Abstract:
Geographers have long been interested in Southern studies and social justice is a common theme in this literature. Traditionally, social justice writing has focused on the plight of the poor and ethnic minorities. Yet human-environment interaction, sustainability, and Florida seldom appear in studies of the American South. This paper advocates the development of a critical water geography of the South that expands the concepts of social justice/social equity to include what I call “established residents” of a place. Much of the South (and especially Florida) has experienced significant population growth in recent years, and although such growth has benefited some people, it has brought negative consequences for many others—such as rising costs for water. State and local leaders in Florida and the rest of the South have long thought in terms of developing additional water supplies to meet the demands of growing populations. Such a stance now often requires investment in costly infrastructure and more expensive sources of water. Rather than assign these costs to their source (recent and future migrants to a place), such expenses are usually spread across entire regions in the form of higher rates for water. I suggest that geographers interested in Southern studies build a critical water geography based on an expansion of the concepts of social justice/social equity to include not just people of color and the economically disadvantaged—but the plight of many established residents in the middle class who are asked to pay more for water to accommodate continuing population growth.

Keywords: Sustainability; Florida; Environment; Water resources; Population growth; Social justice