

## Transcript

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, is made possible in part by the Department of State Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida. It's also made possible by the Jessie Ball du Pont fund and by the historic Rossiter House Museum and Gardens in Eau Gallie celebrating pioneer history, the natural environment and women's history. Available for weddings and events at [rossiterhousemuseum.org](http://rossiterhousemuseum.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, on the web at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org). I'm Ben Brotemarkle and coming up on the program, Walt Disney World is Florida's largest employer and for more than half a century has successfully operated its own government.

### **Rick Foglesong**

That's one of the ways in which the Disney company has been able to control their own fate and become this ten-thousand pound gorilla that dominates Central Florida politics and to some large extent, Florida politics as well.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

We'll discuss new digital exhibits from the RICHES Digital Archiving project.

### **Connie Lester**

The advantage for a digital archive is that items can be mapped, the relationships between them are easier to see and we can create small exhibits with items from the collections.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

And we'll talk about Florida fashion all that ahead on Florida Frontiers. For better and for worse, Walt Disney World has been open in Florida for 50 years. Rick Voglesong is professor emeritus of political science at Rollins College in Winter Park, where he taught courses on national politics, urban politics, and urban policy. He's the author of the books, *Married to the Mouse*, *Walt Disney World and Orlando*, published by Yale University Press.

### **Rick Foglesong**

Well, you know, the Disney company first looked at Ocala as the site for what they called their East Coast Disneyland. They chose Orlando over Ocala because we had better road linkages. And you could argue that Orlando might be Ocala or a place like it or maybe Lakeland had Disney not come. I might focus my remarks on the economy then and now at the time when Disney came, Orlando had an economy that was a two-legged stool, a term a metaphor often used. It had citrus and it had the military with the presence of the Martin company here in the US missile Test Center Cape Canaveral. Those had their problems freezes would burn the citrus crops and the military industry. Military industrial complex if you will, was subject to budget problems from time to time and so there was a hope on the part of local leaders that they could bring a third industry to this area that would give us a three legged stool and they got that for a while with Disney World in that they brought a new industry, tourism to this area

and tourism had never been in the central part of the state. The tourism industry had always been concentrated on the coast. But Walt Disney invented something, the theme park that attracted people to a man-made environment, not just the beach and the water that had historically attracted people, I think, but for Disney coming here. Had they never come we would not have a tourism-based economy. Now I don't think that ever would have happened. Because I think people would have continued to come to Florida for the same historical reasons for the beach, for the water, for the climate.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

To entice Walt Disney to bring his theme park here, the state of Florida allowed the Disney company to form its own government, called the Reedy Creek Improvement District.

### **Rick Foglesong**

The Disney company did not like what had happened in California around Disneyland. They only bought 230 acres there and so they couldn't control their periphery. And there were two things that they wanted when they came to Florida. One was a green belt surrounding the built-up park. So that meant they wanted to buy a lot more land than they had bought in California. And the second was that they wanted to have their own private government because in Anaheim, CA, they didn't control the government, they had political influence, but they didn't control what it did, and they didn't like its growth controls or lack of growth controls. And so here they wanted to have a government that they could control. The key to the success of Disney World, I think is well, first, creativity, ok, let's give the Disney company credit there. But second, they wanted that buffer surround warning them and therefore they got privatization to use a modern term for government would rely on a private business in order to provide public services. And the second was deregulation, that they could provide their own building inspectors that they would be immune to external zoning that was really key to them. One of the drawbacks of the Central Florida location was that Orange County had recently when they came, adopted a comprehensive zoning ordinance and that scared them. They wanted immunity from that. And so, they told the state of Florida that they were going to build a city, a going city where 20,000 people would live and work and play. And in order to make that, they would need privatization where they could provide public services under themselves, and they would need deregulation, that is to control the kind of regulations that local government normally provides. And they got that and to go on just a little bit more, what that did really was to concrete ties in time the unequal bargaining relationship between the Disney company and the surrounding governments. It was an unequal relationship at the time because Disney was a big deal and Florida was not yet that attractive a place to live and do business. And so, Florida threw a lot of blandishments at the Disney company, gave them everything that they wanted. And the result is that when you have Fast forward 50 years, guess what, they still have those controls over their own destiny, something that I'm sure the Universal Company theme park that they would like to have, that other Florida developers would like to have, but they don't have it. And that's one of the ways in which the Disney company has been able to control their own fate and become this ten-thousand-pound gorilla that dominates Central Florida politics and to some large extent Florida politics as well.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Through the Reedy Creek Improvement District, the Disney company is empowered to build its own airport and a nuclear power plant, Foglesong.

