Florida Studies

Florida Studies:
Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Florida College English Association

Edited by

Claudia Slate (General Editor)
and April Van Camp (Executive Editor)

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Florida Studies: Proceedings of the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Florida College English Association,
Edited by Claudia Slate (General Editor) and April Van Camp (Executive Editor)

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-0617-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-0617-6

To Maurice O'Sullivan, Rollins College,
Past FCEA President and Vice President,
mentor, enthusiastic collaborator
and premier scholar of Florida literature.

President
April Van Camp
Indian River State College

Vice President
Carole Policy
Palm Beach Community College

Secretary
Stone Shiflet
Capella University; University of South Florida

Treasurer
Rich McKee
Manatee Community College: Venice

CEA Liaison
Steve Brahlek
Palm Beach Community College

Past President
Keith Huneycutt
Florida Southern College

Webweaver
Jane Anderson Jones
Manatee Community College-Venice

At-Large Board Members
Jill Jones
Rollins College
Maxine Montgomery
Florida State University
Stephen Zeigler
Embry Riddle Aeronautical University
Donald Pharr
St. Leo's University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Natural Florida

Creative Showcase

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2008 Annual Meeting of the Florida College English Association (FCEA) in Tampa, Florida—Ybor City to be exact—was such a success. Attendees soaked up the history and culture of this distinctive part of Tampa while enjoying well-executed, intriguing presentations. Donald Pharr of St. Leo University did a yeoman's job organizing the conference location and sessions while collaborating with Hillsborough Community College-Ybor Campus for breakout rooms. FCEA board members also contributed to the conference planning and its smooth execution. At the conference, Anna Lillios of the University of Central Florida received the seventh annual Distinguished Colleague Award, given for "significant and sustained contributions in teaching, scholarship, and service." Just one look at Anna's accomplishments is enough to see how deserving she is. She served as Vice President and President of FCEA from 1997-99 and is currently the Executive Director of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society and on the Executive Board of the International Lawrence Durrell Society. She is the editor of *Lawrence Durrell and the Greek World* and is author of the forthcoming *Zora and Miss Marjorie: The Friendship of Two American Writers* as well as numerous scholarly articles and papers.

I am indebted to several individuals, without which this volume would not have been possible. As executive editor, April Van Camp of Indian River State College spent hours reviewing submissions and giving perceptive advice. Karen Tolchin of Florida Gulf Coast University once again proved to be an amazing associate editor, never turning down my plea for "one more review." Florida Southern College has granted me indispensable help for the third year: my student production assistant Shay Lessman, who has made this all come together with his word processing skills, akin to magic, if you ask me. When we just cannot seem to get spacing or pagination right, Shay is the one with the patience and the proud attention to detail who makes it right, insuring this publication's professionalism. My husband, a professor and scholar in his own right, is forever propping me up when I wither and cheering me on when I once again bend over the keyboard. Light and love to him.

PREFACE

This is my third year as general editor, and each year my respect for my colleagues increases. With courage and conviction, they submitted essays that were revised, and sometimes lengthened, from their Florida College English Association conference 2008 presentations for our consideration, taking themselves from that public arena to the possibility of an even broader audience. After these submissions were passed through a review process, the final selections were made, further edited, polished for publication, and organized into categories—finally arriving in the published form that you see here.

This volume contains a lot of variety, an eclectic mix of fine scholarship. The first section, Pedagogy, includes essays about employing service learning, blogging, and primary archival research into the classroom, among other techniques. Old Florida is the largest section, with essays exploring the following: the first black general in Florida (1791), antebellum Florida, racism in Florida, connections between a Florida territorial governor and Washington Irving, poet Wallace Stevens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, early twentieth century author Edith Pope, and the memoirs of colonial Florida women. The next section—Contemporary Florida—has essays that discuss EPCOT theme park, Florida newspapers, the rhetoric of Carl Haissen, and the stereotyped poor white Southerner. Jim Morrison's use of Floridian imagery is the topic of the essay in Natural Florida, and the poem "Pineapple Grill" falls into the category Creative Showcase.

