

# **Florida Seminoles and the Cultural Politics of the Everglades**

Jessica R. Cattelino



The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While Members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences—anthropology, economics, sociology and political science—as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how, and under what conditions, the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

Jessica Cattelino is an associate professor of anthropology at UCLA and a member in the School of Social Science at IAS in 2008-09; previously, she was an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago. Her research and writing center on indigenous sovereignty in Native North America, the social meanings of economic action, environment, and settler colonialism. Her first book, *High Stakes: Florida Seminole Gaming and Sovereignty* (Duke University Press, 2008), examined the cultural, political, and economic stakes of tribal casinos for Florida Seminoles. Her current research project explores citizenship and territoriality in the Florida Everglades, with focus on the Seminole Big Cypress Reservation and the nearby agricultural town of Clewiston.



## Florida Seminoles and the Cultural Politics of the Everglades

Marjory Stoneman Douglas begins *River of Grass*, the classic book on the Florida Everglades, with this line: “There are no other Everglades in the world” (Douglas 1997 [1947]: 5). The uniqueness of the Everglades is often repeated by its residents, scholars analyzing its past and present, and political forces fighting over its future. Simultaneously, the Everglades often are taken to be a model or an indicator that others must heed: a model of ecological restoration that brings observers from countries around the world to speak with Everglades biologists; an indicator of American progress, decline, can-do spirit, or malaise. Michael Grunwald, author of *The Swamp*, a recent history of the Everglades, put it this way: “It’s the ecological equivalent of motherhood and apple pie” (Grunwald 2006: 3). Many a claim about America and its citizens has been made with the Everglades as its target, and for this reason it is an ideal place to study American nationalism and citizenship. The Everglades are also home to American Indian tribal nations whose sovereignty and citizenship are tightly bound to territorial claims.<sup>1</sup>

I am in the early stages of a book project that examines citizenship and territoriality in the Florida Everglades. I use the term territorialization to refer to the ways that human groups coalesce and create environments by enacting ties to land and water. In doing so, I raise a series of questions about nature and about cultural politics, or the ways that authority is contested and distributed through communities’ assessments of one another’s distinctiveness and commonalities. In the Everglades, one cannot escape the sense that the land and water shape human communities because they are concerns around which humans establish themselves as interest groups and are measures by which groups assess their civic health. At the same time, human ideas about and actions in the Everglades shape our understanding of that land and water. Human action is everywhere in Everglades nature, whether in the form of iconic alligators sunning themselves on the banks of drainage and irrigation canals, of vast expanses of sawgrass prairie thriving in government-set-aside conservation areas, of sparkling water channels that have been maintained by boat traffic for centuries or more, or of wild-looking, uninhabited islands built out of shell by Calusa Indians hundreds of years ago.

As land, water, and humans interact with one another, power is at stake. Anthropologist Jake Kosek’s characterization of the politics of nature in New Mexico holds for the Florida Everglades: “nature has been the primary target through which bodies and populations—both human and nonhuman—have been governed, and it has been the primary site through which institutions of governance have been formed and operated” (Kosek 2006: 25). General questions about human relations to the environment are of great importance in the social sciences, and the

anthropology of nature has blossomed in the last decade (Hayden 2003, Kosek 2006, Moore 2006, Raffles 2002, West 2006). But this study focuses more pointedly on the cultural politics of territorialization. I ask how political communities come into being, make claims, and understand one another in relation to land and water; how these processes vary among groups; and how they connect to the expectations that people have of one another's actions and attributes. Analysis of the Everglades (Douglas 1997 [1947], Grunwald 2006) and other major ecosystems often presumes rather than queries competing "interests" and designated "stakeholders" such as indigenous peoples, developers, agriculturalists, and environmentalists (but see Espeland 1998). In contrast, this project draws upon scholarly accounts of the social and material production of nature (e.g., Gupta 1998, Harvey 1996) to argue that in the Everglades, *civic practices* of territorialization—they are civic in that they constitute and reinforce political belonging—*produce* ecological stakes and interests.

The primary modes of territorialization for Everglades residents, I suggest, are movement and stoppage: of people at town and Indian reservation borders and in labor migrations; of agricultural commodities and capital; and, most evidently, of water. Looking at movement and stoppage in this iconic region, where American and American Indian nationalisms have played out, has much to tell us about the practical and material processes by which collectivities form around, measure themselves by, and understand one another through land and water. At a time when the word "green" is all over the news, these concerns reverberate far beyond the Everglades.

Anthropological fieldwork and archival research for this project focus on two Florida communities, the Big Cypress Seminole Indian Reservation and the nearby agricultural town of Clewiston (Fig. 1). Florida Seminoles, population approximately 3,500, live on six discontinuous reservations across the swamps and suburbs of South Florida. Pushed deep into the Everglades by nineteenth-century U.S. military incursions and policies that called for their forcible removal to present-day Oklahoma, Seminoles often were viewed in the twentieth century as one of the most traditional American Indian peoples (see Sturtevant 1971, Sturtevant and Cattelino 2004). In 1979, the Seminole tribe confounded government and academic observers by opening the first high-stakes bingo hall in Native North America. This act launched a gaming revolution that soon spread across Indian Country and that now generates nearly a billion dollars in annual revenues that the elected Seminole tribal council spends on its governmental programs. My recent book (Cattelino 2008) examined Seminole gaming and tribal sovereignty. The research for the Seminole portion of this new project began in 2000 when I became interested in how and why Seminoles allocated casino revenues to natural resource management. American Indian tribes, as governments, hold political authority over their citizens and territories and enjoy a government-to-government relationship with the United States; although indigenous sovereignty has been limited by colonization, it has not been extinguished (Wilkins



Figure 1. South Florida, including Seminole Reservations. Map by Mapping Specialists, Ltd.

and Lomawaima 2001). One of the book's central arguments was that much is lost when we assume that sovereignty rests on autonomy; in fact, sovereignty is constituted in part through relations of interdependency. The Everglades project sustains my interest in sovereignty and interdependency.

