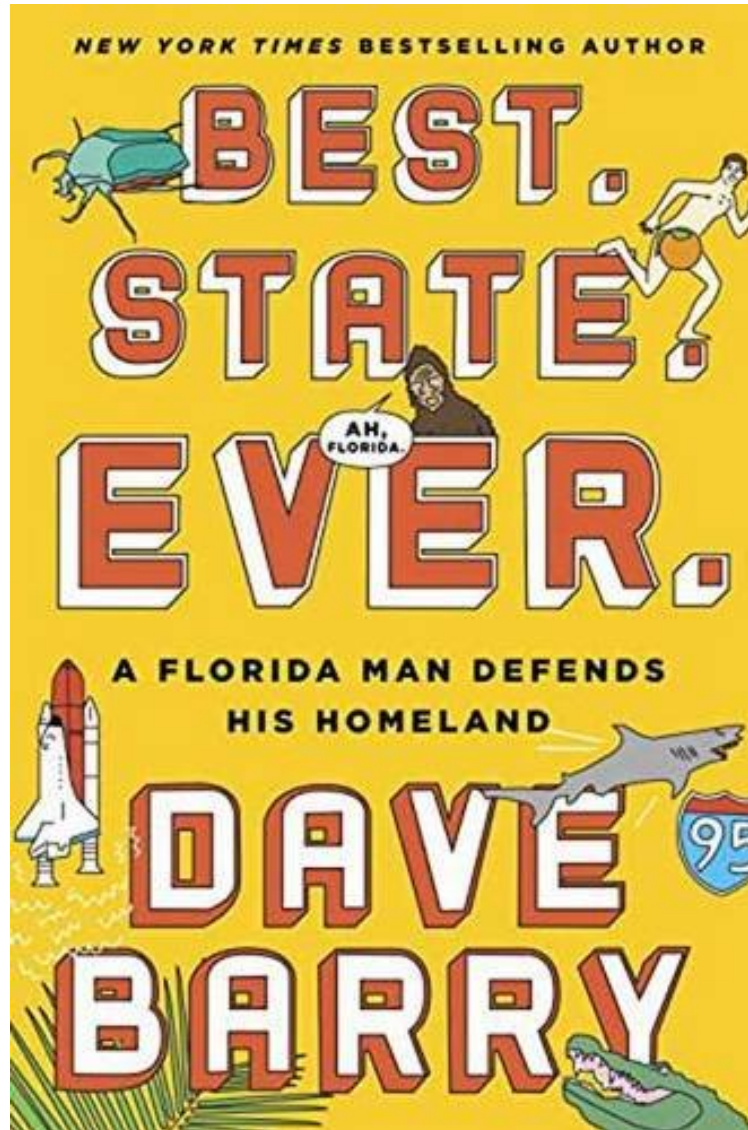


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Best. State. Ever.: A Florida Man Defends His Homeland

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Dave Barry : Best. State. Ever.: A Florida Man Defends His Homeland before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Best. State. Ever.: A Florida Man Defends His Homeland:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Lots of laughs and proof that truth is stranger and funnier than fictionBy LyricBarry has always been a writer who can make the reader laugh out loud regardless of the subject but when the subject is Florida -- well, he's a master. I lived in Florida and he absolutely nails the way that people from

elsewhere react to the crazy stuff that happens in Florida by saying "what is wrong with people down there? or how can you live there?" Trust me when I say that the same thought crosses the minds of most people particularly when a new arrival first becomes a resident, but after awhile the new Floridian just accepts the craziness as part of the deal made for living in south Florida with its mild climate and basically 360 plus days of nice weather -- barring an occasional hellish hurricane. The new residents even adapt to the mostly daily rainstorms and living in the lightening strike capital of the US. Dave's book is funny, witty, clever, and will make you laugh out loud in addition to making you smile when not laughing out loud. Barry isn't "mean" about Florida, Floridians, or people who move in and become Floridians, he's just factual plus when he takes on specific subjects like Weeki Wachee's mermaid show, Gatorland, The Villages, Key West, his visit to a Miami firing range -- he's funny but he also gives an accurate portrait of what they are, represent, and what to expect and he's also a quite fond of it all which means he can laugh at and with his subjects at the same time the details about all of them may make you laugh and cringe simultaneously. It's a funny book and a fast read. Give your brain a break and take this trip with Dave Barry as your guide. Think of it as mind candy. 14 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Defenseless! By unknown As a "Snow Bird", I have to agree with Mr. Barry. Florida is in its own orbit exhibiting a quiriness that defies description. But when all is said and done, this odd shaped appendage at the bottom of the USA is great place to at least enjoy the winter solstice without fur lined boots a snow shovel. I enjoyed every written word Mr. Barry so poetically places on each page regarding the great "Sunshine State." He did leave out a few quirks that we Yankees find unusual.....I.e., the Kamakazi maneuvers by headless drivers in super market parking lots and the lifetime it takes for a traffic light to change. Anyone who enjoys humor, travelogues and the joys of living will certainly find this journey a delight! 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Barry Does Florida By Kate70 This text by Dave Barry reads well, but it lacks the spark of his earlier books. He takes a tour of the Florida coast and reports about activities of residents and tourists. He begins in an area I am quite familiar with, Weekie Wachie and the home of the manatees, and heads straight down the coast, defending the people of Florida from recent bad press involving largely simple minded people who have made the state look bad in the recent past. Certainly it made me laugh, but much of the humor is predictable.

A brilliantly funny exploration of the Sunshine State from the man who knows it best: Pulitzer Prize winner and New York Times–bestselling author Dave Barry. We never know what will happen next in Florida. We know only that, any minute now, something will. Every few months, Dave Barry gets a call from some media person wanting to know, “What the hell is wrong with Florida?” Somehow, the state’s acquired an image as a subtropical festival of stupid, and as a loyal Floridian, Dave begs to differ. Sure, there was the 2000 election. And people seem to take their pants off for no good reason. And it has flying insects the size of LeBron James. But it is a great state, and Dave is going to tell you why. Join him as he celebrates Florida from Key West at the bottom to whatever it is that’s at the top, from the Sunshine State’s earliest history to the fun-fair of weirdness that it is today. It’s the most hilarious book yet from “the funniest damn writer in the whole country” (Carl Hiaasen, and he should know). By the end, you’ll have to admit that whatever else you might think about Florida—you can never say it’s boring.

