

The Florida Terror: Race Relations in the Early Twentieth-Century

Summary

Many years before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's brought nationwide attention to the plight of African-Americans in the South, racial violence was a fact of life. Many whites held firm to an unwritten code that demanded brutal punishment for individual blacks, or entire communities, that "stepped out of line." In this lesson, students will: read about race relations in the post-WWI years and the Ku Klux Klan; explore individual incidents of racial violence in Florida before the Civil Rights era; and create annotated maps/timelines of these incidents.

Objectives

Students will:

- 1) Understand how demographic changes after World War I led to strained relations between whites and blacks in the North and the South;
- 2) Read an account of the origins and reformation of the Ku Klux Klan, from the early 1900's to the present;
- 3) Explore five incidents of racial violence from 1920 to 1944.

U.S. History Event

This lesson could be used within the context of any unit on the 1920's, including racial unrest in the post-WWI years and the nativism movement. It could also be used as an opening lesson to the Civil Rights Movement.

Grade Level

This lesson can be implemented in a middle school or high school American history classroom, but because of the sensitive subject matter may be more appropriate for high school.

Materials

AAA AutoClub maps of Florida (optional), maps of Florida found at <http://fcit.usf.edu/florida/maps/state/64000.htm> (optional), a transparency of the lyrics to "Strange Fruit," a transparency or copies of one of several pictures from <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/african/2000/lynching.htm> , one copy of **Reading Passage #1** and **Reading Passage #2** for each pair, one copy of **Exhibits A-E** for each pair, one copy of "Matrix for Information about Florida Racial Violence" for each student (or pair),

Lesson Time

This lesson can be completed in one block period.

Lesson

Procedures

- 1) Before the lesson, make a transparency of the **Preview** assignment included in this lesson.
- 2) As students enter the classroom, have them sit in assigned heterogeneous pairs around the classroom and complete the **Preview** assignment, either individually or in pairs.
- 3) **Preview:** display the transparency showing the lyrics of the Billie Holiday song, "Strange Fruit." If possible, play the 3-minute song for your students by going to the website <http://www.strangefruit.org/> and clicking on the picture of the rose (you will need Windows Media Player or RealOne Player to play this song on your computer; to download Windows Media Player, click [here](#). To download RealOne Player, click [here](#)). Have your students pay close attention to the imagery of the song. Then, as the song ends (or as they finish reading the lyrics), have them answer the following question: "What is the singer describing in this song?"
- 4) After allowing a few minutes for your students to develop answers, allow them to discuss what they think the message of the song is. You may need to point out particularly descriptive language, such as "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze."
- 5) **Optional:** You may wish to make a transparency, or print and pass around your classroom several copies, of one of the several pictures found at the website titled "Lynchings in America: A History Not Known by Many." Especially powerful is the photograph of Rubin Stacy's body after a lynching in Ft. Lauderdale, with a young child present. <http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/african/2000/lynching.htm> **PLEASE NOTE! Photographs and other depictions of racial violence may be deemed inappropriate for some grade levels.**
- 6) Read to your students the following account of the writing of "Strange Fruit:"

"The song 'Strange Fruit' was not written by jazz great Billie Holiday, but by a high-school English teacher named Abel Meeropol, a Jewish man living in the Bronx who had seen a photo of the lynching of two black men. Haunted for days by the picture, he wrote a poem titled 'Strange Fruit' and published it in *New York Teacher* magazine and later the Communist-Marxist journal *New Masses*. After seeing Billie Holiday perform at the Café Society club in New York, he showed her the poem. Holiday liked it and turned it into a song with the help of musician Sonny White. The song reached #16 on the music charts in July 1939, though *Time* magazine declared it a 'prime piece of musical propaganda' for the NAACP."

- 7) Explain to your students that this lesson deals with a very sensitive issue and that in order to make the lesson a success, they will need to be mindful of the feelings of others. This lesson covers the extremely delicate issue of racial violence in the United States in the post-WWI years leading up to World War II. They will read and answer discussion questions in pairs about the Great Migration of black people from the South to the North in the early 1900's and the formation and resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Then, they will examine five different episodes of racial violence in Florida that occurred between 1920 and 1944. While scrutinizing these episodes, they will also find the five different locations on an AAA AutoClub road map and mark the same places and dates on their own maps of Florida (optional). Afterwards, they will fill in the appropriate information on their copies of "Matrix for Information about Florida Racial Violence," then create their own symbols that represent each episode shown on their Florida maps. Students should be encouraged to color these symbols when finished creating them.
- 8) Pass out **Reading Passages #1 & #2** to students. After allowing 12-15 minutes to read and answer the discussion questions for **Reading Passage #1**, discuss the findings of your students. Repeat for **Reading Passage #2**.
- 9) Pass out Exhibits A-E, copies of matrices, and AAA AutoClub road maps of Florida to students (optional). Allow thirty minutes to complete this assignment. Allow time to discuss answers.
- 10) Be sure to debrief students by closing the lesson with the question, "How are race relations in the United States different today when compared to the time period we covered today? How are they the same?"