These selections showcase the diverse and bold culture of Florida as they enrich and broaden the canon of Florida Studies.

Claudia Slate, editor
Karen Tolchin, associate editor

PEDAGOGY

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF HONORS SCHOLARS THROUGH PRIMARY ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

CHARLOTTE PRESSLER

For four or five years now, I have been requiring students in my Freshman English I courses at South Florida Community College to write "Florida-themed" research papers. That is, they may write their papers on any topic that has a connection to Florida. As a result, I receive many papers each term on alligators, panthers, and manatees, "the gentle giants of the sea." I also receive at least one paper on NASCAR, half a dozen on various hurricanes (gradually, Charley has been displacing Andrew as the hurricane of choice), and several on the Seminoles, "the Everglades" ("it's a very big topic, you'll have to narrow it"), St. Augustine ("you can't leave out what happened at Fort Caroline"), and coral reefs. Few now do papers on the citrus industry, but one or two each year write on the Land Boom of the 1920s, and several – more each year – have approached the contested issues of slavery, Indian removal, segregation, and the civil rights era. I tend to remember the outliers among these papers best: the sad story of Dr. Perrine on Indian Key, a spirited defense of the Key West Wreckers by one of their descendents, and a description of Titusville as it was before NASA (according to the student, half a dozen fishing shacks, a couple of bars, and a whorehouse).

From time to time in the first years I was trying this method, I would receive a paper proposal on some aspect of local history. Here the student would run into trouble almost immediately, because relatively little was available in the way of sources. Thanks to the work of Dr. James M. Denham, Canter Brown, Jr., Spessard Stone, and others, the histories of Polk County, Hardee County, and the Peace River Frontier have been recovered for us, but Highlands County, home to most of my students, is rarely discussed in the works of professional historians. Even the Great Okeechobee/San Felipe Hurricane of 1928 had had only one book-length treatment until recently, Lawrence E. Will's locally printed and hard to find *The Okeechobee Hurricane and the Hoover Dike*. Students wanting to research their local histories were thus all but forced to work with primary

sources, while the few secondary sources available had to be treated with as much caution as primary sources would normally be.

Three years ago, in the midst of these discoveries, I was asked to become director of the South Florida Community College Honors Program, when Dr. Theresa James, who revived it and made it a viable program, became chair of the Humanities Department. Among the requirements students in the SFCC Honors Program must fulfill for graduation is: "Complete and log 25 hours of service-learning." Thus, the syllabus of every Honors class offers, for extra credit, some sort of service-learning project, completion of which earns the student at least five hours toward the graduation requirement.

As I soon discovered, it is not easy to keep up a meaningful service-learning program at a two-year college. We teach general education courses, and our students have general-education skills; we can't partner with service agencies in any sort of quasi-professional way, and there are limitations on our students' time and availability as well.

So when I began teaching the Honors version of Freshman English I, it became a priority for me to find a good service-learning project that could fit into the most basic of all required gen ed courses while giving the students a minimum of time and transportation problems. Searching for a way to combine a service-learning project with the English I research paper, I contacted the Avon Park Depot Museum. This local museum is operated by the Historical Society of Avon Park, and housed in the old Seaboard Air Line depot. It maintains archival records and displays of the material culture of the town of Avon Park and its surrounding area. The museum needed volunteers able to help digitize their large collection of photographs for presentation on CDs, and they were less than a mile from the College. Knowing that local histories could not be written for our area without primary archival research, and knowing that the Depot Museum had such archives, it seemed a fair trade.

