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Jerald T. Milanich, curator emeritus of archaeology at the Museum of Natural History at the University of Florida, lives in the Catskill Mountains, where he continues to write and carry out research on a number of topics, including the people who once lived in what is now the state of Florida. His most recent books are *Illuminating Edison: The Genie of Menlo Park and the New York Sun, 1878–1880*; *Tales from the Catskill Tribune: The Mountain's Premier Source for Fake News*; and *Handfuls of History: Stories about Florida's Past*.

The First Floridians

They survived many millennia of a changing environment until disease and deadly conflict came from across the sea.

Jerald T. Milanich

FROM THE SURFACE, the pond at the Windover site in Brevard County seems like a most insignificant body of water. It is small and shallow. Yet, this is one of the most treasured archaeological locations in Florida, for the pond's peat-lined bottom is a vault that for thousands of years held artifacts and remains that allow us now to form a picture of the lives and practices of some of the First Floridians, the Early Archaic people.

Careful excavations by Glen Doran of Florida State University revealed that about 7,000 to 8,000 years ago the Early Archaic people buried their dead underwater in the peat of the Windover pond. The peat helped to preserve an array of normally perishable artifacts and human tissues, including brains that contain genetic material.

Many of the tools used by Early Archaic people have been found there: shark teeth and dog or wolf teeth, to which handles were attached; pins, points, and awls made from deer bone and antler as well as from manatee and either panther or bobcat bone and bird bone. Found, too, were bones from a number of animal species presumably eaten by the Windover people, which suggest that they utilized almost every meat source available to them. The pond also revealed that these people had an assemblage of material items well suited to life in Florida. From the peat was excavated a sophisticated array of preserved cordage and fabrics whose fibers came from Sabal palm, saw palmetto, and other plants.

The Windover people were part of a continuous line of Native American inhabitants of this peninsula, stretching back at least 14,000 years and reaching forward to the early eighteenth century. But there are no direct descendants of the Windover people to be found now in Florida. What happened? The Europeans arrived, bringing with them genocidal warfare and devastating diseases.

The first settlers of Florida, the Paleo-Indians, found this a much different place than that which we know today. Sea levels were much lower, the result of so much

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Larry Eugene Rivers is a Distinguished Professor of History at Florida A&M University, former president of Fort Valley (Georgia) State University, and the author or coauthor of eight books, including *Slavery in Florida: Territorial Days to Emancipation* and *Rebels and Runaways: Slave Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Florida*. His latest book is *Father James Page: An Enslaved Preacher's Climb to Freedom*.

Image: Plantation scene, circa 1870. Five years after the end of the Civil War, agricultural laborers pick cotton. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

On the Backs of the Enslaved

How Middle Florida and its planter class built wealth and power.

Larry Eugene Rivers

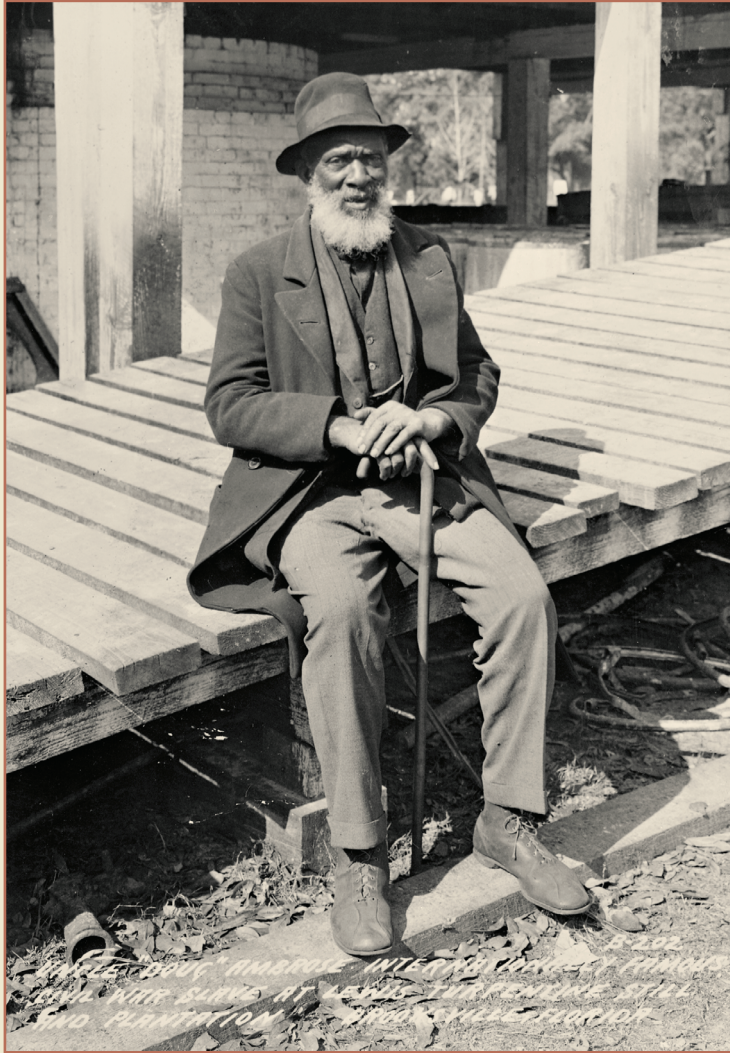
DURING THE TWENTY-FIVE YEARS leading up to the Civil War, a five-county region of north Florida grew into a virtual barony of plantations and farms that echoed the wealthiest precincts of the Old South cotton kingdom. The vast majority of Florida's enslaved Africans lived in this central part of the Panhandle along the Georgia border. Called "Middle Florida," it centered on the capital city of Tallahassee and included Gadsden, Leon, Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton Counties and eventually expanded into central Florida's Alachua and Marion Counties.

