FLORIDA’S SNOWBIRDS
Spectacle, Mobility, and Community since 1945

GODEFROY DESROSIERS-LAUZON
Every year when the temperature drops below freezing, countless northerners do as the thermometers do—head south. Since the end of the Second World War, Florida has been one of the most desired vacation and retirement destinations for generations of “snowbirds.” Florida’s Snowbirds examines the effects of this seasonal migration on both the travelers and the local Floridians.

Developing themes including leisure, state-promoted tourism, citizenship, and business investment, Godefroy Desrosiers-Lauzon considers advertisements, movies, policymakers, and the behaviour of snowbirds to provide a thorough study of the southeastern vacation state. He also looks at the temporary communities of Canadians, Québécois, New Englanders, and Mid-Westerners that develop, showing how they blur the lines that typically divide national and regional identities, and youth and age.

With insight and delightful detail, Desrosiers-Lauzon pieces together a cultural atlas of Florida’s snowbirds that goes far beyond the familiar postcards they send home.

“Desrosiers-Lauzon’s work is original and creative. This is the first book on Florida history—to my knowledge—that offers such a close examination of the snowbirds and their impact on the state and the reader learns much from the snowbird perspective.”

TRACY REVELS, Department of History, Wofford College

“Florida’s Snowbirds makes an important contribution to the new Canadian/United States history, to United States history itself, and to the history and understanding of community and identity-maintenance in general.”

ALLAN SMITH, Department of History, University of British Columbia

GODEFROY DESROSIERS-LAUZON holds a PhD in American history from the University of Ottawa.

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This is a story of the relationship of Florida with the rest of North America since 1945, as mediated by people who went to the Sunshine State from the North, as visitors, tourists, migrants, and snowbirds. I look in detail at snowbirds, the category of Florida-seekers who go south during the winter for longer sojourns than tourists – typically two to six months. Being neither permanent migrants nor (real) tourists, snowbirds are liminal characters, standing on a threshold between the North and South, and thereby able to inform the relationship between the two and cast an enlightening, almost unprecedented light on the great story of Florida dreaming.

As with many Florida stories, this research started from an interest in images of Florida. The palms, the beaches, the dolphin shows, Disney World, Jerry Seinfeld’s parents, mobile homes and others shaped my initial efforts to decode the Sunshine State as an icon. I wondered about the reality behind them, about the interaction of the “real” Florida with the images. The curiosity was shaped by my own gaze: like most northern academics, I have long looked at Florida through a smug, middle-class, proudly Northern lens that captured the images of Florida as mildly repulsive, tainted by crass commercialism, violence, and escapism. Why go there, of all places? I wondered. Merely to escape winter, since there was so little to seek down there? Why would they do that? Winter made Northerners: historically it used to be part of the definition of their identities as Canadians, Yankees, Midwesterners, Québécois – and still is to an extent. The northern winter has been used to explain their drive, ingenuity, and work ethic: I endure, therefore I am.

Yet no Northerner embraces wholeheartedly this uncompromising, climatically determined identity. For instance, most are urban dwellers, and as such consider themselves removed from the worst perils of frostbite. Most Northerners actually have little taste for winter: they embrace the return of spring with an enthusiasm that they recognize as proverbial. Northerners, and Canadians in particular, share a similarly complex – or
layered, or ambivalent, or ambiguous² — relationship with their identity understood in terms of their locality, ethnicity, home states or provinces, or even their "natural" landscape. In this they are like most modern people: feeling different emotions in different contexts; telling different stories to different audiences; using a varied repertoire of postures, statements, and attitudes on the meaning of self, place, and community in order to identify themselves and others while maintaining a sense of belonging, dignity, and personal autonomy.

My typically ambivalent fascination with the images and landscapes of the wintry North and the sunny South, has led me to attempt to understand both the attraction and the repulsion, the lure of the Sunshine State and the burden of northernness, in all their complexity. Why have people escaped winter in such numbers? Why to that particular destination? What can the Florida exodus tell us about the North? What has been the reality of sojourning in the Sunshine State for Northerners? Has the act of going south been a renunciation of Northernness, a denial of birthright? Or has it been rather an act of self-definition where the search for escape from the daily grind and the promise of sensuous pleasure played only a part? But how big a part? Has the act of going south been (yet another) aspect of the layered character of Canadian culture, or have Canadians just acted like their fellow Northerners from the United States, embracing the good life in droves, with a little help from technology and disposable incomes?

My first research journey to Florida struck right at the centre of this ambivalence — the attraction of Florida dawned blissfully on me. At the end of a gruelling, two-day motor coach ride that started in an early-winter Montreal cold snap, the sun rose on Jacksonville, Florida, warming the damp air to a temperature of over twenty degrees Celsius; by the time the bus reached Daytona, it was thirty degrees. Palms and beaches and exotic birds added their own shapes and sounds to the feeling of warmth. In an overwhelming sensuous experience. A few hours later I arrived at my destination: Miami Beach, by the ocean, under a dome of blue sky.

Out of this epiphany emerged a research project that attempted to explain the fascination of Florida, using the trope of a journey. Out of the actual journey that is Florida to so many Northerners, a research project was framed to reflect the journey experientially: from the North to Florida, and back. This book is, therefore, organized in stages: first, the choice to travel to Florida (Why Florida?); second, the "getting there" (How? Did it influence the travellers' worldviews?); third, the "settling there" (How and where did snowbirds settle in Florida?); fourth, the "living it" (How to explain snowbirds' congregation, and their interaction with Floridians?); and finally, the return home (How were snowbirds changed by Florida? Was the North influenced by these sun-seekers?).