After some initial explorations, we began a partnership between Honors Program ENC 1101 students and the Depot Museum in the fall semester of 2007. My initial goals were these: my students would learn about primary archival research, help to satisfy their service-learning requirements, and make connections in the wider community. The Avon Park Depot Museum would receive help with their digitization project otherwise unobtainable, and would acquaint a new generation of Highlands County residents with their museum and archives (insurance against the future). I would bring my students into relationship with the Museum Director and President of the Historical Society, two well-educated professionals, and bring the college into relationship with an

important part of our local community, something that is part of the mission of any community college.

With these goals in mind, I took my ENC 1101 students on a tour of the Museum early in the fall of 2007, before any of the students who had selected their topics. I have found that a tour is critical to getting students interested in primary research on local history projects. Before the tour, such topics are abstractions to the students. The Depot Museum, which is exceptionally strong on exhibits of the region's material culture, gives a felt reality to the otherwise abstract notions of local histories, as does the physicality, the "touchableness" of the newspapers, telephone books, diaries and typescripts in their archives.

The Depot Museum then came up with a second project for my students. They needed someone to research and write up selected aspects of local history. Their plan was to make brochures available at the Museum to interested visitors. I suggested that they present their needs to my students as topics for their research papers, promising my students that if their research papers went well, they could (perhaps with some editing) write the brochures the Museum would publish. Several of them went to work on museum-suggested topics, which included the history of the Sebring Regional Airport, the Civilian Conservation Corps activities in Highlands County, and – everyone's favorite – the bombing of Frostproof. (It happened during World War II, and it was "friendly fire"; no one was hurt.)

These students made trips on their own to research their topics and work on the Museum's digitization project. The lessons I had given them in class on primary and secondary sources did turn out to be useful, but what really mattered to the success of their papers were the Museum volunteers, who directed the students to the typescripts, diaries, and other unpublished materials in the Museum archives and helped them to locate and contextualize the primary sources in a narrative. These one-on-one conversations with Museum volunteers taught the students, in a hands-on, direct way what research is like, and what participation in a research community is like. Personal connections of this kind had been so often missing from their previous education, as I will show in the second half of the paper.

Three of the students went on to present their papers at a well-received panel at the Florida Collegiate Honors Conference in the spring of 2008. Their experiences have inspired other Honors students to pull together their own conference presentations. This year, we hope it will be a physics group presenting at the FCHC conference.

While it might be routine at a larger college or university for Honors students to do activities of this kind, it is entirely new to my students. These Honors students are discovering all parts of the cycle of in-depth research among a community of scholars – an entire way of life – by participating in it, and they are liking it, too.

I'd like now to explore some of the theoretical frames I bring to my own reflections on this work. I cannot say the theory came first. In fact, I have tended to move forward in a more intuitive way, but what I've been doing intuitively can be understood as consistent with theoretical approaches that connect student success with student engagement, especially among first-generation college students—our students.

It is true that South Florida Community College has in recent years been attracting more traditionally-aged college students, with more traditional ambitions. Yet these students, among whom are our Honors students, continue to face a number of challenges, some unique to rural areas such as ours.

We are still, officially, a rural area. Highlands, the largest and wealthiest county in our tri-county area, has a population of just under 100,000. Of that population, just 13.5% have completed a bachelor's degree or higher. The national average, in contrast, is nearly twice that number. Over 34% of Highlands County residents have completed no more than the high school degree or equivalency. These figures are skewed to an unknown degree by the fact that a large percentage of our residents are retirees, who may well be better educated than their younger counterparts in the workforce – at least, this is my own observation. The census figures do not really tell us this. We can certainly assume that most SFCC students will be first-generation college students.

Not surprisingly, our students are also poorer than average. The median household income in 2000 in Highlands County was $30,160, compared to a national average of $41,994, but again these figures do not tell the whole story. The greatest income deficits relative to the national median can be seen in the age brackets between 35 and 54, where the Highlands County median income is 65% of the national median. As the parents of our college students would fall into this age bracket, we can presume that our students will tend to be from lower-income homes.

