



THE LAWTON M. CHILES CENTER
FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
presents the

2026 - 2027

FLORIDA LECTURE SERIES



FLORIDA SOUTHERN COLLEGE®



THE 2026-2027 FLORIDA LECTURE SERIES IS
SPONSORED IN PART BY WUSF PUBLIC MEDIA.

2026-2027 SCHEDULE

Lectures begin at 7 p.m. and are held in Branscomb Auditorium unless otherwise noted. All programs are free and open to the public.

September 17, 2026

James M. Denham, Ph.D.

*Scourge of the Caribbean: Charles E. Hawkins,
Sailor of Three Republics*

October 1, 2026

Lillian Guerra, Ph.D.

Florida and Cuba: 1950s to the Present

November 19, 2026

Jody Baxter Noll, Ph.D.

The 1968 Florida Teachers' Strike

January 14, 2027

Daniel Rivero

*Just Freedom: Inside Florida's Decades-Long
Voting Rights Battle*

February 18, 2027

Rev. Billy C. Wirtz

*Shake, Rattle N' Roll: Florida's Iconic Rhythm
and Blues Artists and Their Music*

March 4, 2027

Evan P. Bennett, Ph.D.

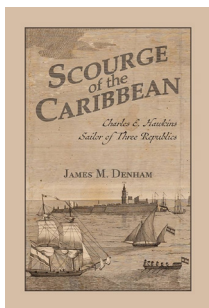
*Tampa Bay: The Story of an Estuary and
Its People*

JAMES M. DENHAM, PH.D.

Professor of History

Florida Southern College

Scourge of the Caribbea: Charles E. Hawkins, Sailor of Three Republics



For the US Navy and its commanders, the early nineteenth century Caribbean presented an untold number of challenges and ambiguities: revolutionary juntas, privateering, piracy, and deadly disease, all within some of the most beautiful landscapes and waterscapes on earth. This program explores the mysterious and dramatic life and career of Charles E. Hawkins, a relatively unknown naval figure in early national America. Hawkins's action-packed life at sea in his brief but accomplished career in the service of the United States, Mexico, Texas—and himself—appears ripped from the pages of a novel. It's a story of desperate naval encounters, deceit, piracy, adultery, bloody assassination, and complicated maritime legal battles in the Caribbean during the Age of Sail.

James M. Denham is professor of history at Florida Southern College and director of the Lawton Chiles Center for Florida History. A specialist in Southern, Florida, and Criminal Justice and Legal history, Denham received his Ph.D. degree from FSU. He is the author of eight books, including *Florida Founder William P. Du Val: Frontier Bon*

Vivant (Columbia, 2015) and *A Rogue's Paradise: Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821–1861* (Tuscaloosa, 2000). In 2016 Denham was named Distinguished Author of the Year by the board of trustees of the Florida House in Washington, D.C. He also served as president of the Florida Historical Society, 2023-25.

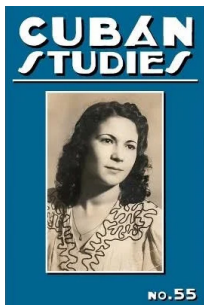


LILLIAN GUERRA, PH.D.

Professor of History

University of Florida

Florida and Cuba: 1950s to the Present



Florida and Cuba have long shared a deeply connected history, shaped by migration, politics, revolution, exile, and cultural exchange. In this lecture, historian Lillian Guerra examines the relationship between Florida and Cuba from the 1950s to the present, offering insight into how events across the Florida Straits have influenced communities, identities,

and political life on both shores. Professor Guerra's insights on Cuba's past will provide needed context for understanding contemporary questions surrounding this troubled island.

Lillian Guerra is an award-winning author of numerous scholarly articles, essays, and books on Latin American and Caribbean history. Her books include *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, 2005), *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption and Resistance, 1959-*

1971 (Chapel Hill, 2012), and *Patriots and Traitors in Revolutionary Cuba, 1961-1981* (Pittsburgh, 2023).

Her scholarship has earned major honors, including fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Born in New York to Cuban exiles and raised in Marion, Kansas, and Miami, Florida, Professor Guerra has taught Latin American and Caribbean history for twenty-four years at Bates College, Yale University, and currently at the University of Florida.

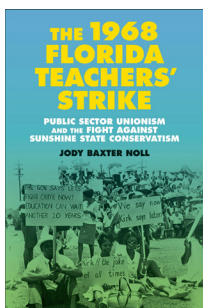


JODY BAXTER NOLL, PH.D.

Lecturer

Georgia State University

The 1968 Florida Teachers' Strike



On the morning of February 19, 1968, roughly 35,000 teachers and administrators in Florida walked off the job, leaving their schools and classrooms. The 1968 Florida teachers' strike launched the first statewide teachers' strike in U.S. history, challenging the state's public education policy and political leadership while strengthening

organized labor in the state. The striking teachers fought for and won a monumental victory, improving education in the state and gaining collective bargaining rights for all public sector employees. Jody Baxter Noll revisits this pivotal moment, examining the educators, activists, and political forces behind a strike that reshaped schools, unions, and public service in Florida.

