



The Everglades National Park
[FIU IDH 4007](#)

"The Plunge"

Karina Figueredo
IDH 4007
Fall Semester 2005

As the airboat tour began, I was in complete awe. Having never been to the Everglades, I had no idea what to expect. I was enjoying the breeze on such a hot Miami day, trying to take in all the beautiful aspects of the nature around us when the airboat came to a stop. I thought to myself, "Well this looks like a nice place to stop and look around." After all, there were no big trees around us and it seemed as though the sky went on forever. I became distracted from the view, when suddenly one of my professors exclaimed, "Well this looks like a nice place to get in." I immediately turned my attention to him and thought that he was joking, because there was no way we were going to jump in the water on the first day of class. The first day of class is one of introductions, syllabi, and getting to know one another. I hardly believed we were going to get this hands-on after just a few minutes of the class. Besides, I had not brought a change of clothes today. No one was going to get me in that water.

Then it happened. My professors jumped in and actually expected us to go in with them. I figured a few will definitely stay on the airboat. Someone has to be feeling the same way I do, right? Well, the way I felt didn't seem to matter. As I saw my classmates, one by one jumping in, all I kept thinking was "Someone please don't jump in. Stay in the airboat with me." At that point, it became clear to me that staying in the airboat was not an option. I reluctantly began taking off my socks and shoes, doing so with extreme calmness hoping that maybe everyone would get back in the boat quickly and there would be no time for me to go in. But that did not happen. Then it came time, almost everyone was inside the water and I had to go in. I did not want to be the prissy girl who stayed in the boat and refused to get wet or dirty. So, 1, 2, 3, I jumped. There I was, in the middle of the Everglades, submerged in water from my feet to almost my waist. I could feel the marshy, slimy ground below me, the pieces of earth sliding between my toes. And guess what? I actually enjoyed it. I had worked it up so much in my mind and told myself that this was gross, that I didn't realize just how amazing this was. I was "in" the Everglades. Not just looking at it from an airboat or driving past it in a car. I was inside the Everglades. The area of land that is so unique and so astonishing that travelers from across the world come to visit every year. I'm so lucky to have it right in my backyard and I've never appreciated it. This very moment instilled in me a new sense of pride for where I live. Living in Miami with all its traffic and man-made structures can get to me sometimes, but at that moment I was so happy to be a part of something so great. To have right in my town an ecosystem so distinctive that it doesn't exist anywhere else in the world. As I continued to walk around the water, trying hard to keep my balance and not fall, a sense of pride came over me, pride for my home. This is where I live, and I couldn't help but smile to myself.

I can honestly say that I now did not want to get back on the boat. I wanted to keep exploring. I listened attentively as my professors discussed the different plants that lived in this water. Up until that point, sawgrass to me was just an outlet mall. Now, as I ran my fingers through the plant and passed around the periphyton, curiosity came over me and I wanted to see and know everything about the Everglades at once. I kept turning my head in every direction trying not to miss an ounce of what was around me. I looked up at the birds flying by and I even looked down into the water thinking to myself "Could there be alligators swimming by?" While we were on our way, back on the boat, with the breeze once again running through my face, I thought to myself "I'm so glad I took this class. I can't wait for what's to come." The car ride home was a silent one. I didn't even have the radio on. I just kept thinking back to this very precise moment and I once again could not help but smile. I still couldn't believe I had jumped into the water and walked through the swampy land. I could not wait to get home and tell everyone about my experience that day.

After class, I saw a lot of my family and friends at an event and I couldn't keep my mouth shut. By the end of the night, everyone who had walked by me knew of my adventures of jumping into the Everglades. I have never been prouder of living in Miami. My family has never been to the Everglades and I told them that after this class, I would take them and be their personal tour guide. Before going to sleep that night, I remember lying down in bed thinking of what a day it had been. Throughout my three years at FIU, never have I had a day of class like this. If only all classes could be like this, I thought. Before going to this class a co-worker told me that I would love the Everglades and that maybe I would find a new hobby for myself. I think she was right. I know I've only tapped into a small piece of this amazing ecosystem, but I already feel as though this is something that I will enjoy for the rest of my life. I look forward to the upcoming year and I can't wait until the next day of class. Who would've thought that just from a single jump into the water, I would have a different outlook on the world around me. I feel as though I appreciate it more and I go a little slower now to stop and look at all the nature that surrounds me.

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The Balance of Good and Bad

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Fall Semester 2005

During the airboat ride through the Everglades, I was continuously reminded of the astonishing complexity of nature. While gliding over the sawgrass and apple snail filled marsh, the dichotomy of good and evil slowly came into focus. Like many things considered exceptionally "good" or positive, a bad counterpart exists lurking in the hidden darkness. In the case of the Everglades Park the two drastically different traits are exhibited through nature's actions in many forms.

The park offers an obvious advantage and opportunity for the animals inhabiting the land by giving them a natural environment, which is protected by Federal and State laws and regulations. However, underlying this safe and tranquil facade is the reality that many of these animals do not always react in a matter considered natural because their environment is not completely "natural". An example of this would be the alligator that meandered over to our airboat during our class trip. It is not natural nor is it safe for the alligators or the people to be accustomed to such interactions. In all probability this is a result of people feeding and trying to befriend the wild animals, possibly by the tour guides as a method to engage and entertain the clients. The alligators get familiarized with this behavior and expect it from all humans, which is where problems and accidents occur. Another example of the not-so-natural environment at the park is the interaction that our airboat had with the Purple Gallinule that flew and landed right next to the fan of the airboat. The bird was so habituated to the humans from the park that it was unaware of the possible danger it was in. A Purple Gallinule not accustomed to human interaction would have been afraid of a loud floating device carrying over 20 human beings.

However, these unnatural interactions do not consist of only negative effects. Due to the fact that these animals are accustomed to people it does provide us with the opportunity to observe them from a closer distance and expand our knowledge on their habits. It also gives us the opportunity to interact with such extravagant animals that under other situations would not be possible.

Another example of good and bad intertwined within nature is the effects of the hurricane. The tranquility of the water and the stillness among the trees were a perfect portrait of peace during the excursion, however blemishes of destruction visible from the airboat randomly disturbed this serene landscape. I realized the balance nature carried between its flourishing environment and the hurricane scenes normally thought to be devastating and destructive. Behind these natural disasters is a meticulous beauty and well-constructed matrix that can only be created by nature. Much like humanity, nature practices survival through production, generations of animals, plants, and organisms. This production however, often leads to overpopulation and

overcrowding. This is a rapid growing problem humanity also faces. Humans have yet to learn an appropriate method to control our population. Often we depend on nature to somewhat control the human race, through disease and old age. Nature, on the other hand, depends on itself to keep its environment balanced. Events such as the hurricane and forest fires help keep the population at an acceptable range. These disasters also promote biodiversity by providing the opportunity for new habitats and species to flourish, which in other overcrowded situations would never have had the chance.

Some of the trees lining the boat's path during our trip were uprooted and knocked down due to Hurricane Katrina. The damage was a scene that brought sadness as well as flashbacks of the damage that occurred to our homes and neighborhoods by the same hurricane. However the results to our homes were different from the results of the Everglades - this is where the complex relationship between bad and good within nature happens. A hurricane, though a travesty, I now have come to realize is also a necessity. The trees I saw damaged and drying created new homes for animals in the area such as the snail kites and the raccoons. The decaying wood offered food to other animals such as the apple snail and the vacant area left in the ground made room for new vegetation to grow. That is nature's method of giving other plants and animals a chance to survive in the marsh habitat - the sunshine through all the rain.

A classic example of good and bad being portrayed within nature is that of hunter and prey. When one thinks of hunter and prey often an image similar to that of a leopard prowling over grassland for dinner comes to mind. The Everglades offers this relationship in a more microscopic form. A symbolic bird from the Everglades is the snail kite. The snail kite survives by feeding on the apple snail, using its beak to loosen the snail from its shell. The thought may seem cruel, however the apple snail is also a hunter. It hunts and scavenges for algae. It is the circle of life, and it is yet another necessity of nature: life and death.

The Everglades has provided our community with an unlimited number of resources from drinking water to an improved knowledge and understanding of our world. One of the most powerful assets given to us by the park is the comprehension of the balance between good and bad. Natural disasters, intrusions to the natural environment, and the need for death in order to survive are all symbolic aspects of the need for a bad counterpart to every good. Through nature's example, society can learn to accept disastrous events, such as the loss of a loved one or daily inconveniences and convert them into positive, beneficial experiences.

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Lost in My Own Thoughts

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It was like a movie or maybe a book. A group of young adult students enjoying their youth and exploring a world that they are not quite familiar with. It is a world that they have heard about and read books on, but this group was actually taking the chance to experience it for themselves. Everyone knows that something is bound to happen when you have twenty college kids canoeing in the Everglades.