Praise for Best. State. Ever."A side-splitting read. With a guffaw on every page, a wealth of detail and a cocktail of irreverence, you might call Barry’s look at Florida a tour de farce. But you’d be wrong. “Best. State. Ever.” represents a loving and ribald look at a weird and wonderful place." — Richmond Times-Dispatch “Whether it’s the invasive wildlife or the annual snowbird migration, plenty of folks have disparaged Florida over the years. But leave it to Pulitzer Prize-winning humorist and longtime resident Dave Barry to pen a proper ode.” — Garden and Gun Praise for Dave Barry “Genuine genius . . . American silliness has long had a champion in Dave Barry. . . . [He] remains, and there is no other word for it, hilarious.” —The New York Times Book “Dave Barry’s latest book of essays is worth every penny when it comes to humor and insight. It’s wonderful to see that he hasn’t stopped writing about our foibles and his somewhat unique perspective on what makes us tick. And he’s able to do it while invoking out-loud laughter.” —Associated Press “These latest essays will cause outright, prolonged laughter.” —Kirkus s “Despite years of medication, Dave Barry is still the funniest damn writer in the whole country. Let’s hope he never grows up.” —Carl Hiaasen “Dave Barry is truly the funniest man living in the three-mile ‘safe’ zone off the shores of America.” —Steve Martin About the Author From 1983 to 2004, Dave Barry wrote a weekly humor column for The Miami Herald, which in 1988 won a Pulitzer Prize for Commentary. He is the author of more than thirty books, including such bestsellers as the nonfiction *Live Right and Find Happiness (Although Beer Is Much Faster)*, *You Can Date Boys When You’re Forty*, and *I’ll Mature When I’m Dead*; the novels *Big Trouble*, *Tricky Business*, and *Insane City*; the very successful YA Peter Pan novels (with Ridley Pearson); and his Christmas story *The Shepherd, the Angel, and Walter the Christmas Miracle Dog*. Two of his books—*Big Trouble* and *Dave Barry’s Guide to Guys*—have been turned into movies. For a while, his life was even a television series, *Dave’s World*, but then it was canceled. The series. Not the life. For many years, Dave was also a guitarist with the late, infamous, and strangely unlamented band the *Rock Bottom Remainders*. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. A Brief History of Florida For millions of years, Florida was uninhabited, because it was geographically remote, not to mention several hundred feet

beneath the surface of the Atlantic, which meant insurance rates were very high. Gradually, however, Global Rising caused Florida to emerge from the ocean, and today the state is above sea level except during certain months. The first humans arrived in Florida twenty thousand years ago, having crossed the land bridge from Asia and made the arduous trek across North America in search of Spring Break. These early inhabitants left primitive archaeological artifacts that can still be seen today, including the world's oldest-known stone bong. In time, the population of Florida started to grow—probably, scientists now believe, as a result of people having sex with each other. Eventually, these indigenous peoples spread out across Florida and formed Native American tribes, including the Tequestas, Mohicans, Cheyennes, Seminoles, Gators, Presbyterians and Kansas City Chiefs. These tribes established thriving, sophisticated societies based on hitting things with rocks until they became edible. Sometimes the tribes would fight wars, but after maybe fifteen minutes they would stop because of the humidity. Thus Florida was a prosperous and peaceful place until the early sixteenth century when the first Europeans arrived in the form of Spanish explorers who had been lured by the legend of the Pájaro Temprano, which told of a mythical place where, if you were seated before 4:30 p.m., you got a steeply discounted entrée. The Spaniards named the new land La Pascua de la Florida (literally, “The Sunshine State”) and claimed it for Spain, seeing as how there was nobody there except for several hundred thousand natives. In 1763, Spain and England decided to end the Seven Years’ War because