On their return, Northerners are usually unsure that they understand Florida. Tourists are aware they may never have experienced the real place, the one known only to locals. Hence most accounts — both tourist and scholarly — write of seeking the real Florida, either tantalizingly out of reach like the Fountain of Youth, or menacingly lurking in the shadows, like a gator in the Everglades. Floridians are quite a sight themselves, delivering a complex human landscape: Southerners, former Northerners, Caribbeans, a few Florida-born, and a fair number of self-appointed Crackers — all of them living testimonies about what life is in the real Florida. Visitors also find reality in the surrounding landscape of canals and levees, streets and highways, commercial strips and malls, mobile home parks and motels, urban skylines and rivers of grass. These visitors may be closer to understanding the real Florida than it appears. According to sociologist Dean MacCannell, sightseeing might be the most readily available way to make sense of modern complexity: it is "a kind of involvement with social appearances that helps the person to construct totals from his disparate experiences.³"

Because Florida is complex, and yet so readily available to an outsider's gaze, scholarship on Florida ought to proceed carefully. From its humble beginnings as a Caribbean trading outpost, as plantation, orchard, pasture, and timberland, and as a winter haven for Northerners, the Sunshine State has grown like kudzu in the subtropical sun. Now, Florida stands for much more than tourism: it has grown to become the fourth most populated state, it hosts a diverse array of international migrants, and it has its own growth and environmental problems, and the vibrant politics that arise from these factors. Florida is a place where modern social innovations and experiments take place, where one might see the future.

Out of the prominence of modern Florida grew a research project that attempts to see the ways in which Floridians have interacted with North America through the medium of visitors to their state, and the ways in which people build communities in Florida. Of all the community-building (and community-deconstructing) taking place in the ever-booming Florida, I focus on the efforts of the snowbirds. In the 1920s, Southerners began calling the migrant workers, hoboes, and labourers who travelled south for the cold season "snowbirds." The term was first applied as well to winter tourists in South Florida in the 1960s.⁴ Snowbirds have had a complex identity: they are tourists because they are sightseers, they are visitors because they interact with Florida and Floridians, they are migrants because they
settle in the state, and are seen as outsiders, yet they are residents because they elect to live in dwellings officially defined as permanent residences – apartments, condos, mobile homes – albeit in a unique, semi-permanent fashion. Finally, snowbirds are community builders, through their unique lifestyle – leisurely but not quite like tourists, with homeownership but unlike permanent residents – and their practice of sociability and mutual help. Not fitting any standard category, snowbirds have often been defined as a step in a tourist life-cycle, from tourist to snowbird to permanent migrant. Thus snowbirds have always been living at the boundaries of different cultures and folkways, at the juncture between accommodations and housing, leisure and workday routine, North and South. Looking at snowbirds sheds light not only on Florida but also on their homelands – the Northeastern and Midwestern United States, as well as Central and Eastern Canada – as well as the links and divergences between them.

Like snowbirds, Florida cries out for scholarly research: both are understudied, peculiar, and hard to classify. Florida is a highly atypical state that came to the national forefront relatively recently, arguably between the 1890s and 1910s, between the foundation of the Royal Poinciana hotel in Palm Beach, and the creation of Miami Beach. Despite its liminality, the Sunshine State nonetheless has stood at the nexus of the most pressing issues in North America since at least the nineteenth century.

First among these issues is community-building in a context of high mobility and spatial fragmentation. As instances of advanced modernity – understood as the complex of attitudes and institutions associated with urban/industrial society – Florida and snowbirds create new meanings to life in our times.

Second, Florida has become one of the world’s most visible nexuses of debate about the management of natural assets given the increasingly divergent demands of real estate, agriculture, recreation, preservation, and natural emergency preparedness.

Third, snowbirds and Florida challenge the meaning of place and Northernness for both Canadians and US Northerners, threatening some of the foundational Canadian and American myths that used to be this continent’s dominant toposophilia – the emotional, sensual relationship between people and the Northern landscapes that has shaped much of North America’s self-perception. By virtue of their movement through space, and their symbolic appropriation thereof, snowbirds show us the agency of “ordinary” people in the definition of region, nation, and culture, and the relations between them, in the space of this whole continent. Snowbirds may also contribute to the development of a refined, complex understanding of
the North American regions, nations, and cultures that they encounter or come from.

Finally, Florida has earned scholarly attention (and deserves more) because it was historically shadowed by the powerful images associated with it. It is a place where the North American society of the spectacle – understood as Guy Debord’s realm of social relations mediated by images – took shape. Arguably, Florida deserves attention because its image-making was unique and important, but stood in the shadows of the icons pouring out of New York City and Hollywood. Most importantly, Florida image-making is unique because it drew the masses to travel and migrate to an accessible yet peculiar and liminal place. By virtue of their numbers, energy, sociability, and community-building, Florida-seekers created their own images and broadcast them as folk culture. Studying Florida images (and their relation to reality) therefore reveals the cultural power of ordinary folk in the context of the North American society of the spectacle.

I want to acknowledge the immense support I received, in the writing of this book, from Professor Donald F. Davis, now retired from the Department of History, University of Ottawa. He has challenged me to ask the big questions, to always situate my work in a big picture, socially and historiographically. He is also a superb writer and an outstanding, engaging pedagogue, as this book shows.