A cloudy day and we have only been in our canoes five minutes and we are soaking wet. Not because we fell in, but because it is raining. That is okay though, we are not going to melt. The view here really is spectacular and quickly makes me forget it's raining. I have lived in Miami all my life and really have never seen so much natural area without a McDonalds or a mall around. I love this natural world - it teaches us a lot, like how easy we have it today, how much we take plants and animals for granted, and how hard past generations worked to give us the technology we have today.

My cell phone and Onstar phone in my car doesn't work and I am going crazy because I wanted to make phone calls. What did the Indians do when they had to communicate with someone far away? They managed and survived so I know I will too. But, why have we become so dependent on these miniscule things of our modern society? Being out in the Everglades I learn that these objects should not have priority in my life.

So, we continue with our journey. We are lucky to have a paddle out here, not like "Willie Bee" who had to use a pole. We are already at the back of the group, if we had a pole I think we would only move with the current.

I spoke too soon. Before I know it, I find myself asking, "Where the hell are we?" None of the other canoes are visible. There are no signs of civilization in any direction. I immediately see myself on the news: "Two FIU students vanish in the Everglades." I imagine helicopters flying around looking for us. A crew of police on a search looking for clues to get closer to where we are. I think of everything. I even try to use my phone, ha ha, yeah right. It will never work out here. I am so freaked out that I forget how badly I have to use the bathroom.

This is even worse than getting lost in a bad neighborhood in Miami. At least there I will probably be robbed and have my car taken, but I am around civilization and I have hope of getting home. Here I wish I could be robbed. It is scary. I don't know where we are, and our only hope is the map we were handed only fifteen minutes earlier. We go to grab it and the rain has pretty much made it disintegrate into little pieces of nothing.

"So, what do we do now?" I see nothing around, not even a bird. The only thing I hear is the canoe against the spike rush, this once beautiful and relaxing sound. It was even the topic of conversation between my partner, Francis and me for a while. The sound is perfect for the CD's that are used to relax people, or the natural sounds used to put babies to sleep. The sound is

so peaceful; it is almost like the waves of the ocean. But, now I can't stand it, it has gotten so annoying. I am even willing to stop rowing so I don't have to hear it anymore.

Being lost has obviously taken the best of me. I am frustrated and afraid. I think of everything: What if it starts lightning? What if there is an alligator? What if we reach the ocean, then what do we do? I am so angry with myself, how could I let this happen. I made it even worse for myself thinking about that python that had been all over the news. If it can eat alligator, it can very easily eat me.

You know what, I will try looking at the bright side. I am giving my arms a really good workout and I am getting a tan, it will be very uneven but it's a tan. This segment of my thoughts ends very quickly. There is not much else positive I can find.

I am back to point A. I am freaking out, but the good thing is I am not really showing it, and we have decided to head back to where we came from, if we can even find where that is at this point.

Am I delirious or do I hear a voice? There is hope. It is a voice. I yell back and hear it closer. I feel like a kid again on Christmas running to the tree to find all the gifts. It is Dr. Graham. I have never been so happy to see a professor in my life.

Now how embarrassing it will be to face the class. Of everyone why did I get lost? Nothing like this has ever happened to me. But, I look back at it now and it was funny, crazy, but funny. It will be a good story to tell my grandkids about. I just hope it never happens again.

What started off like a movie or book actually turned out be what you see on the evening news. Breaking news: "Two young adults are missing. They started their day canoeing in the Everglades with their class and now they are nowhere to be found..."

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Inspiration from the Simplicity of the Natural World

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Fall Semester 2005

When I first thought about the idea of going to an art gallery where all of the work is of the Everglades and the environment, I did not think much of it. I honestly thought it would be boring and kind of a waste of time. But, when I walked in the door of the little cottage-like building I knew I was wrong.

Black and white photos have more colors than color photos actually do. They show the beauty of the photo and do not have any kinds of distractions that colors bring. The little bit of time that we spent in Clyde Butcher's gallery had an impact on me, one that will probably last for the rest of my life.

It is amazing how he can turn something so simple as a photograph into an unforgettable piece of work. Maybe it is because we do not have the time to enjoy nature that Butcher's work is so incredible. Life today in the twenty-first century revolves around material things, that if gone today can be replaced tomorrow. The only true value they have is monetary. Is that a value at all? How can paper painted with colors give something a value?

Butcher's art brings out the meaning of life. It reminds me that today's fast paced life makes us forget about the true importance of life. Butcher spends an entire day out waiting for that one perfect picture. He takes the time to enjoy the real beauty and capture it at its finest.

The sadness of living in today's world is that people actually can't afford to spend a day outside just sitting there. We either have to work, go to school, or do chores around the house. There is always something that we have to do and which cannot be left undone.

All of Butcher's art is a reflection of life the way I see it. When we are given gifts, we don't look at how much time the person spent to choose it or that they took the time to remember us. No, the typical person will look at how much they spent and when they are getting a gift for that person will spend no more and no less than they did. The photographs show the time that Butcher spent to capture them. They also show that we forget to stop and smell the roses.

It is something I always promised myself. When I was younger my parents never stopped to smell the roses. In a sense I can't complain because I always had what I wanted materialistically but not what I really wanted. I wanted them to take the time to get to know me, and the both of them, not just one because the other one

was tired or busy. My parents are great, they really are. But, sometimes I feel that they judge me based on the extent of my education and how much money I make in my career. Why they taught me that, I really don't know, but it often makes me feel like I am not good enough.

To me it is important to see beyond how much money a person is "worth" and take the time to get to know who they really are in terms of personality, thoughts, and just what a person is about. I feel like that has kept my parents from actually getting to know me. That is why I appreciate Butcher's work even more. He takes the time to look deep into nature and discover the beauty that you can't see at a glance. We can all take pictures, but we can't all capture a description of nature itself, because most of us do not take the time. A digital camera cannot help make a photo aesthetically beautiful, it is the photographer. That is why we should give the people around us more time. It shouldn't matter if a person is a CEO or a homemaker, you can't define them based on their profession.

Earlier this year my parents took the time. They, my brother, my fiancé and I went out on our boat the first weekend we had it and spent from Friday to Sunday in the middle of the ocean. We did not have television or Internet; we had each other to get to know. We played card games, fished and talked. There was time to get to know each other going beyond the judgments. That weekend connected us so much that I can actually tell them that I love them.

I easily connected with Butcher's work and saw beyond the fact that it was just a photograph of a flower or clouds. He took so much time to get that perfect picture. I think of each one as the epitome of his connection. Nature let Butcher borrow its beauty as a gift for him taking the time to get to know it.

It is the simple things in life that we need to make time for and appreciate. This is a message that I have carved into my heart and have made sure that my fiancé shares it with me so that we can pass it on to our children and those we surround ourselves with. Blue-collar, white-collar, we are all the same. Money is not always there to take care of you and help you when you are going through a hard time. It is those people who spend the time to get to know you.

Black and white, the photos tell us more than we think. Butcher's work has taken something such as nature and taken it beyond just thoughts and made it into a beautiful photo without the colors, and expanded on what defines the photo.

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Peeking Eyes

Tanisha Grey
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Fall Semester 2005

Fifty stout roots reaching out from the shallow water to touch the undersides of their host tree, short, quick ripples lap each root an inch high above the beach's apparent water level; the sole mangrove enjoys its own breezes on Shell Key in the Florida Keys. Just one of Clyde and Niki Butcher's vast collections of photos of Florida's greatly feared wildlife and profoundly undiscovered wetlands. Greeting its patrons, the studio boasts a life-sized photograph of a fork in the middle of a water-roadway and an alligator peeking through the sawgrass blades at the photographer by the far end of it: the essence of the Everglades.

I walked through the aisles of the studio and through the hearts of all the 'gators in their own homelands, while I smelt the breath of each multi-toothed reptile as they sunbathed, their jaws wide open. Every angle, the lens pondered to get the perfect shot. The Ghost Orchid breathes in and out in synchronized perfection: blooming buds arrested at birth. As my path turned through the gallery, and the collection spread, quietly the twelve seagulls gathered in fellowship to wash their clothes in the bay just before sundown, while the clouds watched angrily on Butternut Key.

I never realized how much lush land Florida has but seems not to flaunt. The journey was long and tiresome to meet the tropics hidden along the Tampa - Miami connection. The beginning saw the burning eyes of nightlong gamblers, whose boots braved the soil outside the casino at Krome Avenue. Beyond The Miccosukee Indian Casino, there were no more tall buildings, no Publix Supermarkets, no ATM's, just blue sky kissing green and brown earth. For someone like myself, who's accustomed to city-slicking convenience, I got a bit agoraphobic, wide spaces for miles. Forty-five minutes and thirty-seven miles later, the bleached blue one story rooftop was not misplaced. It wasn't the homemade thatch roof like the Indian village, nor was it the 21st Century low-rise commercial structure I had expected. Its interior however revealed an unlikely collection of timeless masterpieces.

