

*Indian River Lagoon: An Environmental History.* By Nathaniel Osborn. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. ix, 210. \$26.95 cloth.)

The Indian River Lagoon (IRL) is a system of four, interconnected bodies of water that span roughly one third of central and southern Florida's eastern coastline. As a part-terrestrial and part-marine environment, and a meeting place between both fresh and saltwater and temperate and subtropical climes, the IRL is "the most biologically diverse estuarine ecosystem in the United States" (1). Now, in this concise and compelling volume, Nathaniel Osborn has condensed the history of this complex and fragile ecosystem into a case study that is similar in spirit to David McCally's *The Everglades: An Environmental History* (2000). Overall, *Indian River Lagoon* is a text that specialists on South Florida history will read for its rich details and others may examine for its takeaways about how the IRL's history can inform our approach to modern environmentalism.

In *Indian River Lagoon*, Osborn succinctly narrates both the natural and the human history of the IRL, from its origins in the late Pleistocene to the present day. His first chapter takes the reader up to the end of the Second Seminole War (1842). His second chapter narrates the arrival of the mostly white and northern settlers from the Reconstruction and Gilded eras (pre-1890s). These migrants were distinct from the Southern pioneers who lived inland on the peninsula—known as crackers—and the Caribbean pioneers who clung mostly to the keys—known as conchs. Migrants to the Indian River region came with a romantic concept of sublime nature, as well as an ambitious mentality of land development framed by the internal improvements they witnessed along the Upper East Coast and Great Lakes. As such, they were able to do what boosters of the colonial-era had only been able to promise. They made the first significant attempts to alter the ecology of the lagoon system and start creating the concept of a modern Florida.

Osborn's third and fourth chapters form the core of *Indian River Lagoon*. They take the reader from roughly 1881 up to the present day, with notable turning points around 1941 and 2000. Before 1941, the IRL system was mostly defined by work. Humans related to the waterway via the extraction and production of tangible and marketable commodities like salvage, fish, game, boats, and

agriculture. This relationship increased as cars and trains replaced sails and steam engines. After 1941, a new postwar boom in migration combined with suburbanization to turn the ecosystem into an area defined mostly by recreation. Mosquito impoundments and affordable air-conditioning also helped to revive the idea of the Romantic Sublime. Humans now began to relate to the waterway more indirectly through the proliferation of cheap housing and a service-sector economy. This transition from labor to leisure had been largely completed by the year 2000.

Throughout *Indian River Lagoon*, Osborn emphasizes the hybrid nature of the IRL as a place of both ineffable beauty and astonishing horror. He states that, whether by humans creating jet-ties, dams, reservoirs, or causeways, or by nature shifting barrier islands and shoaling or opening up inlets, the IRL has always been an unstable and transitioning environment. Long before septic tanks and canals polluted the IRL with human waste and excess freshwater, the lagoon was a site of hurricanes, freezes, and massive fish kills. The awe of early settlers was almost always tempered by the anxieties they felt toward malaria, mosquitos, isolation, storms, oppressive heat, or the foul smell of decomposing vegetation. The algae blooms of the twenty-first century are only the most recent manifestation of this capricious and often-unforgiving history.

In terms of framing, Osborn has written *Indian River Lagoon* in response to the logic of restoration ecology. This is a movement that has risen to popularity since the 1980s and generally argues for restoring landscapes to a state of previous conditions now perceived as natural. Contrary to this logic, Osborn states that the IRL should not be characterized as a passive, abused terrain in a declensionist story with humans and artifice on one side and nature and stability on the other. Instead, humans should be acknowledged as a "fundamental and legitimate part of nature," (5). Opposing us to nature is based upon the fantasy that the IRL ever had a period in its history not characterized by flux, transition, and instability. As Osborn warns, any attempt to "restore" the system to a "natural" state will be based upon a flawed and arbitrary standard.

Overall, *Indian River Lagoon* is not a simple book about how humans have destroyed the IRL. Rather, it is a nuanced story about how a changing ecosystem and a changing human society have mutually shaped one another. In the end, Osborn's greatest contribution lies in his suggestion that modern restorationists often have more in common with their Gilded Age predecessors

than they might like to imagine. The latter wanted to stabilize the environment in the name of progressive development, while the former wants to do so in the name of progressive conservation. Nonetheless, both believe that the IRL must be stabilized. Both believe that they should be able to control or predict how nature—which includes humans and the environment—will respond to their actions. And both are motivated by an idea of the Romantic Sublime.

Instead of the Gilded Age or modern-restoration mentality, Osborn leaves us with a different message. He asks us to recognize that the imperiled environment we have right now is one shaped by both the vagaries of nature and the creations of man, and that it will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. As such, we would do better to stop thinking about the ways in which human manipulation can be undone in order to save an environment that we think was natural, and start thinking about how it can be better utilized in order to foster the kind of environment that we want now. If we make this change, Osborn writes, then human artifice will have a positive role to play in increasing the biodiversity of ecosystems like the IRL.

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*Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War.* By Carole Emberton. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes index. Pp. 271. \$5.00 cloth.)

Carol Emberton's *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* is intended as a revisionist work. Emberton seeks to demonstrate the limits of History as a discipline when exploring white America's long standing embrace, use, ambivalence, and institutionalization of violence as a viable political tool. Literary theory opens the study of Civil War and Reconstruction violence to the languages of redemption and suffering. Emberton argues that *Beyond Redemption* "is a study of the making of manhood, freedom, and citizenship" from the Civil War to the ascension of Rutherford B. Hayes to the presidency (2). The work is also about white national reconciliation upon the backs and rights of African Americans as the nation searched for ways of