Further thanks go to the faculty and staff of the Department of History of the University of Ottawa, especially Professors Keshen, Gaffield, Stolarik, Kranakis, and Perrier. Florida Dreamers made this book possible in the first place, both intellectually and logistically, especially Professors Gary Mormino and Ray Arsenault of the University of South Florida, Louis Dupont at Paris-Sorbonne, and Rémy Tremblay at Télé-université (Université du Québec à Montréal). Others, throughout Florida, in libraries, archives, and communities, offered kindness and help that was too invaluable to forget, on occasions too numerous to mention here. The editorial staff of McGill-Queen’s University Press have been cheerful, timely, and supportive throughout the publishing process. Further help was provided by the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture.

My final thanks go to my friends and family, and to my life partner, Karine, who has put up with all this.
INTRODUCTION

WHY FLORIDA MATTERS

"Florida was to Americans what America had always been to the rest of the world – a fresh, free, unspoiled start."

Susan Orlean, The Orchid Thief

To most people, Florida means leisure, seaside vistas, and a semitropical climate. This popular meaning of Florida has been constructed over time, arguably since its European discovery in the sixteenth century. Most scholarly portraits of the Sunshine State, historical or otherwise, have attempted to assess and analyze the powerful images this view conjures, and the peculiar society, economy, and culture that allowed and built on these images. The important questions that shape this book thus come from Florida storytelling, and make the history of visitors to Florida important to the understanding of twentieth-century North America.

Historical writing on Florida tourism is relatively recent, and is generally part of accounts of the evolution of contemporary Florida. This body of academic work is very much in phase with Sunbelt scholarship, which highlighted the post-1941 development of the Southern and Southwestern United States as pivotal events in United States history.

Understandably, historians of Florida have shown an interest in the history of local tourism: its importance to the Sunshine State is obvious, if only for the economic growth and immigration it has brought. Between 1950 and 2000, the state’s population of 2.7 million increased sixfold, to the tune of 700 new residents per day. Meanwhile, tourists added their numbers to the permanent population, with a commensurate impact on the state’s resources and economic health. The tourist population, averaged over the course of the year, has added an uncounted six to twelve percent to the state’s permanent population figure since 1950. All the postwar threats to Florida tourism – inflation, hurricanes, violent crime, 9/11 – merely slowed its growth: in 2005, the number of visitors reached 85.8 million – more than foreign visitors to France or Spain – including 2.1 million from Canada and 6.8 million from overseas, about the same number as international visitors
to the Czech Republic, Indonesia, or Brazil. These visitors poured 57 billion dollars into Florida, or ten percent of the gross state product.

Attempts to explain the causes and consequences of this growth have made the recent history of Florida a fertile subfield of the Sunbelt scholarship created by Carl Abbott, David Goldfield, Mike Davis, and others. The term “Sunbelt” comes from social-political commentary, having been coined by political strategist Kevin Phillips in 1969 to describe the social and ideological changes that underscored the emerging Republican majority. Scholars since then have used the term to contrast the Southern and Southwestern regions with the American Midwest and Northeast. Despite being properly criticized for its inaccurate, levelling portrayal of numerous and differentiated subregions, Sunbelt scholarship has had one great strength – its focus on the rapid changes, economic and demographic, that have taken place in the Southern and Western United States since the Second World War.

The Sunbelt story since Pearl Harbor has been one of phenomenal growth, of its causes and its consequences. The causes have included increased geographic mobility, made possible by improvements in transportation technology and infrastructure, and the rise of the affluent society. Throughout the twentieth century, and with accelerating speed since the 1940s, Americans have moved ever faster, and in greater numbers, around their country. The industry of extracting oil to fuel their cars and planes was a powerful contribution to the Sunbelt’s economic growth. Additional reasons for the Sunbelt’s rapid growth have been the commercialization of leisure, spurred by an advertisement industry with growing means and reach, by the rise of a consumer-oriented society (as opposed to a producer-oriented one), by rising disposable incomes, by increasing vacation time, and by old-age pensions. The Sunbelt has been promoted as a desirable place where living is easy, a place where movies and television shows are shot, a place where, with help from local businesses and governments, North Americans can purchase sunshine. Sunbelt growth also hinges on industrial modernization and the search for non-unionized labour, the rise of the service economy, military spending, air conditioning, and the slow but steady increase in the standardization and mechanization of building and construction techniques. In the South, these factors have been framed by the region’s peculiar racial relations. That’s the big picture of the Sunbelt.

But, as scholarship has progressed, regional differences and nuances have appeared in the Sunbelt story, and the older scholarship is increasingly being criticized for lumping together different growth regimes. Sunbelt areas and cities differ from each other in the relative importance and nature of their growth engines. A Florida literature has therefore emerged that sees the state as a unique place, even by Sunbelt standards.

True, most accounts of twentieth-century Florida follow lines similar to Sunbelt scholarship. They start by discussing its impressive growth – demographic, urban and suburban, infrastructural, and economic. This literature was founded by Raymond Arsenault’s St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream (1988), continued in the works of Michael Gannon, and has culminated, for now, in Gary Mormino’s Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams, a 2005 title that aptly sums up the focus of its author and of the Florida classroom of the Sunbelt school.

Scholars of Florida have been scrambling to keep pace, analytically and topically, with their rapidly changing, increasingly contested social environment. Of Mormino’s Land of Sunshine’s nine chapters, one is dedicated to the postwar Great Land Boom, one to tourism, another to retirement migration, and one to “The Beach.” This last chapter delineates the interplay of promotional image-making, segregation, and capitalism at work on Florida’s most emblematic space. Mormino and others have suggested that Florida challenges existing theories of modernization and urbanization for several reasons. First, Southern culture and urban landscapes have survived amidst the contemporary landscape. Second, recent immigration to South Florida rebuts the Chicago school of immigrant integration. Florida cities, it appears, have remained ethnically vibrant after years of settlement, to the point that local ethnic communities have developed a local identity, divergent from those up north or across the sea. Third, although the forces shaping the Sunbelt were often national in scope, they found some of their most extreme expressions in South Florida. Hence prosperity, consumerism, the democratization of automobile and jet transportation, old age pensions, state-sponsored access to homeownership, and defense spending all drove the growth of Florida as we know it, from the 1920s onwards, and most dramatically since the 1940s.