Cuba's wing is mountainous. The Wildlife Federation named 2002 the year of the mountain, and Butcher was prime suspect for capturing the spirit of the hills, the rocks, the plateaus, and the cliffs in our communist neighbor's territory. There's a grassy natural "replica" of the Mayan Pyramids about 100 miles south of the studio and less than 12 inches from my face, the black & white pictures are so colorful, every detail visible. Dazzling, while fresh, cottony clouds hovered over the herd of blacks and grays, offsetting their grave, yet sharp presence in every window. Along with Cuba and many of America's beautiful postcards, I visited every part of Florida with every turn. My pants cuffs were wet as I walked away from the Loxahatchee tributaries and the sun met my acquaintance on the Rock Island Prairies. Some majestic rivers I've never known existed are just a few miles away from our back yard.

My eyes welled for a few moments just before the receptionist flurried around the bend to see about me and my questions. I wondered why we as Floridians allowed for so much of our natural land to dissipate. Had we ever acquainted ourselves with our own local attractions?

Have foreigners been the chief appreciators of our backyard? Since we haven't valued our own gardens, exotics along with upstate snow flurries flock to our rainy Septembers, blossoming buds, congregating seagulls, roaring panthers, snapping 'gators, and our famous warm Decembers; while we collect their funds, sit back and remain unconcerned about our backyard diamond.

Consequently, time and energy are now being spent to undo our damage of neglect. Recognition of this treasure has been overlooked, apparent in the search and research of Clyde's photos. If our lives weren't as filled with capitol gains and fictitious pursuits of wealth and unused education, then we could be more whole individuals and stronger peoples, much like the Miccosukee Indians.

Developers want our treasure. While the natural ecosystem of the Everglades is essential to its inhabitants and its longevity, their dollars-in-hand argue that land equals money, just as in the situation of the "Miami Circle," a recent Downtown discovery of a possible Tequesta Indian tribe artifact at the mouth of the Miami River. The discovery of the artifact caused a huge uproar between archeologists, naturalists, conservationists, and developers. The developers, of course, wanted to develop and keep on track with the 100 million dollar scheduled twin tower residential high-rise; however they met with due opposition. If we are not careful, the Everglades will fall under the same scrutiny and the outcome may be different from what most might expect.

I left the building, bidding the attendants a fair day, when six pairs of peeking eyes spotted me from the water. Also, there was a 3½ foot alligator at the roadside along with a red-bellied woodpecker, who walked me to the road. Only if I had some kind of camera extender to take a real close-up, would my day be full.

After making friends with the birds and the alligators, I went along my way. Experiencing the Everglades and bonding with its natural fossils, history and culture is a nice back rub: relaxing your soul and rejuvenating your mind enough to invigorate your spirit. The once abandoned backyard had now been discovered by me, an unlikely city-slicking college girl who otherwise would never have met the sawgrass and its peeking eyes.

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Audubon: Careless Bird Lover

Alberto Pisani
IDH 4007
Fall Semester 2005

John James Audubon has been made famous by his work 'Birds of America' in which he portrays life size prints of over 400 birds. His technique consisted of shooting as many birds of the same species as possible so that he could use them as models for his life size paintings. Today such acts of barbarism would not go without public condemnation; but his work was done in the early 19th century, when the general public had a different approach to wildlife conservation. It is argued that without Audubon's work the general public at the time would have never learned about the existence of many species of birds that he shot and drew, and consequently people would have never cared enough to eventually agree that the Everglades need to be protected for these species to continue to exist. Audubon himself was highly concerned for nature conservation, even though his love for hunting would suggest otherwise. In fact, most hunters (not yahoo's from cities that just want to blast something) are very pro-conservation because if their favorite hunting areas are destroyed then there would not be anything for them to hunt. I still do not agree with Audubon's methods, which in many cases are exaggerated (like having a shooting contest with other explorers to the point where the dead and injured birds are amassed in a mountain-like heap) and inexcusable.

Although the work of documenting all those species of birds was a great achievement, one has to look at the price that was paid. Audubon himself killed scores of them to get accurate portraits, and in the generations after Audubon's death, the birds' plumes became a highly requested item of fashion. This led to even more killing by plume hunters that nearly extinguished many species. I think this came about thanks to the publicity that Audubon gave them and that the general public was not ready to appreciate these beautiful birds when Audubon presented them in his works, and instead of wanting to protect them they chose to make fashionable hats out of their plumes. So perhaps Audubon did more harm than good by exposing these birds, because had they never been seen by the fashion designers of the time, they would have never been used as hats for the next few generations.

In general I am not against hunting if the animals killed are then eaten. I believe that one should only kill what one will consume. I cannot stand excessive killing because it is wasteful and harmful to the balance of the ecosystem. Audubon's name in my opinion should not even be mentioned in such books like the Audubon Guide to South Florida' because his excessive shooting did much more damage than good to the ecosystems that he claimed to cherish so much. I simply cannot justify the killing or maiming of hundreds of birds at a time just to let the vast majority of them rot under the sun. In fact, had the public not been exposed to many of these exotic birds to begin with there would have never even been the absurd bird hat' fashion of the later years of the 19th century. It would have been much better had we discovered these birds later, when people were more responsible in their treatment of ecosystems. Then, instead of having one person shoot multiple birds just to draw them, you could have simply taken a photograph of the same bird and not damaged anything in the process. Audubon was a sport hunting fool that does not deserve the recognition he gets. His excessive hunting style reflects on a general culture of excess that led to much damage to habitats around the United States

under various forms: dredging of swamps, pollution of streams and air, cutting down forests, and generally destroying the natural beauty of the United States to please the ever growing population and their excessive needs. Even today the general population embraces this culture of excess. The Native Americans lived in harmony with nature and never took more than what they needed, effectively living within the circle of life; the white man did nothing but disrupt the cycle of life, acting more like a cancer than an animal.

Numerous wonderful animals have gone extinct or are in great danger of being extinct because of our irresponsible treatment of our natural surroundings (a good example being the random shooting of buffalo by train passengers crossing the great plains that led to the near extinction of an animal that once thrived in those regions). Even a beautiful National Park like the Everglades is no where near its past glory, and the once natural water flow is now controlled by man through a series of canals, pumps, and ridges. The restoration plans all include man controlled water flows and fires because we have found it impossible to coexist naturally with our surrounding and the only way for us to maintain them as they were intended to be is to control them ourselves. I do not believe it will ever be possible under these circumstances to restore the Everglades to their past beauty and plentiful resources, but at least we will be able to maintain a semi-natural environment (with the flow of water and the fire control being artificial'). It would be nice if we could all learn to live in harmony with nature like the natives did, but our culture of excess does not fit well with that sort of lifestyle so we need to take what we can get. The only hope we have to maintain these ecosystems is if, through technology, we can simulate and reproduce the natural conditions (such as in the case of the Everglades with water flow and fires). This is why it is very important to focus a lot of resources on science.

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Proud Miccosukees

Alberto Pisani
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Fall Semester 2005

Before hearing an anthropology professor give a brief overview of the indigenous people of South Florida I had no idea to what extent the culture of the two remaining tribes, the Seminoles and the Miccosukees, had been preserved. I always assumed that all Indian tribes in the United States had been assimilated into western culture and that their customs, religion, and language had mostly died out if not for the few words and ceremonies used as tourist attractions. I was highly surprised when I found out that the Miccosukees not only still practice their religion, but they do not allow outsiders into their ceremonies (except for limited access to few) and they still teach their language and customs in their schools. In fact, the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians is actually independent of the United States and the land they live on belongs to them. As is proudly noted on their main web page, they are completely self-sufficient. Another shocking fact is that they are the only Indians that have never signed a peace treaty with the United States, proving that these people have great values and have not been coerced into any compromises.

As an immigrant to the United States myself, I've always believed that it is very important for foreigners to maintain their culture, customs, and language within their community. I'm always very much disappointed when I meet Italian-Americans - just two, sometimes even one generation removed from Italy - who no longer speak Italian and know very little about Italian culture. Not that integrating into American culture is bad, but to lose touch with one's origins so quickly is always a shame. As the generations pass, immigrant groups get integrated into the American lifestyle and often forget everything about their home countries other than the fact that it is their heritage. For the Miccosukees to have been living among Westerners and to not have been integrated (maintaining their native language) is a very positive feat which is seldom accomplished by immigrant groups for such long periods of time (perhaps the Cuban-American community has done a similar job in South Florida, but they have not been on US land for nearly as long). To be fair, the Miccosukees have been mostly isolated until the completion of the Tamiami Trail. The lands they live on have never been appealing to anyone (it is a swamp!) so for the most part they have been left alone by the greater powers. Still, the lands have now been exposed to Western culture and they have maintained their heritage for many years.

