

UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL BULLETIN
ANNOUNCEMENT

Florida International University
University Graduate School

Master in Fine Arts Thesis Defense

Abstract

The Last Mississippi Spa

by

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THE LAST MISSISSIPPI SPA is a memoir about the end of an era.

In Part One (1943-45), set in the rambling country hotel her family owns, the narrator learns intimately its caste system of exclusively white guests and “happy” Negro servants, in the closed society of the segregated South. Part Two (1945-55) moves to Jackson, the state capital, where there is trouble in her parents’ marriage and civil rights rumbles on the horizon. The narrator sides with integration, while her beloved father organizes the White Citizens’ Council. She escapes into marriage. In Part Three (1955-66), she has babies and discovers marriage to be another kind of tyranny, while the larger family crumbles and society is rocked by change and violent resistance to it. Trapped in a horrifying place, she runs away with a civil rights lawyer, becoming an outcast, even as the hotel burns and the old order collapses.

The memoir is written in the first person in a past tense that provides both an evocation of the past and reflection upon it. Like Geoffrey Wolff’s *The Duke of Deception*, it shows a child growing up in a world that is not what it seems. As in Alexandra Fuller’s *Don’t Let’s Go to the Dogs Tonight*, a personal world is linked to the chaotic unraveling of a way of life.

THE LAST MISSISSIPPI SPA begins in the latter years of WWII and ends in the heat of different kind of war, with the protagonist making choices that exile her from the family and home she loved.

Date: October 30, 2008

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Place: Biscayne Bay Campus, AC1 306

Department: Creative Writing

Major Professor: Lynne Barrett