

PRESS RELEASE
FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
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“The Florida Dream”

The Story of Modern Florida and How It Grew

Statewide Public-Television Documentary

Florida’s dramatic transformation since World War II—from a sparsely populated, southern backwater to today’s multicultural megastate—is featured in a colorful, compelling one-hour documentary aired on most PBS television stations statewide.

“The Florida Dream,” produced by the Florida Humanities Council (FHC) and WEDU-TV of West Central Florida, traces the great social, cultural and economic forces that drove Florida’s rapid growth and change.

Using archival film, historical photographs and interviews with scholars and folks who lived the history, the documentary shows how migration, immigration, civil rights, tourism, retirement, technology and politics changed the face of Florida over the past half-century.

It explores how millions of people from across the United States and around the globe migrated to the state. Seeking their own piece of paradise, they transformed a sleepy, swampy, subtropical peninsula with a population of less than 3 million into the nation’s fourth-largest state, with a population now of more than 18.5 million people from all over the world.

“In a state where two out of three people come from somewhere else, we see our mission as providing Floridians with a sense of our common history and our rich heritage,” said Janine Farver, FHC executive director. FHC, a 30-year-old nonprofit organization, creates, sponsors and funds public programs around the state exploring Florida history and culture.

“This documentary offers a compelling look at the trajectory of growth and change and asks questions about the future of our state and the sustainability of the Florida dream,” Farver said.

In addition to this one-hour program, six local-history programs funded by FHC have been produced by PBS stations in Miami, Pensacola, Fort Myers, Jacksonville, Tampa, and Cocoa. (See details below or at www.flahum.org.) All of these half-hour productions are available for broadcast by PBS stations around the state.

FHC has also designed a website to complement the “Florida Dream” documentary: www.floridadream.org. This special website provides hundreds of resources about Florida and includes out-takes of the film, audio interviews with scholars and others discussing topics related to modern Florida, historical photographs, power-point presentations, bibliographies, and lesson plans designed by Florida teachers for Florida teachers.

“The Florida Dream” television documentary was inspired by a book, “Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida,” written by historian Gary Mormino, who holds the Frank E. Duckwall Professorship in Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. The program is

narrated by Ed Asner, the award-winning actor of stage and screen best known for his television character “Lou Grant.”

The film’s director, Larry Elliston, brings a remarkable professional resume to this project. His “Down Home Florida” programs, produced for WTVT in Tampa, roamed the state in search of history, culture, artists, craftsmen and offbeat characters. He recently completed a film for WEDU titled “The Life and Times of John and Mable Ringling.”

“The ‘Florida Dream’ project is a dream-come-true for me,” said Elliston, a fourth-generation Floridian. “It’s been an opportunity to not only chronicle Florida’s incredible growth over the last half-century, but, more importantly, to be part of an effort that raises some thoughtful questions about the state’s future. Florida is a special place.”

The documentary shows how Florida’s population grew exponentially over a half-century, with World War II sparking the first big wave of migration. Many servicemen who were stationed here for training during the war were attracted by the balmy breezes, sugar-sand beaches and lush tropical setting and pledged to return with their families after the war.

Postwar developers saw the opportunity and began promoting Florida as an affordable paradise, a place where even working-class families could buy houses under the swaying palm trees. Just as this idea took hold, the concept of retirement evolved in America. Millions of folks who had worked all their lives retired and traveled down from the cold climes of the Northeast and Midwest to enjoy lives of leisure in the sun.

Then starting in 1959, the Castro revolution drove many thousands of Cubans to seek refuge in South Florida. During the same period, the development of the U.S. space program caused a population boom on the East Coast of Florida. Then Disney moved into Central Florida, luring tourists, workers, entrepreneurs and residents.

The saga continues, with more and more development, migration and immigration from all over the world. Since World War II, Florida has experienced a net average increase in population of 1,000 residents *per day*. A state that had a relatively homogenous population a half-century ago now is second only to California as the most diverse in the nation. The latest projections show Florida's population doubling to 36 million people by 2060.

In addition to chronicling the state's metamorphosis thus far, "The Florida Dream" gets into some of the environmental and quality-of-life issues facing Floridians today, including concerns about protecting natural resources and creating more sustainable ways of living.

LOCALLY PRODUCED HISTORY PROGRAMS FUNDED BY FHC:

"Miami: Reflections on the River"(WPBT-Miami)

This is the story of a working river and the people who struggled to build Miami. Though less than five miles long, the Miami River has carried centuries of human history. It gave Miami its name and its genesis—and the city continues to grow along its banks.

"Khaki Coast: How the Panhandle Helped Win World War II" (WSRE-Pensacola)

The vital role that Northwest Florida military facilities played in training and supporting the U.S. war effort during WWII is explored in this program. In addition to delving into the historic basis for the training facilities, the documentary will include personal stories of veterans who trained in Florida's Panhandle.

"The Sanibel Causeway: A Vital Link?" (WGCU-Fort Myers)

Since its opening in 1963, the 3-mile-long Sanibel Causeway has linked the mainland to Sanibel and Captiva Islands. Notable islanders, including artist Robert Rauschenberg and former CIA director Porter Goss, reflect on how the bridge has affected the island way of life.

“City of Bridges” (WJCT-Jacksonville)

The building of Jacksonville’s railroad and automobile bridges across the St. Johns River had both positive and negative effects on the development of the city. Through the years each bridge has helped to foster growth and prosperity in the suburbs, the beaches, and beyond but has also contributed to the decline of the downtown and local environment. This transformation is seen through the eyes of scholars and residents.

“The State of Florida” (WEDU-Tampa)

Historians Gary Mormino and David Colburn talk with Tampa mayor Pam Iorio and St. Petersburg mayor Rick Baker about the impact that Florida’s growth has had on their West Central Florida communities.

“Wish You Were Here” (WBCC-Cocoa)

Central Florida has been transformed by Florida’s tourist business. This story is told by bringing vintage postcards and archival photographs to life.