The most interesting bit about the Indian discussion was when our guest anthropology professor talked about them never signing a treaty with the US. Apparently, when Reagan was president he noticed this peculiar fact and decided he was going to take their land away from them. This obviously stirred up an uproar and never happened, but the US government still would not recognize the Miccosukees as an independent nation, so the Tribe leaders decided they would go to Cuba and get recognition from Castro (who would have been more than happy to give it to them). Anything that would potentially embarrass the US would be embraced by the Cuban regime. To avoid such a scandal the US government gave in and recognized their autonomy. Again, the Miccosukees (and Seminoles - the two tribes are closely related) showed great determination and courage by not giving in to the pressures of the Federal government.

Also not widely known is that the Miccosukees and Seminoles are closely related. They descend from the same 'federation' (the Creek Indians) but have established themselves separately. It seems that for quite a long time the Miccosukees and Seminoles were not even allowed to inter-marry, but that has changed even though inter-marriage is still rare and if your spouse from the other tribe dies you get kicked out from the tribe (i.e. you are no longer allowed to live among Miccosukees if you are Seminole). This intolerance for cultural mixing (marriages with whites are frowned upon) is what has helped them preserve their heritage, culture, and language and is what surprised me the most. There are many outside pressures that make certain communities (be they immigrants or Native Americans) feel the need to integrate into local customs and language and for a community so small like the Miccosukees to resist these pressures and maintain their heritage is a very admirable feat. In fact I have gained much more interest in the Miccosukees now that I know this and would absolutely love to be able to visit the Indian Village more often (something I would have never thought of before) just to find out more about their customs, history, and heritage first hand.

In a way the Miccosukees are very much like the Everglades National Park: at first there is no interest in the land because it is inaccessible and swampy, then there is a big push to drain and develop the Everglades, and finally, after they survive the drainage attempts, they are protected and allowed to return to their more natural conditions. The Miccosukees in a very similar way were left alone initially (because they lived in the swamp and there were no interests there), then the Reagan administration tried taking what little of their land was left, and finally now they are recognized as autonomous and allowed to practice their religion and speak their language.

To conclude, I think it is good to see that the general public has become more accepting of other cultures, for in the past Native Americans were looked down on and practically persecuted, while today in South Florida we allow them to coexist with our society but at the same time maintain their separate and unique way of life. Perhaps this shows that we are moving in the right direction as a society, away from close-mindedness and towards embracing diversity.

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C is for Confusion, and Chokoloskee

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I had to laugh. Walking in the parking lot with the rest of my class, en route to board our canoes and explore a bit of wilderness, I overheard a tour guide addressing his group. "And over there, behind those trees, Mr. Watson landed his boat to the welcome of 20 men...and when all was said and done, 29 bullets were pulled from Watson's body." Now, I wasn't laughing at the idea of a man being shot to death, just the fact that the tour guide's story was a bit off from what Matthiessen presented in his novel *Killing Mr. Watson*. And that's why we were here. Having finished the novel, we were to voyage to the southwest Florida coast to the city where it all happened: Chokoloskee.

The real number of bullets that were taken from Watson actually numbered 33, according to record, talk, and subsequently, Matthiessen. Yet, after one takes in the entire novel, even that number doesn't hold 100% validity, a common characteristic of Watson talk. The story of Mr. Watson is told from the points of view of several different people who had contact with him while he was in the area known more generally as the Ten Thousand Islands. With no one person covering every event, and there were many throughout the book, it makes it difficult to make any definitive statement about Watson. Add a whole bunch of bias to any information captured and it becomes even harder.

At the time the events of the novel took place, the turn of the 20th century, Chokoloskee was an area very detached from regular society. People on the run sought refuge in the area's labyrinth of water and mangrove islands. The area was not the most welcoming, with most inhabitants keeping mainly to themselves, leaving no real sense of community to be had. Of course, there was no real governmental structure present in the area, leaving the land pretty much lawless. Yet, Chokoloskee seemed to be a place of little activity, that is, until Mr. Watson arrived. Avoiding a shady past himself, Watson came to the area as many before him had done. Unlike them, however, Watson seemed to garner quite a bit of attention. He was a tough businessman, and made his way up as quickly as possible. For example, unlike every other inhabitant, Watson was able to produce more than he needed himself, allowing him to profit off the extra product. Others merely produced what they needed to survive. Further, he did not get along with the kindest of attitudes. This sternness he presented, along with his ambition, stood out quite a bit among his neighbors. Being the center of attention is not always a good thing, and it certainly wasn't for Watson. Stories and speculation, stemming from emotions including fear and jealousy, placed Watson in direct connection with many deaths in the area. Stories, however, don't hold the amount of validity that would be necessary to hold a case in court. For instance, in the murders most closely associated with Watson, that of the Tucker family, the best evidence against him included a motive and an indefinite whereabouts. Watson was very interested in a particular piece of land, hoping to set up a key trading post that would bring in quite a bit of business. The trouble, however, came with who was on that piece of land. A family of squatters with no written documentation placing them as owners of the land had already built a house upon it. When Watson obtained the land and was notified of the squatters' presence, he became rather angry, making verbal and written threats to that family. A bit later,

the husband and pregnant wife showed up dead. Men who pulled up on the scene said they saw a keel mark that was unmistakably Watson's, and he got pinned to the murder. Certainly he denied the accusations, yet never really cooled down, and the attention he drew eventually led to his murder at the guns of over 20 men.

Similar to the confusion and speculation surrounding Mr. Watson, navigating Chokoloskee is not the most straightforward activity. Meeting first as a class next to the Smallwood store, our vantage point allowed us to get a good sense of our bearings. We, however, were a bit detached from wild Chokoloskee; standing upon a seawall adjacent to an old trading post and a marina. In the distance lay several of the islands that form the area known as the Ten Thousand Islands. Viewed from above, the thousands of mangrove islands form hundreds of thousands of possible routes for one to transect. Drawing a line between the islands on a map is quite simple if you're not too picky. Keep the map in hand and take it to the water and things get a bit difficult. The turns are quick and the current can move quite well, so one wrong turn gone unnoticed can send an entire trek off course with little hope of getting back on. Sure, seasoned travelers or long time inhabitants may notice the angle of an island's point, or a distinctive tree, perhaps. Due to the generally uniform nature of the area, however, newcomers may have trouble pinpointing landmarks or distinguishing between one channel or the other. So, if one is unable to impose the map on the landscape, they are not far from lost at all. Traverse with no map from the beginning and good luck finding your way anywhere far from the familiar.

Following the individual stories in *Killing Mr. Watson* can be as confusing as navigating the Ten Thousand Islands. That island may seem to look familiar, creating a sense of certainty, yet just as Bill House's story almost puts Watson at the scene of the Tuckers' murder, you just can't be sure. And if that's not enough, just as the water cuts new channels and reshapes coastlines in the Ten Thousand Islands with time, stories are changed with time as well.

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Lessons Learned

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Spring Semester 2005

Shark Valley... Where were the sharks and the valley? Grass, alligators, birds...they were all there but the sharks were missing in action. Anyways, I may have missed the sharks but I did come away from Shark Valley with two lessons learned. One is that determination pays off and second that it is never too late to try something new.

Fifteen miles sounded like a challenging ride but I figured I could do it. I thought to myself, "you're young and in decent shape it shouldn't be so bad." Lets just say that the dark sky and threat of rain were an ominous warning of what lay ahead. I jumped on my bike and the first couple of miles went by easily. There were birds to see and alligators to avoid. Then the wind started to take its toll. I felt like I was peddling and going nowhere. The wind was determined to keep me from making any forward motion. Miles started passing slower and slower. The tower, the halfway mark and my refuge, seemed a distant dream. It was frustrating and tiring. I started to empathize with Chaz's character from Skinny Dip. The everglades changed from a place I once liked to one I couldn't wait to get out of. I understood Chaz's eagerness to get home and be comfortable and away from the sweat and labor. Then I realized that I was identifying with a whining, lazy con artist and I straightened myself out. I told myself that the tower wasn't that far away and that if I kept pushing I would be there in no time at all. My mind said keep going but my legs were saying stop right here. Determination to reach my goal carried me to that tower and onto a comfortable bench. After lunch I was feeling rested and my legs were ready to go. The ride back went a little smoother because the wind was not a factor. It no longer teased me as I struggled to move forward. Not even the rain could stop me. I was on a roll and I wasn't going to stop rolling until I reached the end of the trail. It was a challenging ride for me but I was determined to complete it. Needless to say, I have never been so happy to see my car before. I couldn't wait to throw that bike in the trunk and go home. I was proud of myself for riding those 15 miles. I am not, however, too proud to admit that I won't do it again.