Florida scholarship, like the Sunbelt school, emphasizes the importance of image-building to the evolution of the Sunshine State, through its self-promotion as a desirable place to visit and settle. A permanent coalition of transportation executives, real estate and theme park entrepreneurs, boards of trade, and local and state politicians have zealously promoted Florida since the 1920s. Florida’s recent history is thus to a large extent the story of its promoters, its amenity entrepreneurs. In these narratives, one can see how Florida has been, to a large extent, the result of land speculation, developing means of transportation, boisterous self-promotion, rising
consumerism and commercial leisure, and the transformation of a fragile, swampy, subtropical landscape. Most recent accounts of postwar Florida have, like the Sunbelt scholarship before it, documented the environmental damage to the Sunshine State’s natural assets, menacing even those that made people want to move to Florida. Mormino, Arsenault, and Gannon have written about examples of this tragic trope, but the most ecologically sensitive narrative of growth is R. Bruce Stephenson’s acclaimed history of twentieth-century St. Petersburg.16

These stories of postwar Florida have built upon the foundations laid by accounts of earlier times, when Florida was first promoted as, and transformed into, the Sunshine State. Much of twentieth-century Florida had its origins in the construction of Henry Flagler’s and Henry Plant’s railroads and luxury hotels37 during the 1880s. Flagler, after retiring from the active management of Standard Oil, vacationed in St Augustine for the first time in 1881; while there he decided to invest in Florida tourism by improving its railway lines and hotels. He bought and extended the Jacksonville–St Augustine line in 1885, while building the 540-room Ponce de Leon hotel at the end of the line. By 1889, the Flagler railroad reached Daytona; by 1894, West Palm Beach, where the 1,100-room Royal Poinciana greeted wealthy patrons. The hotel attracted such a unique concentration of money that Henry James noted that “there as nowhere else in America, one would find Vanity Fair in full blast.”14 By 1896 the railroad reached Miami, which was incorporated as a city the same year. Meanwhile, Henry Plant had extended his own line to Tampa by 1883, where he had a luxury hotel built the same year.19

The most memorable episode in this saga of resort-building occurred between 1913 and 1928 with the dredging, clearing, subdivision, and selling of Miami Beach under the aegis of Carl Graham Fisher. Fisher had found fortune in the automobile industry and fame in creating the Indianapolis Speedway. He also was one of the central actors in the opening of the Lincoln Highway between New York and San Francisco in 1915 and the Dixie Highway from Michigan and Illinois to Miami in 1916. Though ruined by the Florida land sales crash of 1926, Fisher is largely responsible for the dominant position Miami has held in American tourism.19 Fisher and other land developers also set the tone for Florida’s subsequent growth through their reliance upon publicity. Building upon the vernacular repertoire of images that the semitropical landscape conjured in Western culture, they created the modern version of Florida image-making by sending pictures and laudatory articles to newspapers, and newsreels to movie distributors, all of which featured beach landscapes, pretty girls, happy rec-

ational fishers, rich and famous people in various leisurely activities, and tropical fauna and flora.

As Florida grew, so did muckraking journalism.22 As in similar contexts throughout American history, the fabled and much-vaulted beauty and opportunity to be found in the Sunshine State had a seedy side: corruption, greed, exploitation of labor, and waste of resources, and especially the destruction of the natural and human assets that had been used to lure migrants and investors in the first place. Any serious Florida story must take into consideration the legacy of folklorist-environmentalist, Jacksonville-born Stetson Kennedy, who put together Palmetto Country (1942) a collection of texts on Florida folklore, based on his participation in the Federal Writers Project.22 The efforts of the Miami Herald’s journalist Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and its editor John E. Pennekamp, who are considered the main actors in the creation of the Everglades National Park in 1947, also durably influenced Florida muckraking. This genre of writing about Florida evolved into full-fledged historical accounts, though some of them retained a journalistic quality.23

Also influential, though less concerned with history, are Carl Hiaasen and his emulators. Since the mid-1980s, this Miami Herald columnist has taken up the same environmentalist, liberal stance, while paying keen attention to the dystopian quality of contemporary Florida, framing his critique in provocative, merciless prose aimed at careless developers and boosterist, incompetent public officials.24

Taken together, postwar Florida scholarship and muckraking tales of hubris and self-conscious image-building claim that to understand Florida as a desirable place to escape, one has to examine the agency of those who made it: in Gary Mormino’s words, “tourism is not destiny.”25 Tourists do not grow naturally on sand like palms, or in swamps like kudzu. Like Florida’s other cash crops, tourists are the fruits of careful cultivation. For tourists to appear in large numbers, Florida had first to be cleared, dried up, dredged from the bottom of the sea. In the words of Alex Shoumatoff: “Before it was any good to [Man], it had to be essentially destroyed by Man.”26 Mormino also captures the agency that made the Sunshine State:

In its natural state, Florida may appear poorly designed: meandering rivers, shifting coastlines, and shore-hugging mangroves. Malleable, accessible and seemingly inexhaustible, the Florida landscape can become anything that humans want it to be. Hot was made cool, and wet became dry ... land and water retreated before ax, machete, plow, steamshovel and construction crane ... Civic, mechanical and
social engineers perfected an imperfect Florida. Air conditioning lowered the temperature, DDT banished the mosquito, and the bulldozer eliminated the mangrove. Floridians, more than most Americans, are hooked on technology.\textsuperscript{27}