One of the areas where Seminoles exercise sovereignty and undertake civic projects is natural resource management, and a focal point for these efforts is the Big Cypress Reservation. A tribal museum exhibit describes remote Big Cypress as "an area that no other Floridians have settled" (August 23, 2007). Facing stark economic pressures, Seminoles gradually shifted their dispersed and more mobile settlement patterns to Big Cypress and other reservations beginning in the 1930s; today, the reservation covers 52,000 acres and has a population of approximately 600. To the north is Clewiston, a planned small city (population approximately 7,000) founded in the late 1920s that is self-labeled "America's Sweetest Town" and is home to the powerful United States Sugar Corporation, the largest U.S. producer of cane sugar.

Small in population and seemingly remote, Big Cypress and Clewiston in fact stand at the center of social processes that have earned Florida an increasingly iconic status in America as what a *New York Times Magazine* cover article called "America in Extremis" (Paternitti 2002). As Florida writer Carl Hiassen told Steven Colbert in January: "You start looking at what's wrong with America, we would feel very hurt if you didn't start looking here first" (Colbert Report 2008). Big Cypress and Clewiston have been home to contests over the scope of American and indigenous citizenship and nationhood, from indigenous water claims to anti-Cuban Cold War sugar industrialization, from environmental stewardship in the creation of the Everglades National Park to migrant agricultural labor and attendant civil rights disputes. In both places, nature looms large, whether with the swamps, cypress tree islands, alligators and endangered Florida panthers at Big Cypress, or with Lake Okeechobee and the fields of sugarcane that stretch off to the southern horizon beyond Clewiston. In each place, nature shapes culture, and culture shapes nature.

The remainder of this paper focuses on Florida Seminoles only. First, I show how American settlers have either collapsed Seminoles into the Everglades or erased them from the Everglades, and in the course of doing so have justified Everglades drainage, restoration, and indigenous dispossession. Then, I turn to three episodes during which the control over movement and stoppage produced Seminole and American civic life: the movement and stoppage of Indians in the creation of the Everglades National Park; of deer during a World War II-era cattle tick controversy; and of water on the Big Cypress reservation during Everglades drainage, subsequent Seminole water claims, and present-day restoration efforts.



## Collapse and Erasure

Cultural geographer Bruce Braun said of nature in British Columbia: “If nature is to be successfully constructed as primal, First Nations must be either erased entirely or collapsed into it” (Braun 2002: x). As with First Nations in Canada, Seminoles’ erasure from the Everglades and their collapse into the Everglades have been mutually reinforcing. Since the mid-1800s, Everglades politics have been dominated by two settler imperatives, with a third added more recently: first, to make land agriculturally productive; second, to develop a permanent residential population in South Florida; and more recently, to restore the Everglades (how it should be restored depends on what you think about the first and second imperatives). For the most part, the first two goals—agricultural productivity and development—have gone hand-in-hand, although presently Everglades systems organized around agricultural drainage and flood control flush over one billion gallons of fresh water into the ocean every day, even while urban dwellers face water shortages during drought seasons.<sup>2</sup> In the nineteenth century, the goal of reclamation for productive use united white settlers straggling into Florida against the perceived miasma, waste, uselessness, and impenetrability of the South Florida swamplands. The story of settler perceptions of the swamp is a fascinating one, but for the purposes of this paper I underline how the nationalist projects of both Everglades reclamation and restoration went hand-in-hand with undermining indigenous nationalisms through processes of collapse and erasure.

The federal Swamp and Overflowed Lands Act of 1850 turned the Everglades and other wetlands over from the federal government to the states, on the condition that revenues from their sales be allocated for reclamation. The new state of Florida, only five years old, jumped right in. The idea of reclamation supposes a prior claim, pointing most obviously to God’s gift of the earth as the dominion of man.<sup>3</sup> Everglades reclamation became a nationalist project, a test of America’s fortitude and technical prowess, a demonstration of manifest destiny, and a testament to the settler nation’s rightful position as steward of the land. Everglades bard Marjory Stoneman Douglas later mocked Everglades drainage schemes as having been characterized by the following “schoolboy logic”: “The drainage of the Everglades would be a Great Thing. Americans did Great Things. Therefore Americans would drain the Everglades” (Douglas 1997 [1947]: 286).

Seminoles long have been collapsed into the Everglades as part of pure nature, in a region that until the mid-twentieth century often was called “America’s last frontier.” Of course, “the frontier” is hardly an innocent concept. For much of American history, the frontier was taken to be a space that divided settler from American Indian occupancy and, in a misplaced Lockean view, divided productive from not-yet-productive uses of land. American fighters in the nineteenth-century Seminole wars—the longest, bloodiest, and costliest of the Indian wars—speculated

that Indians not only belonged to the Everglades but were constitutionally adapted to tolerate its mosquitoes and diseases (Grunwald 2006: 46). Perhaps this was a convenient explanation for the U.S. military's dismal record against Seminoles, many of whom defied attempts to forcibly remove them to present-day Oklahoma, and whose descendents consider themselves to be unconquered because they did not sign a peace treaty with the United States. Florida settlers took the conquering of Indians and the reclamation of the Everglades to be part of a single project of progress. Environmental histories of the Everglades make note of Indian occupancy, first of Calusas and other groups and then of Seminoles being pushed down from northern Florida, but these histories generally mark the beginning of meaningful human agency only with the onset of white settlement.<sup>4</sup> Douglas, for example, wrote that after American Indians repelled sixteenth-century Spanish settlement and missionization efforts, "There followed three hundred years in which history was the wind running over the enormous waves of the sawgrass. Men and women were only small, far-off figures, rarely glimpsed, forgotten and unknown" (Douglas 1997 [1947]: 168). Seminoles continued to be collapsed into the premodern Everglades in twentieth-century popular culture, for example, in a 1933 National Airlines postcard, where they point in seeming awe at the technological achievement of "modern" Florida (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. National Airlines color postcard. Courtesy of the Seminole/Miccosukee Photographic Archive.

