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Visions of Paradise Park:

Bruce Mozert's iconic photographs capture life at a segregated African-American tourist attraction

By Victoria Billig

Bruce Mozert spent 30 years as the official photographer for Silver Springs, Florida's first tourist attraction. Using the crystal clear waters of the Silver River, Mozert's iconic underwater photography pioneered the art form and created some of the most recognizable tourism photography of the mid-20th century.

But he also captured invaluable images of Paradise Park, the segregated counterpart one mile downriver from Silver Springs in Marion County. Operated by African-Americans for African-Americans, the park was open from 1949-1969 and featured glass-bottom boat tours that introduced visitors to the beauty of the Silver River and served as a communal space for family gatherings, holiday celebrations and summertime recreation.

Mozert was the only professional given permission to photograph Paradise Park, and his work captures the beauty of the park and the spirit and joy of its visitors at a time when Florida could be a dangerous place for African-Americans during the days of Jim Crow segregation laws.

Paradise Park and Mozert's images are what brought Lu Vickers of Tallahassee and Cynthia Wilson-Graham of Ocala together to write, *Remembering Paradise Park: Tourism and Segregation in Silver Springs*, a book that served as basis for the exhibition "Paradise Park Remembered."

Working closely with the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala, the College of Central Florida, and in partnership with Silver Springs (now a state park), the exhibition featured 100 photographs of Paradise Park by Mozert, as well as snapshots and memorabilia from community members and Marion County Black Archives. The exhibition debuted at the Appleton in January 2016, with a satellite installation of memorabilia at Silver Springs.

Funded in part by a Florida Humanities Community Project Grant, the museum presented several talks and a panel discussion on the historical and cultural significance of "Green Book" destinations across Florida that were open to African-Americans, such as American Beach near Jacksonville and Hampton House in Brownsville. Programming at Silver Springs included a talk by former



An advertisement for Paradise Park by Bruce Mozert.

Paradise Park boat captain David Faison, who shared stories from his 58 years of service between the two parks.

Last year, "Paradise Park Remembered" was exhibited at Tallahassee Community College Fine Art Gallery, featuring 50 of Mozert's prints. Vickers, a faculty member at Tallahassee Community College, was co-curator and organized a lecture series in which speakers shared their recollections of the park and African-American travel. Speakers also included Doby Flowers, who helped found the Civil Rights Institute at Florida State University and was the school's first African-American homecoming queen, as well as Dr. Tameka Bradley Hobbs who discussed her book, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching at Home*.



Bruce Mozert, Courtesy of Lu Vickers.



Men and women playing basketball at Paradise Park, by Bruce Mozert.

After Mozert passed away in 2015 at 98, his family sold his vast, historically significant collection of negatives, photographs and equipment to the Marion County government and the College of Central Florida, which teamed with the state Division of Library and Information Services to purchase it.

Later this year, the Appleton Museum will exhibit some of its Mozert photographs, including of Paradise Park, Silver Springs, and some of Mozert's underwater advertising photographs. Check the Appleton Museum website, appletonmuseum.org, for dates.

Mozert's legacies will live on and continue sparking important conversations about photography, tourism and Florida's rich and varied history.

Victoria Billig is the assistant director of the Appleton Museum of Art at the College of Central Florida.

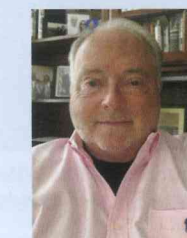
Meet Florida Humanities' new board members



Reginald Ellis (Tallahassee) is assistant dean for the School of Graduate Studies & Research and associate professor of history and African-American studies at Florida A&M University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees from Florida A&M, and his Ph.D. in history from the University of Memphis. He serves on the Leadership Tallahassee Board of Governors, previously chaired the board of the John G. Riley House Museum, and served on the boards of the Friends of the Leon County Public Library and the American Historical Association Committee on Minority Affairs. Along with multiple publications, including two books, Dr. Ellis is a frequent speaker at conferences and events in Florida and around the nation.



Makiba Foster (Plantation) is the director of the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale. She earned her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in library and information studies, and a second Master of Arts in American studies at the University of Alabama. She is a member of the American Library Association, the Association of African American Life and History, and the New York Technical Services Librarians. Her work and extracurricular activities focus on the role of libraries and archives in advancing social justice.



George Lange (Tampa) is the executive managing director of Slick Rock Capital Partners. He earned his Bachelor of Arts at Southeast Missouri State University, his Juris Doctorate at St. Louis University of Law, and attended the Southwestern Graduate School of Banking at Southern Methodist University. In 1994, he retired from the Missouri Army National Guard after 23 years. A member of Leadership Florida, Mr. Lange's civic involvement includes service to public broadcasting, the arts, economic development, mental health advocacy, and as a member and chair of the Friends of Edison Community College.



Maria Goldberg (Pensacola) is the director of marketing, public relations and events for Great Southern Restaurants and the Merrill Land Company, where she also oversees the organizations' philanthropic endeavors. Previously, she was the executive director of the Pensacola Museum of Art, and was the arts & culture columnist for the *Pensacola News Journal*. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in art history and her Master of Arts and Ph.D. in arts administration from Florida State University. She currently serves on the Board of Arts Culture Entertainment, is a member of Leadership Florida, and is involved in everything arts related in Pensacola.