Thus, the vision of Florida presented by these two approaches is much like the earlier, broader Sunbelt scholarship in its sensitivity to the landscape since it too has changed dramatically. The two dominant ideas of Florida, the modified Sunbelt and the muckraking, are a tribute to the American ethic of constant perfectibility that de Tocqueville once saw at work; Florida is also an illustration of what Daniel Boorstin called the Republic of Technology, the reliance on technological skill in the building of American living spaces.\textsuperscript{28} Journalist Frances FitzGerald proposed that Florida escapism is a tribute to what historian Richard Hofstadter considered the source of the mobility and loose social fabric in America — a rootlessness that can be read in the social structure and landscape. These factors have made Florida, in a dramatic fashion, one of the primary places where Americans have tried to remake themselves: "In times of discontent Americans traditionally resisted the elementary proposition that every social system carries a composite price. They would not relinquish the hope of finding somewhere in the world an ideal remedy ... to cure their nagging pains."\textsuperscript{29} For many, that meant travel to Florida. Thus, any explanation of Florida has to consider what Edward Soja called its \textit{Raumgeist} — its spatial spirit.\textsuperscript{30} As the Sunbelt and muckraking schools have shown, most depictions of Florida are voyages through geography.

The Florida story told here includes tourism and retirement migration. Frances FitzGerald and social critic Vance Packard have written in depth on retirement migration in their attempts to analyze American rootlessness and the resultant attempts at community-building.\textsuperscript{31} This migration is, after all, unprecedented in human history, for as FitzGerald suggests: "never before in history [have] older people taken themselves off to live in isolation from the younger generations."\textsuperscript{32} To make this move, Americans had to experience a "seismic mindset," in Mormino's words, one in which technology, consumerism, social programs, and longer life expectancies allowed the creation of leisurely retirement beyond the upper-class confines of Palm Beach.\textsuperscript{33}

Because of the image of Florida as a desirable, accessible paradise on earth, and as a tribute to the efforts of those who have endeavoured to realize the myth by building Florida or by moving there, Florida historians have used the idea of the Florida Dream as a useful metaphor for the state's narrative. The departure point for any application of the Florida Dream trope is the underlying American Dream — the "hope for a better life" — which in some places, like California, is amplified by a growth mythology, giving it a "probing, prophetic edge in which the good and evil of the American Dream [have been] sorted out and dramatized."\textsuperscript{34}

Like California, the Sunshine State has thrived on a coherent set of images and expectations that have framed the way developers and promoters have presented it to the world, as well as the way in which newcomers and visitors saw it in making their decision to come down. As summed up in a 1928 magazine article, and retold in 1980 by environmentalist Mark Derr, Florida is a "state of mind."\textsuperscript{35} The Florida Dream is the Sunshine State's "place-ideology," the historically and socially constructed way of seeing Florida, and of thinking about its future. Ray Arsenault defined the Florida Dream in 1988 as the "promise of perpetual warmth, health, comfort, and leisure." More recently, striving for a more inclusive theme, he proposed the more polysemous "dreamscape." The Florida "dreamscape" is, for him, "a cultural backdrop capable of inspiring a variety of dreamlike images and expectations." This is a more historicized concept, as landscapes — and the gazes they entice — change over time through the efforts of their users and inhabitants. Florida's dreamscape once consisted of dreams of cheap agricultural land, an almost frost-free climate, and abundant crops of citrus fruits. Nowadays "the dreamscape has moved to the city, the tourist camp, and the theme park." It now means "the prospect of living (and perhaps even working) in a relatively beneficent climate; to others it is the expectation of a long and prosperous retirement... of the millions of tourists who visit the state, it is a week or two of blissful sunbathing on a sandy beach, a breathless tour of Disney World and Busch Gardens."\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to the visions of orchard, beach, and retirement community, the Florida dreamscape has also offered safe haven to millions of Latin American refugees and migrants.

However, even on this great theme the literature is still of the pioneering sort. Most authors are charting a virgin semitropical coast, because the Florida that these books describe is relatively new, and because the state's most impressive developments have occurred only recently. It would be too easy to lose sight of chronology: the Sun-and-Fun Capital of the World lost her crown in the early 1970s, at the tail end of the great era of Florida Dreaming that had started in Miami Beach during the 1950s, and had reached a feverish pace since 1945. This change was due to the convergence
of three factors from outside the state: first, the wave of international migration that started in the 1960s, which is symbolized (but by no means summed up) by the effect of the Cuban Revolution of 1959; second, the Sunbelt boom that fostered rapid population and economic growth after the 1940s, with an accelerated pace during the 1960s; third, the opening of the Disney World theme park near Orlando in Central Florida on 1 October 1971. These three events dramatically altered the Florida dreamscape by the addition of three new, different categories of dreamers: on one side, international immigrants and refugees from the Caribbean, Latin America, and beyond; from another corner, legions of new residents, largely from the Northeastern states, drawn by the newfound ease of access and the new economic activity and opportunities of the region (many of them the result of military spending and high-technology industry); and finally, visitors from the northeastern quadrant of the continent, looking for a version of fun created in California by movie executives: a version without beaches, without swamp critters, and without the sensuous expectations associated with a semitropical vacation. The Disney version of fun was kid-oriented, family-oriented, wholesome, enchanted by Hollywood magic, nostalgic for small-town America. By these three processes, the dreamscape acquired a multiplicity of meanings, a complexity that illustrates how suddenly and radically Florida had moved into a state of advanced modernity and cosmopolitanism. Because of this modernity, Florida has become diverse, multiple, complex, and fragmented — it has the look and feel of an aporia, a "crazy hodgepodge," as Carl Hiaasen once put it. Understanding modern Florida is a challenge to all who think about, write about, and debate the recent history of Florida, including the dreamers themselves.

