

## ***How my heart grows weary:***

### **Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River**

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The Florida Trail's Suwannee River section spans roughly 70 miles from White Springs to Dowling Park.<sup>i</sup> Along the way, it passes through nearly a dozen state forests, campgrounds, and conservations areas—a stunningly beautiful and historically resonant landscape. The terrain shifts from higher, dryer, sandhills and hardwood hammocks to lower, wetter swamplands and sinkholes. Hikers are just as likely to leave the trail with muddy boots as they are to find themselves atop a mixture of sand and pine straw so soft that it feels like walking on a pillow. A saw palmetto understory builds up to smaller, scrubby oaks and their larger, Spanish-moss-draped live oak siblings, and from there to cypress and spruce pine. About half-way through, the Holton Creek Tract boasts the world's tallest live oak and the second largest bald cypress. Every hundred yards or so, the trail takes hikers to the river's edge, with its dramatic contrast between the Suwannee's tea-colored, tannin-stained water and its white, sandy shoals. The surrounding limestone bluffs look like a catacomb's skulls.

Make no mistake, however: history is very much alive on this section of the Florida Trail.<sup>ii</sup> In September 1539, Hernando De Soto crossed the Suwannee, calling it the “River of Deer,” near its confluence with the Georgia Withlacoochee, in today's Suwannee River State Park, north of Dowling Park. Near the village of Napituca, (close to present-day Live Oak), the Spanish explorer and his troops fought and killed several hundred Timucua in “The Battle of the Lakes.” De Soto's march from Florida north to Mississippi paved the way for a trail of Spanish missions along *El Camino Real* (or, Royal Road), built during the seventeenth century to link St. Augustine with Tallahassee and connecting, via a Suwannee River route, to the Gulf of Mexico. After the Spanish ceded *la Florida* to the United States in 1821, the former mission trail helped to connect the cotton plantations that sprang up amid the fertile grounds of the Suwannee and other local

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

ivers. After the plantations came the railroads, and with the railroads came the tourists. Not too far away from Live Oak and the location of De Soto’s “Battle of the Lakes,” Suwannee Springs provided, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of Florida’s earliest attractions, drawing visitors to mineral springs that were thought to have healing properties—and that still carry sulfur’s rotten-egg stink. The site is better known today as a hiking destination across the river from the 800-acre Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park, a mainstay of the Florida folk scene. Further east again, near the edge of the Florida Trail’s Suwannee River section, White Springs once offered a multi-story bathhouse surrounding another pool of mineral water and Victorian mansions now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Like its Live Oak sister, the town is more familiar to modern visitors for the state park that sits across the river, the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center, dedicated to the songwriter who made the Suwannee famous.

Starting at 10:00 each morning, and every two hours until 4:00 p.m., one can hear Florida’s official state song—“The Swanee River (Old Folks at Home)”—radiating from the nearly 100 bells of a 200-foot-tall carillon, one of the world’s largest. The park, which opened in 1950, was a vision of Josiah K. Lilly, the son of pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and a major collector of Foster’s sheet music.<sup>iii</sup> Foster never actually visited Florida or saw the Suwannee. Instead, he wrote on commission from Edwin Pearce Christy, who in 1851 asked the composer of “Oh! Susanna,” “Camptown Races,” “Beautiful Dreamer,” and hundreds of other popular folk songs to pen a tune for his Christy Minstrels, a vaudeville precursor that featured white performers in blackface. Foster’s lyrics, written in his version of African American dialect, speak from the perspective of someone who looks back fondly at the “Swanee Ribber” and longs “for de old plantation.” “All de world am sad and dreary / Eb-rywhere I roam,” goes Foster’s chorus; “Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary, / Far from de old folks at home!” In 2008, the state approved an updated version of the song, polishing Foster’s lyrics into more contemporary, less stereotypical language and replacing its “darkeys” with “dear ones,” its “plantation” with “childhood station.”<sup>iv</sup> This new rendering offers a wistful gaze at a bucolic past with its blackface roots scrubbed as clean as a Suwannee River sandbank. Yet the Culture Center still provides a glimpse of that old plantation. Its roads loop around a two-

story, white columned Georgian mansion that is set amid massive live oaks and peppered with silhouettes of gallant-looking gentlemen and hoop-skirted belles. Twice a year, thousands of visitors to the park's Florida Folk Festival (held in May) and its Christmas-themed Festival of Lights stroll among the shadows while munching popcorn and taking in examples of antebellum and Cracker culture. Mom enjoys the quilts while Dad and the kids learn blacksmithing.