The Everglades are a paradigmatic wilderness. As environmental historian William Cronon (1996) showed, positing nature as pure wilderness, and human action as a disruptive force that acts on nature, generally impoverishes our view of humans' role in the material world. If nature is taken to stand outside human action, we fail to grapple with how humans can responsibly exist in this world and, moreover, we fail to see how our ideas of nature are formed by our ideas of culture. More importantly for my purposes, a purified notion of nature, whether as a wasteful state in need of reclamation or an idealized arena uncorrupted by humans, is not neutral with respect to different human groups. Instead, a purified vision of nature in settler states systematically erases indigenous agency and governance. Indigenous dispossession is justified, and indigenous peoples are viewed as inauthentic insofar as they act in ways that are recognizably human and modern.

I must note that Seminoles also emphasize their deep connection to the Everglades. Alligator wrestling, an iconic twentieth-century Seminole tourist trade, conjures up images of Indians conquering wild beasts, primal reptiles with nut-sized brains and vicious teeth, in a simultaneous triumph over nature and reminder of indigenous peoples' association *with* nature. Contemporary ecotourism at Big Cypress reinforces the association of Seminoles with the Everglades. Tribal general counsel Jim Shore, who grew up as the son of a traditional religious leader on the prairies of the Brighton Reservation and became the first Seminole lawyer, testified before the United States Senate in 2000 about Everglades Restoration: "Our traditional Seminole cultural, religious, and recreational activities, as well as commercial endeavors, are dependent on a healthy South Florida ecosystem. In fact, the Tribe's identity is so closely linked to the land that Tribal members believe that if the land dies, so will the Tribe" (Shore 2000). The health of a people and a government, for Shore, is inextricable from the health of the Everglades.<sup>5</sup> But here it is important to note a difference from the ways that settlers identified Indians with Everglades wilderness: Shore does not collapse Seminoles into the Everglades as nature; instead, he asserts their identification with the Everglades as well as their political authority over decisions about the Everglades. This is no minor difference.

Seminoles also have been erased from the Everglades. Histories of modern Everglades development focus on non-Indians despite Seminoles' role in shaping Everglades tourism, their labor in surveying and building the highways that slice through the wetlands, and their presence as a polity with governing authority over land and resources. But Seminoles' erasure from Everglades development perhaps is less surprising than their erasure from Everglades preservation. One example of the latter is the website of the Everglades National Park. Seminoles are pictured on the tab for "Native Peoples," but the content of that page is exclusively archaeological data that ends with the Seminole Wars; the only inkling that there are Indians living in the Everglades today is an unexplained small link to the Seminole Tribe's website. Seminoles disappear altogether from historically unfolding pages on "Pioneer

Settlement,” “Development in the Everglades,” and “Conservation Efforts.” One website hardly suffices as evidence, so let me hasten to add that this pattern holds for much of Everglades restoration.

Erasure, for Seminoles, is temporal: whereas they are collapsed into the nature that was the Everglades before settlement, they are erased from the Everglades once it is developed *or* preserved. Indians’ collapse into or erasure from nature is patterned. Insofar as Indians can be treated as harmless, apolitical, and traditional, they are collapsed into nature. Insofar as they make disruptive claims or might interfere with a purified notion of nature, and insofar as they are perceived to be modern, they tend to be erased from nature. The purification of nature as outside of modern human action has patterned effects that undermine the political recognition and power of indigenous peoples in settler states.

Thus far, in order to show how settler territorialization projects often preclude indigenous ones, I have focused on images and discourses. Let me now turn to a different mode of analysis by foregrounding practical and political processes of movement and stoppage in three episodes: the creation of the Everglades National Park, a controversy over deer ticks, and Seminoles’ response to the drainage of their reservations.

### **The Everglades National Park**

The Everglades National Park often is lauded as the first national park created to preserve biological species and processes, rather than to celebrate monumental scenery. Its creation, from authorization in the mid-1930s through dedication in 1947, enacted American stewardship over the land, in a nationalist articulation of preservation as a sign of American progress.<sup>6</sup> The national park developed as a form as the American frontier closed and during the period when American Indians were relocated onto reservations (Spence 1999; see also Keller and Turek 1998).<sup>7</sup> As Philip Deloria (2004) has written in an essay about American Indian mobility, with the closing of the frontier came new restrictions on indigenous mobility that took hold not only in law and policy but also in cultural politics. Examples included marketing campaigns that placed Indians as objects and symbols on vehicles to be driven by others and public scandals that erupted when Indians got behind the wheels of automobiles and literally controlled their own mobility. A national reorganization of movement was underway.

