**Florida in the Jazz Age**

**Boom and Bust**

By 1920, many Americans had come to think of Florida as a desirable place to visit or live. Advertisements, magazine articles, and the memories of those who had visited for business, pleasure, or military service had all done their part in promoting the state. Americans were aware of Florida’s luxury hotels, parks, beaches, and other recreational opportunities. The state eliminated its inheritance and income taxes to provide additional appeal. Between 1923 and 1925, more than 300,000 Americans moved to Florida.

The increasing use of automobiles put pressure on the state to construct a roadway system. Florida’s first highway department was established in 1915. The state’s first concrete highway, between Jacksonville and Lake City, was completed in 1923. The Tamiami Trail, connecting Tampa and Miami, was completed in 1928. It was 273 miles long and took five years to build. In 1920 there had been fewer than 1,000 miles of paved roadways in Florida; by 1930, there were more than 3,800 miles.

Airplanes also arrived. The first airport was established at Miami Beach in 1912. By 1926, nine cities in Florida had their own airports, carrying both mail and passengers.

With trains, planes, and cars, “snow birds” found they could escape the winter cold by coming south. Florida became a place where many people wanted to buy land. In the early Twenties, speculation in real estate led to a land boom in Miami Beach, which

spread along the coasts and moved as far west as Tallahassee and Pensacola. Properties were bought and resold only a few days later at a pro t. Land on Miami Beach, which the developer Carl Fisher had been willing to give away for free in 1915, was worth $26,000 an acre by 1925.

During these years, the land boom dominated Florida’s economy. It affected transportation, construction, labor, and the allocation of resources. Architects designed luxurious mansions in the Mediterranean style for wealthy buyers, with tile roofs, wrought- iron balconies, fountains, and patios. Banks made speculative loans to developers and speculators without strict requirements. Inevitably, some loans went unpaid and a few banks began to fail. In 1925, a strike on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad temporarily halted the movement of passengers and freight. A natural disaster struck a year later on September 18, 1926, when a deadly hurricane smashed Miami, Coral Gables, Fort Lauderdale, Dania, and Pompano. In Miami alone, as many as 2,000 buildings were destroyed, the city docks were demolished, and all the boats in the harbor were lost.

Real estate prices collapsed almost as rapidly as they had risen. Some people began to exit the state and more banks began to fail. The boom became a bust. There was a slight revival in 1927 and 1928, followed by another destructive hurricane in September 1928. The Mediterranean fruit fly arrived in 1929, destroying 80% of Florida’s citrus crop. The stock market crash in October later the same year marked the beginning of the Great Depression, which would soon envelop the entire nation.

**The Seminole Indians**

The Seminole Indians are related to the Creek. Most once lived in Georgia and Alabama, but they were driven south into Florida by the Creek Wars. Several thousand Seminoles were living in Florida at the start of the Second Seminole War (1835–1842). Many were killed, but a few hundred survivors escaped into the Everglades. By the 1890s, the Seminoles were living peacefully in the Everglades and Big Cypress, surviving as hunters who traded their otter pelts, deerskins, egret plumes, and alligator hides with whites. The state and federal governments set aside reservation lands in Florida for the Seminoles, but few moved into them.

As the scale of tourism and real estate development increased in the 1920s, the Seminole way of life became endangered. Florida experienced a population boom in the early 20th century when the Flagler [railroad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railroad) to [Miami](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miami) was completed. The Tamiami Trail, connecting Tampa and Miami, became the first road through the Everglades. The state became a growing destination for tourists and many resort towns were developed. Efforts to drain parts of the wetlands to create more farmland and build homes further threatened the Seminoles. The demand for their alligator hides and furs fell. In the years that followed, many Seminoles worked in the cultural tourism trade. By the 1920s, many Seminoles were involved in service jobs. In addition, they were able to market their culture by selling traditional craft products (made mostly by women) and by exhibitions of traditional skills, such as wrestling alligators (by men). Some of the crafts included woodcarving, basket weaving, beadworking, patchworking, and palmetto-doll making. The Seminoles began selling their patchwork art, baskets, and other crafts to tourists, who visited their roadside homes.

**Rosewood**

In the early Twenties, Florida became the scene of some of the nation’s worst racial violence. As much as 30% of the state’s population was African-American. Most lived inland in the “backcountry,” where they were subjected to “Jim Crow” laws, economic exploitation, and terrible abuse. Florida historian Michael Gannon points out that Florida led the country in lynchings. The turpentine camps still relied on the practice of debt peonage, in which African-American workers could not leave because they owed the camp owners for their food and clothes.