### **Rick Foglesong**

That's right. They're still subject to federal regulation, but as far as state law is concerned, they have that power. And by the way, any other company that bought their land, you go back 10 years. Comcast was talking about a leveraged buyout of the Disney company, then Comcast, a company with less of a public name would own that land. And if they own the land then they would control the government as well and they could use it as they chose. Or they could divide up the land to maybe as no name kind of companies that wouldn't have the same public image concerns that the Disney company has and that's one of the Achilles heels of the Disney company that has motivated them to be somewhat responsible over the years, less bad stories be written about them in the national or international media and thereby harm that important public image that they have favorable public image that they have to some very large extent.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Despite the popular attraction, It's a Small World which celebrates diversity. Disney has been criticized for a lack of inclusiveness, which the company has acknowledged and is working to address. Rick Foglesong says that Disney's biggest problems have more to do with class than race.

### **Rick Foglesong**

The problem with our overreliance on tourism is that it's associated, at least in the Florida case, I'll come back to that, in the Florida case with low wages, we have a smaller percentage of jobs and manufacturing today than we did in the 1980s and 1990s. Only Las Vegas and the United States has more reliance on retail services on the service economy now service work is not inherently low wage. If you look at California and the movie industry and entertainment, if you look at Las Vegas, you find high wage jobs that are part of the service sector. The difference in a word is labor unions. Florida is a right to work state, it is very difficult to organize the labor union in this state. In the case of California and the entertainment industry, heavily unionized in the case of Las Vegas, heavily unionized. There, someone can work in tourism and entertainment and have a living family wage but not here in Florida at Disney World. So that's the challenge I think for Central Florida is to move on up the ladder of economic. Revolution to produce higher value-added products where we're not so reliant upon tourism and just quickly here there's a saying among some economic historians about half dependence. That where you start from an economic evolution determines where you can get to, and some places you can't get to from where you start and that's the question whether Central Florida can evolve beyond tourism or not. I think the record of the last 20 years suggests that we may be stuck with Disney and tourism.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Rick Foglesong is the author of the book, *Married to the mouse Walt Disney World and Orlando*. He participated in the panel discussion 50 years of Walt Disney World as part of the Florida Historical Society Virtual Public History Forum, accessible online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle. Visit US online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org) to find out about the Florida Historical Society 2022 Public History Forum and the 33rd annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Conference being held May 19th through 21st and Gainesville. The event features panel discussions on a variety of topics, tours of historic sites and museums, and much more. More information at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org).

Joining us now is Connie Lester, associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES Digital Archiving project and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. Connie, every week I introduce you as director of the RICHES Digital Archiving project, but we haven't said a whole lot about that project. I know that you recently opened a new digital exhibit space and now have your first exhibit. Can you tell us about it?

### **Connie Lester**

As the two projects, RICHES and the Bending Towards Justice project can become a little confusing, I'll start by trying to explain the differences. RICHES is a digital archive where we collect documents, maps and images and organize them in collections the same way physical archives do. The advantage for a digital archive is that items can be mapped, the relationships between them are easier to see and we can create small exhibits with items from the collections. An example would be our collection of wiki watching material. You can view each item separately, listen to the oral histories, see how those items relate to other items in the collections, and there is also a small image and text exhibit in RICHES. That interprets the mermaid experience within the context of women's history and labor history in the mid 20th century. In 2019, the RICHES team began to consider the creation of a larger exhibit space, separate from the archive but drawing on the material within the archive. It would be an exhibit space that would be interactive and have more functionality than the archival exhibit space. Two projects that already involve the RICHES team shaped the new exhibit space. For two years the students in my economic history class had been working in Orlando's Paramore neighborhood, a historically black community mapping the black businesses in the mid 20th century. Second, the truth and justice project of Orange County invited RICHES to serve as the archive for their materials the group was collecting on the Ocoee massacre. The 100th anniversary of that event was rapidly approaching. Together, the two projects pushed the team to think more broadly about the creation of an interactive exhibit space we named Bending Toward Justice. The exhibit space will house multiple exhibits on black life in Central Florida. The title of the space bending toward Justice Harkins to the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement. The Ark of History is long, but it bends toward justice. Those were words spoken by Theodore Parker, the abolitionist minister, in 1853. Martin Luther King Junior modified the quote during the civil rights movement when he proclaimed the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. The abolitionists and the civil rights activists directly confronted injustice to bend the Ark. The quote, however, can also be interpreted to mean that patience and a passive wait for justice will be rewarded. Others interpret this quote to mean that justice is conferred by those of superior moral, political, or social status on those less fortunate. The Bending Towards Justice digital exhibit project builds on a different interpretation. The exhibits planned and presented in this digital space, document the ways in which black individuals and communities. Bent the arc toward justice through their everyday lives and under extraordinary conditions, choosing Bending Towards Justice as the title of the multi-year digital project and adding the subtitle documenting the struggle for political, economic and social equality to find the parameters in important way. First, the project recognizes an arc that begins with slavery and continues into the present and acknowledges the moments that define steps, bending that arc toward justice. Second, justice is the most difficult word of the title. Dialogues on the concept of justice and what defines it for succeeding generations will be embedded in the material presented in the exhibit. And third, incorporating the struggle for political, social and economic goals suggests that the struggle itself is one that cannot be limited to the achievement of a single outcome that fully equality incorporates all aspects of individual and Community life. Bending Towards Justice has completed its