One of the most frequently published images from the 1947 Everglades National Park dedication shows Seminoles presenting President Harry Truman with a patchwork jacket, in a customary diplomatic gesture that one sees today whenever Seminoles honor outside politicians. In spring 2006, I took part in a conference on Truman and American Indians in Key West, Florida. After a lawn reception at the Little White House, we gathered for the keynote address by former Senator Ben

Nighthorse Campbell and speeches by representatives of the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes.<sup>8</sup> The Miccosukee representative, the Tribe's long-serving non-Indian attorney Dexter Lehtinen, took the occasion to tell all in attendance, some of whom looked quite surprised, that Florida Indians rue the day that the Everglades National Park was created. He explained that Indians had little say about the federal takeover of lands they consider to be theirs (May 19, 2006). Today, park visitors who justifiably celebrate the park's role in fending off unchecked development might never know that Indians were removed to create the environment they appreciate. Or that this created the present-day reservation system in Florida.

In the early 1900s, Seminoles lived all across South Florida. They speak of the Everglades as the refuge that saved them from the American military onslaught, and they credit their survival with knowledge of Everglades waterways and cypress tree islands known as hammocks. Elders recall growing up on hammocks with gardens that produced corn, pumpkins, bananas, citrus, and sugarcane. Until the 1910s, many earned income by hunting birds for the lucrative plume trade and by selling alligator hides at stores scattered throughout the Glades (Kersey 1975).<sup>9</sup> After the Tamiami Trail highway opened in 1928, connecting Tampa with Miami, many moved to roadside camps where they sold patchwork clothing, wrestled alligators, and posed for pictures. None went to public school, few spoke any but commercial English, and they maintained a distinct way of life in matrilineal clan camps consisting of thatched-roof chickees. A 99,000-acre state reservation had been set aside for Seminoles in 1917 in southern Monroe County, but it remained undeveloped, and Seminoles did not observe reservation boundaries.

In 1934, Congress authorized the Everglades National Park with a provision that protected "any existing rights of the Seminole Indians which are not in conflict with the purposes for which the Everglades National Park is created" (quoted in Kersey 1989: 189-190). The local Indian Agent had written to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, concerned that the park's creation would disadvantage Seminoles, and Seminoles had expressed their opposition in local newspapers. The park's most tireless advocate, Ernest F. Coe, sought preservation of the Everglades landscape as pure nature, unadulterated by humans; therefore, he resolutely opposed any human presence in the park. In a memo to the federal Office of Indian Affairs, Coe simultaneously collapsed Seminoles into the natural Everglades and erased them from its future as landowners by advocating their removal and selective reincorporation as laborers:

The Seminole is as much a part of the Florida landscape as any other of its features in the northern mind.

What could be more inviting to the Park tourist than a canoe ride through a jungle waterway, poled along by a Seminole brave?....the

Seminole would be in great demand and the tourist would be quite content to pay the price asked for such a treat.

It is believed that the Seminole would take kindly to the idea and fit into the general park scheme perfectly. Should this prove to be the case, the present Seminole social problem would solve itself.... (Coe 1931)

In effect, Coe proposed to remove Seminoles off of park lands except when employed as guides. Others considered the park to be a better conservator of Seminole lifeways than Seminoles themselves. For example, the Florida historian Charlton Tebeau wrote in 1963 that concerns about Seminoles' future during the park's creation had been misguided because Seminoles were fated to assimilate to a white way of life. The park, in his estimation, would preserve, not disrupt, Seminole life: "The Seminole Indian artifacts in the museums to be established in the Park are mute evidence of a life that had largely ceased to exist before the park was created" (Tebeau 1963: 33).<sup>10</sup>

In an effort to appease park advocates while providing for Seminoles, Indian Affairs officials encouraged a land swap. Over ten years later, the state reservation was dissolved into the park, and lands that Seminoles had occupied elsewhere in the greater Everglades were set aside and placed in federal trust as reservations. These included the Big Cypress Reservation. Some Seminoles objected, others approved, and still others knew nothing of the deal. Elders today remember being moved out of the park, and no one recalls anyone being hired back as a guide. Some called reservations concentration camps, and they feared being gathered together in order to be shipped off to Oklahoma.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the hunting and fishing economy had collapsed, and a new sort of poverty tied to wage labor took hold. None of this makes the current reservations any less real as homes, and today reservation identity is reinforced in everything from inter-reservation sports competitions to the reservation-based tribal electoral system. Still, traces of suspicion persist among those Seminole families who refuse to move onto reservations because they do not want anything to do with the federal government, and in the placement of the Green Corn Dance grounds outside of reservations because it is considered culturally inappropriate to hold this most important annual ritual event on reservation lands.

With the simultaneous creation of the Everglades National Park and the new Seminole reservations in the 1930s, control over movement in the South Florida wetlands would shift. An American nationalist project of environmental stewardship relied upon the exclusion of Indians, as was typical of Indian removals in the creation of the national park system, and yet the new reservations would be hotbeds for Seminole sovereignty claims that would yield organized governmental status and growing economic and political clout. First, however, Seminoles had to establish

reservation communities' legitimacy in their own and others' eyes. One occasion would be a contest over the movement of deer, ticks, and hunters.