At no point during such celebrations of Old Florida—or at any spot along the Florida Trail's Suwannee River portion—will one find a reference to Willie James Howard. Those who know his story, however, cannot enter into this landscape without reckoning with his ghost.

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Willie James Howard was a fifteen-year-old African American lynched in 1944 just outside of Live Oak.<sup>v</sup> Howard lived with his parents on the town's eastern edge near the railroad tracks. Lula and James Howard called their stocky, round-faced son "Giddy Boy" because of his cheerful nature. He loved to whistle and sing; he was also quite smart. Unlike other local Black boys his age—confined to menial, hard-labor jobs—Willie James found good work stocking shelves and sweeping floors at the Van Priest Dime Store. During the 1943 holiday season, he gave his co-workers, most of them white, Christmas cards. One of them, a girl about his age named Cynthia Goff, was upset to get a card from a Black boy. On New Year's Day, Willie James allegedly sent her a letter of apology. A possible transcript of the letter (spelling and punctuation below consistent with the original) reveals a mixture of contrition and camouflage, with the writer abbreviating words that signal flirtation or reveal identity ("W.J.H" for Willie James Howard, "L" for love, "Y.K.W. for You Know Who," and "S.H." for sweetheart):

*Dear Friend:*

*Just a few line to let you hear from me I am well an hope you are the same. this is what I said on that christmas card. From W.J.H. With L. I hope you will understand what I mean. that is what I said now please don't get angry with me because you can never tell what may get in some body I did not put it in there my self God did I can't help what he does can I. I know you don't think much of our kind of people but we don't hate you all we want to be your all friends but you*

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

*want let us please don't let any body see this I hope I haven't made you made if  
I did tell me about it an I will for get about it. I wish this was an northern state  
I guess you call me fresh. Write an tell me what you think of me good or bad.  
Sincerely yours, with,*

*From Y.K.W.*

*Fo Cynthia Goff*

*I love your name. I love your voice, for a S.H. you are my choice*

It is unclear whether Cynthia showed the letter to her father, Alexander “Phil” Goff, the local postmaster and a former state legislator, whether he found it, or even if the letter actually existed, as Goff himself provided investigators with the typewritten transcription quoted above.<sup>vi</sup> Either way, the result was the same. Howard was accused of edging near one of segregation’s most highly policed boundaries—the line between Black males and white females—and, therefore, Jim Crow would teach him a lesson.

On Sunday morning, January 2, 1944, Goff and two friends, Reginald H. Scott and Seldon B. McCullers, went to the Howard home and took Willie James from his mother Lula at gunpoint, promising to return him soon. Then they drove to the Bond-Howell Lumber Company, where James Howard worked, and had the father join his son in the car. The men followed Highway 129 north toward Suwannee Springs, turning off on a dirt road that today leads to an abandoned bridge. Goff, Scott, and McCullers parked, grabbed a rope from the back of the car, and bound Willie James’s hands and feet. They ordered the father to lead his sobbing son down an embankment to a high bluff overlooking the river. Historian Tameka Bradley Hobbs describes the chilling scene that followed: “At that point, Goff gave Willie James a choice of how he would die: ‘You can either jump into the river, or take what is in this gun.’ Willie James chose the former, backing off the edge of the bank and falling into the water below. Howard stood by and watched, helpless to intervene.” Afterwards, the men told James Howard to keep silent or die. They drove him back to work, where police officers were waiting to take him to the courthouse. There, an affidavit was prepared for Howard to sign—acquiescing to Goff, McCullers, and Scott’s version of

events—that Willie James had committed suicide: “When we arrived [at the river], I [Goff] tied the boys feet and hands to keep him from running so that his father could whip him. . . . But the boy making the statement he would die before he would take punishment from his father or anyone else made his way to the river where he jumped in drowned himself. His father stood by and viewed the son without attempting to prevent this from happening” (mistakes consistent with original). Surrounded by police, town officials, and the men who killed his only child in front of him, James Howard wrote his name under the line, “This I acknowledge to be true,” and agreed, as he was told to do, that an investigation was unnecessary.