Another thing that I came to realize is that it is never too late to learn something new. Whether it's learning a new language, physics, or how to ride a bike, any time is a good time to try something new. "There is no time like the present" sums up the way new things should be approached. Robert exemplified this approach admirably when he mounted a bike for the first time last Friday. I never thought somebody could go twenty-one years without learning to ride a bike. I always figured everybody learned to ride a bike in elementary school with their parents running along side them offering words of encouragement. Robert put a dent in that line of thought. He

learned how to ride in an unconventional way. Instead of being gradually introduced to the world of biking he skipped the training wheels and plunged right into the main event. It must have been hard for him to start learning how to ride a bike in front of all his peers. He didn't let the laughs and giggles stop him from jumping on the bike. He didn't even seem embarrassed when the professor was holding the bike up for him while he tried to maintain his balance. That shows that if you want to learn something you should just do it. It is often difficult to try new things because we are afraid of what people might think. It's a matter of letting go of judgments and taking the bull by the horns. Robert took a few falls but learned quickly how to keep the bike upright.

Learning and trying new things involves risks. The biggest risk is failure. Failure is a common fear for many people. That fear keeps people from breaking out of their comfort zone. Nobody likes not achieving a goal. It can be a blow to self-esteem. The key is to have enough confidence to try again. It is easier to say, "this is what I know how to do and this is what I am sticking to." It takes courage to do something you have never done before because chances are you might not get it right the first time. If no risks were taken or changes happening one would not be living. Life is change and doing new things. This evidenced by the overwhelming amount of "first times" that everybody experiences: This first time you learn to walk, ride a bike, first day of school, first day on the job... the list goes on and on. They may all get the butterflies going in our stomachs and the doubts cluttering our heads but once you do it the unfamiliarity and nervousness fades away. It is the initial fear that inhibits people from doing new things. Once the first step is taken, things start to fall into place.

So even though Shark Valley did not offer any obvious likeness to its name, it did offer me two important lessons to take home with me. Who knows what challenges lay ahead of them? There may be times when it seems like there is no way you are going to get through a problem. That is where determination kicks in. If you want it bad enough you will keep going until you achieve what you set out to do. There is always going to be new things to learn and it's never too late to learn them. We are constantly learning throughout our lives. It takes confidence and the willingness to fall down a few times in order to ride successfully down the path of life.

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The Everglades for Dummies

Catherine Torres
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Spring Semester 2005

The best way to get people interested in a novel is to title it *Skinny Dip*. Even better, one of the most effective ways to get people involved in Florida's Everglades is by subtly making it the setting for a novel full of murder, sex, mayhem, and lots of comedy. Carl Hiaasen's *Skinny Dip* is an attractive read from the start. The title and the cover immediately call on the baser of human instinct. They are catchy and promise readers entertainment. It is a perfect marketing scheme. Even if a person were to see the novel but neglect to purchase it, there is a big chance that that person will read the cover preview... "Chaz Perrone...the only marine scientist in the world who doesn't know which way the Gulf Stream runs"... "Illegally dumping fertilizer into the endangered Everglades"... "The warped politics and mayhem of the human environment"... Automatically, any passer-by skimmer of the novel will wonder: "What way does the Gulf Stream run?" At the same time, they get a glimpse into possibly un-chartered waters and gain minimal, yet important details about the Everglades, namely, that it is endangered and that 'warped politics' are part of the reason. If an individual delves into the novel, knowing little to nothing about Florida's Everglades, they get a crash course about Florida's environment in an *Everglades for Dummies* kind of way.

Skinny Dip is a great read for various reasons. It is packed with a murder mystery plot full of vengeance, plenty of shootings, and lots of scheming. It provides some ridiculous situations, hilarious sex scenes, and enough drama to keep a reader sufficiently entertained. The characters are real and the situations, though sometimes farfetched, are a good measure of the absurdity that is very much a reality. The most important aspect of the novel, however, is not why Chaz tried to kill Joey or how Joey goes about getting her revenge, but rather how an environment can affect the daily lives of individuals. The Everglades in Hiaasen's novel is the core of the story. Many critics may argue that the novel oversimplifies the Everglades situation, and it does. But what person, save an environmentalist, is going to pick up a novel titled *Everglades: a Complete History*? Not too many people want to pick up the complete Microsoft handbook and read it in its entirety. Instead, they pick up the *Microsoft for Dummies* guide and learn the basics. That is essentially what *Skinny Dip* is all about, the basics of the Everglades. It exists, it is endangered, and it needs to be saved.

Hiaasen exposes the truth about the Everglades by interweaving it into the story's plot. Earl, the big fat and hairy bodyguard, becomes the 'tool' essential to understanding the Everglades. Because of Tool's overwhelming pain caused by a bullet wound, he becomes addicted to fentanyl. In his quest for the patches of fentanyl, he visits hospices, "where the people are too sickly to make a fuss". He steals from them, with no care whatsoever

for their wellbeing, and regardless, always goes back for more patches. In the same respect, Florida's Everglades are like the hospice patients, continually attacked, vandalized, and then ignored. Ultimately, the environment has no voice and gives in without a fuss. If the environment were to have a voice and refuse to "part easily with [its] medication" as in an assisted-living facility, then it would not be as easy a target for people like Tool. The only reason Tool chose to target hospices is because it is there that he can steal without a fuss. It is amazing that no one questioned Tool's actions, but ignored him and assumed that he was a newly hired orderly. Because people and their actions go unquestioned, an innumerable amount of sins are committed against the environment. Nature acts like the book "The Giving Tree". It says, like Maureen, "Go ahead and take it, but please be careful. I tend to bleed for no darn reason these days" (135). The Everglades give us the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the beauty we see, but if people continue to use it and abuse it, we will lose it. Tool continued to take from the voiceless until one voice told him different. It is only when Maureen became a living being to him (by asking him his name and keeping up a conversation) that Tool realized that perhaps he was doing something wrong. It is only when you allow someone or something to get close that that something affects you enough to make you think twice about your actions. Unfortunately, unless people add a voice, like Maureen's, to the Everglades, it will continue to be destroyed.

A clever addition to Hiaasen's novel is the title given to Maureen's nursing home, Elysian Manor. Elysian is the perfect paradise that comes after death. In a sense, it seems that Hiaasen's reference to Elysian points to the paradise of the Everglades, a paradise that may one day only be remembered after its death for the paradise that it once was. Tool realized the 'bankable fact' that "people spend little time with their ailing mothers and fathers" (133). This bankable fact also exists in regards to the Everglades. People spend little to no time engaging in the environment that surrounds them, which only adds to its misery. There are plenty of residents who have lived in Florida their entire lives and have never ventured into the Everglades. At the same time, how can someone like Chaz, who has traveled into the Everglades, "not be dazzled" by its stunning beauty? (250).

After fifteen miles of pedaling by bicycle through the Everglades, watching the birds, and counting the numerous alligators, it is difficult to believe that anyone cannot appreciate the environment of Florida. Reading novels about the settings that need to be conserved adds to the actual experience of that environment. But when a visit to the environment is not possible, authors like Carl Hiaasen offer readers important information about the Everglades without the fifteen mile bike trip. Only a dummy would pass up on the message.

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Controlling Life

Catherine Torres
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Spring Semester 2005

Anhinga Trail was absolutely gorgeous last Friday. It was a beautiful day. It was sunny and breezy. The birds were out in full force, while the alligators sunned themselves on the land. Everglades's visitors were also abundant, and tourist attractions were everywhere. The Double Crested Cormorants lined the sides of the walk ways, ignoring the hoards of school children and tourists that occasionally walked too close. The Wood Storks walked through the saw grass, clumsily churning the water with their feet and blindly indulging in late morning snacks. The Great Blue Herons fished as well, though with their sight instead of their feet. The lower water level made for a spectacular feeding ground.

After all of our class visits into Everglades National Park, it was neat to see the difference in the trail from one semester to the next, a rainy season to a dry one. Last semester, there were only occasional birds out for identification and hundreds of mosquitoes following us through the Anhinga Trail, onto Gumbo Limbo Trail, and into our cars. There were barely any visitors to the park, and we closed our eyes to listen to the sounds of the Everglades. This time around, noise was everywhere. Children were calling out identifications, rangers were giving lectures, and tourists were taking pictures, claiming that they saw birds as big as bears. Despite the chill of the morning, it was indeed a beautiful day. It was a day that emphasized the wonder of nature and its ability to change while still retaining its splendor.

