

H-Net Reviews

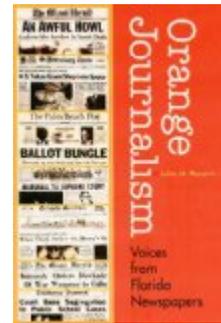
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Julian M. Pleasants. *Orange Journalism: Voices from Florida Newspapers*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. xvi + 345 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2653-4.

Reviewed by David Lee McMullen (Departments of History, University of Aberdeen, and University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

Published on H-Florida (January, 2004)



From Hot Type to the Internet: Florida Newspapers in Transition

From Hot Type to the Internet: Florida Newspapers in Transition

As a native Floridian and former Florida journalist who is acquainted with several of the individuals interviewed and discussed in *Orange Journalism*, I found the book to be accurate, insightful, a pleasure to read, and an important contribution toward recording the history of Florida newspapers during the twentieth century.

Orange Journalism is a compilation of fifteen oral histories, each of which provides a slightly different perspective of print journalism, in a state noted for innovative newspapers. The diversity of this collection can be found in the diversity of observations made by the journalists who were interviewed: African Americans, Hispanics and whites; editors, publishers, reporters, columnists, cartoonists and sports writers; and representatives of national, daily and weekly publications. The book's author, Julian M. Pleasants, is director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program and a professor of history at the University of Florida. A foreword is provided by the series editors, Raymond Arsenault and Gary R. Mormino.

Among the more fascinating interviews were those outside the mainstream of Florida journalism: Garth Reeves, long-time publisher of the *Miami Times*, South Florida's leading African American newspaper, discussed the role of his publication in the desegregation of Miami; Tommy Greene, a past president of the Florida Press Association and publisher of several North Florida weeklies,

talked about the realities of starting a small town publication and keeping it profitable; and Horacio Aguirre, founder of *Diario las Americas*, explained how he runs an international Spanish language newspaper from Miami. Discussing his editorial policy during the violence in Liberty City in 1988, Reeves noted, "Editorially, we did not call them 'riots.' We called them 'protests.' Sure, everybody else called them 'riots,' but, editorially, we were saying that the people were not just rioting to be rioting. They were protesting wrongs that were piled upon them year after year and that it looked like nothing was being done about it" (p. 202).

Among the most colorful oral histories are those of Rick Bragg, an Alabama farm boy who grew up to become a top writer for the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *New York Times*, and Carl Hiaasen, a columnist for the *Miami Herald* and successful novelist. Commenting on the quality of newspaper writing these days, Bragg said, "I'd encourage writers to take chances, not in their reporting so much as in their writing. Everybody is not a stylist. Everyone is not intended to write like Tennessee Williams after a half-bottle of whiskey. But one reason that there is so much damn deady dull writing in this country is because writers are being told by their editors to 'save it for your novel'" (p. 244).

Only two women are included, which seems odd when reporting on an industry where women have taken a significantly greater leadership role during the past several decades. The two are Diane McFarlin, publisher of

the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, and Lucy Morgan, an investigative reporter for the *St. Petersburg Times*. McFarlin observed that quality journalism and profits are not mutually exclusive. Referring to Nelson Poynter, the former publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times*, she said: He “demonstrated to probably the most memorable extent that great journalism makes a great business [...]. His standards were immensely high, and he structured his organization to support those high standards” (p. 123). Others included in the volume are: Al Neuharth, *USA Today*; David Lawrence, *Miami Herald*; Fred Pettijohn, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*; Tippen Davidson, *News-Journal* (Daytona Beach); Earle Bowden, *Pensacola News-Journal*; Loyal Frisbie, *Polk County Democrat*; Don Wright, *Palm Beach Post*; and Edwin Pope, *Miami Herald*. Noticeably missing from this collection are the perspectives of the Jacksonville, Tallahassee and Orlando newspapers, leading broadcast journalists, and the countless reporters who abandoned the profession because of long hours, low salaries or managers who openly manipulated news coverage to meet the editorial policies or business interests of their publications.

In several incidents, the interviewers failed to push

deeper into some of the tougher issues facing Florida newspapers, including how the business side of the publication influences news coverage and what the future of journalism holds for newspapers, especially as the Internet continues to develop. In a few cases, there is a noticeable “chumminess” between the interviewer and interviewee that distracts from the quality of the discussion. Personally, I am disappointed that this volume wasn’t written done years ago. Anyone familiar with Florida newspapers can quickly name several individuals, no longer with us, who would have made a significant contribution.

All that said, *Orange Journalism* is a valuable addition to Florida’s historical archives, and should be of interest to anyone who wants to know more about newspapers or the Sunshine State.

Copyright (c) 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-florida>

Citation: David Lee McMullen. Review of Pleasants, Julian M., *Orange Journalism: Voices from Florida Newspapers*. H-Florida, H-Net Reviews. January, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8641>

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.