

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
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PROPOSAL FOR CREATIVE THESIS

THE LAST MISSISSIPPI SPA

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THE LAST MISSISSIPPI SPA is a memoir about growing up in a large family at a rambling southern hotel famous for its food and the vile, curative waters. The hotel, with its rhythm of seasons and a caste system of owners, guests and servants, is a metaphor for the closed society of the South during the '40's and '50's and the resistance to change.

The memoir covers twenty-two years. Part One, from 1943-1945, takes place at the hotel where the narrator becomes aware of her powerlessness as a female child. Her father's absence teaches an early lesson—one way to escape what you can't change is to leave. Part Two, from 1945-1955, is set in Jackson, the state capitol. The narrator's father returns safely from the War, but life is not the same. There is trouble in the parents' marriage, and the civil rights movement rumbles on the horizon. No one in her world believes it can touch Mississippi, where separation of the races is viewed as sacred. The narrator sides with integration, while her father joins the White Citizens' Council. She escapes into marriage. In Part Three, from 1955-1966, she discovers marriage to be another kind of tyranny. She has babies while the family around her crumbles. A beloved aunt commits suicide, an uncle dies suddenly, her mother drinks, and the hotel burns. Everything burns: black churches are torched and bombed; civil rights workers are murdered; she is labeled a person with "views," "pink," a communist. Trapped in a horrifying place and unable to change it, she runs away with a civil rights lawyer, come to save the State, but willing to settle for her.

The memoir is written in first person in a past tense that permits both evocation of the past and reflection upon it. Like Geoffrey Wolff's *The Duke of Deception*, the memoir shows a child growing up in a world that is not what it appears. As in Alexandra Fuller's *Let's Not Go to the Dogs Tonight*, a personal sphere is linked to the chaotic unraveling of a way of life. THE LAST MISSISSIPPI SPA begins in the latter years of World War II and ends in the heat of a different kind of war, with the protagonist forced to make choices that exile her from the family and home she has loved.