Middle Florida holders of enslaved Africans were pioneer entrepreneurs from Old South states who migrated to Florida after it became a US territory in 1821. Many hailed from the cream of southern planter society. Coming from Kentucky, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, they settled on the rich, fertile land between the Apalachicola and Suwannee Rivers and established farms and plantations primarily to grow cotton. By 1860 this area, virtually unpopulated by whites before 1821, had emerged as the state's plantation belt.

Middle Florida's economy was based firmly on slavery. Nearly all of the enslaved Africans (98 percent) were involved in agricultural labor. Most of them worked on large plantations established by wealthy "planters," an elite class composed of farmers who had at least twenty enslaved workers and more than 500 acres. This planter class, 21 percent of Florida's slaveholders, held more than 75 percent of Florida's enslaved people.

The vast majority of Florida's slaveholders ran much smaller operations. They owned small or medium-size farms and enslaved fewer than ten people, often only one or two. Usually the enslaved at these farms worked alongside the white property owners on a variety of jobs and lived in small cabins near the main farmhouses.

The enslaved on the larger plantations, however, were divided up into job categories. Some worked according to a task system as carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths,



Left: Ambrose “Uncle Doug” Hilliard Douglass, circa 1938, postcard. Once enslaved, Douglass (1845–1940) is photographed at the Lewis Turpentine Still and Plantation in Brooksville. The still had been turned into an “Old South” tourist attraction by its proprietor, Pearce Lewis, in the 1930s. Douglass’s story is among those captured in *A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*, typewritten records prepared by the Federal Writers Project, 1936–1938. *Right:* Charity Stewart, at ninety-three. This photo was taken in 1937, decades after her years in slavery. During the Civil War she was hidden in the swamps of Jefferson County to make soap for soldiers. Photos courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

and so forth. But field hands (as opposed to house servants) were sorted into work “gangs.” This “gang slavery” system, commonly associated with antebellum cotton culture, required each gang of slaves to routinely do one type of job, such as hoeing or plowing.

On the most fundamental level, the degree of harshness and oppression that marked an enslaved individual’s life typically resulted from the nature of his or her master, his wife, and his relations. A bad master meant a bad life for slaves.

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Richard Foglesong is the George and Harriet Cornell Professor of Politics, Emeritus, at Rollins College and author of *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*, *Planning the Capitalist City*, and *Immigrant Prince: Mel Martinez and the American Dream*. He was the first recipient of Rollins's Bornstein Scholar Award honoring the faculty member whose scholarship has contributed most to the national reputation of the college. He is a frequent commentator on local and national politics and a political analyst for ABC affiliate WFTV 9 in Orlando.

Image: Walt Disney points to the location of the proposed Disney World development, a 43-square-mile land parcel sixteen miles southwest of Orlando. This 1966 photo comes from the last filmed presentation by Disney. Copyright 1966, Walt Disney Productions, courtesy of the Orange County Regional History Center.

The Mouse That Roared Quietly

With secrecy worthy of a spy novel, Walt Disney set his sights on Orlando.

