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## Book Review

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Rick Kilby, *Florida's Healing Waters: Gilded Age Mineral Springs, Seaside Resorts, and Health Spas* (University Press of Florida, 2020,) 227pp., \$29.95, ISBN: 9780813066530.

Rick Kilby's *Florida's Healing Waters* offers readers the untold history of the spiritual sentiments that spawned the rise of water's healing properties in Florida, paving the way for the state's bustling tourism industry. Kilby's book includes photos, advertisements, and other images that paint the picture of Florida's healing waters and the beliefs that lured a range of people to 'take the waters' in hopes of experiencing their healing powers. Kilby largely organizes the book chronologically and by geographical regions in order to provide an alternative medical history that explains the rise of human-nature connections in the Sunshine State. By focusing on the healing powers of Florida's springs and coasts by way of sanatoriums, spas, sea bathing, and hydropathy, Kilby highlights the underlying worldview that created 'magical waters' and 'fountains of youth'.

Kilby begins in the first two chapters by describing the sacred origins of water and the rise of medical tourism in an effort to lay the foundation on which to understand early sentiments of water within Florida. Offering a range of perspectives from around the world and throughout history, Kilby situates water's ability to heal through the idea of 'water as life', first associating sacred water with Florida's early indigenous people. Kilby later connects these worldviews with those of the ancient Romans and Greeks. The role of water within Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism is also briefly mentioned. However, much of the discussion centers on Europe, as the sacredness of water during the Middle Ages gave rise to scientific healing with water during the Enlightenment. Collectively these ideas spark the emergence of spa culture that eventually made its way to the US, made popular through destinations like Saratoga Springs, New York, Hot Springs, Arkansas, and, in the 1800s, Florida's springs.

In an effort to attract people to Florida, the British turned Florida into 'an earthly paradise' with 'health giving' natural properties encompassed by warm weather, sunshine, and healing water (pp. 15, 19). With such publicity, Florida soon became a place for an elite minority facing disease and sickness, and later expanded more generally to wealthy populations with the advent of the steamboat. Combing through historical archival information, these chapters lay a foundation for an early attraction to water for many well-to-do northerners including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe (pp. 31, 35).

Chapters 3 through 6 focus on the mid-1800s to the early 1900s and spotlight the development of 'taking the waters' in Florida by highlighting different springs and the stories and attributes associated with them. These chapters depict the discovery of particular springs, which was often aided by local Native American guides who deemed such locations to be sacred. These discovery stories became folklore, adding to the esoteric ambiance surrounding the springs. Kilby explores the distinct qualities

that drew people to particular springs, and also notes the structures that were constructed to care for the tired, weary, and infirm. Development and buildings erected exposed wealthy visitors to water-based cures and the taste of mineral water, which was soon bottled and returned to their northern homes. Though many of these early structures have since burned in fires, some of the long-standing icons later became Florida's first hotels, like the Magnolia Hotel in the mid-1800s.

The last two chapters of the book venture into sea bathing and hydrotherapy as transportation once again expands the horizons of health seekers from the center of Florida to the coasts by way of the railroad in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Railroad tycoon Henry Flagler's resources and power built Florida's early resorts, which offered 'the appeal of swimming, sea bathing, and other water therapies in the middle of winter' (p. 152). Similar to the first chapter, Kilby steps outside of Florida to provide readers with a history of sea bathing, the cold-water cure, and a return to nature through an exploration of naturopathy. The forces of nature accompany unconventional cures like walking barefoot in wet grass. But Kilby's book is not just grounded in alternative spiritualism; he delivers an insightful history into the role of organized religion through John Preston Kellogg and the Seventh Day Adventists, which both had a role in the progression of water-based healing in Florida.

Kilby ends his book by looking at the current state of Florida's water. Chlorine pools and artificial environments of theme parks mimic the springs of the past, while swimming and recreation replace sea bathing (p. 200). With rampant development, such a picture looks bleak, but Kilby offers hope by recognizing that water is still used for healing. As Kilby recounts, the popularity of water's spiritual nature pays homage to indigenous notions of 'water is life' and the growing popularity of spiritually based beliefs like those from alternative medicine's Masaru Emoto (2004), made famous for professing water's ability to change based on negative and positive energy, remind readers that 'medical science has not removed all the magic from water' (p. 204).

The irony of this history is that Florida's once healing waters are now in need of healing. Kilby writes, 'If Florida's healing waters are to be healed, a paradigm shift needs to occur in the very way water is perceived' (p. 205). For this, he encourages readers to return to the basics and, more specifically, to view water through the lens of ancient cultures, prior to its view as a commodity for healing, tourism, and recreation.

Kilby takes seriously the notion of spirituality in the construction of Florida's history. By doing this, he adds to the environmental humanities and, more specifically, to a growing discourse that explores human-water interactions. His call in the final pages encourages readers to recognize the human-nature connection in order to further preserve and protect these life-giving waters. By seeking to change the narrative surrounding water, Kilby lays a foundation for a range of readers to understand how healing and water come together to build tourism in the Sunshine State. Such a book is an excellent addition to Southern discourses on religion and nature and would easily fit into a Religion and Healing course.

Victoria Machado  
University of Florida  
vickie7@ufl.edu

#### Reference

Emoto, Masaru. 2004. *The Healing Messages in Water* (Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words).