



A History of Smuggling in Florida: Rumrunners and Cocaine Cowboys

Stan Zimmerman

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Think you're a smuggler? With that box of Cuban cigars or those unclaimed duty-free souvenirs from last summer's trip to Paris? Untaxed and untraced commerce—call it contraband—is a trillion-dollar-per-year global business. New technologies to discover and curb smuggling are met by equally well-equipped perpetrators determined to stay below the radar. With its long coastline, hundreds of remote landing strips and airports clogged with sun-seeking tourists, Florida is a superhighway of smuggling. It has been the passageway for illegal goods like weapons, drugs, slaves and exotic (but forbidden) birds and flowers since its earliest days. Who does this smuggling? Well, one Florida governor and the wife of another, for starters. Spanish explorers, hardscrabble commercial fishermen, mafia mobsters, crew chiefs for fruit pickers—just about everybody. And there is no end in sight. Every major episode in Florida's history is touched by smuggling. The state's discovery and settlement, the Seminole Wars and the Civil War were shaped by smugglers. Florida's repeated land booms—including today's—are heavily influenced by smuggler profits. The current business economy is warped by smugglers laundering their profits. Stan Zimmerman means neither to vilify nor glorify these entrepreneurs. Nor does he intend to leave any stone unturned—or rather, suitcase unopened. With stories of drug runners and prostitute pushers alongside the exploits and follies of Florida's elite, we are able to see why Florida is a true “smuggler's paradise.”

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