### **Deer ticks and other pests**

In the 1930s, the federal government maintained a relatively light touch when it came to Seminoles, who fiercely protected their independence and distrusted the U.S. Despite this, New Deal progressives hoped to build trust and move more Seminoles onto reservations. Their efforts were dramatically undermined when in 1939-40 the State of Florida and the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that all deer on the Big Cypress reservation would be destroyed as part of a massive effort to eradicate a tick that caused cattle illness and had crippled the growing Florida cattle industry. Big Cypress was the last holdout after years of state-sponsored hunting had destroyed the Florida deer population, and Seminoles were not about to allow a deer kill on their land. The dispute led to state-federal and interagency conflict, a federally-declared closure of the Big Cypress Seminole reservation to non-Indians, efforts by outlaws to shoot deer from low-flying planes over the reservations, and occasional standoffs between Seminoles (who instituted patrols along reservation borders) and locals (see also Kersey 1989: 124-130, Philp 1977). At one point, the Department of Interior proposed a compromise plan to build a 7-foot fence around the 36,000-acre reservation. Seminole suspicions of ulterior motives ran high, and many advocates shared them. For example, Ethel Cutler Freeman, an amateur anthropologist living at Big Cypress during the height of the patrols, wrote in her diary that "It all looks phony to me - I have the sneaking suspicion that oil may be at the bottom of this. They will kill the deer, say there is no game, ship the Sem. to Oklahoma & take the land for oil & minerals" (Freeman 1940). Opponents provided little reassurance: at one point, a Florida congressman told the Associated Press that he considered Seminoles to be squatters, living in Florida illegally after agreeing to move to Oklahoma (*Miami Herald* 1940). The idea that Seminoles could stop non-Indians from moving across reservation lands horrified many Floridians. This was a contest over movement: of deer, viruses, hunters, and people.

The battle raged in Washington, with a surprising amount of proposed Congressional legislation and posturing between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Agriculture.<sup>12</sup> The demands of World War II finally convinced President Roosevelt to order the cessation of the eradication campaign. In a 1942 letter to the Secretary of Agriculture, Roosevelt instructed that no deer at Big Cypress be killed until the war was over and until scientific investigation proved that deer really were the hosts to cattle ticks. He concluded: "You might also tell the Bureau of Animal Industry that they have never proved that human beings are not hosts to cattle ticks. I think some human beings I know are. But I do not shoot them on suspicion - though I would sorely like to do so!" (Roosevelt 1942). Subsequent

scientific research determined that the deer kill had been unnecessary and ineffective. The deer at Big Cypress were saved. In the end, an alliance of progressivist pro-science New Dealers, Indian advocates, and fledgling environmentalists won out. A less obvious but no less consequential outcome was that Seminoles came to appreciate that reservation status gave them some control over the movement of non-Indians and animals (c.f., Blu 1996). This, in turn, set the stage for Seminoles to reorganize and gain full federal recognition of their governmental status in 1957.

The creation of the Everglades National Park and the deer tick battles drew boundaries in the land and the water and prevented people from crossing them based on their identities or their actions. Considering only these two examples, it might be tempting to reduce my focus on movement and stoppage to one of boundary-making or borders. But borders represent only one civic technology of movement and stoppage. In Everglades drainage and its aftermath we can identify others, such as canalization and water flow timing.

### **Drainage and Water Rights**

After World War II, in the wake of devastating 1920s hurricanes and 1940s floods, and during a Florida development boom, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers implemented the Central and Southern Florida Project. Over decades, they built a massive ditch and drainage system that separated Northern Glades farmland from Central Glades water conservation areas and Eastern Glades cities. The Southern Glades was preserved as the Everglades National Park. Drainage of the South Florida swamps hit Seminoles hard, shaping every aspect of Big Cypress reservation life and propelling the tribal government into complex political and legal entanglements with other governments. A series of canals were built on the Big Cypress and Brighton reservations, some of Seminoles' easternmost lands were flooded without consent, and the bulk of the Big Cypress reservation was drained.

Some Seminoles cheered because their pastures improved, and the cattle business grew. Florida's powerful cattle industry had pushed for drainage, and the 1940s floods were detailed in a government report with a famous drowning "crying cow" on its cover. Seminoles had owned cattle since the early days of Spanish colonization, and they had maintained massive herds in North Florida; after a hiatus during the Seminole wars and their aftermath, Seminoles took up cattle once again beginning in the 1930s. To this day, cattle are a cultural marker of Seminole identity, a locus of community when people gather for reservation rodeos or to work cattle, and a shaky but persistent tribal economic venture.<sup>13</sup> But even as cattle owners welcomed pasture drainage in the 1960s, they quickly realized that they exercised little control over new and alarming fluctuations in water movement through their reservation. Meanwhile, Seminoles began to worry that drainage damaged a valued



way of life and threatened the health of individuals and the community as a whole. To understand why, first let me explain a bit about how Everglades water moves.

Water flows southward from a chain of central Florida lakes and the Kissimmee River into Lake Okeechobee, and until the 1930s it then spilled seasonally over the lake's banks to create the Everglades wetlands that slowly moved water southward to the ocean. Beginning in the 1930s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a levee around Lake Okeechobee's perimeter for flood control. The Central and Southern Florida project drained lands south of the lake for agricultural use and built an extensive canal system for seasonal drainage and irrigation. Seminoles at Big Cypress live downstream from large sugar growers and other agricultural interests. Increasingly, sugar, citrus, and vegetable growers consumed water from canals during the dry winter season, leaving Seminole reservations in drought conditions. When growers opened floodgates to drain their fields during the wet summer season, they flooded Big Cypress and polluted it with phosphorus and other fertilizer-based nutrients. Unlike agricultural and development interests, Seminoles lacked the political clout or taxpayer influence to block or even shape these drainage systems. Seminole cattle ranchers and subsistence cultivators suffered economically from the whiplash of drought and flood, and a swamp way of life grew more tenuous.

When tribal citizen David Motlow returned from two tours in Vietnam he had difficulty readjusting to life on the urban Hollywood Reservation, so he moved out to the quiet and remote Big Cypress Reservation. Some Seminole children were in trouble, so he became a drug and alcohol abuse counselor and developed a "cultural heritage program" that offered culturally-specific treatment for abuse and addiction. Seminole elders offered guidance, but they lamented that the swamps were drying up and that, as a result, it had become difficult to find and harvest medicinal herbs. At the time, the Tribe was mired in land claim settlement negotiations. Motlow and others linked the two issues and decided that they needed to change the drainage systems that constrained Seminole life: "It became pretty clear to us that we needed to not only talk about getting our monies for the lands they had taken, but also [control of] the designs and systems that were pretty much implemented on us" (May 24, 2001, July 2, 2001). At stake was the health of the Seminole people and polity.