it started in 1756 and they couldn’t agree on a new name for it. In the peace settlement, Spain gave Florida to England as part of a package that also included 167 trillion mosquitoes. England, seeking to link Florida with its colonies to the north, erected a two-hundred-mile-long line of orange highway-construction barrels, which can still be seen today. For the next two decades, English settlers attempted to engage in agriculture, which mainly consisted of fending off alligators with hoes. Finally in 1783, England said the hell with it and gave Florida back to Spain, reserving the right for English citizens to return on holiday and lie on the beach until their skin was the color of Hawaiian Punch. Meanwhile, to the north, the United States was forming. The Spanish authorities tried to keep the Americans out of Florida, but settlers from Georgia kept coming across the border and erecting primitive log Waffle Houses. Eventually, Spain gave up and tried to give Florida back to England, which, of course, refused, as did France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Australia, Egypt, Japan and the Republic of Fiji. Finally, in 1821, Florida became an American territory, which it remains to this day in many areas. At first there were land disputes between the U.S. government and the Native American tribes, but these were eventually settled via a treaty under which the government got the land and the tribes got to leave. In 1845, Florida became the twenty-seventh state in the union, choosing Tallahassee as its capital, which got a good laugh from the other states because Tallahassee is located in Alabama. In those days, the Florida economy was strictly agricultural, with the main crop being cotton, which was grown on large plantations and gathered into bales, which were then transported to seaports, where they were thrown away because of mildew. This was hard work, but much of the labor was provided by slaves, who were always willing to lend a helping hand in exchange for not being beaten to death. In 1865, the Civil War broke out, although Florida did not find out about it until 1883, when it was too late to really get involved. Meanwhile, the state’s farmers had given up on cotton and were growing oranges, which were popular in the Northern states. One fateful day, a Florida farmer decided, as a prank, to ship up some grapefruit. At the time, nobody in Florida considered grapefruit to be edible; it was used exclusively as a weapon. But, incredibly, Northerners actually ate it, apparently believing that anything tasting that bad must be healthy. This marketing breakthrough paved the way for such “health foods” as tofu, which is actually a waste by-product of the manufacture of linoleum, and quinoa, which gets its name from the Bolivian word for “gravel.” January 1, 1900, marked the dawn of the twentieth century, although because of a broken telegraph wire Florida did not find out about this until July 18, 1903. For the next decade or so, the state remained fairly isolated, although it played a pivotal role in World War I on November 10, 1918, when American biplanes—in an action that was widely condemned by international human-rights organizations—dropped several dozen grapefruit on Germany, which surrendered immediately. World War I was followed by the Roaring Twenties, a time when Americans went to speakeasies, where they drank bathtub gin until they were so impaired that they believed it would be a sound financial strategy to invest, sight unseen, in real estate located at or below sea level in a tropical -cyclone zone. This resulted in the first Florida Land Boom, during which Miami went from being a sleepy village to a thriving metropolis, until the Hurricane of 1926 turned it back into a sleepy village, but with a lot more kindling. This was followed by the Great Depression, which was very bad in Florida. q: How bad was it? a: Some families resorted to eating grapefruit. The only ray of economic hope during the thirties was the growth of Florida’s tourism industry, which was boosted by the construction of such “only in Florida” attractions as Alligator World, Alligator Land, Alligator Swamp, Alligator Jungle, Alligator Jamboree, Alligator Rodeo, Alligato-Rama and Alligators Out the Wazoo. These attractions consisted of -alligators—some of which were clearly deceased—lying motionless in odiferous muck for days at a time. But tourists flocked to them anyway, because back then people were a lot stupider than they are today. (This also explains the popularity of the yo-yo.) The next major event was World War II, during which Florida, once it found out what was going on, was totally on the American side. In 1956, the federal government began work on the Interstate Highway System, an ambitious project intended to realize the dream that someday, thanks to a vast network of safe, well-engineered, high-speed roads, Americans in formerly isolated communities would be able to get into their cars and, within a matter of hours, stop at a