Later that day, Sheriff Tom Henry ordered the local Black undertaker Ansel Brown to retrieve Willie James’s body from the Suwannee and prepare it for burial. The funeral took place the following day, with no autopsy, inquest, or headstone for Willie James’s grave. Mamie Perry, Lula Howard’s sister, told historian Marvin Dunn that Lula and James were given 24 hours to leave town. They arrived at her Orlando home in a taxi with all their belongings and never went back to Live Oak again. From the perspective of the town’s white power structure, the incident was over. As the saying goes, water under the bridge.

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Live Oak’s Black community did not forget. Instead, African Americans on the local, state, and national levels undertook a Sisyphean struggle to seek justice for Willie James Howard.

Within days, letters began arriving at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) offices in Washington, D.C. One of the first came from Elbert C. Robinson, a D.C. attorney spending the holidays in Florida. Robinson told Walter White, the NAACP’s executive director and a former lynching investigator, that African Americans in and around Live Oak lived in fear. Robinson wrote: “It appears that the conditions here are so tense, and the colored people (high and low) are so frightened [sic] that they are afraid to have their names identified with cases of this type. . . . The hush, hush, fear and secrecy surrounding this whole miserable thing is beyond comprehension and description.” Supporting

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

Robinson’s observations were other letters that maintained different levels of anonymity. White received one with no return address from a man named Robert Jackson. Edward Davis, president of the Marion County NAACP, reported another from a Live Oak minister who would not give his name. These writers’ hesitations stemmed in part from the fact that Live Oak’s postmaster led the small group that lynched Howard. But Phil Goff and his two compatriots did not act alone. Multiple local officials, including the police chief and the county sheriff, reportedly assisted in covering up the incident. Beyond an active cover-up was a more general reluctance of legal systems across the South to investigate or prosecute lynchings. The NAACP’s assistant special counsel Edward R. Dudley recommended instead seeking assistance on the state level. To facilitate those next steps, the organization brought in the head of its Legal Defense and Education Fund, Thurgood Marshall.

Marshall contacted Florida’s governor, Spessard Holland, and its well-known senator Claude Pepper, but the NAACP request for an investigation met mixed results. Pepper stonewalled. The senator had, in 1937, joined other Southern legislators to filibuster a proposed bill to make lynching a federal crime.<sup>vii</sup> Willie James Howard’s death did not move him to change his mind on the subject. Instead, Pepper told the NAACP, “I have heard nothing of the report of the lynching of a fourteen-year-old-boy in Florida and know nothing of the facts in the case. Consequently, I am unprepared to make any statement concerning it.” Governor Holland was more amenable to an investigation, asking State Attorney David Lanier to convene a grand jury, but he was hardly optimistic about possible results. Holland cautioned Marshall not to get his hopes up, writing, “I am sure you realize the particular difficulties involved where there will be testimony of three white men and probably the girl against the testimony of one negro man.”

Pepper’s and Holland’s responses represented a long history of difficulties that Black people encountered within the justice system, especially in Florida. Between 1877 and 1950, white mobs lynched more than four thousand African Americans in twelve Southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia)<sup>viii</sup>. Although Mississippi, at 654, reported the largest total number of incidents, Florida, at 317, had the highest number per capita, relative to its smaller (at the time) population. The thirty-three

