Florida Crackers and Yankee Tourists: The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Florida Park Service and the Emergence of Modern Florida Tourism

Scholars harbor little doubt that tourism and other forms of commodification have played a crucial role in Florida's social, economical, and cultural past. But few scholars have dealt directly with that commercialization and its cultural and social effects upon the state. Fewer still have tried to locate the start of such commercialization. This study will attempt to accomplish that as it looks at Florida during the New Deal-era. In its simplest form, the argument presented here is that Florida's commercialization began in its present form during the 1930s, fueled in large part by federal relief programs as well as by an influential and largely non-native commercial-civic elite. This dissertation will look at that transformation primarily through the Civilian Conservation Corps’ development of the Florida Park Service. This dissertation will also branch out to explore how the federal and state governments, alongside the local civic-commercial elite, transformed Florida in order to make concrete Florida's long-standing literary and popular image.
popular image. In addition it will also show that such a transformation was not welcomed by all. In many ways, a cultural and political battle ensued over the future of Florida as economic and political priorities shifted from agriculture and extraction of the state’s resources to one of promotion and attraction. For many residents, the consequences were not just economic and political, but also personal. Long before Disney World opened for business and bold-faced the cultural divisions in the state, native white Floridians of the 1930s whose parents fought for and supported the “Lost Cause” were none too happy to find themselves residing in a state becoming more known for coconuts and flamingoes than cotton and states’ rights. A new white Southern identity emerged to contest the prevailing tropical image. The Florida Cracker, a long-used derogatory moniker, was re-packaged and reformatted to provide the label for a diverse and often divisive group that nonetheless were united in their rejection of the state’s catering to so-called “foreigners.” Also of interest here is the effect these changes had upon both the human relationship with Florida’s environment as well as upon the physical environment itself. As so much of the image of Florida rested upon its climate, palm trees, sandy beaches and tropical forests, much was undertaken to realize physically that image. Forest fires were extinguished, livestock fenced, ecosystems altered and even local fauna such as panthers, bear, bobcats and turtles slaughtered in order to provide a safe, but exotic, “natural” environment. Today thinking of state parks as tourist attractions is alien to most, who usually see such places as antidotes to the kitschy and overtly commercial theme parks and tourist attractions. Yet in the 1930s nearly all of the state’s tourist attractions utilized some natural aspect including swamplands, beaches, natural springs, alligators, the climate, and limestone caverns. To understand modern Florida is to understand how the CCC, the FPS and Florida’s government developed Florida tourism as well as those citizens who rejected their efforts in the 1930s.

Identifier: FSU_migr_etd-2672 (IID)
Submitted Note: A Dissertation submitted to the Department of History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Degree Awarded: Spring Semester, 2008.
Date of Defense: March 26, 2008.
Keywords: Florida Park Service, New Deal, Civilian Conservation Corps, Tourism, Florida, Environmental History, Southern History
Bibliography Note: Includes bibliographical references.
Advisory Committee: Elna C. Green, Professor Directing Dissertation; Jonathan Leib, Outside Committee Member; Jennifer Koslow, Committee Member; Frederick Davis, Committee Member.
Subject(s): History
For Civilian Conservation Corps projects in the U.S. state of Florida. Pages in category "Civilian Conservation Corps in Florida". The following 13 pages are in this category, out of 13 total. This list may not reflect recent changes (learn more). Florida Caverns State Park. Fort Clinch. Fort Clinch State Park. G. Greynolds Park. H. Highlands Hammock State Park. J. Juniper Springs. Florida Historical Society Rembert Patrick Award Countering the conventional narrative that Florida's tourism industry suffered during the Great Depression, this book shows that the 1930s were, in reality, the starting point for much that characterizes modern Florida's tourism. Nelson examines the impact of three connected initiatives—the federal New Deal, its Civilian Conservation Corps program (CCC), and the CCC's creation of the Florida Park Service. He reveals that the CCC designed state parks to reinforce the popular image of Florida as a tropical, exotic, and safe paradise. The CCC often removed native flora and fauna, introduced exotic species, and created artificial landscapes that were then presented as natural. that gave birth to the Florida State Parks system. This volume throws light on Florida's transition from its nineteenth-century past to its modern form.—Brian R. Rucker, author of Treasures of the Panhandle: A Journey through West Florida. Read more. About the Author. David J. Nelson is professor of history at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College at Bainbridge. Read more. Product details. Hardcover: 314 pages. Publisher: University Press of Florida (May 7, 2019).