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Editor's Preface

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Editor's Preface

Serials

This issue of the *Florida Historical Quarterly* is dedicated to the exploration and consideration of political and economic relations between black and white Floridians in the first half of the twentieth century. Articles by Jon Evans, Pam Iorio, Leonard R. Lempel, and Raymond A. Mohl examine the attitudes and actions that shaped racial life in Tallahassee, Tampa, Daytona Beach, and Miami, respectively. Following the articles, David H. Jackson Jr., Glenda Alice Rabby, and Clarence Taylor elaborate on the themes of the articles, offering ideas about how early twentieth-century Florida fits into American and southern history, and the lessons we can take from our racial past.

Special thematic issues on controversial questions concerning race, class, or gender are often risky ventures for an editor. Many readers consider such projects too liberal or even radical in their implications. Others, with ancestry in the Sunshine State, view authors' conclusions as condemnations of the actions and attitudes of their grandparents or parents. Still others are just uncomfortable with the subject. Indeed, among the many responses to a recent survey of the *Quarterly's* membership, there was stated disapproval of the "emphasis on minorities like women, blacks, Indians," the move toward "political correctness," and the "inclusion of race and sex . . . as a political undercurrent." These are all understandable criticisms, arising from discomfort with an apparent attack on the status quo that articles on race, class, and gender so often seem to epitomize. Many readers become angered or uncomfortable with historians who seem determined to emphasize the "negative" aspects of our collective past.

But since the 1960s, historians have increasingly attended to such themes because they illuminate the reasons for the shape and content of our own contemporary society. While there is nothing

wrong with history as an activity of story-telling, the purpose of history has become more complex than mere entertainment. History has become the lens through which we define ourselves—who our ancestors were and therefore who we are, how we and our families are rooted in a community, and how our communities are part of a nation and the world.

Any publication that aspires to reflect the cutting edge of Florida, southern, and American history, then, must occasionally provide a platform for more controversial ideas and take a critical perspective on the region's past. True, our collective identity is found in the grand story of the creation and development of a nation dedicated to freedom, individualism, and hope. But the lessons of history are found as well in the unpleasant and uneasy stories of those who were deprived those same aspirations. My desire is that all readers will approach the articles objectively, seeking in the contributors' ideas and conclusions opportunities to consider the shaping of Florida, the South, and the United States. In sending forth this issue, I invite readers to share thoughts on its contents, on the themes addressed, and on the ways that "Reconsidering Race Relations in Early Twentieth-Century Florida" illustrates an expanding vision for the study of our collective histories and cultures.

Craig Thompson Friend