first digital exhibit, with two additional exhibits under construction. The first exhibit is titled Voting Rights and Voter Suppression. The next two exhibits will be opened in phases. The second exhibit is titled Black Capitalism. Its first phase will focus on black entrepreneurship and paramour and will include an interactive visualization that shows the effects of the construction of I4 and state Road Four O 8 on the viability of the neighborhood. The visualization is being constructed with funding through an Iron Mountain community engagement grant. Additional black communities will be added in future phases of this exhibit. A third exhibit will bring together the large collection of oral histories conducted in multiple black communities. This exhibit will be titled, This is my Story. Future plans include exhibits on the black school and the Black Church.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie, there are voting restrictions being voted into law throughout the country. Tell us more about the first exhibit on voting rights and voting suppression.

### **Connie Lester**

The right to vote is fundamental to American citizenship, but even after emancipation and the establishment of black citizenship in the three Reconstruction Era, constitutional amendments and the 13th, 14th and 15th and the 19th amendment in the early 20th century, acknowledging women's right to vote. Blacks faced violent pushback and legal restrictions against voting, holding offices, serving on juries and other activities associated with citizenship. This exhibit uses the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Ocoee massacre to highlight the long history of voting rights and voter suppression. Phase one of the exhibit explores the Ocoee massacre as a case study of violent voter suppression. It places Ocoee within the context of national and international events that made the election of 1920 especially fraught in the South and in Florida. Blacks in Ocoee owned homes and productive land. They built churches and schools, established fraternal organizations, and served in the military during World War One. Like blacks across Florida, they went to the polls confident in their right to cast their ballots. The violence that ensued destroyed their homes and killed at least five, and perhaps as many as 35 to 60 members of the community. All Blacks were expelled from Ocoee and the town became a sundown town in which no blacks lived from the 1920s until the late 1970s. Phase two of the exhibit looks at the long history of the expansion and contraction of voting rights through constitutional amendments. State and federal legislation and court cases that continue into the present. This section also highlights the long period between state and federal office holding by Florida blacks in the late 19th century and the election of blacks to the same offices in the late 20th century, decades after the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Phase three focuses on commemoration. Of the Ocoee massacre in 2020, during another contentious election, the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Documenting public exhibits, public presentations and discussions, local and state government actions, newspaper coverage, podcasts and documentary films and commemorative events. This phase of the exhibit invites a broader discussion on the meaning of Ocoee and voting rights. Although the exhibit is complete, the exhibit team anticipates that other artifacts may be added as they become available. We know, for example, that a future special issue of the Florida Historical Quarterly will focus on Ocoee 100 years later. The articles in that issue of the FHQ will be added to phase three after publication.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie, where can we find the multifaceted bending towards justice digital exhibit? Where can that be seen?

**Connie Lester**

The exhibit can be found at [bendingtowardjustice.cah.ucf.edu](http://bendingtowardjustice.cah.ucf.edu).

**Ben Brotemarkle**

And unfortunately, we're still facing many challenges to voting rights for all. Thanks, Connie.

**Connie Lester**

You're welcome.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie Lester is associate professor of history at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES digital archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

This is Florida Frontiers. Fashion is relaxed in Florida. Holly Baker has this look at resort wear and swimwear in the state.