Richard Foglesong

ON NOVEMBER 22, 1963, Walt Disney and an entourage of his top executives flew from Tampa to Orlando searching for an East Coast Disneyland site. The night before they had checked into a Tampa hotel under assumed names to avoid tipping off the press and stirring up land speculation. Reports Walt had read on “Project Winter,” as it was code-named, could take him only so far. Ever the artist, he needed to visualize the possibilities for himself.

Disney was close to selecting an expansion site after considering thirteen locations in the eastern United States. An early favorite, Niagara Falls, was rejected because its winter cold would prevent the park’s year-round operation. Walt wanted to avoid having a seasonal workforce, fearing that carnival-type workers like those in existing amusement parks would corrupt the family atmosphere he sought to achieve. So the search turned to Florida, with its natural advantages of sunshine and water.

As the plane circled south of Orlando, Walt looked down, saw the confluence of Interstate 4, then under construction, and Florida’s Turnpike and exclaimed: “That’s it!” What sold Disney were the roads crisscrossing beneath him that were needed to import tourists from afar to make their business plan work. Florida had fewer residents than the Los Angeles region surrounding Disneyland, yet Walt and his executives envisioned a pleasure palace ten times the size of Disneyland. It would not be a Florida theme park so much as an East Coast tourist spa, located in Florida.

From Orlando, the entourage flew west along the Gulf coast to New Orleans, where the members disembarked for the night. During the cab ride to their hotel they learned from the radio that President Kennedy had been shot. It was a fateful

Editor’s note: Excerpted from Richard Foglesong’s 2001 book *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando* (Yale University Press). Research for the book was supported in part by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, of which Florida Humanities is a state affiliate.



How Disney Became a City State

“It was as though they’d put a gun to our head,” recalls Harlan Hanson, the director of tri-county planning in the Orlando area. “They were offering to invest \$600 million, and there was the glamor of Disney. You could hardly say no. We were all just spellbound.”

The project was Walt Disney World; the year was 1967; the place was Winter Park, outside Orlando, where the poobahs of the state had gathered to hear Disney’s plans for a giant theme park. Highlighting the press conference was a twenty-five-minute color film featuring the last screen appearance by Walt Disney, who had died two months previously. In the film, Walt described Epcot as the “heart” of the Florida project, a vibrant community where 20,000 people would “live and work and play.”

In essence, the Disney Company sought a Vatican with mouse ears, a city-state within the larger state of Florida, controlled by the company yet enjoying regulatory powers legally reserved for popularly elected governments. Said Roy Disney, who now headed the company, “This was something that we would ask for in fairness for coming to Florida.”

To secure state approval, the Disney Company ably plied the old-boy system. An example was a meeting in April 1967 between J. J. Griffin, a former state representative who became a Disney lobbyist, and Verle Pope, the powerful president of the Florida Senate. In the private meeting, Griffin tried to explain the complex Disney charter when Pope stopped him short: “J. J.,” he said, “is this good for Florida?” In response, Griffin said, “Yes sir, I believe it is.” Said Pope, “Well, that’s good enough for me.”

With Pope on board, the legislation sailed through the senate, passing unanimously and without debate in May 1967. In the house there was one dissenting vote, from Miami. Less than an hour later, the State Road Board approved emergency funding for Disney’s road requests.

Cinderella’s Castle is a symbol of Walt Disney World, 2018. Photo by Matt Clare, Creative Commons license, Flickr.

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Nila Do Simon is a writer and editor whose work has appeared in *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Marie Claire*, the *New York Times*, *Garden and Gun*, *Philadelphia Style*, *Miami Magazine*, *Flamingo Magazine*, *Alaskan Airlines*, and *Bostonmagazine.com*, among other outlets. She is the founding editor-in-chief of *Venice* magazine and the custom publications *Botaniko*, *1926*, and *Florida Panthers' CATS*. Her work has received top honors, including for feature and headline writing by the Florida Magazine Association.

Image: Dr. Joshua Simon savors off-duty moments with daughter Fallyn and son Adrian, 2020. Courtesy of Nila Do Simon.

A Lesson in the Pandemic

Teaching our young daughter to cope when Dad was on Covid-19's frontlines.

Nila Do Simon

IF I'M LUCKY, the most exciting part of my day of the past three sheltering-at-home months happens around 7 p.m. If fortune is on my side, my husband comes home from work then. Sure, I love the shift change, when I can clock out from my work-from-home life with our three-year-old daughter and one-year-old son and hand the keys to their entertainment schedule over to Daddy. But that's not all.