The final and perhaps most important challenge our students face stems from the cultural isolation of the area. Like many other rural Florida communities, Highlands County is intensely inward-looking. One sign of this is that well over 50 percent of Highlands County students who go on to higher education enroll at SFCC first. Very few go directly to a four-year university or college. Last year, for example:

> with a graduating class of about 180 students, Lake Placid High had 11 students accepted to USF and five accepted to the University of Florida, but one of those students decided to go to Georgia Tech. (Valero)

Not quite 10% of the graduating class went directly to university, in other words. Considering that the dropout rate for the County (as currently measured) hovers around 30%, the percentage of entering high school students who graduate and go directly to a university falls to around 7%.

In addition, many SFCC graduates who continue to the baccalaureate degree do so through classes offered at SFCC's University Center. They do not, in other words, leave the area or move physically to the campus of a four-year college. Often the reason is cost, but students and their parents have also frequently expressed unease at the prospect of moving to a big university or urban area.

Dual-enrollment students in our Honors courses have further challenges. These students, whether they are from private, usually denominational schools that lack a full upper division, or whether they have been home-schooled, have often experienced a mosaic-style education, assembled from face-to-face classes, 2-way TV classes, Florida Virtual High School classes, and home-schooling, essentially whatever was available to make up requirements. The course content may be sufficiently rigorous, but the variety of delivery methods and experiences gives students little sense of membership in a stable community of learners.

What do these students need that we can give them? A number of researchers have identified non-cognitive factors of importance to student success. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences is well known. The economist James Heckman's studies stress, in contrast, the importance of such character traits as persistence, work ethic, and the ability to defer gratification. I am most interested in a third set of factors, however. At one time called "acculturation" or "socialization," these are now known collectively as "student engagement," a generalized label that describes students' relationships to their instructors, their relationships to other students, and to the college environment overall.

Several recent studies have shown that student engagement is a non-immutable characteristic particularly critical to the success of first-generation college students. Thus, Gary R. Pike and George D. Kuh's comparative study of student engagement emphasizes that:

> learning requires both active participation in a variety of academic and social activities and integration of these diverse experiences into a meaningful whole. A considerable body of research points to the positive

> influence of student engagement in educationally purposeful activities on learning. (279)

First-generation college students, however, were typically less engaged overall (289), perhaps because they know less about the importance of engagement and about how to become engaged. That is, compared to second-generation college students, they have less tacit knowledge of and fewer experiences with college campuses and related activities, behaviors, and role models. In addition, parents are unable to help much, even if they are so inclined, as they, too, lack knowledge of, or in some instances may find off-putting, certain activities that could lead to greater levels of engagement (290).

Yet, Pike and Kuh assert, engagement is crucial:

> [g]ains in student learning were directly related to [….] integration, or the extent to which students were able to incorporate information from their courses and other learning activities in their conversations with peers and others. (289-90)

"Cultural capital," the "ease and familiarity one has with the dominant culture of one's society" (Pascarella et. al. 251-52), is another term in common use. This not-quite metaphor derived from Pierre Bordieu's sociological work calls attention to the fact that college students on entrance are presumed already to have some knowledge and understanding of the cultural and social milieu of higher education. This will become the foundation for the additional understanding they will acquire in the course of their college education. Even well-prepared students who lack this "cultural capital"—and many first generation college students do lack it – may feel lost, disengaged, "put off," and disconnected, and fail to get the full benefit of their education as a result.

Pascarella et.al. found that first generation college students benefit more than their multi-generational counterparts do from experiences, in and out of the classroom, that build up cultural capital. Despite this, however, they find that first-generation college students are significantly less likely than their counterparts to engage in such experiences. Based on these findings, they argue that, as a matter of educational policy, first-generation college students must be ensured "access to the full range of college experiences" if they are to succeed (278-81).

