

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 35
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 35,
Issue 2

Article 7

1956

Book Review: Freedom River: Florida 1845

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Recommended Citation

Gregory, Agnes (1956) "Book Review: Freedom River: Florida 1845," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 35: No. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol35/iss2/7>

Freedom River: Florida 1845. By Marjory Stoneman Douglas.
(New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953. 264 pp. Illustrations. \$3.00)

FREEDOM RIVER, one of the first books published in "The Strength of the Union" series, like the others develops the theme of building the Union and the contribution which each state brought to it. Although this book is intended for teenagers the authenticity of background and the quality of writing are such that adults will read it with enjoyment.

The story takes us back to 1845, that memorable period when the territory of Florida had to decide whether to enter the Union as one state or two; slave state or free. In the foreward the author provides the historical setting and sets forth the political problems involved.

Against this background we have an absorbing chronicle of the friendship of three boys: Richard, son of a white settler; Billy Micco, a Seminole Indian; and Eben, a Negro slave. Each boy evolves as a distinct individual. As the story develops we see each of them working out his own particular problem. Richard, who studies at the Big Plantation with Mr. Fitzpatrick's two daughters under the tutelage of Mr. Turner, looks forward to the day when he can go to college. From a rather thoughtless and carefree boy we see him develop into a mature young man accepting the responsibility of making his own decisions. Billy Micco approaching manhood must, as is the custom of the Seminoles, fast and pray to the Great Spirit as he prepares for the Green Corn Dance. Eben, who has escaped from a slaver and landed on a deserted island, is found and claimed by Richard. He is treated kindly and given a modicum of freedom in Richard's home but longs, nevertheless, to gain full freedom. He runs away and joins the Indians in the Everglades, but at the end of the story we find him setting out in a boat made of a hollow log, seeking his own people in the Bahamas.

The three boys, each speaking a different language, find a basis for friendship in their mutual love of the out of doors. Memorable events in the story are the deer hunt where Richard proves his stamina in keeping up with the Indian and Negro; the making of the indigo, with Eben recalling from his misty memory

the exact process; the picnic held in celebration of the news that Florida had been accepted into the Union as one slave state; and the Green Corn Dance of the Seminoles witnessed by Richard and Eben.

This vigorously written account of an important era in the history of Florida will kindle the enthusiasm and fire the imagination of any one who reads it and will recreate the atmosphere much more adequately than a text book. Mrs. Douglas shows an admirable understanding of the life and history of the time and in her vivid descriptions of Florida wildlife her own love of nature comes through clearly on almost every page.

The format is good: clear typography, sturdy binding and excellent paper. Colorful end papers and black and white illustrations by Edward Shenton enhance the attractiveness of the book.

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