Rosewood was a rural African-American community southwest of Gainesville. By 1920, it had about 350 residents, living in neat, wooden plank homes. Most worked in the timber industry: there were several turpentine mills, two pencil mills, and a sawmill nearby. Rosewood had two general stores, three churches, and its own turpentine mill. Early one January morn- ing, a white woman in the nearby town of Sumner was attacked after her husband had gone to work. She claimed her attacker was an unknown African- American man; other witnesses said it was in fact a white train worker who o en visited her and may have beaten her. The same day, a black prisoner had coincidentally escaped from a chain gang. The county sheriff organized white volunteers, who began searching for the escaped prisoner as the probable attacker.

Trained dogs led a group of the search party to Rose- wood. Under torture, one of the local residents told the men that he had helped to conceal the escaped convict. The unfortunate resident was lynched in the woods. e sheri tried to disperse the growing mobs of angry white men, some of them drunk, who came pouring in from neighboring communities. They laid siege to one of the homes in Rosewood, which was defended by a resident who was a skilled hunter and marksman. Several were killed in the exchange of gun re, including children. News of this local resistance spread, and crowds of white men descended on the town, where they burned its churches and houses. Men poured kerosene on the houses, ignited them, and shot those who came out. A few brave whites helped to smuggle some of Rosewood’s surviving residents to safety. All of the survivors moved to other towns. On January 7, 1923, the mob returned to burn down all the remaining structures at Rosewood.

Despite coverage in several national newspapers at the time, the attack on Rose wood was quickly forgotten. Neither surviving victims nor neighboring whites spoke publicly of the incident for decades. In the 1980s, a survivor’s child told the story to a reporter. At first, others tried to deny its truth. The Rosewood survivors led for damages based on the state government’s failure to protect them from the mob. The suit was dropped, but Florida’s state legislature commissioned a special report. Afterwards, they voted to provide the survivors and their descendants with $1.5 million in compensation. It was the first time a state government had ever voted to compensate victims of racial violence.

**Influential People**

Alfred Irénée du Pont (May 12, 1864 – April 28, 1935) was an American industrialist, financier, philanthropist and a member of the influential Du Pont family. Alfred du Pont first rose to prominence through his work in his family's Delaware-based gunpowder manufacturing plant, E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (now known as DuPont), in which for many years he served as a director of the board and Vice President of operations.

Following an acrimonious departure and a brief dip in personal fortunes, he embarked on business of his own, investing in land and banking in Florida. In Florida, du Pont made primarily small real estate investments at first, correctly fearing a drop in real estate values, before turning his attention to acquiring interest in banks. He acquired an interest in Florida National Bank (FNB) of Jacksonville, keeping it solvent during a bank run of 1929 by putting $15 million of his own money into an account. During the early 1930s, six other Florida National Banks were opened throughout Florida, including Lakeland and Bartow.

During this time, du Pont was expanding his philanthropic activities. He personally funded a pension plan program for seniors in Delaware in 1929 and turned his attention to revitalizing Florida after the devastation of a 1926 hurricane and the Great Depression. He died a multimillionaire, with the bulk of his fortune sustaining the Alfred I. duPont Testamentary Trust.

Zora Neale Hurston (January 7, 1891 – January 28, 1960) was an American folklorist, anthropologist, and author. Of Hurston's four novels and more than 50 published short stories, plays, and essays, she is best known for her 1937 novel Their Eyes Were Watching God. She grew up in Florida and studied anthropology at Columbia University before becoming an important writer of the Harlem Renaissance.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (August 8, 1896 – December 14, 1953) was an American author who lived in rural Florida and wrote novels with rural themes and settings. Her best known work, The Yearling, about a boy who adopts an orphaned fawn, won a Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1939 and was later made into a movie of the same name. The book was written long before the concept of young-adult fiction, but is now commonly included in teen-reading lists.

James Weldon Johnson was born in Jacksonville, Florida. Not just an influential and notable novelist, poet, and songwriter, James Weldon Johnson was a lawyer, a United States consul in a foreign nation, and served an important role in combating racism through his position in the NAACP. Johnson developed his own philosophy on lessening racism in America. While W.E.B. Du Bois advocated intellectual development and Booker T. Washington advocated industrial training to combat racism, Johnson believed that it was important for blacks to produce great literature and art. By doing so, Johnson held that blacks could demonstrate their intellectual equality and advance their placement in America.