To sum up, most accounts of Florida’s recent history focus on four factors: constructed desirability, accessibility, migration, and growth. The first two are causes of migration; the last two merge together in tourism, since "tourism is the geography of consumption outside the home area; it is about how and why people travel to consume" according to geographers Colin Hall and Stephen Page.

Fluttering through these stories is the "snowbird." The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that this term was initially used early in the twentieth century to name the men who enlisted in the army for the winter to avoid the cold, and deserted in the spring. The word took on a new meaning in the South during the 1920s when it depicted the migrant workers, labourers, and unemployed who went south each winter. Since the 1960s it has been used in the Miami area to name the migrants, many of them elderly, who winter down south away from cold conditions, in leisurely pursuits. The term has since spread to other destinations of seasonal migrants, places like Texas, Arizona, and California. Few historical inquiries have looked at snowbirds. An exception is Mormino’s Land of Sunshine. One of his chapters discusses the changes that allowed the creation, after the 1940s, of leisurely, active, independent retirement in the South: between 1950 and 1990, one in every four elderly inter-state migrants went to Florida. The 1960s saw the construction of specialized housing projects designed for them, although hotels and apartment houses catering exclusively to retired persons had existed in St Petersburg and Miami Beach since the 1920s. Soon the unemployed status of retired persons, their demand for cheap and safe living spaces, and their leisurely lifestyle turned the less urbanized counties of South Florida into retirement magnets — northward from Miami, south and north from St Petersburg. Mormino acknowledges the ethnic diversity of Florida’s elderly residents, as well as their segregation by places of origin, their plethora of leisure sociability and affinity groups, their political clout, and the popularity of mobile homes among them. He concludes his chapter with a warning about the potential for intergenerational conflict in the sway seniors hold over public spending. Mormino’s work makes it clear that it is essential to study the ethnic composition of snowbirds, their community-building, and their relations with their neighbours.

Another snowbird history that discusses community-building is Lee Irby’s article on trailer dwellers in St Petersburg during the 1950s and 1960s, and their interaction with the St Petersburg city government. Irby shows the intense sociability and community-building within trailer parks resulting from the racial and age segregation inherent in retirement communities. The same factors gave elderly people the desire and power to mobilize in the face of adversity: Florida’s influential Federation of Mobile Home Owners originated in St Petersburg in 1962 to counter the threat of higher taxes.

A chapter, an article — the American literature on Florida’s snowbirds has had scant space to discuss their national, or regional, or ethnic origins, if one overlooks the better-documented but unique case of Miami Beach Jews. For information about the Canadian snowbirds, one must start with an article by historian Robert Harney on the "Patterns of Canadian Migration to Florida." To understand the process of Canadian travel to Florida Harney resorted to patterns delineated by the migration scholarship: pioneer migrants first explore a destination; then, as the information
about the new settlement gets back to the homeland, a "leuer" can develop that will send migrants to that destination. Migrants put to work social and commercial networks to facilitate their information-gathering and movement. Entrepreneurs surface to specialize in migration brokerage; in Florida's case, motel owners, real estate agents, transportation companies, and others have competed for and prospered in the Canadian migrant market, thus becoming an "organic intelligentsia" in the production of discourse on migration. The migrant market eventually fostered competition among migration brokers and among potential destinations: soon Florida was challenged by other Gulf States, Mexico, Caribbean islands, and the Carolinas.63

Harney's text describes the great similarity between Canadian snowbirds and other types of migrants, both in Canada and elsewhere. When the migratory movement is seen as significantly large, people in the homeland often denounce the bleeding of the homeland's strength. This "counter-discourse" - for instance in 1920s Italy about emigrants to the Americas and in 1970s Canada about snowbirds - shows how migration can become a salient issue in the affairs of the homeland. From this realization, it only takes a small step intellectually to see that the migration destination can influence the homeland, as has been observed in several studies of international migration.48

Social scientists have reached conclusions similar to Harney's. George Calvin Hoyt, for example, conducted a sociological survey and participant observation in Manatee County in 1960,65 where he documented the social networks that first brought people to the Bradenton Trailer Park and studied the sociability and perceptions of retirement among the trailer park dwellers. Gerontologists have studied the patterns of retirement migration: building upon migration theory,49 they have found that the retired, like other migrants, use their social networks and their experience of previous migration - as tourists, for instance - to choose their destination. Thus they move in streams from given places of origin to given destinations. Retired persons, like other migrants, also tend to move more often when they are tenants than homeowners. Their wealth and occupation prior to retirement have also mattered: the educated and wealthy have been more likely to move.47 Yet retirement migration has in some ways been unique, for lower-income and average-income retired folk have been relatively more likely to move than their peers in other age groups. Consequently, retired migrants have been cost-sensitive migrants, eagerly looking out for cheap housing. For this reason, plus their yen for leisure activities and relative detachment from work, retired migrants have tended to settle in peri-urban, non-metropolitan areas with low economic and institutional centrality. Social scientists have also discovered that life-cycle events matter in decisions to migrate: for elderly people, the recent emergence of an "early retirement" life-stage has been a key factor in migration. In early retirement, one enjoys the good health and the disposable income necessary to move long distance, away from family. Later in life, inflation, the death of the spouse, increasing health costs, and dependency either discourage migration or encourage northward migration to the vicinity of kin and friends.49