Seminoles' interests had been unrepresented when the Everglades were drained, but the issue here is not simply one of competing interest groups who hold more or less power. Seminoles do not consider themselves to be an interest group commensurate with agriculturalists, environmentalists, and developers, nor do they have that status in law. Rather, they are a people and, importantly, a polity. Meanwhile, by the late 1970s, Seminoles began to assert their sovereignty more aggressively in several arenas, from gaming to social service provision to natural resource management. In 1987, the Tribe, with General Counsel Jim Shore and

outside counsel Jerry Straus at the table, negotiated a historic water rights settlement with the State of Florida and the South Florida Water Management District; it was the most important riparian Indian water rights case east of the Mississippi River. A product of negotiations among multiple local, regional, and state governing bodies, the agreement was approved by Congress as a component of the Seminole Indian Land Claims Settlement Act of 1987. Shore and Straus wrote in a law review article about the settlement that the agreement “dramatically changed the relationship between the Tribe and the State,” as the State recognized the Tribe’s reserved right to natural resources, the Tribe settled a long-standing claim for the unlawful flooding of a portion of the East Big Cypress Reservation, and, more dramatically, the Tribe agreed to extinguish all other major land claims against the State (Shore and Straus 1990).<sup>14</sup> The tribe secured a right to a certain amount of water and to “first use preference” for aquifers under reservation lands.<sup>15</sup> Fifteen years after the compact, lawyer Jerry Straus noted that even while the tribe and the state still had tense relations over gaming, they had become close collaborators in the environmental arena (February 4, 2002).

The water compact ushered in a new era of Seminole control over natural resources and of increased interdependency among the Tribe, the State of Florida, federal agencies, and the South Florida Water Management District. Although the compact was a serious compromise, it resulted in tribal bureaucratic control and technical expertise that would buttress subsequent environmental claims (see Clow and Sutton 2001). Craig Tepper, a non-Seminole soil conservationist who directs the Tribe’s Environmental Resource Management Department, operates offices at Hollywood, Big Cypress, and Brighton that employed approximately thirty people in 2009. In the wake of the water rights compact, he explained, his department took responsibility for reservation water sampling and quality assessment, research, surveying, maintenance of large systems (dikes, pump stations), and issuance of well permits. His staff regulates on-reservation water use, oversees cleanup of underground fuel tanks and other pollutants, participates in federal wetlands protection programs, and consults in planning for tribal development projects (August 31, 2000). The federal Environmental Protection Agency has delegated to the Tribe the authority to implement the Clean Water Act within the Tribe’s jurisdiction, and so the Tribe sets and enforces its own water quality standards, much like a state would. Technical language and red tape abound, whether in tribal council resolutions about water monitoring or small-font Environmental Impact Statements published and generally ignored in just about every issue of the widely-read *Seminole Tribune*. Other departments now establish and enforce hunting and fishing regulations, although the scope of permissible Seminole hunting became a hotly-contested issue in the mid-1980s, when then-Tribal Chairman James Billie was arrested and tried for killing an endangered Florida panther for religious purposes. Jim Shore, general counsel, acknowledged to me that many Seminoles stand at a

distance from the compact and related legal issues because “The general Seminole public doesn’t feel as though they are part of the destruction of the environment.” They don’t necessarily care about the compact, he added, and they may feel as though they shouldn’t have to worry about cleaning up after others (December 6, 2000). No doubt in reference to its bureaucratic demands, chairman James Billie once in a tribal council meeting referred to the compact as a pain in his behind (March 8, 2001).

The water compact has given the Tribe unprecedented control over the movement of water on its lands, not just over boundaries but over quantity, distribution, timing, quality. These are the four key terms used in Everglades restoration circles to describe the components of “getting the water right.” Increased control over water movement has brought the Tribe into new relations of negotiation and cooperation with other large land managers.<sup>16</sup> It is through this interdependency that Seminoles have secured a prominent place at the environmental negotiating table, a position they leverage to protect and extend their interests, but also from which their interests develop in the first place.

In 1999, the Tribe partnered with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to undertake a major water conservation project at Big Cypress that incorporated storage, quality treatment, conveyance, and flood control. This was the largest-ever joint effort by the Corps and an American Indian tribal government and, in order to secure decision-making power, the Seminole Tribe provided matching funds of \$25 million. Local newspaper coverage noted that the Tribe was directing casino revenues toward environmental stewardship, and Seminoles emphasized that gaming finally was enabling them to regain control over their territory and its environmental quality. A January 2002 groundbreaking ceremony featured speeches by elected tribal leaders and readings by Seminole children about the importance of protecting the Everglades (Weinberg 2002). Councilman Max Osceola, Jr. told *The Miami Herald*: “It’s ironic that the military forced us here and pushed us here [to South Florida], and now the military is working hand in hand with us” (Cabral 2002). Such intergovernmental collaboration represents a shift from hostility and neglect to cooperation, a change made possible only after Seminoles had legally secured their water rights and achieved gaming-based economic and political power. In 2000, Congress authorized the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program (CERP), an extraordinarily complicated multi-component project, which, at estimated tens of billions of dollars, is the world’s largest ecological restoration project and is touted as a model and a test of America’s commitment to its future. CERP’s logo includes text about the effort’s many partners and mentions “tribal partners” along with federal and regional agencies and other governments. Though not as prominent in this effort as their Miccosukee neighbors, Seminoles are at the table again, staking a claim to this massive ecological, social, and political experiment. Theories of sovereignty often unduly privilege autonomy, but in the era of Everglades restoration, Seminoles’

increasing interdependency with other governments in natural resource management facilitates their sovereignty claims.<sup>17</sup>