Because when my husband arrives home, for about twelve seconds I get to see my kids showing borderline-animalistic joy. The moment the garage door rolls up and sends vibrations through the house, my children start squealing. My daughter usually drops her activity of the moment like it's on fire to jump and yell, "Daddy!" That yelp triggers her one-year-old hoss of a brother to break out into a staccato-y jig and ogre-walk to meet Daddy at the entryway.

When Daddy emerges, I imagine it's like the Beatles arriving in America. Pandemonium breaks. My son rhythmically shouts, "Da-Da, Da-Da" in between giggling, and my daughter can't stop shrieking with glee. I wordlessly stand witness, not interjecting, adding or taking away from the excitement because I know that as much as I enjoy watching these seconds, my husband exponentially lives for it even more.

But many days I don't get lucky. Out of those ninety-some quarantine days, I haven't seen this level of joy from my kids in about half of them. That's because Daddy isn't able to come home. As both a general and trauma surgeon who covers the ICU, he's been caring for Covid-19 patients as the number of cases in Florida steadily climbs. As in most households, Covid-19 has resulted in a severe disturbance in our lives. My husband's work hours have always been long and intense. Covid-19 has stretched them.

But he and other medical professionals have trained for these extreme hours and situations on both skill and emotional levels. It's their kids who have not.

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Maude Heurtelou is vice president of Educavision Inc., which publishes Haitian-related educational materials for use in the Caribbean and North America. She is also an author, storyteller, and motivational speaker. She and her family currently live in the Fort Lauderdale area.

What You See When You Look at Me

A Haitian immigrant meets her neighbors.

Maude Heurtelou

“IT’S AMAZING how you have become Americanized so quickly!”

I was stunned by this comment. Did my American neighbor see America in me? What part of me had become American “so quickly”? My husband and I had been in the United States for only about a year. I was still adjusting, looking for the right job, thinking of my dream house, and building a social life.

I was from Haiti. I was in my thirties and had already been an immigrant twice before, once in Guatemala, where I studied nutrition for four years as a fellow of the World Health Organization, and the second time for six years in Quebec, Canada, where I graduated with a master’s degree in public health. In both cases, I had planned to return to Haiti. But in 1985, as the sociopolitical instability was boiling hot there and some of our friends were getting concerned for their safety, we decided to contemplate advanced university degrees in the United States—and possibly settle in for the long run.

It was my idea to move to Florida, the state that most reminds me of Haiti in terms of weather, flora, and multicultural life. Little did we know that many years later our daughter, Mia, would be raised here and would call Florida home.

My husband and I had much to learn about America. But among the first things we did upon our arrival in Tampa was to join a Haitian civic club. There we found people of all ages, grandma storytellers, grandpas playing cards and dominoes, children and grandchildren swimming and joking. The members of my generation became cultural bridges between our parents, who came from Haiti, and our children, who were born in America. We spoke to people in a blend of Creole, French, and English, depending on how long ago the person had left Haiti and how comfortable he or she was with one of those three languages. We taught Haitian folklore to the children. We also shared sweet memories of Haiti and compared our experiences in America.

But I was also eager to have a multicultural social life in America. A few weeks after arriving in our new home we became acquainted with Sheila and Chris (not

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A police reporter for the *Miami Herald* for eighteen years, **Edna Buchanan** won the Pulitzer Prize in 1986. She went on to write eighteen books, including a fictional series about an intrepid Miami reporter and nonfiction accounts that include her best-selling true-crime memoir, *The Corpse Had a Familiar Face* (Random House, 1987). The *Los Angeles Times* dubbed her the “queen of crime.” Buchanan was the 2017 recipient of Florida Humanities Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. This story is based on her acceptance speech.

Muse over Miami

How a hopeless kid from New Jersey became South Florida’s “Queen of Crime.”

Edna Buchanan

AT AGE FOUR I told everyone I would write books when I grew up. I was hooked on the stories my mother read to me. When she became too busy, I wandered the neighborhood, book in hand, and asked strangers to read to me. They were all too busy, even the mailman. So I decided I had to learn to read. Fast.

My textbooks were the newspapers my father read for the race results. I’d carry them down the street and read news stories to my grandmother at her kitchen table. She could not read English and was always shocked by the content. We lived in north Jersey, where I spent all my nickels on the *New York Daily News*, *Mirror*, and the *Journal American*. That is where I met the dark heroes of my childhood. Eagerly I followed the careers of Willie (the Actor) Sutton, the Babe Ruth of bank robbers; George Metesky, the mad bomber who terrorized New York; and Lucky Luciano, the man who organized the mob. Years later I interviewed two of them.

