “slaughter” – and that's what they did. They cut the Frenchmen's throats. Which I guess was their way of showing the local savages how civilized nations act. But it's also the reason we eat medianoche sandwiches instead of éclairs.

So they establish St. Augustine, and for the next 200 years, they scatter across Florida and what is now the southeast United States, trying to Christianize the Indians, or sell them into slavery, or kill them, whichever comes first. Setting up a mission here, a mission there.

The year 1763 rolls around. The French and the Spanish and the British are having their war of the week. And the British seize Havana. And they go to Spain and say, “We will give you back Havana if you will give us Florida.”

Believe it or not, at the time, that was a good idea. It was a better deal than losing Havana. Florida was a vast wasteland. Havana was the capital of Spain's empire in the west. It was a happening town with brothels and saloons and restaurants and they could not give it up. So they gave up Florida. And Florida became British.

So which were the only British colonies not to leave during the revolution but which later became part of the United States? If you want to win a bar bet, ask which were the 14th and 15th British colonies. The answer is Florida.

Actually, there were two Floridas.

If you draw a line along the Georgia-Alabama state line and bisect the panhandle, that's the Chattahoochee River, which becomes the Apalachicola River, which is where you change to the Central Time Zone. Everything east of that was the Territory of East Florida. Again, remember we're really just talking North Florida. There were only a few white people south of Ocala at the time. The territory of West Florida included the southern halves of what's now Alabama and Mississippi and the toe of the boot that is Louisiana. And to this day, all the parishes, which is what they call their counties, north and east of Lake Pontchartrain are still called the Florida parishes, because that was part of the ter-

ritory of West Florida.

So the first question: What side did Florida fight on in the American Revolution? Most people would probably say, “Neither. They were Spanish.” But they weren’t.

Florida got a much better deal than the other colonies. They like the king. And they were fiercely loyal. The last thing they wanted to do was throw in their lot with these upstart rebels up the road.

And all these Tories, or loyalists, in Virginia and the Carolinas and Georgia fled down to loyalist Florida for protection. And when the revolution ended, they all shot across the Gulf Stream to the Bahamas. And to this day pretty much every white family on Andros and Abaco Islands in the Bahamas can trace their lineage back to the Tories who fled Florida after the Revolution.

So 1783 rolls around. The British have been totally humiliated. They decide to cut their losses. They keep Canada, keep some islands, and give the Floridas back to Spain.

And Spain holds on to Florida for about another 30 years. What happened? This new country, the United States, had this thing called Manifest Destiny. Everyone remember that from high school? This was the idea that God himself, or herself, had decreed that this new country would rule the continent from sea to shining sea. Well that didn’t just go left to right. The Americans wanted Florida.

So they did all these things to harass the Spanish and make their lives miserable, including inviting these Creeks down from Alabama into North Florida. And that’s how we got the Seminoles. They’re not native to Florida.

Finally, in 1819, Spain has had enough. They give Florida to the United States. They signed the treaty in 1819, and actually took possession in 1821. The mails were very slow back then.

Did they give Florida to the United States for nothing? No. The United States got the place for five million dollars. I guess that was a lot of money in 1819; now it wouldn’t even buy something on the beach in Hollywood.

But it wasn’t five million in cash. Here’s what happened. There were American citizens who’d been living in Florida under Spanish rule. And they’d had various torts, or damages, done against them. Spanish soldiers had burned their home or burned their crops or killed their slaves or whatever, And these American citizens had made claims against the colonial courts of Spain, in Spanish Florida. They sued Spain in its courts in Florida. And these claims totaled five million dollars.

The United States said, “If you will give us Florida, we will assume these five million dollars in debts and we will settle directly with our citizens, who had these various torts done against them while they were under Spanish rule in Florida.”

Well, guess what. The United States never paid. So what did they get Florida for? That's right. Nothing. Zippo. You want to talk about Florida real estate scams? That really set the bar. They could the whole place for nothing.

So who has owned Florida longer, Spain or the United States? If you count Ponce de Leon in 1513, and go to 1821, even with the 20 years off for England, that's about 300 years. The United States has had Florida for not even 200 years. So when people complain about hearing Spanish on the streets of Miami, they need to remember that in Florida, they were speaking Spanish before they were speaking English.

So Florida becomes a territory of the United States in 1821. And they become a state in 1845.