random exit to pee. Before long, millions of Americans were using the Interstate system to reach Florida, where—thanks to the modern miracle of air-conditioning—they were able to remain indoors until it was time to go home. Florida also got a big economic boost when the federal government decided to locate the space program in Cape Canaveral, which was an ideal location for launching rockets because over the centuries hurricanes had blown away most of the gravity. In the sixties, Florida's population grew rapidly as large numbers of retirees moved down from the north, seeking an affordable place to grow lengthy nose hairs and drive 14 miles an hour in the left lane. At the same time waves of Cuban refugees, fleeing the Castro regime, settled in the Miami area and, like so many immigrants before them, set about creating their own foreign policy. Also during the sixties, millions of college students flocked to Florida's beach towns each spring to engage in youthful hijinks and pass out in puddles of vomit. Meanwhile, Walt Disney was buying up huge tracts of land near the sleepy Central Florida town of Orlando, but nobody figured out what he was up to because he used the secret code name "Balt Disney." Disney World opened on October 1, 1971, drawing 400,000 visitors, many of whom are still trying to remember where they parked. Central Florida soon became a major tourism destination boasting many theme attractions, including Movie Galaxy Universe Planet, Wet 'n' Damp, Licensed Merchandise Land, and World of Sea Creatures Delighted to Be Trapped in Tanks Swimming Around and Around and Around for the Rest of Their Lives. Otherwise, nothing much happened in the seventies, unless you count disco, which sucked as much in Florida as it did everywhere else. During the seventies and eighties, Florida grew rapidly and prospered because it had a good climate, low taxes and an energetic economy based on tourism and guys importing narcotics by the ton. Also, ammunition sales were very strong. In the nineties, Florida experienced many important historical events that we are unable to tell you about because for some reason the Wikipedia article stops before then. Today, Florida—once a quiet backwater—is a modern and dynamic state that has totally entered the twenty-first century, except during presidential elections, when it reverts to 437 b.c. It is a truly exceptional place, as we can see from these: Facts About Florida Today Florida is the third most-populous state. It is actually in second place if you count dead people. More than 1,000 people move to Florida every day. Roughly eight of these people understand the purpose of the turn signal. Florida's government is divided into three branches: the executive, the judicial and the criminal. Under Florida's "stand your ground" law, it is legal to shoot anybody for any reason as long as you are standing on the ground. Although the state supreme court recently ruled that "sitting is also OK." Currently, the number one industry in Florida is attorneys on billboards asking if you have been in an accident, followed by tourism, reptile sales and buttocks enhancement. Florida is the world's largest cruise-passenger market, with an average pre-buffet weight of 357 pounds per passenger. Florida is home to both the Shuffleboard Hall of Fame and Carrot Top. Also supposedly there are some museums. For years the highest point in Florida was LeBron James, but then he moved back to Cleveland. Cleveland, for God's sake. Florida has two separate rivers named Withlacoo-chee, which sounds like a slang term for a sexually transmitted disease. Florida also has a river named Pithlachascotee. It is sometimes called the Cootie, for short. We don't know why, and we don't want to know why. Here are some other actual names of Florida rivers: Alapahoochee, Caloosahatchee, Econlockhatchee, Fakahatchee, Ichetucknee