Activities

Reading Passage #1- "Race Relations Before and After WWI"

Towards the end of the 1910's, Americans of all backgrounds tended to place progressivism behind events overseas in terms of importance. In Europe and Asia Minor, war was raging. Soon, the United States would be drawn into the conflict in response to attacks against Americans and their property on the open ocean carried out by German U-boats.

After Congress declared war on the Central Powers in May of 1917, the nation concentrated on mobilizing resources and industry behind the war effort. But despite the outward appearance of national unity behind the war effort, all was not well in American society. If America was truly fighting a war to "make the world safe for democracy," why were no measures taken to offset racism and discrimination at home? As historian David R. Colburn writes, "The superiority of the American way of life was not so obvious if one looked below the surface and especially if one talked to black Americans. Racial and ethnic tensions were widespread, and no amount of rhetoric could hide or diminish them."

In the prewar years, President Woodrow Wilson had attempted to work for better circumstances for black Americans (and recruit black voters into the Democratic Party), but by filling half of his cabinet positions with white Southerners, his attempts were forgotten. Instead, policies that further dispossessed blacks at the federal and state levels became the norm. American involvement in World War I did little to improve the lot of African-Americans. In the North and in the South, whites lashed out against African-Americans in an effort to deny them the rights and privileges reserved for whites. White mobs, often in alliance with law enforcement officials, terrorized blacks through lynchings (illegal executions of accused persons by mobs) in the South and outbursts against entire neighborhoods in the North.

Why, after so many thousands of blacks fought valiantly overseas and others had given in totally to the war effort at home, had white citizens turned against them? According to Colburn, the roots of these violent attacks could be traced to the years before World War I, when black Americans fled the South in record numbers to escape segregation and racial violence, and the economic havoc created by the boll weevil's destruction of the cotton economy of the South. Combined with these "push" factors, the North held the promise of freedom and economic opportunity. Because of federally-mandated immigration quotas, there was a labor shortage in the North. Labor agents from the Northern industries and railroads were able to attract almost 283,000 African-Americans from the South to move above the Mason-Dixon line. Over forty thousand blacks from Florida joined this "Great Migration."

Recruiting efforts directed towards blacks by Northern businesses, and especially the suggestion that someone would actually desire their services and be willing to pay a decent wage for them, was a new and welcome development for black Southerners. African-Americans that moved to the Northeast and the Midwest earned dramatically higher wages than their Southern counterparts in agriculture and in the South's fledgling industries. Moreover, blacks could vote without fear of white reprisal and could move about freely in the North.

In Florida and other parts of the South, whites at first were only too pleased to allow blacks to leave. Many Floridians had even entertained plans of sending blacks to a foreign country or to an uninhabited region of the United States where they could live separately and govern themselves. Later, as the migration escalated, white Southerners worried that it was creating unrest and dissatisfaction among those that stayed behind.

Things were not grand in the North for long, though. Northern whites eventually began to express anger at the large numbers of blacks moving north and the impact on housing, neighborhoods, and jobs. Northern whites blamed blacks for the loss of jobs and income. Stereotypes and misconceptions about African-Americans further eroded their standing in the North. Many whites mistakenly believed that blacks were mentally inferior, immoral, and criminal, as well as lazy and boisterous.

World War I only served to heighten racial concerns among whites. All of a sudden, enlisted blacks were being armed and trained in the North and the South. German propaganda on the war front in Europe added considerably to white fears by encouraging blacks to lay down their weapons or turn them against Southern whites. Skirmishes between whites and blacks began occurring with regularity in several Southern communities when black soldiers came to town and did not follow Southern social customs. In Houston in August 1917, armed black soldiers killed seventeen white residents after a prolonged period of harassment by whites.