Does everyone remember in 1995, Florida had its sesquicentennial, the 150th anniversary of statehood? Everyone remember the essay contests, and parades, and fairs? You don't? That's because there weren't any. Iowa became a state the same year as Florida. They had the essay contests and parades and fairs. Why did Iowa, a much smaller state, make such a big deal about its sesquicentennial, and Florida hardly did anything? The answer is simple. People in Iowa are from...Iowa.

So Florida becomes part of the United States in 1821, they become a state in 1845, and they've been part of the United States ever since. Right?

Third question: What side did Florida fight on in the Civil War? That's right.

Today, Florida is by far the most northern of the southern states. In fact, in Florida, the joke is that the further north you go, the further south you get. And the further south you go, the further north you get.

But in 1860 – keep in mind that at the time Florida had about 60,000 residents, about half of them slaves – in 1860, Florida was fiercely southern. And Florida was run by big business – which of course is different than now. But what was big business back then? It was these huge plantation owners. They owned huge tracts of land up in the Panhandle. They could not compete with the islands in the Caribbean that were growing the same crops. The islands had better year-round weather, they had lower living standards so they could pay people less, and they had better trade routes with Europe. So they could sell their crops for less than what the Florida farmers could. And if the Florida farmers had to start paying their slaves, they couldn't compete. So to these plantation owners, they didn't have time for the morality of slavery. For them, it was like the mob. It was strictly business.

They went to the people running Florida and said, "This slavery thing has to continue or we're out of business." So what did Florida do? Florida was the third state to secede, behind South Carolina and Mississippi.

This is the part where ask if you remember your high school history, and many

of you might have been told that the Civil War was strictly and exclusively a holy crusade by the blessed North to rescue the helpless black man from the evil South. We all know it was far more complicated than that. We know it wasn't just about slavery. We know most northerners couldn't care less about black people. And on the day the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, making it illegal to own a slave in Florida, it was still legal to own a slave in Missouri.

Everyone who wants to take down these Confederate flags better take down every manifestation of the American flag that flew over the United States between 1776 and 1867. Or else you're a hypocrite. Because the United States stood for slavery too.

They want to take Jefferson Davis's name off a school in West Palm Beach. Because he represented slavery. That's wrong. That's incorrect. You'd better take off George Washington's name, and Andrew Jackson's name, and every one of those presidents up to Abraham Lincoln, because they represented a country that endorsed slavery as well.

Now if you want to take off Jefferson Davis's name because he led an armed insurrection against the authority of the greatest democracy in the history of the world, I'm OK with that. Because in my opinion, even as a son of the South, that's what the war was about. It was about the southern half of the United States committing what was basically treason. And you can argue about that but that's what we're really talking about.

If you want to condemn the South, condemn the South for being treasonous. But don't get on this slavery thing, because the North didn't care about slavery either. And in fact, the day President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, they had draft riots in Manhattan! These people said, "Wait a minute. I didn't know this was about slavery."

That's my Civil War rant.

Florida secedes and they have a torchlight parade down the streets of Tallahassee. And they get to the home of Richard Keith Call. He had been a governor when Florida was a territory. He believed in many of the beefs of the South. But he also believed that secession was treason.

Let me give you a little aside about Richard Keith Call, because I can't resist taking another shot at the Sun-Sentinel. Seriously, I enjoy competing with them. They're a great paper. It would be easy if they're a lousy paper. But it's fine competing against a great paper. That way the readers win.

Having said that, I'm going to pick on them.

Richard Keith Call's great-great-great-something granddaughter or niece or whatever was the wife of a man named LeRoy Collins.

He probably was the greatest political figure in the history of Florida. He was the guy who in the 1950s went to the people of Florida and said "integration is a

Mack truck. It's a locomotive. We have two options. We can throw ourselves in front of it, or we can stand aside. Because it's coming. And we here in Florida, where tourism is our bread and butter, have two choices: Either we accept integration, which is going to come whether we accept it or not, or we have people watching TV seeing pictures of Florida policemen knocking people down with fire hoses and beating people up on bridges. And if we do, you can forget about tourism for 50 years." And by the way, Alabama and Mississippi are still fighting to get tourists, aren't they?

So LeRoy Collins said, "I don't care how you feel about black people. Integration's coming, and you can fight it or we can accept. He went on statewide live television on a night when Winn-Dixie said the law allowed them to refuse service to black people, because they were creating a disturbance by sitting at the lunch counter, and he got on live TV and said, "It may be the law, but it's morally wrong." Can you see today's leaders having that kind of political courage? He basically was signing his political death warrant. Now it turned out OK for him in the long run, but he didn't know that at the time. He put his career on the line to say, "This is morally wrong."