and Hontoon Dead. Fort Lauderdale is sometimes called The Venice of America by people who clearly have never been to Venice. In Florida, cockroaches are called Palmetto bugs, because if they hear you call them cockroaches, they will become enraged and destroy your kitchen. Natives of the Florida Keys often refer to themselves as Conchs, and for good reason: They have been drinking. In 2015, the official state tourism marketing corporation, Visit Florida, named as a "Florida ambassador," in which capacity he will represent the state: Pitbull. Seriously. Mr. Bull, a professional "rap" artist, has authored numerous tunes about having sex, doing drugs, shooting people, selling drugs, having sex on drugs, shooting people over drugs, etc. In other words, he is perfect. The Skunk Ape I set out from Miami driving west on Route 41, the Tamiami Trail, which connects Miami on the east coast of Florida with Tampa on the west. At the Miami end, it's also known as Calle Ocho—"Eighth Street"—which is considered the heart of Little Havana, the place where the TV news crews go to shoot man-in-the-street video of authentic Cubans drinking authentic Cuban coffee and reacting to whatever is happening in Cuba. You can spend a day here and never hear any language but Spanish. I head west on the Trail to Krome Avenue, which is just a few miles from Calle Ocho in linear space but light-years away in ambience. Across Krome, the world changes, quite suddenly, from city to swamp. This is the edge of the Everglades, Miami's vast, wild, weird backyard. For many decades, most people—most white people, anyway—viewed the Everglades as a waste of space, a bug--infested bog to be drained and turned into something useful. We now know, of course, that the Everglades are a unique, precious, fragile and irreplaceable wetlands ecosystem. But I'll be honest: This place has always kind of creeped me out. Strange things live out here; strange things happen out here. For example: On the northwest corner of the Krome Avenue intersection, just inside the swamp, is a three-hundred-room hotel/casino resort operated by the Miccosukee Indian Tribe. One day in 2007, police received a report that two men were breaking into cars in the parking lot. Police responded and caught one of the men. The other ran away and dove into a nearby pond. That was a poor decision: This particular pond happened to be the residence of a large alligator, known to the resort staff as "Poncho." The next day divers recovered what was left of the man fifty feet underwater. I know some pretty crazy things have happened in Las Vegas, but I doubt that anybody on a Vegas casino property was ever eaten by an alligator. Poncho is not alone: There are a couple of hundred thousand gators in the Everglades, and maybe a billion

bullfrogs. There are also panthers out there, and bears, all kinds of birds, and God knows how many snakes, including Burmese pythons just about long enough to be used, if you could straighten them out, for first-down measurements. And there's exotic human wildlife in the Everglades. There are poachers out there, and smugglers, and other well-armed people who seriously—I mean, seriously—value their privacy. There are fugitives hiding for one reason or another, lying low in a place where it's famously easy to disappear. There have been hidden commando bases out there where, for decades, various paramilitary groups—some known to the U.S. government, some not—trained for secret missions. There are stories of Indian burial sites where the ground is littered with artifacts worth a fortune, just lying around for the taking, if you could find them, which you can't. This is an inadequate list of the elements that make the Everglades weird. It's safe to say that there are many more strange things going on out there that very few people know about, or ever will. So, what with the combination of wildlife and weirdness, I have never viewed the Everglades as a place where I want to hang out. I have viewed it as a big flat space to be driven across as quickly as possible, much like Nebraska, but with a funkier aroma. When I'm crossing the 'glades, I crank up the car radio and zip along at 70, 80, 90 miles an hour, my only interaction with the unique, precious, fragile and irreplaceable wetlands ecosystem around me coming in the form of flying insects the size of cocker spaniels splatting on my windshield.