**Holly Baker**

After World War Two, South Florida became a top tourist destination and the country's third largest producer of sportswear. The emerging industry focused on the kind of clothing worn on vacation and sunny tropical locations. Doctor Kimberly Voss is a professor of journalism at the University of Central Florida and Orlando. She's also the author of several books, including Newspaper Fashion Editors in the 1950s and 60s, Women Writers of the Runway.

**Kimberly Voss**

Resort wear largely comes from Florida. In fact, many travelers would come down to Miami specifically with empty suitcases so they could take back clothing. And there was a growth on both labor. There's a seamstress work that was in South Florida polyester led to a whole lot of jobs in South Florida and it really. In some ways helped usher in kind of a fifth season if you consider that clothing is often based on. Our traditional Four Seasons resort, where was the one where, if you were lucky enough to live in a place or travel to a place where it was warm in winter, that was one whole new industry that really sprung up from Florida.

**Holly Baker**

As tourism increased in the Sunshine State, the sportswear industry grew, particularly in South Florida. Shopping for the latest in fashion trends became a popular pastime.

**Kimberly Voss**

There was such population growth in Miami or all of South Florida through the Post World War Two years, right, the 1950s and 1960s, you had a strong consumer culture. You had lots of department stores who were really dictating what was significant. What was important? And because that kind of clothing, particularly in the winter months, was so different than the rest of the country, it also meant you got a

lot of magazine coverage of editorial and of course, when it's cold and sad and a little dreary in the middle of winter. Who doesn't want to see the Miami Sun and the bright colors of the pinks and the greens and the oranges? So, it was a very editorial concept too. It made for good pictures. It really has been overlooked, I think in many ways because it isn't say, California or New York, but really, Florida and South Florida specifically made a difference when it came fashion.

### **Holly Baker**

As consumer culture emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, fashion reporters working for newspapers like the Miami Herald became influential. Fashionistas looked to Florida editorials for the latest clothing trends, especially swimwear and resort wear.

### **Kimberly Voss**

The Miami Herald and I would say probably the Saint Pete Times, were the leaders in writing about Florida fashion. Those two newspapers regularly sent their fashion editors to the international and the national fashion shows. Those and that was a pretty big deal when women were rarely even allowed to do much at any newspaper, and suddenly they're world travelers, and in doing so, they were able to explain what was appropriate and what wasn't. And they would kind of translate runway close to their local readers. And it was a real change in time 1950s and 1960s, the 1950s were very much about tradition, even in the middle of summer you would see pictures of models wearing hats and gloves and stockings, it was very much about being ladylike and replicating what it was that your mother and grandmother did.

### **Holly Baker**

Today, consumers do most of their shopping online. But in the 1950s and 1960s, the department store was the center of social life and fashion. Journalists reported on fashion trends in Florida newspapers like the Miami Herald, while department stores carried the latest fashions that the newspapers and magazines advertised, with both working hand in hand to put Florida fashion on the map. Doctor Kimberly Voss.

### **Kimberly Voss**

In newspapers, it's advertising that dictates how big the section is. So, if you sell enough advertising, your section could be very big. And that was often the case for fashion journalism because it was department stores that had so much advertising. So, there was this connection to department stores because they had fashion shows quite often. You would go and have lunch at a department store and watch a fashion show, and then buy the clothes, just talking about the significance of hats they were. Higher fashion shows are devoted to nothing but hats. I mean, that's what a big deal was, and department stores were their own little world. You would go to a department store. They had restaurants, they had furnishings, they had food, candy stores, and of course, clothing. You could get your hair and nails done. It was kind of like its own little world. And in some ways, that was kind of the back and forth between the economy and the local community and their newspaper because all that money that was spent buying advertisements from department stores often went to fund other parts of the newspaper. So, these women were doing everyone at the newspaper a favor, and these department stores were often very reflective of the community that they were in. So, they were called Florida Fashion, and it was that. But these department stores of that era, say post World War Two, the 50s and

the 60s, were very significant and most major metro areas at several department stores. And it was also, often a situation particularly for middle class, upper middle-class women to socialize because going shopping was in the public sphere was much more acceptable than other kinds of activities.

**Holly Baker**

For Florida Frontiers, I'm Holly Baker, public history coordinator for the Florida Historical Society and archivist at the Library of Florida History and Cocoa.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

You've been listening to Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle, please join us right here again next week and find us anytime online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org) and on Facebook. Production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Holly Baker and Connie Lester. The program is edited by John White. Have a great week, I'm Ben Brotemarkle.

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