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BOOK REVIEW

The Everglades: River of Grass.

By Marjory Stoneman Douglas

(New York : Rhinehart and Company, 1947.

pp. 406. \$3.50)

The publication of Mrs. Douglas's volume on the Everglades marks the third study of Florida's natural waterways in the Rivers of America series. With the previously published books on the Suwanee and the St. Johns, the Everglades volume ranks Florida with Virginia as another state to be thrice honored.

The inclusion of the Everglades in a series depicting the history and folklore of a river may seem incongruous, but before reclamation the Everglades formed the third, or downstream unit, of the Kissimmee River-Lake Okechobee-Everglades watershed extending two hundred fifty miles through the interior of Florida from Orlando to the southern end of the state at the Gulf of Mexico.

In her description of the nature of the Everglades and its people Mrs. Douglas has dug deeply into the voluminous, academic, and oftentimes dull literature of the physical sciences of geology, biology, botany, archeology, and anthropology. To say that she has succeeded in accurately portraying, in pen pictures, the natural features of this singular region would be damning a master craftsman with faint praise. Even the casual reader will sense that this talented artist has seen the Everglades during all the seasons and in all kinds of weather; but to one who has lived in southern Florida her descriptions are nature itself.

In the treatment of the ancient peoples of the general area of the Everglades the author has distilled an essence from the available sources, making a narrative of compelling interest. Though much more archeological research is needed before the true picture of aboriginal man in Florida can be drawn, the extent and continuity of the author's narrative are excellent. It should be borne in mind, as Mrs. Douglas admits, that these people

lived on the fringes of the Everglades along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Seemingly it remained for the late arriving Seminoles to become the first residents in an area almost totally inhospitable to man in its natural state.

The exploits of the discoverers and adventurers along the shores of Florida, though interesting, have been told time and again, and the reader, after he has followed De Leon, De Soto, Narvaez, Menendez, the Catholic fathers, and Jonathan Dickenson through many pages, will agree with the author that they are "only remotely connected with the Everglades." The truth is that the Everglades were virtually unsung and even unknown from the time of the few sixteenth century experiences of Fontaneda until the 1840's when the armed forces of the United States entered them in pursuit of the Seminoles. The section of the volume dealing with the background, fighting, and indefinite results of the Seminole wars accurately relate the dishonorable record of our treatment of these Indians about whom Grant Foreman wrote that there was "perhaps no blacker chapter" in American history.

As Mrs. Douglas develops her story of the Everglades through the latter half of the nineteenth century much matter extraneous to the Everglades is introduced. Long references are made to subjects extending from the islands of the Gulf below Everglades City and the fugitives that inhabited them to the establishment of the city of Miami on one coast and the Koreshan Unity at Estero on the other coast. Although the miscellaneous matter dealing with settlements on the New, Miami, and Caloosahatchee rivers is quite interesting, these "goings on" took place on the periphery of the Everglades at best. The abundance of such material leads one to recall that under natural conditions these rivers had their source in the Everglades and that a title "The Everglades : Mother of Rivers" might be appropriate.

The modern phase of Everglades history begins with the administrations of Governors Jennings and Broward

and Mrs. Douglas adequately covers the political machinations which were a part of the fight made by the State to secure the area from the land grant railroad and timber companies. While mention is made of the land sales, such as those to Bolles and Davie, many readers would like a little more detail on the fanfare which accompanied the highly speculative land boom, on the Ft. Lauderdale land lottery, on the hardships of life in the first settlements such as Okeelanta, and on the fishing industry which flourished under such operators as the Brently brothers at Chancy Bay.

A number of references are made to the most active of the Everglades pioneers, Thomas Elmer Will (not Wills, as on page 323, *et passim.*), but apparently the author overlooked or by-passed the extensive and unequalled collection of historical material of every kind left by Dr. Will. This collection is the most prolific source of information on the Everglades from 1910 to 1935. It should be noted here that Will did not write the collection of papers which Senator Duncan U. Fletcher had published as Senate Document 89 of the first session of the Sixty-second Congress. Will was employed by ex-Governor Jennings and Senator Fletcher to assist in the compilation of the document. In this connection, the much-discussed James O. Wright drainage report was surreptitiously published in the document and became the "cause celebre" of the Everglades hearings conducted by the House Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Agriculture in 1912. These forty-three hearings produced over 1,700 pages of testimony, a first-rate primary source on the Everglades drainage scheme and consequent land boom.

The statement made on page 386 that "there is little source material on the Everglades despite all the descriptive writing" should be questioned, as the material available is voluminous, there being well over one hundred federal, state, and local documents pertaining to the area, not to mention several manuscript collections and

a number of newspaper files that contain a great deal of material.

A few errors, particularly in names, should be noted, for example : Francis Voss should be Francis Vose ; F. C. Elliott should be F. C. Elliot; V. G. Dahlberg should be B. G. Dahlberg ; J. J. Connors should be J. W. Connors ; Thomas E. Wills Jr. should be Lawrence E. Will. Many readers will realize that the incline of the rock below the Everglades from Okeechobee to the Gulf is a great deal less than a half a mile each six miles and, that 18,000 deaths in the hurricane of 1928 should be 1,800. The dredges *Everglades* and *Caloosahatchee* did not begin operations in November, 1905; the former was not launched until mid 1906, and the latter until well into 1909.

Despite such minor errors Mrs. Douglas has made an outstanding contribution to the growing body of published Floridiana, one that is greatly needed. She has captured and glowingly depicted the romance and history of the whole of Southern Florida and has preserved for posterity a highly readable record of fact and folklore.

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