My goal: fiction. It was not easy. My mother was seventeen when I was born. My father took off forever when I was seven. Nearsighted and clumsy, I didn’t mingle with other kids because my mom worked two jobs and I took care of everything else. I wore hand-me-downs that coworkers gave to my mother. I was laughed at, with good reason, and hated school.

An elementary school math teacher said, in front of the entire class, that I’d be nothing, not even a good housewife, since I’d be unable to count my change at the supermarket or measure ingredients for a recipe. I was so humiliated I never forgot her words. But recipes are not my strong suit, and I *never* count my change at the supermarket. I use credit cards.

Two gifts brightened my childhood: reading, and my seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Tunis. She said, in front of the entire class, that I could write, and asked the question that changed my life, forever: “Will you promise to dedicate a book to me someday?”

That triggered my eleven-year-old mind, and I began trying to sell short stories to the *Saturday Evening Post*. I showed Mrs. Tunis my first rejection slip and asked

I showed Mrs. Tunis my first rejection slip and asked why they didn't buy my story. She explained that it would be the first of many rejections but that I should never, ever give up, because someday I would write books. She was right.

why they didn't buy my story. She explained that it would be the first of many rejections but that I should never, *ever* give up, because someday I *would* write books. She was right.

The Corpse Had a Familiar Face, published in 1987, was dedicated to Mrs. Tunis. She never knew. She died at forty-eight, when I was in the eighth grade. But Mrs. Tunis is still alive to me and always will be.

We moved frequently; I changed schools often. The summer I was twelve, I worked in a sweatshop, a coat factory where my mother operated a sewing machine. My job was to turn the long, fuzzy winter coats right side out after they'd been sewn together. Fuzz and lint swirled all around me.

When my mom felt too exhausted to report to her midnight shift, I'd go instead. I worked in a candle factory and an all-night sandwich shop. No one objected. At sixteen, I was old enough to sell socks at Woolworth's and baby clothes at W. T. Grant—and work as a telephone solicitor for a department store's photo studio,

Edna Buchanan with typewriter.
Courtesy of Edna Buchanan.



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Bill Belleville (1945–2020) was an award-winning environmental writer and documentary filmmaker who was the author of seven books, including *Losing It All to Sprawl: How Progress Ate My Cracker Landscape* (University Press of Florida, 2006) and *The Peace of Blue: Water Journeys* (University Press of Florida, 2014), and more than 1,000 articles and essays in publications such as *Audubon*, *Outside*, *Sports Afield*, *Oxford American*, *New York Times*, *Parade*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Denver Post*, and *Salon.com*.

Florida's Deep-Blue Destiny

From the depths of a spring it is clear, we lose connection with the state's waterways at our peril.

Bill Belleville

I AM SOMEWHERE inside the vortex of Blue Springs, way past the “Prevent Your Death: Go No Farther” sign at 60 feet, and far beyond the muted glow of surface light.

The river that Blue feeds has been gradually warming, and the warm-blooded manatees that winter here have just left. Except for a few snorkelers back up in the shallow run, my dive buddy and I are alone in the spring.

The only illumination down here is portable, hand-held. And like the trail of exhaust bubbles from my regulator, it tethers me to the surface with my own limitations. Scuba tanks, face masks, containers of light, they are all reminders of how unsuited we humans are to immerse ourselves in the most primal and universal element of all.

Here, near the 120-foot-deep bottom of this limestone chasm, I am as aware as I have ever been of the pervasive power and magic of water. All but invisible, it arises from a slot in the rock, flailing me like a rag doll with its energy.

If underground water is the veins and capillaries that sustain our Florida physiography, then I am squarely inside a natural incision, a place where the liquid transports itself to the surface, where science meets myth and culture head on. Naturalist William Bartram sat on the banks of Blue once and later wrote in wonder of the “diaphanous fountain” that surged just below. He wrote likewise about Salt and Manatee Springs. In all of his travels, nothing seemed to touch him as fully. His descriptions inspired the romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge to write of Kubla Khan, “where Alph the sacred river ran, through caverns measureless to man.” I would give all I have if Bartram could be next to me today, could feel the full sway of this natural “ebullition” down here inside of Alph.