incidents documented in Orange County made it Florida's lynching capital, but Suwannee, with twelve, comprised part of what Hobbs calls the state's "lynching belt": a swathe of counties in north-central Florida that ran from Madison, Taylor, and Lafayette (west of Suwannee) to Columbia, Alachua, and Marion (south and east), where numbers fell in the double digits, overshadowing those in the rest of the state. Lynching, in Florida and elsewhere, was during this period routinely considered part of the crime and punishment spectrum: white people believed extra-legal justice was permissible in places where the law was too slow, especially when addressing Black men thought to have raped white women. The "old thread bare lie," antilynching advocate Ida B. Wells called it, culling the data to show that accusations of rape accounted for less than 30% percent of all lynchings, with most of those accusations spurious at best.<sup>ix</sup> Witness the case of Willie James Howard, a boy lynched because he allegedly sent a flirtatious note. Howard's case embodies what more recent research confirms: that lynching was a form of domestic terrorism designed to maintain white supremacy. It didn't matter whether an African American committed a crime, was believed to have committed a crime, or merely stepped beyond the era's racial hierarchies. White mobs burned down the entire town of Rosewood, Florida in 1923 after a white woman accused a Black man of rape. Fueling the mob's anger was the economic self-sufficiency of an all-Black Rosewood, better off than its white neighbor, Sumner, where the mob originated. Scholar Koritha Mitchell describes lynching as "know-your-place aggression": part of a continuum that stretches from more mundane microaggressions to threats to violence designed to keep African Americans in what white people dictated was their "place."<sup>x</sup> Such was true for Willie James Howard, a smart Black boy who made the mistake of sending Christmas cards to his mostly white co-workers.

Beyond lynching, African Americans faced other barriers when seeking legal redress against white injustice, as Governor Holland's lack of optimism suggested. Rules varied by location. In Florida and other slave-holding states prior to the Civil War, a slave could not testify in any case involving a white person. Some states prohibited testimony from any Black person, enslaved or free. Emancipation, and the constitutional amendments that followed, did little to expand the reality of Black rights. The Fourteenth Amendment,

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

ratified in 1868, granted citizenship to formerly enslaved people and equal protection under the law for everyone. Still, many states, including Florida, continued to put up barriers to Black participation in courtrooms. One must be a registered voter, for example, to serve on a jury; but protections supporting the right to vote would not be guaranteed by law until the 1965 Voting Rights Act. (Florida still struggles with the problem of voting rights suppression, especially with regard to immigrants and people with felony convictions.)<sup>xi</sup> A high-profile case from Live Oak in 1952, the murder trial of Ruby McCollum, illustrates the realities that Holland alluded to regarding African Americans in the Florida justice system. An all-white jury found McCollum, a Black woman, guilty of murder in the shooting death of a white doctor. During McCollum’s trial, the judge placed her under a gag order. She was not allowed to testify that the doctor had repeatedly raped her and forced her to bear his children, nor could she speak to anyone other than her attorney about the case.<sup>xii</sup>

Against this backdrop of violence and silence, James Howard walked into the Suwannee County courthouse on May 8, 1944, prepared to testify before a grand jury about the death of his son. As Hobbs explains events, Howard waited all day with the bailiff ignoring him, calling case after case but not his son’s. He ultimately had to confront the bailiff, with Lanier’s subpoena in hand, to ask when the case for which he had been called would be heard. The bailiff conferred with the County Sheriff, Tom Henry, who had been among those present when Howard was coerced into signing his original affidavit. The sheriff hemmed and hawed. This was a new James Howard, different from the man who sat before him in shock months earlier, one who had time and space to move into a new stage of grief: anger. Howard’s insistence led Henry to the state attorney. Lanier confirmed that a hearing would take place and soon brought Howard into the courtroom. The white men present, however, had little interest in his side of the story. After Howard gave his version of events, the grand jury had just two questions: what age was his son at the time of the incident, and did Willie James give Cynthia Goff a note. No other witnesses were called, even though James’s lumber-yard boss and his wife Lula also came prepared to testify. In Lanier’s closing statement, he argued that Goff, McCullers, and Scott were guilty of murder, but Governor Holland was ultimately right. The grand jury failed to indict.

The NAACP persisted, for a time, in seeking justice for Willie James. During the months between Howard's death and the grand jury hearing, Harry T. Moore, an organizer from tiny Mims, Florida (near Titusville), became active in the case.<sup>xiii</sup> Moore took special interest in Willie James Howard as a Suwannee County native. He was born in Houston, just outside of Live Oak, and attended high school with Willie James's mother Lula. Moore had investigated the lynching of Cellos Howard in Marianna, FL a year earlier. In 1949, he would play a major role in the Groveland Four case, one of Florida's most notorious racist killings. With Willie James Howard, the violence hit home. Shortly after Howard's death, Moore began working to establish an NAACP chapter in Live Oak, a hotbed of Ku Klux Klan activity. For more than a year after the grand jury failed to indict, Moore worked closely with Thurgood Marshall to push for a U.S. Department of Justice investigation that never materialized. Hobbs recounts Moore's exasperation when federal intervention, like that of the state, failed to yield results. In one of his last letters to the attorney general, from September 1945, Moore notes, "The life of a Negro in Suwannee County is a very cheap article."