Most retired migrants have taken their Northern connection rather seriously, enough that most have chosen to be buried up north, if they died when down south. Therefore, mobility found has raised the possibility of community lost, both for retired migrants and their hometowns. Most Northerners studying snowbirds have depicted them as avatars of their original communities in a contentially integrated culture favouring mobility, uneasy with winter. By contrast, those writing from the Florida perspective have been surprised and intrigued by the levels of social and cultural cohesion achieved by snowbirds, yet worried about the overall fragmentation of Florida society and the potential for intergenerational conflict that elderly migrants' political, social, and economic power may engender for the state. Frances Fitzgerald thus found in the Sun City Center retirement community a strong uniformity of professional background, culture, dress, eating, leisure, family history, and political ideology - the sort of social and economic homogeneity from which community and social class evolve. Fitzgerald concluded about the Sun City dwellers: "In a country where class is rarely discussed, they had found their own niche like homing pigeons,"49 suggesting that snowbirds should be understood, and studied, as a distinct class in Florida society.

To understand snowbirds as a community, it is necessary to get some purchase on a slippery, contested concept. Every attempt to define "community" starts by acknowledging the great number and variety of definitions it evokes. In a 1955 analysis of community that found ninety-four definitions, sociologist George A. Hillery Jr grouped them into three broad analytical categories: "commonality among people, social interaction, and common land."50 Geographer Remy Tremblay also came up with three definitions: social and cultural interactions, the spatial bases of organization and display of the community, and the member's attachment to the group and the identity stemming from this. "A community involves a limited number of people in a somewhat restricted social space or network held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation. Relationships are close, often intimate, and usually face-to-face. Individuals are bound
together by affective or emotional ties rather than by a perception of individual self-interest. In the words of Thomas Bender, there is a 'we-ness' in a community; one is a member.  

Steven High and John Walsh provide another triad: "community as interaction, community as imagined reality, and community as process."  

Community understood as interaction commands the study of snowbird clusters in Florida, their leisure and affinity groups, and their meeting places. Snowbirds and retired persons, it may be hypothesized, find, through their affinity grouping around face-to-face leisure activities, reason to perpetuate and cultivate the "thirddspaces" that Ray Oldenburg has deemed so essential to community life. These thirddpaces, exemplified by the church, the pub, or the cafe, are the relatively public, egalitarian, economical places where people can build community informally and inclusively, through socializing outside the first and second places, namely family and work. Retired migrants to Florida can be expected to invest heavily in third places.

Second, community as imagined reality relates to how snowbirds have defined themselves, how they have used their lifestyle, northern backgrounds, or Florida nestled to construct a worldview of where they belong as individuals and eventually as a group. As coherent, visible, and segregated communities, snowbirds may have also impacted on the imagined reality of their Florida neighbors, and on their home communities in the North.

Third, community as process begs the questions of how snowbird communities have been connected to their collective memory as Northerners, how their sociability and identity have evolved over time, and how snowbirds have been perceived in the North, within the dynamic context of Florida's evolving image. These three concepts of community — as interaction, imagination, and process — provide the primary analytical axis of this book.

The third concept — process — brings up the question of narrativity: how has community changed over time? As stasis is well-nigh impossible, community has either grown or declined, in Florida or elsewhere. There has been a pervasive sense in the social sciences of community decline since the advent of modernity. This worldview was imbedded in classical sociology, and has been durably integrated in the sociological imagination of Western historians, as Thomas Bender noted in his 1978 Community and Social Change in America. There, he acknowledged that community is polysemic and that a fear of community decline has pervaded American culture since the Puritans. Thus most social change in America has been interpreted as conducive to community decline. Bender acknowledg-
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born between 1910 and 1940, whose activities contributed enormously to American (and arguably Canadian) social capital, particularly the bridging, inclusive, wide-ranging forms. People in this demographic, sometimes known as the New Deal Generation, were very active in formal organizations, such as churches, political parties, volunteer and charity associations, and affinity clubs. However, even they, Putnam has found, decreased their private socializing as the decades unfolded – activities such as visits to friends, playing cards, and entertaining at home.

Overall, however, the long civic generation had community in spite of the modernist upheaval it experienced. It proved Durkheim wrong about the effects of modernization, and snowbirds have been a particularly vivid illustration of its community-building capacities. However, this book must address a troubling question: will the snowbirds born since 1940 create as much social capital as their parents' generation? If the answer is yes, if community is achieved by the first snowbirds to experience the post-modernity first widely noted in the 1970s, then there is reason for optimism that we post- (or late-) modern Canadians and Americans can achieve it also.

Readers will have to await an answer.

I frame the narrative in this book around the two themes of migration and community, which suggest the questions that will shape the discussion. The first set of questions concerns the decision to migrate, the decision best understood as an evolving, dynamic process: How have snowbirds chosen Florida? How have they travelled there? Did the journey south itself affect them? In other words, the book starts with the journey. Its hypothesis is that the journey has historically been planned with a number of expectations. Because Florida was widely advertised, formally by mass media and informally by social networks, travellers' expectations were high, and probably changed during the journey and upon arrival. The questions that flow from the most basic one of all – “Why Florida?” – are addressed in chapter 2.