And the day he died, the Palm Beach Post, my paper, gave him a big spread on the front page and a whole page inside. And the Miami Herald gave him a big spread on the front page and two pages inside. And the Sun-Sentinel ran a brief on its state and regional page.

I talked to a friend of mine who was one of the editors of the Sentinel. I said, "What happened?" He said, "Well, we had a new state editor who just came down two weeks ago from New Jersey or wherever."

I said, "I don't care where he came from. Don't you think his news alarm would have gone off when he saw on the news wires that, upon hearing of Collins's death, the state legislature stopped in mid-sentence, and without debate, passed a unanimous resolution declaring Collins the Floridian of the Century? Wouldn't that set off some alarm in that editor's head?"

So LeRoy Collins is buried next to Richard Keith Call at a house in Tallahassee called the Grove. His widow still lives there. It's catty-corner to the governor's mansion. When Jeb Bush comes out to pick up his newspaper, he looks at the graves of LeRoy Collins and Richard Keith Call.

Richard Keith Call believed in many of the South's complaints. But he believed secession was treason. And he believed secession was suicide. They said, "Governor, what do you think? We've broken away from the Union." He raised his cane and said, "You have opened up the gates of Hell, from which the rivers of the damned will flow." Boy, they don't talk like that on C-SPAN. But he turned out to be absolutely right.

And here's the part where I explain to you why Vicksburg, Mississippi is the

reason we have Century Village. I promise it will make sense.

If you go to Vicksburg, Mississippi, which by the way is a beautiful city on the bluffs of the Mississippi River, the Interstate 20 bridge is there, and next to it is the railroad. That's the original railroad line that crossed the Mississippi River and connected the Confederacy with Louisiana and Texas. When the North seized Vicksburg, they already controlled the northern Mississippi in the Confederacy at Memphis because of their victory at Shiloh. They already controlled the mouth of the Mississippi because of their blockade of New Orleans. Which, by the way, guess what about one fourth of the Confederate coastline was? That's right. Florida. And now they controlled the middle Mississippi by taking Vicksburg. More importantly, they had cut that railroad line.

Why was that important? First of all, Texas was the only Confederate state with a land border to another country, Mexico. We all know the South was starved out both financially and literally as much as it was defeated in battle. If you can't do trade with the rest of the world you ending up eating your money.

But the other thing was that Texas was the Confederacy's breadbasket. It's where they got their cotton, and their timber, and their turpentine and their winter vegetables and their salt for curing meat because they didn't have refrigeration, and their beef and their pork. And all of this when they couldn't get it from Texas, where do you think they went looking? To the place that even today is one of the largest beef producing states east of the Mississippi River, and if you don't believe me, take a ride up U.S. 27 north of Lake Okeechobee and you'll see what I mean.

So the crumbling Confederacy in its last years sucked Florida dry. And at the end of the war, Florida is broke, broke, broke.

The war ends. Occupying forces come down to Florida. And the soldiers are standing in front of the state capital in Tallahassee with their rifles. And they guy turns to his buddy and says, "You know, here it is February, and it's really quite pleasant?" OK. Vicksburg?

The occupation ends. Florida is rehabilitated back into the Union. The soldiers end their occupation. And the guy goes back to New Jersey and says, "Mabel, we're taking a vacation in Florida."

Keep in mind, again, that when we're talking about Florida back then we're talking about just north Florida. In the 1860 census there were maybe 600 white people south of Ocala. One of my colleagues at the paper, after the Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War came out, she called me and said, "I want to do a feature on all the Civil War battles that took place in Palm Beach County." I said, "Well, unless a gray alligator was fighting a blue alligator, I think you're out of luck."

There actually was one battle. It was the battle of the Jupiter Lighthouse. The

blockade runners knew all the shallows and shoals. The blockade ships didn't. The blockade runners wanted the light out. So the assistant lighthouse keeper said to the keeper, "This lighthouse is now in another country. Take out the light." The lighthouse keeper stayed loyal to his federal paycheck. His assistant said, "I like you. I don't want to shoot you." So finally the keeper gave in. Now this light mechanism was so expensive and hard to replace that they didn't destroy it. They hid it in the bushes and brought it back out after the war. That was the great battle in Palm Beach County.