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Moore could not have been more right. What was true about Suwannee County was true of Florida, and more generally, of the nation.

While James and Lula Howard struggled in Orlando to put their lives back together after the killing of their only child, the world went on as normal for the Goffs. They held a thirteenth birthday swimming party for Phil Jr. at Suwannee Springs, just yards away from where fifteen-year-old Willie James, hog-tied, sank to his death. In September, Cynthia was elected class treasurer. The next year, underneath her graduation photo, she added her motto: "Do not take life too seriously. You'll not get out of it alive." Four years later, she married, and began having children of her own.<sup>xiv</sup>

While Cynthia Goff campaigned for class treasurer, another Suwannee County African American—a sixty-three-year-old World War I veteran named Sam McFadden, who tried to intervene in an arrest—was forced at gunpoint to jump into the river, where he, like Willie James Howard, drowned.

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

Four years later, beyond Live Oak, a white woman in Groveland, Florida accused four Black men of raping her. One of the suspects, Ernest Thomas, was captured and killed by a posse. The National Guard was brought in after a mob of several hundred nearly destroyed the town’s Black business district, taking nearly a week to quell the unrest. The three remaining suspects were later found guilty. Sixteen-year-old Charles Greenlee was sentenced to life, while adult suspects Sam Shepherd and Walter Irvin received the death penalty. Moore and Marshall again joined forces, ultimately taking the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which overturned the convictions. In November, 1951, Lake County Sheriff Willis McCall was tasked with transporting Shepherd and Irvin to the new trial. On the way, McCall claimed, the two handcuffed men attacked him and tried to escape, so he had to shoot them in self-defense. Shepherd died at the scene. Irvin lived, claiming that McCall shot them without provocation at point-blank range. Moore called on Governor Fuller Warren to suspend McCall, but the sheriff was never punished. Instead, he retired nearly thirty years later with a reputation for inmate abuse and civil rights violations infamous across the state.<sup>xv</sup>

By the end of 1951, Moore himself would be dead. Someone set off a bomb underneath the home he shared with his wife Harriette on Christmas, their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. He died on the way to the closest hospital that would treat African Americans, thirty miles away in Sanford. Harriette died from her injuries nine days later. The FBI investigated, but the case was never solved. Moore is considered today to be the first martyr of the civil rights movement, joining figures such as Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.<sup>xvi</sup>

And of course Emmett Till. Ten years after the death of Willie James Howard, fifteen-year-old Till was accused of flirting with a white woman named Carolyn Bryant in Money, Mississippi. Bryant’s husband Roy and his brother-in-law J.W. Milam picked up Till from his uncle’s home—much like Goff, McCullers, and Scott did with Howard—aiming to teach him a lesson. Three days later, Till’s mangled, bloated body was found in the Tallahatchie River. An all-white jury found Milam and Bryant not guilty of murder, but the two later confessed in an article for *Look* magazine to killing the boy. In 2008, Carolyn Bryant told historian Timothy Tyson that she fabricated her accusation.

Unlike the death of Willie James Howard, Till's murder grabbed national attention. His mother, Mamie Till Mobley, insisted that her son be buried in an open casket in their home town of Chicago. Jet magazine published photographs of Till's body, and thousands attended his funeral. His lynching galvanized the U.S. civil rights movement, acting as a wake-up call for a generation of activists.<sup>xvii</sup>

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Multiple historical markers exist to mark sites associated with Emmett Till's lynching. Similarly, across the country, and especially in the Southern states most frequently associated with lynching, communities are beginning to commemorate historical acts of violence as part of the Equal Justice Initiative's Community Remembrance Project. The effort involves putting up historical markers, collecting soil samples from lynching sites, and educating local communities about their history.<sup>xviii</sup> Community Remembrance Projects, according to EJI liaison Trey Walk, act "as a tool of narrative change," making visible the injustice and violence that is part of our shared, although too often unspoken, national history. Such efforts are about more than ending silence. For the EJI, truth-telling and remembrance are ways of repairing a broken justice system: one that denied African Americans a voice during slavery, deprived them of due process throughout the segregation era, and continues—in a period known as the "New Jim Crow"—to disproportionately arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate Black and Brown males. For police, prosecutors, judges, and the people who comprise juries to know and understand this history, Walk says, provides an opening for justice.<sup>xix</sup>

As of this writing, however, no markers exist for Willie James Howard, nor is one planned.