Encouraging student engagement has become, as a matter of policy, a cornerstone of the SFCC Honors Program. However it is defined, the importance of becoming connected to a community of scholars, of feeling "part of the college," part of the academic world, is something we strive to

foster in our students. Although formal learning communities for Honors students will not be initiated until next year, we have been making every effort to bolster our students' sense that they are part of a community of scholars.

Pike and Kuh's preferred method of fostering student engagement is to require freshmen to live on campus. While this is not an option open to our community college students, we hope to replicate the experience Pike and Kuh describe of "immersion," of the "close physical presence" of a "community of scholars," through academic projects involving a cohort of students connected through service-learning.

For, as Nancy Stanlick has written, Honors is not Honors unless a community of Honors students is fostered. "For an honors community," she argues, "'honor' is the shared practice and commitment of the group." In her virtue-theoretic approach to Honors education, such communities form in order to further "a *community* goal shared by the individuals" who make it up. Communities of this kind have a "shared conception of the good" such that "individual excellence may manifest itself in the search for the good for all" (79-80). Stanlick's model is one of mutuality, in which "benefits for the individual come about only through the strength of community [while] the community gains its strength, honor, and reputation from the individuals who comprise it" (86). It is pleasant to see Stanlick's Aristotelian model, with its roots in the ancient Greek *polis*, being confirmed by the latest statistical research in education. It is still more gratifying to watch the Honors students at SFCC benefiting from the growing strength of their connection to the community of scholars.

And now, by way of conclusion: The SFCC Honors Program has just begun a new joint project with the Avon Park Historical Society and Depot Museum. They have received a mini-grant from the Florida Humanities Council for their pilot project in oral history: "The early days of integration in Avon Park." This project will collect, preserve, and present to the public first-person narratives of the 1950s and 1960s, as experienced by both African-American and white residents of a rural South Central Florida community. South Florida Community College will lend its recording facilities, making podcasts of the interviews available on the Depot Museum's website. Mike Denham is joining us as our Humanities scholar. SFCC Honors students will earn service-learning credit for primary research in the Depot Museum's archives in support of the project. We'll have a public forum and museum exhibit as a capstone, again with more assistance from the Honors students. In fact, one of SFCC's Honors graduates has been hired as an assistant to the project. We

call him our one-person WPA. He's about to join a long and honorable tradition in the scholarly community. It's really just the beginning.

Works Cited

Pascarella, Ernest T., Christopher T. Pierson, Gregory C. Wolniak, and Patrick T. Terenzini. "First-Generation College Students: Additional Evidence on College Experiences and Outcomes." *Journal of Higher Education* 75.3: 249-284.

Pike, Gary R., and George D. Kuh. "First- and Second-Generation College Students: A Comparison of Their Engagement and Intellectual Development." *Journal of Higher Education* 76 .3: 276-300.

Stanlick, Nancy A. "Creating an Honors Community: A Virtue Ethics Approach." *JNCHC* 7.1 (2006): 75-92.

Valero, Marc. "University Admission Not a Given Anymore." *Highlands Today.* Online Ed. 2 Jun. 2008. 12 Dec. 2008. http://www.highlandstoday.com/.

BLOGGING FLORIDA'S REPUTATIONS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

KYLE D. STEDMAN

A Google search for "Florida reputation" yields the following results: we learn that "Antebellum Florida carried the reputation of a 'rogue's paradise'" (Miller), that "Florida's reputation for flakiness is at stake" (Feldstein), that it is "the destination for migrating 'snowbirds' from northerly climes" (Wearmouth), that "Florida's reputation for electoral integrity has been called into question in recent years" ("Help Verify"), and that "Florida's reputation as the 'Sunshine State' has made it a popular destination for immigrants as well as folks within the U.S." ("Florida History"). And that's just from the first page of results.