After the war, as the migration of blacks into the North continued, Northern cities swelled. Black neighborhoods expanded into white residential areas. In Chicago, where the black population had expanded from about 30,000 in 1900 to 109,000 in 1920, racial tensions erupted in violence. On July 27, 1919, white beachgoers on Lake Michigan stoned a black swimmer who crossed over into the white area. The following day, confrontations occurred throughout the city. For the next two weeks, Chicago was without law and order as the

two camps armed themselves and attacked one another. Over 38 people were killed, another 520 wounded, and 1,000 people lost their homes.

No longer content to sit quietly and allow their rights to be trampled, black citizens began to defend themselves and their property more ferociously. The result was more violent retribution from whites in the North and the South. Lynchings escalated as whites sought to reimpose segregation following WWI; from 1917 to 1927, 444 black men were hung across the nation. Of these, 47 were in Florida. According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, between 1882 and 1968, mobs lynched 4,743 persons in the United States, over 70 percent of them African-Americans. And while Alabama and Mississippi had the highest number of lynchings, it was Florida that had the highest ratio of lynchings per person from 1900 to 1930. So violent did society become in this period that communities often posted public notices in newspapers inviting people to come and watch the burning of live African-Americans.

Discussion Questions for Reading Passage #1

- 1) What was ironic about the U.S. making the world “safe for democracy” in World War I given conditions at home?
- 2) What was the reaction of law enforcement officials in many instances of racial violence across the United States?
- 3) List two “push” factors that forced many southern African-Americans to move north, and list two “pull” factors that may have helped to entice them.
- 4) What was the approximate proportion of southern blacks from Florida who moved north during the “Great Migration?”
- 5) What was the reaction of many northern whites to the “Great Migration?” Why?

Reading Passage #2- "The Revival of the Ku Klux Klan"

Although the state of Florida has promoted its image as a tourist paradise for more than a hundred years, the truth is that the state has also been a Ku Klux Klan stronghold throughout much of the 20th century. The Klan was first organized in 1866 by young ex-Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee. Their purpose was to organize a secret "hilarious social club," to "have fun, make mischief, and play pranks on the public," with the objects of their pranks typically being recently-freed former slaves. They called themselves "*ku klux*," a corruption of the Greek word for "circle" (*kuklos*), and changed the spelling of the word *clan* for aesthetic quality. In keeping with the intended fun, they gave themselves mythical-sounding titles such as "grand cyclops," "night hawk," "grand wizard," and "magi." These men then had their wives sew together outfits to make them look like ghosts. From these beginnings, every night in Pulaski became Halloween as the white-robed and hooded Klansmen terrorized blacks. One of the founders later told a congressional investigative committee that the "impression sought to be made upon them (freedmen) was that these white-robed night prowlers were the ghosts of the Confederate dead, who had arisen from their graves in order to wreak vengeance."

Before long, the Klan found a new mission; to thwart any and all efforts on the part of the federal government to include blacks in Southern life, from politics to government to economy. In the antebellum South, blacks could not legally own any land or property, could not vote in any elections, and were not legally allowed to learn to read and write. Ex-Confederates bristled at the federally-mandated changes that Reconstruction brought to their homes, feeling that Reconstruction was pushed on the noble South as a form of post-Civil War Northern revenge. As Reconstruction became a way of life in the South, Klansmen intimidated, beat, and murdered any black that attempted to practice his newfound freedom and rights or find employment outside sharecropping, and any white who attempted to aid him. To the Klan, the South was still a White Man's Land and blacks needed to be reminded of their place, which was the bottom of the social order. Within a year, each former Confederate state, plus Kentucky, contained an active klavern. Within five years, thousands would be murdered, and tens of thousands menaced, beaten, mutilated, and driven from their homes.

As quickly as it had appeared, though, the invisible empire of the Klan dissipated. Historians are not sure of the exact date that the Reconstruction Klan disappeared; Grand Wizard Nathan Bedford Forrest, a former Confederate general, had ordered all Klan activities to end by 1869 under federal pressure, but that only affected the state of Tennessee. Klan-like violence continued in Florida and other pockets of the South into the 1880's and beyond, but no evidence exists of any organized activity at this point. But this lack of activity did not signal surrender. As years passed after the Civil War and Southern states were readmitted into the Union, representatives were elected that were more friendly to the old order. Laws were passed at the state and federal level that chipped away at the new rights of African-Americans; poll taxes were required, as were literacy tests at the voting booths. Since many blacks still owned no property or were unable to read or write, they were effectively disenfranchised. As one former Klansmen later said, the Klan in its earlier form had been successful in terrorizing blacks and keeping the established order of the South, and so it was no longer needed.