In the early 2000s, Douglas Udell, the successor to Live Oak undertaker Ansel Brown, led efforts to memorialize Howard's murder. A 2005 ceremony—attended by approximately 200 people, mostly African Americans—commemorated Howard's death and marked his grave in the East Side Memorial Cemetery with a small headstone that reads "Willie J. Howard / Born 7-13-28, Died 1-2-44 / Murdered by Three Racist (sic)."<sup>xx</sup>

*“How my heart grows weary”:  
Willie James Howard and the Suwannee River*

In 2006, Marvin Dunn produced a documentary about Howard’s death, *Murder on the Suwannee*, that he hoped might persuade Florida’s then-attorney general Charlie Crist to reopen the case. Crist did not.<sup>xxi</sup>

Instead, as governor in 2008, Crist provided window dressing for justice, signing the bill that changed the lyrics to Florida’s state song. Stephen Foster’s earlier version operated as one piece of the larger cultural matrix that permitted the lynching of Willie James Howard. Written during the height of slavery, “Old Folks at Home” imagined a world where African Americans were happier and better off enslaved. Performed by white people in blackface as minstrel shows rose to dominate U.S. popular culture during the middle and late nineteenth century, the song continued to reinforce white supremacy. The familiar term we use today to reference the segregation era, “Jim Crow,” originated from minstrelsy, when a white man named Thomas Rice parodied African American forms of song and dance in his routine “Jump Jim Crow.”<sup>xxii</sup> In 1935, less than ten years before Willie James Howard was killed, when “Old Folks at Home” became Florida’s official song, it was common among white people to see Black people as objects of parody. Music, theater, movies, and household knick-knacks regularly featured African American caricatures and stereotypes: Mammies, Uncle Toms, Zip Coons, and Pickaninies. Popular postcards from Florida featured Black children as “Gator Bait.” The move from finding alligators eating Black babies humorous to seeing white men killing Black boys as justice does not entail a big leap in logic.

For anyone who knows Howard’s story, hiking the Florida Trail stretch that runs along the Suwannee River is difficult, despite the lovely scenery and the easy footing. Speaking personally, I cannot hear the Stephen Foster Center’s carillon chime out “Old Folks at Home” without thinking of Lula and James Howard, mourning the death of their son. I cannot look at the river’s rippling currents without thinking of Willie James inside its dark waters struggling to breathe, fighting to be free.

## ACKNOWLEDEMENT

This essay is indebted to Marvin Dunn and Douglas Udell, both of whom spoke to me at length about Willie James Howard; to ranger Andrea Thomas of the Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, who clarified information about the park's famous carillon; and to Thomas Hallock, who walked this section of the Florida Trail with me in December, 2020 and provided important feedback on each stage of the writing process.

## NOTES

- i For more information on this section of the trail, see "Suwannee River," Florida Trail Association, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.floridatrail.org/suwannee-river/>; and Sandra Friend and John Keatley, *The Florida Trail Guide*, 2nd edition (Sanford, FL: Watulla Press, 2015), 191-212.
- ii This capsule history is indebted to Michael Gannon, *The History of Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013). See also "Suwannee Springs History: From Historic Resort to Local Park," Visit Suwannee County, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://visitsuwannee.com/suwannee-springs-history>; and "The Spring House at Stephen Foster," Florida State Parks, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/spring-house-stephen-foster/>
- iii I visited the Stephen Foster Center in December, 2020, when the bells were still active. The almost 65-year-old carillon is currently silent while it undergoes extensive repairs, a process that might take months or even years. Under typical circumstances, the bells play Stephen Foster tunes and, during certain seasons, holiday classics. For more information about the carillon, see "Stephen Foster Memorial Carillon," Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/stephen-foster-memorial-carillon>; and "History," Stephen Foster Folk Culture Center State Park, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/stephen-foster-memorial-carillon>.