The most mesmerizing part of the experience was not only the beauty of nature and of change, but the beauty of nature's willingness to allow us such close interaction. The wildlife practically ignored us. They went about their daily routines and let us, the visitors, stroll along and enjoy. They put on some entertainment for us too, occasionally dancing around, singing, or posing for pictures.

It is hard to believe that such beauty is taken for granted, used and abused because we have no inclination to think before acting. The human race has this notion of superiority about everything it does. Kill the birds to make decorative hats, drain the Everglades to make farming land, dredge the rest of it to make transportation possible, plant an invasive species because it makes a nice lawn ornament... and the list goes on and on. "The Everglades from beginning to end???" is the perfect title for this course. We have studied the Everglades' beginnings and visited its home and now are left to fear that no matter what is done to save it, it just might have an end. All the 'conservation' projects and all the management efforts to control life, though seemingly helpful, make one thing perfectly clear: we muddled up big time. In class, we mentioned the idea of playing God or Mother Nature. Though humans attempt to control the natural world, the truth is that we are far from perfection. We are not playing the life giving force, but rather making up for the mistakes that will eventually take that life force away. We are not conserving. We are backtracking. We are desperately trying to fix the natural world, because we now realize that without it, we will be lost. Several weeks ago, the district tour and its ten parts per billion plan seemed like a rational conservation effort to protect the Everglades with a Freddy the Alligator mascot. Though the plan is better than allowing farmers free digging

and dumping into the Everglades, the plan does not entitle the district to a 'Mother Nature' status. The problems faced by the district were created by them to begin with. 'Mother Nature' does not make mistakes, people do. The Storm Water Treatment Areas, the Hole in the Donut restoration project, and all the other 'conservation' efforts are merely management means to fix what we have already destroyed. That is a shame to say the least. People are thoughtless of consequences. They see a pretty holly and plant it in the middle of a completely unique ecosystem and turn that ecosystem upside-down. People are thoughtless because they just don't care or because they are ignorant, and they are ignorant because they do not realize how each and every act produces an equal or opposite reaction. Yet, it does not take a physics major to make that connection!! Although I did not get to experience the Hole in the Donut project in its entirety, what I did see made an enormous impact on me. The fact that one slight action can produce a huge environmental headache is not a surprise, but it is nonetheless quite startling. Farmers came into the Everglades and plowed the limestone out of the ground, grinding the rock into dust and effectively creating a farming-rich environment. But when the farms were abandoned in the 1970's, it did not take long for the farming action to force a reaction. The higher surface level caused by the dust volume allowed for less flooding. The fertilized soil provided nutrients galore. In turn, the invasive holly or Brazilian Pepper, brought to Florida for decorative purposes, thrived. The abandoned farmland provided the ideal haven for the migrant plant, and it began to take over the Everglades ecosystem. It killed other plants, it repelled deer, and it just kept going. No burning or plowing would stop it, and it did not help that birds were spreading the seeds as well. The Hole in the Donut restoration project is a brilliant plan to eradicate Brazilian Pepper, and slowly but surely, it is working. It is just unfortunate that so much time has to be spent repairing the environment because people were ignorant enough to destroy it. It is my hope that someday, the backtracking will end. I hope that backtracking will end because people stop being stupid and finally stop making a mess of nature. Then and only then can the Everglades be enjoyed and conserved rather than just managed. It is my hope that someday, the backtracking will end. I hope that backtracking will end because people stop being stupid and finally stop making a mess of nature. Then and only then can the Everglades be enjoyed and conserved rather than just managed. e muddled up big time. In class, we mentioned the idea of playing God or Mother Nature. Though humans attempt to control the natural world, the truth is that we are far from perfection. We are not playing the life giving force, but rather making up for the mistakes that will eventually take that life force away. We are not conserving. We are backtracking. We are desperately trying to fix the natural world, because we now realize that without it, we will be lost. Several weeks ago, the district tour and its ten parts per billion plan seemed like a rational conservation effort to protect the Everglades with a Freddy the Alligator mascot. Though the plan is better than allowing farmers free digging and dumping into the Everglades, the plan does not entitle the district to a 'Mother Nature' status. The problems faced by the district were created by them to begin with. 'Mother Nature' does not make mistakes, people do. The Storm Water Treatment Areas, the Hole in the Donut restoration project, and all the other 'conservation' efforts are merely management means to fix what we have already destroyed. That is a shame to say the least. People are thoughtless of consequences. They see a pretty holly and plant it in the middle of a completely unique ecosystem and turn that ecosystem upside-down. People are thoughtless because they just don't care or because they are ignorant, and they are ignorant because they do not realize how each and every act produces an equal or opposite reaction. Yet, it does not take a physics major to make that connection!! Although I did not get to experience the Hole in the Donut project in its entirety, what I did see made an enormous impact on me. The fact that one slight action can produce a huge environmental headache is not a surprise, but it is nonetheless quite startling. Farmers came into the Everglades and plowed the limestone out of the ground, grinding the rock into dust and effectively creating a farming-rich environment. But when the farms were abandoned in the 1970's, it did not take long for the farming action to force a reaction. The higher surface level caused by the dust volume allowed for less flooding. 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South Florida: Rated R For Adults

Larissa Patten
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Spring Semester 2005

Reading "Skinny Dip" by Carl Hiassen was like taking a microscopic view into the clichés and stereotypes of South Florida. Subtly, Hiassen introduces some of the dramatic themes of his story- sex, money, and corruption while softening the blow with humor and witty sarcasm.

What most people don't know is that there is a lot of truth lying beneath the humor regarding South Florida's scandalous reputation. There have been several attempts to shine light on the fact that South Floridians are obsessed with sex, money, and public corruption scandals. Take for instance Hollywood's spin on life in South Florida. Motion pictures have done an outstanding job of exaggerating the already existing clichés that surround our towns and neighborhoods. Such movies as *Scarface*, *Miami Rhapsody*, *Bad Boys*, and *Some Like It Hot*, highlight South Florida's reputation for being less than casual about its "rated R" atmosphere. It's not exactly part of the alluring charm that draws seventy year old tourists every winter. *Scarface* uncovered the truth behind drug use, mainly cocaine, and trafficking in Miami during the 70's. It also heavily touched on the subject of Cuban immigration which is still a highly controversial topic even today. *Miami Rhapsody* depicted the unconventional love life of an American family in Miami. The mother's adulterous relationship with a younger man, the daughter's secret obsession with the same man, and the brother/son, who was struggling to maintain a healthy marriage in light of his numerous affairs and obsession with models. This storyline would seem more hypothetical if it didn't take place in South Florida. But, given the highly sexual, and often eccentric lifestyle of South Floridian residents, the plot demonstrates what a typical family might encounter and the sexual tendencies of tropical urbanites. Next, *Bad Boys* brought us an insider's perspective on money laundering, violence, and espionage in the conflicted world of Miami drug trafficking. This story outlined the lives of two policemen and their fight to resist corruption among their own men and the temptation to choose money over justice.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Movies are just that... movies, they are not real life. However, after some careful researching, I found that there is some truth behind these Hollywood blockbusters and their plots certainly do reflect a certain level of reality here in South Florida.

First of all, there is a subsidiary of the organization, Office of National Drug Control Policy, called High

Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA). The purpose of this concept is to closely monitor South Florida's extensive drug trafficking, money laundering, and violent crimes due to drug use. In the hopes that most of these crimes can be reduced, the goal of HIDTA is to eliminate the impact of illicit drug use in other parts of the country. I don't know about you, but it sounds to me, as if South Florida is responsible for the initial spreading and nationwide use of drugs in our country today. It makes sense because of our convenient bridge location to the Central and South Americas, not to mention the Caribbean. We have two major ports of transportation that are the most frequented areas of international travel and exchange in the United States- The Port of Miami and Miami International Airport. These two points create a nexus for maritime smuggling operations. The importing and exporting of narcotics, money laundering, and criminal organizations are primary factors in the illegal activity that gives South Florida a bad name. Due to the continuing growth of fraudulent operations down here, it's no surprise that Carl Hiassen would take advantage of a real life drama for his book, "Skinny Dip". For example, when the character Joey tries to save herself from drowning in the Atlantic Ocean after her husband tries to kill her, she is saved by a floating bag of marijuana that takes her to safety. There is no coincidence that Carl Hiassen uses this opportunity to make a subtle play on the cliché that South Florida is known for its high drug trafficking.

Another example in which the book, "Skinny Dip" captures the truth behind the clichés, stereotypes, and speculations is when Red Hammernut offers Chaz the five hundred thousand dollars for his debt. Ordinarily this would seem like a nice gesture but when you consider that Hammernut planned to have Chaz killed just to get his money back, you begin to see the author's awareness of money scandals that occur in South Florida. As well as drug traffic, money related scandals top the list of suspicious activity. Miami is ranked third behind New York and Los Angeles as being highly vulnerable to scandals that involve money and public corruption. South Florida has been known to be an international hub for Central American, South American, and Caribbean drug traffickers, money launderers, and a high concentration of immigrant career criminals. With a track record like this, it's no wonder environmental advocates are already questioning the authenticity of the proposed eight million dollars to restore the Everglades. Given the consistent rate at which South Florida continues to produce fraudulent campaigns and corrupted authority figures- it's doubtful the Everglades will see a penny without putting up a fight.