Our undergraduate students come to Florida universities with many of these ideas about Florida already simmering in their minds. Those new to the state may have had no prior experiences here except a Disney vacation years earlier, while others may have worked in our citrus orchards or rowed crew on our lakes. As a first-year composition instructor, I try to attune my pedagogy to the real concerns and embodied lives of my students, pushing them to write in real contexts with real audiences as much as possible. This project emerged when that concern for relevancy intersected with my realization that Florida, perhaps more than other places, has a thick series of reputations that students are dealing with, whether we address them in class or not.

This work also grows out of my interest in Tim Lindgren's and Derek Owen's work on "place blogging." Lindgren resists any neat definition of place blogging, describing it in his 2005 *Kairos* article as "an adaptation, or perhaps more precisely, a *localization* of blogging with both generic and geographic qualities." This movement is growing: we can read various personal accounts of life in Florida--or practically anywhere else--by browsing any of the 120 Florida-themed "placeblogs" listed at placeblogger.com, a site whose subtitle is "towards an annotated world with blogs, wikis, forums, maps..." (*Placeblogger*)

.

Lindgren implies that place blogging can be a sort of healing for the distressed, fractured lives so many of us lead. In fact, he sounds as if he is describing frantic undergraduate students coming to school in Florida for the first time when he writes:

> [P]lace blogging displays characteristics that suggest it is responding to additional elements of cultural kairos, namely, the need to construct a meaningful sense of place in the midst of widespread social mobility and rapid environmental transformation. In other words, place bloggers may be actively constructing a sense of self, but it is a self which is deeply informed by place as a central category of identity. (Lindgren)

These lines suggest that I can shape my course activities to participate in this place-based construction of identity that students are already experiencing, encouraging them to add a layer of thoughtful reflection to their interactions with new places. I can create spaces where students' lives away from their computers are fed back into their writing, writing which then shapes their perspective on the physical spaces they encounter; Lindgren and Owens describe this as a "feedback loop" in their 2007 book chapter (197). Ideally, I want students to investigate what Edward W. Soja calls a "trialectics" of space in his book *Thirdspace*, teaching them to use writing to mediate their understandings of how they conceive, perceive, and live in their various spaces. And as Adrienne Rich reminds us in "Notes toward a Politics of Location," attuning ourselves to our embodied selves--selves embodied in specific places--can be a crucial first step toward becoming more ethical and resistant subjects.

As a first step of inquiry into these questions of space and writing online, I developed a series of three blogging prompts designed for first-year composition classes at a large public university in Florida. Blogs are an especially appropriate medium with which to consider issues of space, since they inhabit both a digital space characterized by their specific html and RSS addresses and because they so often reflect writers' perceptions of their lived spaces. I'm reminded of Kathleen M. Kirby's claim in "Thinking through the Boundary: The Politics of Location, Subjects, and Space" that "Space brings together the material and the abstract, the body and the mind, the objective interaction of physical subjects and the elusive transience of consciousness (or the unconscious)" (174). It sounds to me as if she's describing a physical human extending tendrils of consciousness into a computer for a writing task.

In these prompts, I ask students to consider their relationship to Florida, read other Florida-themed blogs, and to practice writing from different subject positions in order to consider the complex interaction

between place, identity, and audience in writing--a tall order for three brief prompts, I know.[1] I received IRB exemption for this project because the classes assigning these prompts already assign public blogging to their students, because students read an informed consent document before accessing the assignments, and because of the anonymity I give to all students: any identifying markers have been left out or changed.

I admit that my approach was rather unscientific: in late summer of this year, I e-mailed the list of almost 80 FYC instructors at my school and asked them to consider assigning my blog topics to their students early in the semester. I had previously created a simple website with student and instructor pages that included suggestions on discussing the prompts in class and technical help on blogging.[2] Seven instructors agreed, and I asked them to share with me the links to their students' blogs when they were completed. However, of those seven, I only received data from two sections, both taught by the same instructor; some of the other teachers apparently only assigned these options as extra credit, which no students so early in the semester felt was necessary. Nevertheless, I still find my results engaging and casually suggestive, as the results of pilot projects like this often are.