- iv On “Old Folks at Home,” see “State Song,” Florida Department of State, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://dos.myflorida.com/florida-facts/florida-state-symbols/state-song/>; “Stephen Foster,” Center for American Music, accessed February 2, 2021, <http://www.pitt.edu/~amerimus/foster.htm>; “Old Folks at Home,” Center for American Music, archived January 16, 2009, accessed February 2, 2021, <http://www.pitt.edu/~amerimus/lyrics.htm>.
- v My account of Howard’s lynching and the investigation that followed is derived from Tameka Bradley Hobbs, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 121-155; and Marvin Dunn, *Beast in Florida: A History of Anti-Black Violence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 153-164.
- vi A copy of Willie James Howard’s supposed letter to Cynthia Goff, along with other documents referenced below, can be found in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Papers, Group II, Box A-395, General Office File, Live Oak, FL: Willie Howard, 1944, on microfilm at Reel: 25: 0391, Investigations—Miscellaneous Reports, 1940-1946.
- vii Nearly 200 anti-lynching bills went (unsuccessfully) before Congress during the 20th century, beginning in 1918 with H.R. 11279, sponsored by Rep. Leonidas Dyer (R, Missouri). In 2005, the Senate apologized for its role in the failure to enact such legislation. In 2020, however, the Senate missed another opportunity when Sen. Rand Paul (R, Kentucky) held up H.R. 35, The Emmett Till Antilynching Act, sponsored by Rep. Bobby Rush (D, Illinois), which proposed to make lynching a federal hate crime. See Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); S.Res.39, “A resolution apologizing to the victims of lynching and the descendants of those victims for the failure of the Senate to enact anti-lynching legislation,” accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-resolution/39>; and H.R. 35, “Emmett Till Antilynching Act,” accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/35/actions>.
- viii These numbers and ones below can be found (along with an interactive map) at the Equal Justice Initiative’s Lynching in America report, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/>.

- ix Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases," in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900*, edited by Jacqueline Jones Royster (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996), 58. See also Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).
- x Mitchell, *From Slave Cabins to the White House: Homemade Citizenship in African American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 2. Dunn discusses Rosewood in Chapter Five of *Beast in Florida*.
- xi Julio Capó, Jr., and Melba V. Pearson, "What Modern Voter Suppression Looks Like in Florida," *The Washington Post*, November 3, 2020, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/11/03/what-modern-voter-suppression-looks-like-florida/>.
- xii Florida's Supreme Court overturned the ruling; later, McCollum was found unable to stand trial because of mental incompetence. She remained in a state mental hospital until her 1974 release. See Tammy Evans, *The Silencing of Ruby McCollum: Race, Class, and Gender in the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006).
- xiii Ben Green recounts Moore's involvement in the case in *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore: America's First Civil Rights Martyr* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 48-51.
- xiv *Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore*, directed by Sandra Dickson and Churchill Roberts (Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2000).
- xv See Gilbert King, *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of New America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013). Green also treats the Groveland case in *Before His Time*, Chapter Eight.
- xvi Green discusses Moore's death, the investigation, and the incident's legacies in *Before His Time*, Chapters Nine-Twelve. See also *Freedom Never Dies*.
- xvii The scholarship on Emmett Till is extensive. Good starting points include Stephen Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Timothy B.

Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); and Christopher Metress, *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

xviii Orange County, in one of the first Community Remembrance Projects in Florida, put up a marker for July Perry/The Ocoee Massacre in 2019, and projects are currently underway in Alachua, Hillsborough, Pinellas, and other counties across the state. "Community Remembrance Project," The Equal Justice Initiative, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://eji.org/projects/community-remembrance-project/>.

xix Trey Walk, Telephone Interview, February 25, 2020.

xx Udell, Telephone Interview, December 2, 2020.

xxi Dunn, 162-63.

xxii Much has been written about the history of blackface minstrelsy and the links between caricatures, disenfranchisement, and violence. Starting points include Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, Ferris State University, accessed February 2, 2021, <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/>. The latter contains images of Black babies as "Gator Bait," discussed below.