The Klan found a new audience, however, in the years preceding American involvement in World War I. Between 1890 and 1920, over 23 million foreign immigrants moved to America from eastern and southern Europe and Asia. This influx of people carried with it unfamiliar customs, languages, and religions. Native-born white Protestants all over the country chafed at the number of new residents. The call was made for another Ku Klux Klan in 1915, one that would have national importance. The second Klan spread rapidly throughout the South and into many Northern communities as well by taking a broader stance against immigrants, Catholics, Jews, Communists, organized labor, and blacks.

In Florida, the second Klan quickly found support in government. Polk County native Park Trammell, who served as governor from 1913 to 1917, was no friend to black Floridians. As the state's attorney general, he had ignored the lynchings of 29 blacks; as governor, he did the same when another 21 were lynched. His successor, former Baptist minister Sidney Johnston Catts, was elected on a platform that was anti-Catholic and anti-black. Once in office, he publicly labeled blacks "an inferior race" and also refused to put an end to lynchings, saying instead that blacks were "always harping on the disgrace that it (lynching) brings to the state... , when if you would teach your people not to kill our white officers... , you would keep down a thousand times greater disgrace."

By 1925, the Klan could boast of three million members nationwide. Three years later, that figure had shrunk to several hundred thousand, and continued to shrink as the Great Depression began. In Florida, however, the Klan grew in strength. During the Depression, the Florida realm had over 30,000 members, with the most powerful klaverns in Miami, Jacksonville, Tampa, and Orlando. In the years after World War II, the national Klan splintered into dozens of violent factions in different states across the South. In Florida, a plumbing contractor named Bill Hendrix chartered the Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and named himself as its head. The Klan's power grew quickly, particularly in Orange County, where its ranks included prominent lawmen, businessmen, and elected officials: Sheriff Dave Starr was a known Klansmen, as were a county commissioner and the city

manager of Winter Park. Apopka and Winter Garden were particularly infested: Apopka's police chief, constable and night patrolman all belonged, as did one constable and the justice of the peace in Winter Garden. One businessman estimated that 75 percent of Apopka's male population belonged. Today, the Florida Klan, though small, is extremely active, and its commitment to racial hatred and prejudice has not gone away.

Discussion Questions for Reading Passage #2

- 1) What was the original purpose of the Ku Klux Klan? Do you think that it stayed true to its original purpose? Explain your answer.
- 2) How did the Klan attempt to thwart Reconstruction? List two ways.
- 3) What was different about the Klan when it reappeared in 1915 as opposed to its earlier form? What had brought about this change?
- 4) How did the Klan receive support from Florida government officials in the early twentieth century?

Reading Passage #3- "Acts of Violence in Florida: 1920-1944"

Directions: For each exhibit, locate the town or city on your roadmap of Florida, then place a dot on your own Florida map representing the same place. Be sure to label the dot with the place name and the date of the incident.

Exhibit A- Ocoee, Florida (November 2-3, 1920)

Mose Norman, a black man who resided in the mostly black western Orange County community of Ocoee, went to the voting polls during an election but was denied a ballot. Angry, he returned with a shotgun but was roughed up and disarmed. Retreating to the home of a friend, Jules Perry, Norman brooded over the insult while false rumors spread of a black mob preparing to march on the polls. Sheriff's deputies and armed vigilantes, presumably made up of Klansmen, surrounded Perry's home and demanded that both Perry and Norman come out peacefully and be arrested. A battle erupted, leaving two whites dead in the yard, with at least four men wounded. Perry, the assumed "ringleader" of this black revolt, was captured and lynched in the predawn hours of November 3, 1920. Meanwhile, white rioters were busy in "N-----town," burning down at least 25 homes, two churches, and a black fraternal lodge. Officially, the death toll included six blacks and two whites, but other estimates of the black body count ranged from 35 to 56 (the latter number given by a mob member who bragged of having killed seventeen victims himself). In the aftermath of the riot, all blacks were ordered to leave Ocoee, and none had returned by the late 1940's. Klan historians deny any Klan involvement in this riot, and no hoods or robes were seen, but Klan threats had been made in the district and other sources reported afterwards that the riot had been Klan-led.