The first prompt, "Your Florida Experience," reminds students of Florida's many reputations and asks them to write a blog post "about [their] relationship with Florida." It closes by asking, "How do you want to situate yourself in relation to Florida? What choices do you want to make when writing to communicate your chosen stance toward the state?"

Two things stood out in their responses: first, I read many of their posts as choices to align themselves with or against Florida's reputation as the sunshine state. In a state filled with premade images—Florida as sunny, as a place to go to the beach—it was very common for students to state emphatically how much they either love or hate Florida's weather and beaches, much in the way that we often hear a song and naturally align ourselves as someone who likes it or doesn't like it. Of course, these posts often bordered on the banal, a situation that suggests a teachable moment. What techniques do experienced writers use when approaching hackneyed topics?

Second, many students expressed their relationships to Florida by comparing it to other places, which seems to support a conclusion that writing about place almost necessarily involves writing about *multiple* places. One student who has only been in Florida for about a year writes, "Florida is like the redheaded step child of California. Florida's beaches are good, but not quite as good as Cali. The waves are good, but not quite as good as Cali. The fresh organic food is good, but not quite as

good as Cali's. The plastic surgery is good, but again not quite as good as Cali's."[3] Another student who grew up in Florida writes, "I remember going up to Virginia a few times with my family. As soon as we hit the border of the state it was as if everyone became a bit more friendly and considerate." Another from Florida writes, "I have 28 cousins that live in Texas and whenever I go over there to visit, the way they dress and what is important to them is completely different. They are all about appearances, make up, clothes, hair, being popular, the works. My mom even said that when she lived in Texas she felt like she had to put on make up just to go outside and check her mail down the driveway." One student from South America aligns himself with both Florida's reputations *and* with the U.S.'s larger reputation as a "land of opportunity."

Perhaps in future assignments I will encourage these comparisons in further depth by asking students to choose two or more places and blog regularly about them, given the way our minds naturally make connections. This approach might align with Nedra Reynolds's extended metaphor of composing as an encounter with a city in her book, *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference* (33). I wonder what it would look like to invite students to see their lived experiences in places as a sort of city of memory, which they can then explore through informal public writing--sometimes by blogging their "high rises," the places they work and focus their energies, and sometimes by blogging their "ghettoes," the hidden places they travel that often remain hidden from the mainstream.

My second prompt asks students to read selected readings from two blogs. The first, *A Guide to All Things Tacky Fabulous in Orlando*, is the collection of "tacky fabulous" places, events, people, and signs in Central Florida, written by a blogger known as "Tacky Fabulous." Common posts include ridiculous bumper stickers and signs sighted in the Orlando area, extravagant items for sale (sometimes in the blog's Tacky Fabulous Gift Shop), and reflections on current events around town.

The second blog students read is *Welcome to the Real*, the blog of an anonymous former student at my university who identifies himself only as "Jakob Free." My relationship with this blog has been complex, and decidedly place-based. I saw a flier for it in the stairwell of my department's building on campus, and I was intrigued by its blend of disrespectful political imagery (mustaches and pirate patches drawn onto images of presidential candidates) with comic-book style art—not to mention Jakob's brazen crossing of the boundary between digital and print media, using cut-out letters in a ransom-note style to write "digital guerilla warfare." When I started reading his blog, I had a complex series of

reactions: I was amazed at the strength of his desire to regularly share with the world his disgust with corporate, shallow America (I think I saw a little bit of my more intense, high-school self), but I also felt distaste with his brash determination to not be politically correct in any way, which often meant offensively expressing his hatred for people he didn't want to put up with—especially Floridians. Here's a typical excerpt of his Florida-themed posts:

> Goodbye Florida. You smell like geriatric filled hospices and death and freshly cut grass (for the golf y'know).
> Goodbye Florida. You backward thinking, conservative cesspool.
> Goodbye Florida. I've never contemplated suicide more than when I was within your borders.
> Goodbye Florida. You desolate wasteland of hot stickiness and sweat and fat girls.