Jody Baxter Noll is a native of Gainesville, Florida, and holds degrees from USE, Auburn University, and a Ph.D. from Georgia State University. He is a lecturer at Georgia State University where he specializes in Southern Labor, US Political History, and African American History. He is the author of *The 1968 Florida Teachers' Strike* (Baton Rouge, 2025), winner of the Florida Historical Society's Rembert Patrick Prize. This work explores labor history, education, public policy, and the struggles of public-sector workers in the modern South.



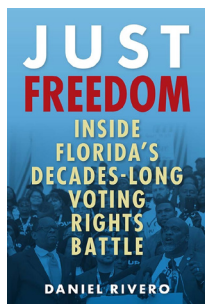
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HISTORIC LAKELAND INC.

DANIEL RIVERO

Reporter & Producer

WLRN Public Media

Just Freedom: Inside Florida's Decades-Long Voting Rights Battle



When Florida voters approved Amendment 4 in 2018, the decision was celebrated as one of the largest expansions of voting rights in the United States in decades.

In *Just Freedom*, Daniel Rivero traces the long history behind that moment, beginning with Florida's Reconstruction-era lifetime voting ban for people with past felony

convictions and following the grassroots organizing, legal battles, and political resistance that shaped the fight for restoration. Rivero's program will detail the advocacy and action that led to this moment—and show how political polarization, implementation challenges, and monetary interests have stalled the amendment from becoming fully realized to this day.

Daniel Rivero is a reporter and producer with WLRN Public Media in Miami and part of the station's investigative reporting team. His work has received honors from the Murrow Awards, Sunshine State Awards, and Green Eyeshade Awards. *Just Freedom* received the Florida Book Awards Gold Medal for Florida Nonfiction. Mr. Rivero was born on the outskirts of Washington D.C. to Cuban parents and moved to Miami twenty years ago.



REV. BILLY C. WIRTZ

Pianist Extraordinaire and Radio Personality

Shake, Rattle N' Roll: Florida's Iconic Rhythm and Blues Artists and Their Music



The Reverend Billy Wirtz has a mission: he wants to see Florida blues artists get the recognition they deserve. For over forty years he has been studying and performing this original American art form, while adding his own contributions to the genre. Rev. Billy's program will cast a bright

light on Florida's Rhythm and Blues tradition by identifying these Sunshine State performers and playing their work.

Billy C. Wirtz, a.k.a The Master of Disaster, King of the Atomic Boogie, and the Fashion Plate of Public Radio, hosts WMNF's famed Rhythm Revival Radio Show. Known for his twisted humor and blazing boogie-woogie piano,

Wirtz is a skilled musician, music historian, former wrestling manager, educator, writer, and co-producer of the recent film "Florida's Chitlin' Circuit." Since his first solo gig in 1979, he has opened for such diverse acts as Bob Dylan, ZZ Top, The Beach Boys, Boz Skaggs, The B-52s, Emmylou Harris, and Stevie Ray Vaughn. Wirtz lives in Ocala with his wife Linda and a house full of cats.

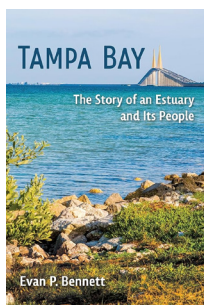


EVAN P. BENNETT, PH.D.

Professor of History

Florida Atlantic University

Tampa Bay: The Story of an Estuary and Its People



Tampa Bay is more than a body of water; it is a living estuary whose history is deeply tied to the people, industries, communities, and environmental changes that have shaped Florida's Gulf Coast. In this lecture, Evan P. Bennett explores the story of Tampa Bay through the intertwined histories of nature and human life, offering a

broader understanding of one of Florida's most significant landscapes. The largest open water estuary in Florida, Tampa Bay has been a flashpoint of environmental struggles and action in recent years. Bennett's focus is on the humans that have been part of the bay's ecology since the estuary took its modern form 2,000 years ago, along with the communities of fish, birds, reptiles, and mammals that proliferated in its seagrass meadows, tidal salt flats, and mangrove forests.

Evan P. Bennett earned his Ph.D. from the College of William and Mary and is associate professor of history at Florida Atlantic University. He is a historian of the American South whose work examines the intersections of labor, land, and the environment. He is the author and editor of three books, including *Tampa Bay: The Story of an Estuary and Its People* (Gainesville, 2024), which earned him the Florida Historical Society's Stetson Kennedy Award and the Florida Book Awards Silver Medal for Florida Nonfiction.





THE LAWTON M. CHILES CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY

Founded in 2001, The Lawton M. Chiles Center for Florida History strives to enhance the teaching, study, and writing of Florida history. The Center seeks to preserve the state's past through cooperative efforts with historical societies, preservation groups, museums, public programs, media, and interested persons. This unique center, housed in the Sarah D. and L. Kirk McKay Jr. Archives Center is a source of continuing information created to increase appreciation for Florida history.

ABOUT THE LECTURE SERIES

The Lawton M. Chiles Florida Lecture Series is a forum that brings speakers to the Florida Southern College campus to explore Florida life and culture from a wide range of disciplines, including history, public affairs, law, sociology, criminology, anthropology, literature, and art. The overall objective of the series is to bring the community, faculty, and students together to interact with and learn from leading scholars in their fields.

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The Lawton M. Chiles
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