With good writing material here at home, it's no wonder why Carl Hiassen doesn't need to travel to research new ideas for his books. He can get all the sex, drugs, and scandals he needs to write a thrilling story, right here in South Florida. As for all of this suspicious activity being merely "speculation" and clichés, I believe there is some truth behind the fiction.

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Coming to Terms

Gabriel Grana
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Spring Semester 2005

It's not a light bulb that suddenly turns on. It's not a bolt of lightning that strikes you without pain. It's more like a boot; a steel toe boot that literally drops out of the sky and kicks you directly in the face, knocking out the majority of your teeth and smashing your nose into a bloody mess. That's more what it's like when you come to a realization. All that talk of a magical epiphany is left in the dust while the boot moves on to its next victim. It doesn't let you see through some new set of eyes; it dulls your other senses so that all you can do is see. You see what you've been missing for a long time. Being a person of many passionate convictions, it's fair to say that I've had to have facial reconstructive surgery quite a few times.

It most notably happened my sophomore year of college, taking a class called "Cubans in the USA." Of course my family warned me that the professor was a raging communist, known for such ghastly evils as not believing in the embargo, questioning the motives of the Cuban American National Foundation, and, dare I say it, not thinking that Fidel Castro was the anti-Christ in the flesh! (Oh no! Stone Him!) So sure enough, the first day I went in, wearing a Cuban flag pendant, guns ablaze, ready to strike down this hedonistic infidel with my passionate patriotism. But something happened. He told us to give him a chance to ward off these notions our grandmothers instilled in us. (Oh no, he's already using some evil mind control technique!) But I did give him a chance. And at the end of the semester, I was eager to learn more of how to correct my mis-education, without losing my sense of pride in my background, while slowing recovering from the boot's most vicious attack.

But even more recently, and more notably, it happened during our visit to the South Florida Water Management District. I scanned the website the night before class and went in on Friday morning, armed with my deep, uncontested knowledge of the everglades, ready to battle this evil government agency whose sole purpose had to be to serve as a façade for the fact that the government didn't care about the everglades.

"Ah-ha! Free pens, colorful brochures, a cute paper alligator! Let the mind washing begin!"

As I sat through the first two power point presentations, I took notes on things I could readily attack. Instead I found myself scribbling down valid points and things I actually agreed with. Then, when the class started asking more questions, I felt like the lady who appeared out of nowhere was merely some PR super genius who had been sent in to deal with people who pried too deeply. My extreme passion flared inside of me. What do they mean we can't restore The Everglades to its original state? Haven't they thought of the possibility of making people move out? We have a responsibility to the survival of humanity, and that includes preservation of the environment. Just as I thought: another government institution set in place to make it look like

they really care.

But then as we took the tour of the facility, I saw people who looked genuinely interested in the environment, such as the gentleman who told us about the control room. Then on the trip over to the STA's, our tour guides seemed to have a true passion for their jobs, especially the lead biologist who swore by the mission statement. I was immediately reminded of those characters from the movie Independence Day who worked in the secret Area 51 laboratories, truly dedicated to their field of study, not allowed out of their workplace. (These people that we encountered however, were obviously allowed out, though. Just to clear that up.)

It was when the female biologist was explaining the STA's up in the observation towers that the boot hit me. As the wind was smacking us, my first thought was that nature was upset that we aren't doing enough to help out. Then the steel toe smashed my face. Luckily enough, no one noticed. As the pieces of my teeth were falling apart, the pieces of this fractured day were finally coming together. In this biologist's voice, I heard the power of someone who was coupling her knowledge and love for the environment with the plentiful resources of the government. When she spoke of the SFWMD as being premier, she did so to emphasize the fact that they were doing more than anybody else. The goal was 10ppb, and she was proud that they had gotten levels down to 30 ppb, in some areas. However, she emphasized that it wasn't enough, and let us know that she would willingly work until all her strength was gone to ensure that number would be reached. Even if the agency is set up to look like the government does care about the environment, here is someone who is, in turn, putting it all to good use. She spoke of her job with pride, as did our other tour guides, eager to let us know just how much they cared.

They also had the understanding that, as much as we've disfigured nature, bringing it back to how it was, is for now out of the question. Where I began my day was in the mind frame that we owed it to the world to discomfort ourselves in order to let nature take its course. These guides of ours, however, understood that that wasn't a possibility. It would be completely irrational to make people move out. Those who built the original canals and planned the drainage were either dead or too old now. Those who live in what was once The Everglades were not at fault. It is not only the responsibility of the SFWMD to conserve The Everglades, but also to conserve the way of life of those who live in its historic lands. Earlier that day I thought about the hurricanes of '26, '28, '47 and '49 and thought that those early settlers deserved it for trying to tame a natural process. I left that same afternoon realizing that I was now one of those people, living in that same land. Luckily I have never had to suffer the tragedy of a flood decimating my way of life, so who the hell was I to start complaining now?

That afternoon I left West Palm realizing that I still had a lot to learn about the balance of this world I thought I so well understood. With my mouth fractured, however, I couldn't open my mouth to complain about nature and mankind both taking their rage out at the same time: traffic and rain on a slippery 826.

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The Power of Water

Brenda Adrianzen
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Spring Semester 2005

Visiting the South Florida Water Management District was different than I thought it would be. For some reason, I had flashbacks to elementary school trips regarding water management and water cleaning where all they talked about was how precious water was. Then, they would give us a workbook with that alligator, Freddy, who represented the work all these people did.

Of course, these memories are foggy and reconstructed, so they are a bad way to imagine what the SFWMD really does. I found the experience enlightening. It had never occurred to me, and I had never really thought much about the subject, what a complex job it is to control the water flow and quality for such a large area.

The visit this time actually taught me something. The people who spoke to us explained the water situation, the problem we had gotten ourselves in because of bad planning and explained what will be done to correct these difficulties. Aside from the fact that I can actually remember this most current visit, I also feel that I learned something. I came away with an understanding and a respect for the job these people do.

Imagining the meteorologists and high-ranking officials being locked in their own workplace for days because of the multiple hurricanes that threatened us this past summer, made me realize the importance of their success. Think about it: just pushing a button can affect the water in any area. This is like controlling life. It's the atomic bomb.

Maybe I'm exaggerating, but maybe not. Those that talked to us at the SFWMD took their job seriously. And they should. I'm glad they do. All that I learned during the visit made me realize that many things that seem inconsequential are actually groundbreaking. Now that I think about it, maybe all jobs are quite consequential.

Everyone gets wrapped up in their world from time to time. We all like to think that whatever we do, whether good or bad, will cause astronomical changes. I've always wondered whether we put way too much stock on our tiny actions. Will my decision to go to some party really cause tiny ripples in the fabric of life that will have far-reaching consequences? I seriously doubt it. But maybe for those that work in water management this is not the case. Any decision they make, whether it is as simple as closing the valve in a canal, or as complicated as attempting to fix water flow to the Everglades, will undoubtedly impact South Florida. It will affect how and from where we get our water and it will ultimately affect the environment we live in.

It would be nice to think that despite our small size in comparison to the universe, we are actually important.

I'm certain that if this were the case, many people would feel as if they actually had a purpose in life. It would help us stop meandering in our existence and actually invest our time and energy in enterprises that will ultimately better mankind, the world and the universe.

This is something my journalism professors have been telling me. "You can write an article and uncover some important truth. It could change people's lives." I believed them because it is the truth. My articles can help people. Other professions can also affect people. Doctors, lawyers, scientists all these people can help make the world a better place. But what about a secretary or a waiter? Can they change the world?

According to my newfound optimism the answer is yes. It doesn't matter that these jobs provide a service. If a secretary can help his boss think of better ideas, then the secretary can change the world. If a waiter brings a little sparkle into the otherwise drab day of a customer, then that customer can go on and spread that sparkle into the world.

Am I being too optimistic or too general? Perhaps, but I don't care. I'm young; I should be able to be naively optimistic. And all these ideas simply came from listening to people talk about how they distribute and manage the water in South Florida. Their new projects are ambitious, but necessary to restore the natural flow to the Everglades.

This ecosystem has been altered by too many people for too many years. I think that regardless of how ambitious or costly the project is, it should be done. I personally found it refreshing to meet a group of people so dedicated to their "mission". After all, this world is filled with too many people who have given up hope and who don't care what happens to what and who around them.