Water rights claims and high-profile conservation initiatives are less important in the lives of most Big Cypress reservation residents than everyday acts of territorialization. For example, pupils at the Big Cypress Ahfachkee School plant and tend gardens, learning ethnobotany as part of their curriculum, and school children from Brighton learn about native plants.<sup>18</sup> One afternoon in 2000, tribal museum staff brought Ahfachkee students to a remote cypress hammock where the staff had recently located the camp of legendary Seminole war hero Sam Jones. Students learned how to identify old camps by their grapefruit and banana trees, land clearance traces, and surface artifacts. That this was Sam Jones' camp, not just any camp, reinforced the connection between ecological knowledge and Seminoles' ongoing identity as an unconquered people. A museum staff member asked students whether the museum should inform the broader public of the camp's location or should keep it a secret for only Seminoles to know. Predictably, there was consensus for the secret (November 15, 2000). Not all civic acts of territorialization are pedagogical: each year Seminoles plant a small plot at Big Cypress with special corn seeds passed down for generations and now kept by Jacob Osceola, Joe Frank, and other organizers of the annual Green Corn Dance, an event where important governing decisions are made. In the 1990s, the Tribe successfully negotiated with the Big Cypress National Preserve to open an additional Green Corn Dance ground adjacent to the reservation, extending their claim beyond reservation borders. Other Seminoles understand their agricultural practices to be an act of reclamation, not a reclamation over wasted land in the modernist vein discussed earlier but rather a reclaiming of a Seminole agricultural way of life that their ancestors had enjoyed prior to dispossession.

The Big Cypress swamp actively territorializes Seminoles, too. While still mourning the death of her husband, Carol Cypress one day discovered something curious on her porch: big, muddy, paw prints of a Florida panther led up to her door and then disappeared, with no return footprints leading away. Carol offered two mutually-compatible explanations. First, the panther had come to visit her during this difficult time. Second, the panther probably came to her door for a rest, bathing and sleeping before leaving with dry paws that left no trace. It went without saying that Carol is a member of the Panther clan, so this was her clan totem. Matrilineal clans are civic units within the Seminole Tribe and markers of identification that differentiate Seminoles from non-Seminoles. Whether in tribal elections influenced by clan affiliation or at the Green Corn Dance, where clans determine one's role in a larger Seminole public, clan membership structures belonging and public obligation. The swamp and its inhabitants territorialize civic belonging and obligation, and these are the foundations upon which tribal sovereignty claims are built.

## Conclusion

Seminoles often remind others that it was not they who created South Florida's environmental crisis: the Army Corps of Engineers drained the swamps, developers reduced swampland and increased water demand, and sugar and citrus growers polluted the water. Seminole mobilize casino revenues for natural resource management because of their multifaceted reliance upon the land, from cattle operations to medicinal needs, and because they link their indigenous identity and political authority to territorial claims and practices. I understand Seminoles' efforts to gain control over natural resources not as an expression of intrinsic indigenous environmentalism or a mythical connection to the land.<sup>19</sup> To the contrary, Seminoles sometimes clash with environmental groups that decry tribal cattle operations, housing development, and other threats to the environment. Instead, Seminoles' dedication to controlling their environment is, at least in part, a process of *reterritorialization* whereby they assert their sovereignty and indigeneity against a history of dispossession. Indigenous movements that reterritorialize nationhood by grounding themselves in the land do not simply reiterate a nationalist isomorphism of people with place, in the kind of reterritorialization that Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) find to be typical of new nationalist movements. Rather, indigenous reterritorialization emerges from the interconnection of historical processes of dispossession and present-day civic practices.

Social theories of territorialization and ecological models of interdependency too often fail to capture the civic aspects of the many ways that human groups claim and relate to land and water. Examining territorialization as a civic project has led me to make a series of arguments about nature: that it is part of culture just as culture is part of nature; that for indigenous peoples purified notions of nature and wilderness have patterned effects of dispossession; and that nature is a site of governance for particular practices like movement and stoppage. Territorialization also points me to positions about cultural politics: that territorialization is a civic project constitutive of participation in sometimes-overlapping national projects; that territorialization produces interests through practical processes open to social scientific analysis; that indigenous reterritorialization cannot be understood except in relation to a history of dispossession; and that interdependency characterizes not only ecosystems but also sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> Beyond its scholarly import, such a sociocultural analysis can—and, I hope, will—inform pressing public debates about the environmental future of the Florida Everglades



## ENDNOTES

1. Yet the boundaries of Everglades belonging and its cultural stakes do not stop at the swamp's edge or the nation's borders: the Everglades have been named a World Heritage Site and therefore, according to UNESCO, "belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located" (UNESCO 2007).
2. See [http://www.evergladesplan.org/docs/fs\\_cerp\\_english.pdf](http://www.evergladesplan.org/docs/fs_cerp_english.pdf), accessed March 3, 2009.
3. In this sense, impenetrable nature is an interruption in the divine passage of time, and reclamation restores it to a particularly moral kind of productivity. Even the Bureau of Reclamation, the federal agency that built the American West's massive dams, in its official history notes the origins of reclamation in the principle of subjugating land that is man's dominion (<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/2203656/Brief-History-of-The-Bureau-of-Reclamation>, accessed March 1, 2009).
4. The Everglades as an icon of natural power over people resonates with Amazonia, as discussed by anthropologist Hugh Raffles (2002: 6): "It was a region where social conditions could be explained according to a fiercely hierarchical notion of the relation between people and their landscapes, a notion that became more stable as the distinction between culture and nature secured its footing in European thought."
5. Former Miccosukee tribal chairman Buffalo Tiger wrote in his autobiography that the Indian connection to the land is given by the creator, which Florida Indians call "Breathmaker," and this makes it inalienable: "Since Breathmaker put this land for us to live on and care for, money cannot buy the land. We are not supposed to buy or sell even a cup of muck. Many of our people have fought and died for us to keep our land" (Tiger and Kersey 2002: 35). In a recent conversation with me, the octogenarian repeated that the Breathmaker intended this land for Indians—he did not base this on any claim of superiority over others, whom he said were intended for other places (February 11, 2009).
6. Later, the park would serve a different kind of national purpose as host to Nike Hercules missiles during the Cuban missile crisis (Mormino 2005: 164).
7. Yellowstone, the first national park, was created in 1872. The National Park Service was created in 1916. Conservation, in the early twentieth century, was less focused on