So they're vacationing in Jacksonville after the war, and they're relaxing on the St. Johns River, and the people running Florida say, "Hey. This tourism thing is great! This isn't like a tire factory. All they leave is their dirty towels and their money! This is just the thing to get us out of our terrible, terrible debt we are in because of the Civil War."

And then someone said: "Hey. What if we could get people to move here?"

So they set up something called homesteading. "If you're willing to set up a farm, we'll give you so many acres. And if you want to build a town and set up a tax base we'll give you some land too."

And Mr. Henry Flagler. Everyone knows who he is. Good because he pretty much created where we're sitting. "Mr. Flagler. If you want to extend your railroad south from Jacksonville to Miami, --that's about 350 miles -- we'll give you 4,000 acres for every mile of track that you lay." Do the math. That's the Florida East Coast railroad right over there.

And Mr. Henry Plant. Never heard of him? You should. Mr. Plant. If you want to extend your railroad to Tampa Bay, we'll give you the same deal.

And oh, the two Henrys: If you want to build the most luxurious hotels in the world and invite the richest people in the world to stay in them at exorbitant prices, that's OK too."

And in fact, the first bridge to cross the Intracoastal Waterway from West Palm Beach to Palm Beach was a railroad spur, so rich people could bring their personal railroad cars to the front lawn of the Royal Poinciana, because they did not travel light. They didn't have flight bags. They packed their things in trunks. They had to have their own railroad cars! And Mr. Flagler gave them their own railroad spur. That's who was coming to stay in South Florida to stay in these hotels.

This once again was helping get South Florida out of the terrible financial debt they were in. And Florida became the American Riviera. That's what they called it in all the papers.

And once again the people running Florida said, "This is great for our debt. But maybe it would be even better if we could get people to move here!"

So now we have the Boom.

It was an orgy of capitalism the likes of which we probably will never see again in the United States. People were coming down here and staying 10 to a room in downtown West Palm Beach, downtown Miami, staying in these flophouses. And then going down the street and buying and selling property over and over again like it was play money. They were called the “Binder Boys” because all they had to do was lay down the 10 percent down payment, the binder.

So they just kept moving this property around and moving this money around. The same piece of property might get bought and sold two or three times as it worked its way down the sidewalk to get punched into that little clock thing at the courthouse. And what happened every time it got bought and sold? That’s right, the price went up. And pretty soon what was the price compared to what it was really worth?

Nowadays we call that a pyramid scheme. And how does a pyramid scheme end? Someone gets stuck. And that’s what happened to the Boom.

How did people get stuck? First, all the banks in the North and Midwest were in a panic because all their money was going down to Florida. So they begged the federal government to help. And the government started taxing the speculators not just on the down-payment but on the value of the entire property. And these guys packed up their bags and they were out of town.

The next thing that happened was that people got tired of flipping these properties over and over again like a Monopoly game and people decided they wanted to actually build on them. And that’s when they discovered that a lot of this property was under water. Or there was water between you and it.

They also found out that while Florida was rich in natural resources, all the places that turned timber into two-by-fours and made penny nails and bricks were up north. We didn’t have I-95. We didn’t have all these 18-wheelers in the early 1920s. The car was just getting going. We had railroads but they could handle only so much. And boats were slow.

Then we had some hurricanes you might have heard of.

Anybody who thinks God spreads out hurricanes to cut us a break, well we know from the past few years that that’s not the case. But also consider this: three of the four most profound hurricanes to strike the Florida in the 20th century occurred nine years apart: 1926, 1928, and 1935. The fourth, of course, being Andrew. And 180 miles apart. Which in hurricane terms is nothing.

The ’26 hurricane. Came through downtown Miami. If Andrew – remember Andrew? – if Andrew had followed the path of the 1926 hurricane, it would have done four times the damage. Andrew. Times four.

And when the 1926 storm left Miami, it crossed over the Lake Okeechobee, and washed out part of the flimsy six-foot dike on the lake’s southwest corner and killed about 150 people in Moore Haven. And people said, "You know we

need a bigger dike around the lake." And they were still arguing about it two years later when the 1928 hurricane showed up. That's the one I wrote a book about.

The 1928 hurricane is the second deadliest natural disaster of any kind in the history of the United States. And most Americans never heard of it. Drowned 3,000 people. Three thousand. I say in the book that if it had drowned 3,000 white businessmen in downtown West Palm Beach, or smashed a black tie affair out on Palm Beach, on the island, they'd still be talking about it. But it killed mostly poor black migrant workers around the lake, from the Deep South or the Caribbean islands.