A second set of questions concerns the process of settlement. How have snowbirds settled down south? How has this process related to their original expectations? Settlement raised questions of community-building: How have snowbirds fashioned their communities? What brought them together? What sorts of housing or accommodations have they chosen? Have their choices changed with affluence? Has social geography mattered? How have snowbird “communities” interacted with their Floridian neighbours? What can be learnt from snowbirds about community-building in conditions of late-modern rootlessness? (More on these conditions in chapters 3, 4, and 5.) Have snowbirds given new meanings to Florida's landscapes through their settlement? How much have snowbirds become ghettoized? Were there forces tending to ghettoize them? If so, how have these been tempered?

Logically, given the findings of history and the social sciences, we may expect to find that snowbird communities carry a mixed message for North Americans fearful of “community decline.” Optimists will be comforted by their vibrant sociability and their taste for thirdspaces, for informal and face-to-face social interaction despite their relative rootlessness. This finding is the most significant of this book, and one relevant to the ongoing “urban” crisis – ongoing, that is, since modernity assailed community. Community-building is the overarching theme uniting the second set of questions. Thus, chapter 3 deals with accommodations and housing; chapter 4 with issues of community decline in Florida; chapter 5 with the ways and means of snowbird community-building by affinity; and chapter 6 with a case study of snowbird community-building.

The third set of questions considers the legacy of going south: How have snowbirds been changed by their Florida experience? How has their Florida experience been transmitted, if at all, to their home states and provinces? While it is well-known that its Northern settlers have influenced Florida, this book will look for evidence of feedback, of Florida's influence on the North. It asks: Did travellers to Florida experience a cultural change – a Gulf and Gold Coast “sea change,” as it were – that the traveller took back home? Did, for example, Canadian snowbirds become less “Canadian” than those who wintered in the North? Also, what has Northern discourse about Florida told us about the values and assumptions, over time, of the American Northeast and of Central Canada? It will be shown in chapter 7 that winter travel to Florida has had a major influence on the culture, worldviews, and cultural modernization of the northeast quadrant of this continent – for instance in cuisine, or in the views held about continental geography and cultural divides.

To answer these three sets of questions, the narrative unfolds in the sequential manner of a vacation to Florida. First there is the beckoning of Florida (chapter 1), then the journey (chapter 2), next the sojourn (chapters 3–6), and finally the voyage home (chapter 7), laden with fruit, seashells, memories, and insights. The conclusion attempts to answer the third set of questions. Florida stands for more than itself; it has had a major influence on North America, one that has been mediated by its image-making and advertisement as an Edenic place, since the late nineteenth century. After 1945, these images found a fertile ground in the consumer culture that was becoming triumphant across the continent. Migrants and tourists
beckoned by the Florida Dream therefore became agents in the growing relation between the peninsula and the North. The snowbird story reveals that Florida’s influence on North American culture has been more complex and ambiguous than the usual jeremiads of creeping cultural sameness conjure.

My original interest in Florida’s snowbirds — especially those from Canada — was stimulated by my suspicion of cultural sameness. Arguably this is what led me to Florida in the first place. As a young Québécois, I am aware of the waves of cultural assimilation emanating from the Anglo-Saxon sea surrounding Quebec. Canadians in general have been more fearful of continental, homogenizing forces than East Coast Americans. As a result, we fear few things more than being mistaken for Americans. Hence I have looked at the Canadian and Québécois snowbirds most carefully. Like canaries in a mine, these birds alert us to the risks of seeking El Dorado. My generation, like my parents', has been beguiled by the promise of continental mobility and comfort, leisure, and pleasure promised by the Florida Dream. Those who snub Florida seem to have their own dream-destination of hope, pleasure, and leisure — Las Vegas, California, Hawaii, the Costa del Sol, the Côte d’Azur, Mexico, Brazil, Australia. Most of us have been gazing at some version of the Florida dreamscape for some time now. Most of us have dreamt of freedom and pleasure somewhere far away from winter, à l’envers de l’hiver. Are these places far away from the daily grind necessary to life in the North, or are they, as they have often been depicted, mere mirages that beckon people to a friendless, meaningless life and death beneath the cruel southern sun? In hiberna veritas?

CHAPTER ONE

FLORIDA DREAMING

"Why Florida?" Why has winter tourism been so important there? The obvious answer, climate, is insufficient. For it ignores the extent to which Florida had to be constructed as a tourist destination. Florida’s natural assets would have remained as ignored by mass tourism as the volcanoes of Kamchatka had it not been for human artifice — the construction of hotels and attractions, advertisements and media visibility, as well as transportation technology and accessibility, which will be discussed later. Here is how Southern Florida was turned into one of the world’s most lucrative artifacts: a tourist destination for 86 million people in 2005 — indeed, more than France’s international visitors for that same year, without a glaciated Alp, Gothic cathedral, or Mona Lisa to visit.

Before the Dream: Climate, the Beach, and Myths

Florida historian Raymond Arsenault, while concluding that "climate may not be the key to human history," has recognized that Florida has been sold to Northerners as the place "where the sun goes in winter." As a 1960s guidebook on Florida claimed, "climate is the ultimate factor in Florida." During the 1900s, when tourism seemed threatened by South Florida’s reputation for violence, a snowbird and local journalist summed up the state’s attraction: "the only thing that Florida has to offer now is weather."

Winter is indeed more temperate in South Florida than anywhere else in Canada or the continental United States. Tourist businesses and tourism-dependent communities have not only thrived on warm Florida winters, but have also used migrants’ and visitors’ aversion to cold northern weather to persuade them to come back, extend their stays, immigrate permanently, or overlook Florida’s defects. These boosterist paens to life in the sun had been written and printed ever since Florida entrepreneurs took an interest in growth, and were still common by the 1960s a January 1960 article of the Miami Herald relayed the testimony of a contemporary