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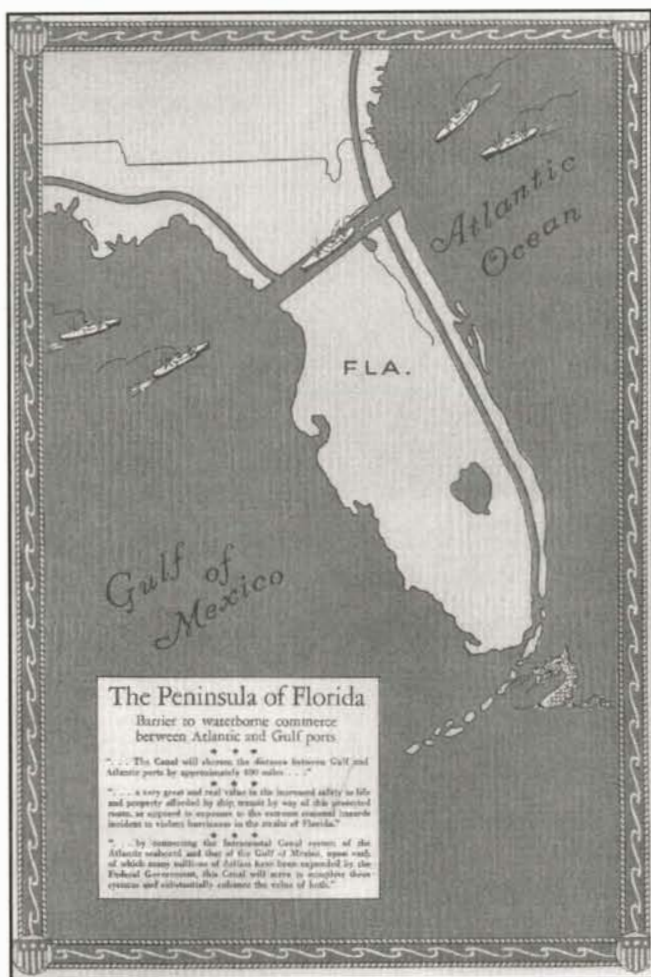
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THE FLORIDA

HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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The Cross-Florida Canal and the Politics of Interest-Group Democracy

by Wayne Flynt

Polluted water. Hurricanes. Ship-wrecks. Drowning sailors. Land developers. Cheap transportation. U.S. presidents willing to invest federal funds in order to court Florida voters. Presidential advisors who attempt to clear the minefields of conflicting local interests in order to implement presidential policy. Public expectation that powerful congressional leaders will bring home the bacon. The ever escalating tension between economic developers/civic boosters on one hand and environmentalists on the other. Typical Florida boondoggles and screwups. If the cast of characters and issues sounds familiar, it is because few patterns of human conduct are entirely new, nor are our current debates entirely foreign to our collective history.

I could begin this story in the sixteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth centuries. Each point of origin conveys its own context and meaning. The argument for the sixteenth century is in some ways the simplest and purest. In the 1570s Pedro Menendez de Aviles, designated "Captain General of the West" by Spanish King Phillip II, thought a canal from the Gulf to the Atlantic would assist Spain's conquest of America. So in its earliest manifestation, the dream of a cross-Florida canal was a geo-strategic effort conceived amidst great power rivalries.

Wayne Flynt is Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Auburn University. A Ph.D. from Florida State University, he is the author of many books on southern culture, religion and rural poverty. He is a past president of the Southern Historical Association.

Democrats, Cubans, and Lily Whites. He even pleased Locke on a person level, since the clerk and De Lono were associated closely in the work of the International Order of Odd Fellows. Locke expressed his thanks by publicly endorsing the governor's move.²⁸

It should be noted, though, that Fleming's action most certainly did not please everyone. "Our city has been in a state of excitement for the past two weeks over the suspension of Judge Dean from office by Governor Fleming," a Key West correspondent recorded on July thirty-first. "The act is considered by all classes irrespective of race, nationality or politics," the correspondent—probably L. W. Livingston—insisted, "as an outrage perpetrated on him from mere race prejudice and not for malfeasance in office." The next day "a mass meeting of about 800 citizens was held in Jackson square with Jose De C. Palemino (colored Cuban) chairman." The *Times-Union* related what ensued. "They passed a resolution protesting against the action of the governor in removing Dean from the office of county judge," it observed. "Following is the resolution: 'That we hereby respectfully protest against the action of the governor of the state of Florida in this matter, and we earnestly request him to revoke said order until the said James Dean has been tried and convicted of said charge by due process of law in a court of competent jurisdiction.'"²⁹

Such appeals proved of no avail. For a time Dean refused "to turn over his books to his successor until the right steps are taken in the matter." The issue then quickly moved into the local state courts (controlled by Democrats), as Dean sued "to determine the legality of the removal." Thereupon, a Lily White leader came to De Lono's defense. "As soon as this was done," a man going by the sobriquet "Observer" explained to the *Gainesville Florida Sentinel* in November 1890, "Mr. [G. Bowne] Patterson appeared in court as attorney for the democratic appointee, and did all in his power to bolster up his illegal and groundless claim to the office." Observer added, "[Dean] is still fighting in the Supreme Court of the State

28. *Gainesville Florida Sentinel*, November 14, 1890; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, July 24, 1889; *Tampa Tribune*, August 1, 1889; Jefferson B. Browne, *Key West: The Old and The New* (reprint ed., Gainesville, Fla., 1973), 69, 82, 110, 118, 121, 138. On the political stance of Key West's Cuban community during the mid-to-late 1800s, see Consuelo E. Stebbins, *City of Intrigue, Nest of Revolution: A Documentary History of Key West in the Nineteenth Century* (Gainesville, Fla., 2007), 165-76.

29. *New York Age*, August 17, 1889; *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, August 7, 1889.