However, I've seen a shift in Jakob's posts in the last few months. Instead of posts like the one I just quoted, he seems to have grown increasingly subdued, more interested in intelligently discussing politics than in bashing people who don't share his views. It reminds me of Lorianne, a placeblogger that Lindgren quotes, who writes, "One of the joys of blogging is the experimental nature of it all: one day you can try your hand at a serious post; the next you can experiment with a lighter, more zany voice. In a word, blogging provides a forum where you can let *all* of your personalities (if you happen to have several) out of the bag, each with a day and a spotlight all their own." This is at the heart of my three blogging prompts and this project: my desire to ask students to read and practice this experimental trying on of different identities.

The first part of that goal is reflected in my second blogging prompt, "Blogging Florida," which asks students to read posts by both Tacky Fabulous and Jakob Free and answer four questions about each, including a question that encourages them to see these authors' relationship to Florida as consciously shaped and situated, and two more questions that focus on the potential audience of this discourse about Florida.

Most students posted forcefully and defensively, both on their class blog site and some in comments on *Welcome to the Real.* A couple illustrative examples: "This blogger in particular seemed to do everything he could to establish that he is NOT a part of Florida, and I could really care less. He can take his anger and potty mouth with him when he gets the hell out." Another writes, "And honestly, I have no idea who would find these blogs interesting… maybe fellow Florida haters, or perhaps someone who's thinking about moving here? Or maybe sick people in

general. The second blogger is just creepy, in my opinion." Some seemed to identify his blanket statements about Florida with other forms of prejudice: "It shows how ignorant the blogger is; it is a stereotype of Florida and cruel." One even went so far as to assume that Jakob Free was a bad driver, just because he criticizes Florida drivers, writing, "This blogger sees himself as part of the mess, but not one of the horrible drivers. Maybe he just doesn't realize his own driving skill, or lack of. Many people believe they are the best drivers around when other people may think they're not so great." And perhaps my favorite student response is, "I have to say (sorry) that I'm glad that this is the last week for this particular blog. I don't so much like anything that says, straight out, F*** Florida. I've learned from reading these negative posts that I really like Florida. I was insulted by how harsh they were. So there you have it. Florida is a great place to live. It took disturbing, disturbing posts to help me relize that. So thanks! I love Florida!"

What surprised me was that many students read *All Things Tacky Fabulous in Orlando* as similarly insulting. I've learned from teaching other blogging assignments that students often get especially vocal when they feel that they've been cornered into a stereotype, as if they are being forced to lose some of their identity. For example, one student writes, "Yea there are some weird people out there like the beer can collector and stupid merchandise like those high heel scuba fins but that is just what makes Florida unique. So what they are saying are just examples of specific events, not of the state in a whole. They obviously don't live here or else their viewpoints would change in my opinion." Notice the interesting contradictions here: this student labels Tacky Fabulous's descriptions approvingly as "what makes Florida unique" but then claims that Tacky Fabulous isn't really describing "the state as a whole," implying that we should zoom our focus *out*, away from these oddities. Similarly, another student writes, "I feel really insulted by this blog! Their comments are definitely not well thought into, and they need to take a closer look into Florida, not just the silly things that catch the eye!" It's such an interesting dichotomy: on one hand, a positive impression of the details we see when we take a "closer look into Florida," and on the other, a negative impression of "the silly things that catch the eye."

I left these student posts with a sense of how much first-year writing students value honesty in depictions of place; they reject whatever they perceive as stereotypical or lacking complexity, whether the topic is social class, people groups, or places they care about. But when I consider this attitude toward truth in light of their sometimes banal posts in response to my first prompt, I can't help but wonder: if they crave nuance and detailed