They built big pyres and burned the bodies, for health reasons. And they dug a mass grave near downtown West Palm Beach and dumped about 700 people. Again, for health reasons. But they never marked the grave. And it stood there unmarked for some 60 years.

You want to talk about how history isn't abstract, that it's tangible? There's a 50-foot dike around Lake Okeechobee. Because of the hurricane.

So as if we were not finished, 1935, the Labor Day storm, most powerful hurricane ever to strike North America, rips through the Florida Keys. Washes Mr. Flagler's railroad to Key West into the ocean. And if you don't believe me, go to the library and get a book or go on the Internet and you can see the famous picture of the railroad track going right off the causeway and disappearing into the water. Killed 600 people. Killed the railroad.

Now Florida is deep, deep, deep into the Depression. And because so much of Florida's wealth had been on paper, had been speculative, had been pie-in-the sky, they were really in it, more than perhaps any other place, except maybe the Dust Bowl states.

What got Florida out of the Depression? The same thing that got the rest of the country out of the Depression. That's right. World War II. In 1940, Florida had eight military facilities. Three years later they had 172.

Fort Lauderdale International Airport was a naval air station. George Bush Sr. flew bombing practice bombing missions out of there, over Lake Okeechobee. Palm Beach International Airport was Morrison Field. Boca Raton Army Air Field: half became the Boca Raton airport and half became Florida Atlantic University. If you ever go up to FAU and the parking lots at FAU look like landing strips? They were. Camp Murphy, a radar school in southern Martin County, now Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Prisoner of War camps, for Germans, in Belle Glade, and Clewiston, and down where Dadeland Mall is now.

Soldiers were training in places like the Breakers in Palm Beach and the Biltmore in Coral Gables and Miami Beach. Thousands. And not just Americans. Expatriates and exiles from Poland and China and other places training to try to

fight and get back their countries.

And every time a local contractor was hired to run a railroad line or build a barracks, or clear a road, that was federal money coming into Florida. And every time a soldier reached into his pocket for a quarter for the jukebox, or a beer, or a slice of pie, that was federal money coming into Florida. And before you knew it, Florida had pulled itself out of the Depression.

You remember Vicksburg, right? Time and time again in Florida's history, since the Civil War, Florida is in terrible financial shape, tourism bails them out, and someone says, "Hey, we could do even better if we could get people to move here!" And people do.

In 1940, Florida had two million people. Two million. That's what Miami-Dade County has now. By 1950, Florida had three million. Doesn't sound like a lot, but it's 1-and-a-half. By 1970, which I can remember, I was 14, Florida now had seven million people. And now, 35 years later, Florida has about 18 million people.

Nobody's clapping.

Now this is the part where I say, do I wish you had all moved here? I don't think you want me to lie. But it's not the quality. It's the quantity. I get people saying, "I've lived here 20 years and I don't want any more people moving here." It's a good thing they didn't say that when you were moving here.

But is it your fault? No. We asked you to move here. And you did!

We ran full page ads in the Philadelphia Inquirer and Cleveland Plain Dealer saying, "Move to Florida!" So why are we surprised that you did? My own newspaper had front page stories saying, "Another 10,000 housing starts. Another development near West Palm Beach. Isn't this great!"

And somewhere along the line we came to realize that growth, in and of itself, is not necessarily good. It's like alcohol. Everything in moderation.

So what do we do now? Frankly, I don't want my two children, who are teenagers, to have to take their grandchildren to a museum and look in an aquarium to see the Everglades. I don't think anybody does. But we've got a problem. People keep wanting to move here. Six hundred a day. And they all want a piece of the Florida that they see in the commercials, the Florida that attracted you here. What they don't understand is that they are helping make that Florida disappear. This is not an abstraction. We have all watched Florida vanish little by little just in our lifetimes. You can almost see it happening in front of your eyes.

But we cannot tell people to stop moving here. It's against the law. You can't put a gate up at the state border. You cannot tell somebody in America where they can live. Everyone wants to pick on the developers, like they're twisting their mustache. The developers are doing what the constitution gives them the right to do, which is to take a piece of property and if it's zoned for development, they're

allowed to build on it. Because a guy in New Jersey wants to buy it.

By my house west of Boca, there's a Home Depot and a Lowes about a mile and a half apart. Both were built by knocking down wooded areas. Because, you know, we need more wrenches than raccoons. But, you know, raccoons don't vote.