I believe that the people we met really believe in their cause, but I realize that there may be other people and perhaps companies and corporations who are out for themselves and could really care less about how their actions impact the world. This is why we need more people who are interested in the environment and in making the world habitable for everyone.

People are too busy living their lives and struggling to survive in this world, which is quickly becoming far too image-conscious for my liking, that they don't have time to even think about how it is that all these wonderful products, food and water are heading their way.

I think that a visit to the SFWMD will open up their eyes. At least, it affected me in this way. The visit has driven me into a frenzied contemplative mood. Listening to the employees at the water management district and hearing the echo of my professor's words has suddenly inspired me to use my abilities to help whoever I can. Covering events and city council meetings may have dulled my journalistic radar, but from now on I will be on the lookout for strong ideas and occurrences that will somehow make an impact on people all the way from South Florida to Australia.





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[FIU IDH 4007](#)

Writing About Dirt

Brenda Adrianzen
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Spring Semester 2005

The Everglades is dirty. I definitely did not expect to find a place littered with everything from beer bottles to discarded pieces of clothing. I shouldn't have been surprised by what I found, though. Everywhere around us there is an array of old, forgotten articles that have been left on the street. These, I think, serve as constant reminders of our lives. They are our mark on the world.

Libraries, museums, buildings, homes, personal articles, all these are our marks on the world. I think litter can also be a mark. It's how we stake out our areas. Our homes are filled with trash. Businesses are filled with it too. The dark corners and park benches of our world are also occasionally bombarded by leftovers.

All this is really sad. Just the other day, I was leaving home and heading for FIU when the person in the car in front of me decided to toss his empty Wendy's cup out of the window and onto the street below. I got mad. I was tempted to get out of my car and yell at him, or at least pick up the cup. Soon enough, though, the light turned green and I just went my way. I kept thinking about the cup now marking the intersection between NW 47th Ave. and NW 7th St., but decided there was nothing to do about it.

Then, later that day, our Feature Writing professor told us to write a story about a social issue that concerned us. He went around the room asking everyone what they would write about. Most of my classmates spoke about the excessive violence on TV, women's issues, and even the war in Iraq. I thought about the cup. I was the only one who mentioned the environment, pollution, or conservation. My professor listened to my ideas, then looked at me and asked, "Is this really the issue that concerns you the most?"

I have to admit, I was a little shocked and hurt at his question. Did he think I just spat out the first thing that popped into my head without thinking it through? Did he think that I am an odd or insensitive person because I happen to be more concerned about the state of our world than the state of our fellow human beings? Does he not understand that pollution affects everyone? Or that it is perhaps the greatest cause of all because without this nice planet of ours none of the other so-called great social issues will matter? I defended my answer; he went on with class.

A few days later I ran into a friend at the library. We began discussing class. She asked me if I was still planning on doing my story on the environment. "That sounds kind of boring," she said. I suppose she had a point. A story about the inanimate environment can be a lot duller than her idea of doing a story about people suffering from clinical depression. I'm still thinking of a way to make the story more real. I'm trying to figure out

a way to make the environment have a voice and a face and a personality so that readers can identify with it. It isn't going too well. All these factors: a cup on the road, hundreds of beer bottles along the road, my professor's and friend's disbelief in my most important cause, have been weighing on my mind. I find it hard to believe that people are really that callous when it comes to protecting the one thing they can't live without. Maybe they don't realize that regardless of how much money they have or how great their life is going, if the world suddenly becomes a toxic wasteland none of that will matter. Or maybe they don't want to think about such possibilities.

So, I sit here at my computer thinking what I can do to better the situation. Will writing a really great, not-so-boring article for the dreaded Feature Writing class really make such a difference? Maybe, but first I have to think of a really great idea and combine that with really great research, interviews and words to make it work. If I am able to do that, I wonder how my classmates will react when I read my story out loud in front of class. What will their comments be? Will they comment on the context as well as the style and execution of the story?

All this remains to be seen. My main concern is just writing the freaking story. I am sad to say that despite the fact that I've been taking this Everglades class and that I've been concerned about pollution and the environment for as long as I can remember, I'm finding it increasingly difficult to think of a way to write a story that won't be dreadfully general or painfully boring. I thought I had an idea. Unfortunately, I overanalyzed it and it disappeared, literally. For some reason I can't even begin to fathom what that idea was. Time is now running out. I need to get this done by Tuesday afternoon.

I want people to realize that the garbage they leave lying around is a testament to the sometimes dubious priorities in our lives. I want them to open their eyes and see that our garbage can easily become our legacy. I'm not talking about power plants or pollution caused by cars. What I'm talking about is much simpler: littering, wasting water and power. I think we should first concentrate on ridding ourselves of bad habits such as these before we can fully conquer the war against pollution and concentrate on bigger issues.

Now, if only I could write an article about that and not make it be a bunch of facts and statistics. I'll keep thinking of a way to make these issues, which don't seem to weigh too heavily on some people's heads, pop out and demand attention. Hopefully, I'll get this done before my class, otherwise I hate to think what will happen if my professor calls on me and I have no story to share with the rest of the class.

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Full of Crap

Antonio Eguiluz
IDH 4007
Spring Semester 2005

Who would have thought that by picking up trash you could have a great revelation? The idea of spending a whole Friday morning picking up trash along Tamiami Trail in the Everglades was not something that really excited me, but it was something that I had to do as part of a class. As I started walking along the path assigned for us to clean, I rapidly noticed that cans and bottles of beer were going to be the most common element in our garbage bags.

A Coke twelve-pack box was the most noticeable object on the ground, so I walked to it to pick it up. Unfortunately something disgusting awaited me; my nose did not help me notice what was sitting underneath that colorful box. Stinking human feces decorated with white toilet paper around it was what I found. I was disgusted and I did not want to keep picking up trash fearing to once again find something similar. Nevertheless, I kept doing it. As we walked down the road, the image got printed in my mind, and it did not go away. Little did I know what I was going to learn about those excrements.

I can imagine that around one week ago, three fishermen arrived at this road. They were fishing, drinking and eating for a couple of hours, when suddenly one of them needed to go to the bathroom, but there was none around. Therefore, the one in need had to walk away from the group in order to do what he needed to do in a private place, where none could see him. Moreover, what he did had a highly displeasing smell. Even though defecation is a natural action, it carries a level of shame with it. Furthermore, this fisherman covered his excrement with the intention that no one would ever find it. In spite of everything, I am sure that he was not the first person to do something like that, nor will he be the last one. In another words, I can say that the Everglades is full of crap.

Just as defecating, sinning is a natural act within our natural nature. Furthermore, many times, when you defecate, you do not smell the bad odor, but others surely can. In a very similar way our spiritual lives are full of hidden stinking areas that we do not want anyone to find or even worse touch. There are many areas deep inside of us that are so full of disgusting things that we have secretly done throughout the years. Although these things have been forgotten, they still remain inside of us, emanating a nasty smell. Yet, just as I picked that Coke box up and revealed that which was hidden, something similar happens in our lives when we decide to surrender ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. Once you open your heart to Him and accept Him as your Lord and Savior, then He will start a cleaning up process. Jesus will put on his rubber gloves and take lots of plastic garbage bags to do a major clean up of yourself. This could be a long and painful process, but it certainly is

worth the pain because in the process you will be able to fulfill the purpose you were created for, which was to have a relationship with your creator. Just as the Everglades can not clean itself, and it needs us, higher beings to do so, we need God to do that cleaning job in us because we can not do it by ourselves. The wise King Solomon wrote in the book of Proverbs: *AThere is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*@ The first step that you need to take to be cleaned is to truly see yourself in the condition that you are. That is, the condition of a person who sins every single day of his life, and that will never make it to heaven on his own. Moreover, you have sinned, and the price that you will pay for your sin is eternal death; nevertheless, Jesus paid that unreachable price with his life on the cross, and now you are able to come to God through Jesus Christ alone.

Something that I learned, which impacted me, was that when Indians die, their families dispose of their suitcases (in the Everglades!) with all their belongings with the hope of giving them freedom in their afterlife. I know that different cultures are brought up to believe different things, but once you have a real encounter with the only living God, then you will know, that He is real, and that He is the only one. He says that all the other gods are just idols, made out of clay and mud. Moreover, reincarnation is a traditional belief in many cultures, which seeks a way of trying to reach a level of purification. Nonetheless Hebrews 9:27 states: *AAnd as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment.*@ Many times people decide to follow their own tradition even though they might go against God's will.

Just as we are the only hope that the Everglades have to be saved, Jesus is the only way to heaven. Now that you know this truth, what are you going to do with Jesus? Would you let him clean your Everglades? Remember that He is the only one that can. Save your Everglades, and do not let that beautiful creation burn forever.

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