the environment for its own sake than on the wise use of nature not only for productive activity but also for human enjoyment. As Michael Grunwald observed, at the park's dedication President Harry Truman did not say that the Everglades should be saved for the sake of nature. Instead, he lauded their preservation for "the enjoyment of the American people" and for "conservation of the human spirit," and he held up the park as an example of "the wise use of natural resources" (Grunwald 2006: 215).

8. The Miccosukee Tribe is a separate but closely-related federally-recognized tribe that split from Seminoles in the 1950s and long has been involved in Everglades restoration. See Tiger and Kersey 2002.
9. The federal Lacey Law of 1900 and a Florida statute of 1901 outlawed the traffic in domestic bird plumes. However, it was the New York law of 1910 that ultimately cut off plume supplies to the fashion industry. The market collapsed, and Seminoles entered a seventy-year period of widespread poverty and increasing dependency on federal assistance programs (see also Kersey 1989).
10. Whether encountering Seminole guides or mute artifacts, northern visitors would be able to enjoy what Renato Rosaldo (1989) has called "imperialist nostalgia," or the longing for that which one has destroyed.
11. While the concentration camp label may seem extreme, this is how Seminoles experienced a nineteenth-century effort to move them onto a reservation and from there to Indian Territory during the height of the removal era. A few years after the Everglades National Park was dedicated, Truman would name Dillon Myer, former Director of the War Relocation Authority during Japanese internment, as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and Myer would build a termination and relocation program that aimed to dissolve American Indian tribal governments and relocate Indians from reservations to cities.
12. Marjory Stoneman Douglas would later hail Seminoles' resistance to the eradication of Everglades wildlife, but she also noted that Seminoles had never been consulted: "It had occurred to no one that the Indians had any say about it" (Douglas 1997 [1947]: 364).
13. As of 2006, Seminoles had the twelfth-largest cow and calf cattle operation in the United States. In the last year, Seminoles have promoted their Seminole Beef brand, which generates high-quality beef not only from Seminole herds but also from a large buying consortium with other American Indian tribes. The latest New York Yankee Stadium includes a high-end steak house owned by the Seminole Tribe.



14. This settlement concluded decades of litigation and negotiation over implementation of the Indian Claims Commission Act of 1946, a process that had contributed to the splitting of the Florida Seminole and Miccosukee tribes, to the creation of the Independent Seminoles, and to hostility between Florida and Oklahoma Seminoles (Kersey 1996: Chapter 6). For a glimpse at the complicated, decades-long political disputes around the Indian Claims Commission (ICC), see testimonies in the Senate Hearings (United States Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs 1978).
15. In the United States there are three water rights doctrines that together explain the difficulty and the significance of the compact. Under the doctrine of prior appropriation, which generally holds in the arid West, priority for water consumption is given to the first party who appropriates water from that source. In the eastern states, the riparian system of water rights generally applies, whereby each owner of land adjacent to a stream or river has the right to reasonable use of the water. Florida and some other states have adopted “hybrid statutory permit systems integrating the more efficient water allocation characteristics of the appropriation doctrine into traditionally riparian systems” (Shore and Straus 1990: 1). The Winters Doctrine, set forth in *Winters v. United States* (207 U.S. 564 [1908]) established unique rights for American Indians to use waters on their reservations, but the applicability of the Winters Doctrine to eastern tribes has not been well established. By negotiating a compact, the State of Florida and the Seminole Tribe avoided costly, high-stakes litigation. Under the compact, the Tribe did not pursue Winters doctrine rights, but rather “achieved state and federal recognition of substitute *federal* water rights” (Shore and Straus 1990: 12, emphasis in original). The Tribe, as a sovereign, would not subject itself to state law.
16. These include the Everglades National Park, the Big Cypress National Preserve, the Miccosukee Tribe, federal and state agencies, the South Florida Water Management District, and agriculturalists (Tepper August 31, 2000)
17. For more on sovereignty and interdependency, see chapter 5 of Cattelino 2008.
18. Even while native plants are privileged, Big Cypress residents struggle against invasive species, from Brazilian pepper to released exotic snakes. Last year, a well-meaning memo warning of pythons sent via email by a non-Seminole employee caused an uproar because unsuspecting Seminoles opened their email messages to a picture of a snake, an animal that carries taboos whether it is a native or exotic species.
19. This is not a repeat of the famously romantic “crying Indian” public service announcements of the 1980s, which drew on a stereotyped association of American Indians with the environment and topped even the “crying cow” cover’s fame. For

treatment of the “ecological Indian” stereotype, see Krech 1999; for critique and discussion of Krech, see Harkin and Lewis 2007.

20. This last point will become clearer in subsequent writings, with the addition of material from the Clewiston portion of this research.

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