So what are we going to do? Well we're now learning that we have to have controlled growth. Managed growth. We're not going to stop it. In fact the only way I can see it stopping is if Florida becomes no longer desirable. Do you like that idea? Me neither.

In Palm Beach County, we have the Loxahatchee Wildlife Refuge, just west of U.S. 441, and it's protected. Down in Broward County, 441, they're just clearing their throat, It goes way west of where the Loxahatchee Refuge is. And if you follow the Sawgrass Expressway, there's a fence. And the other side of the fence is the Everglades. You can see it by the hockey arena. You can see it when you fly in from the west. There's the fence, and the houses go right up to it. And does anybody dispute what would happen if that fence was not there. They'd go all the way to Naples, wouldn't they?

And in fact in the '60s, the state wanted to build a jetport 20 miles west of Miami. They were going to build an expressway along the Tamiami Trail. And what do you think would have happened to every inch of road from there to the jetport 20 miles away in the middle of the Everglades? There'd be 7-11s and Wal-Marts all the way out. And that jetport got stopped by people like Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who for being a great environmentalist, got a high school in northern Broward County named for her that was built on a wetland.

So what we need is managed growth. The government says to developers, "Want to build 500 homes on 500 acres in southern Broward County? Tell you what. You can build 250 homes on 250 acres and leave the rest alone. And tell people it's up against natural wilderness. And just double the prices of the houses you do build. And you know what? The people in New Jersey will pay it." Is the same thing going on here with housing prices that's going on up in Boca?

Everybody know what concurrency is? That's where you tell the developer, "You want to build a neighborhood? Fine. You put in the sewer and the water and the power lines and the roads and the elementary school. And just fold the cost into the price of the homes. Don't worry. People will pay it."

That's some of the ways they are trying to manage growth in Florida.

We in the press love to pick on our elected officials. But it's a tough job. I don't think I can do it. They have to make wise decisions every day that are going to have tremendous ramifications on the future of Florida.

Those elected officials have to balance the rights of the people who want to move here and the rights of the developers, and the pressure from the develop-

ers, against the rights of people who don't want to lose the Florida that is vanishing.

And it would be hard enough if everybody in Florida felt like they were a Floridian and cared about Florida. Which takes me back to the beginning. Which is that our problems are complicated enough and on top of that we're full of people who might not care what's going to happen to Florida in 50 years. I'm not going to be there. They'll ship my body back to Cincinnati. Because that's home.

So that's the problem we're in. And that's why people like me, you've heard the line, better to light a candle than curse the darkness, people like me teach people a little bit of Florida history, maybe they'll feel more like it's their home.

I hope I've given you an appreciation of why we all have to make people feel like Florida is their home so that we can solve the problems that we're all going to face and are facing already.

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The Honors College at Florida International University in Miami offers the best of two worlds. It is a small community of outstanding students, dedicated scholars, and committed teachers who work together in an atmosphere usually associated with small private colleges. Yet, we do so with all the resources of a major state university, which is one of the nation's top doctoral / research extensive universities. Only 152 universities in the United States hold this superior rank.

The Honors College provides a broad foundation for dedicated students who want to get the most out of their undergraduate education. The undergraduate experience it provides is significantly enhanced by the broad interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum and opportunities to work closely with expert faculty and in the community. The opportunities for graduate or professional study and for employment are greatly expanded because of the range of unique activities and academic experiences made available to students in the College.

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THE MISSION OF THE HONORS COLLEGE IS TO PROVIDE AN INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY WHERE OUTSTANDING STUDENTS AND DEDICATED TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS PURSUE INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY, CRITICAL THINKING, AND PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ENRICHMENT MARKED BY EXCELLENCE IN ALL ENGAGEMENTS. IT IS GUIDED BY THE FIU VALUE STATEMENT, WHICH ESPOUSES A COMMITMENT TO: FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION; EXCELLENCE IN THE PURSUIT, GENERATION, DISSEMINATION, AND APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE; RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL; RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT; HONESTY, INTEGRITY, AND TRUTH; DIVERSITY; AND SERVICE EXCELLENCE.

THE AIMS OF THE HONORS COLLEGE ARE TO

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5. OFFER SCOPE FOR SERVICE LEARNING ENGAGEMENT AS A WAY TO BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN DOMAINS OF KNOWLEDGE AND SERVICE ACTIVITY THAT ENHANCES CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY.

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