Exhibit B- Perry, Florida (December 2, 1922)

An escaped black convict allegedly murdered a white schoolteacher named Ruby Hendry in this small Panhandle town. Local residents discovered her badly beaten body. The convict and an alleged accomplice were quickly captured by the sheriff and placed in the Perry jail. Local whites, joined by men from as far away as Georgia and South Carolina, gathered at the jail in Perry and forcibly took the two black men from the sheriff and his deputies. They escorted Charlie Wright, the escaped convict, outside town where they beat him brutally in order to extract a confession and to determine if others were involved. Despite the severity of his injuries, Wright refused to indict anyone else in the crime. He was subsequently burned at the stake. The mob's vengeance remained undiminished, however, and members subsequently seized two other black men whom they suspected of being involved in the teacher's murder. Both black men were shot and then hung, although neither was ever implicated in the crime. Following the murders, the white mob then turned its fury on the entire black community and burned a church, amusement hall, and a black school. Several homes were also put to the torch, despite the fact that no black resident was accused of participating in the crime and most had expressed their sympathies and horror at the death of the schoolteacher. Although many in the mob may have belonged to the Ku Klux Klan, none wore Klan outfits during the attacks on the alleged murderers or the black community.

Exhibit C- Rosewood, Florida (January 1-7, 1923)

The towns of Rosewood, a mostly-black community in Levy County, and Sumner, an all-white settlement three miles away, had peacefully coexisted for over 75 years. Rosewood's population was about 355, with 25 to 30 families living nine miles east of Cedar Key. The town boasted of three churches, a store, a school, a dozen large two-story homes, and a number of smaller one-room houses. Most of Rosewood's men worked at the Cummer Lumber saw mill in Sumner, and some of the women worked in the homes of Sumner's families. This peaceful coexistence was shattered by events beginning on New Year's Day in 1923.

That day, 22-year-old Fannie Taylor, a Sumner housewife, claimed that a black man had attacked her in her home after her husband had left for work. That same morning, two Rosewood women, Sarah Carrier and her granddaughter Philomena Goins, were working in the Taylor household laundering clothes. They had seen Fannie Taylor's lover, a white man named John Bradley, arrive that morning after Mr. Taylor had left for work and left soon before Fannie made her accusations. They believed that John and Fannie had had a quarrel and that Bradley was responsible for Fannie's injuries. But since Fannie Taylor was white, and Sarah and Philomena were black, their word counted for little.

Though Fannie never said that her unknown attacker had come from Rosewood, she never said anything when rumors began to circulate to that effect. The night before, a black convict named Jesse Hunter had

escaped from the county jail, so law enforcement officials and the people of Sumner made the logical leap that this must be the guilty party. Bloodhounds were made to sniff Fannie Taylor's clothes and immediately chased John Bradley's scent to Rosewood, where Bradley had gone for help. The posse went to the home of Aaron Carrier, a relative of Sarah Carrier. Upon finding that Aaron was not home, the hastily-assembled posse visited his mother's house and found Aaron there. Despite being told that Aaron had been sick for several days, the mob tied his wrists to the rear bumper of a car and dragged him into the woods. Upon torture, Carrier named Sam Carter, a Rosewood blacksmith, for the crime. While Carrier was taken to Gainesville for safekeeping, a mob seized Carter and lynched him.

The next three days were relatively quiet, though rumors began circulating around Sumner and nearby Cedar Key that Sylvester Carrier, Sarah Carrier's son, was hiding Jesse Hunter and had reportedly taunted that if any white men wanted to catch Hunter, "to come get 'em." Aware of the potential for more attacks, Sylvester spent the next three days persuading his relatives to gather at his parents' two-story home for mutual defense. Word quickly spread in the white community that the Carriers were "stockpiling arms and planning an attack," but vigilantes bided their time until Thursday, sipping moonshine and waiting for others to gather.

Finally, on the night of January 4th, an armed posse surrounded the Carrier home, shot the family dog, and demanded that everyone exit the house. When their demands were met with silence, the mob fired their guns into the dwelling, killing Sarah Carrier and wounding another woman and an infant. When the gunfire was not immediately returned, two mob members entered the home and were killed. The Carriers and the mob exchanged gunfire for the next several hours until the mob ran out of ammunition. While retreating, the mob burned down a church and several homes. Meanwhile, the Carriers and other black families in Rosewood fled into the neighboring swamps, where they hid for the next two days in their bedclothes and shivered in the uncommonly cold night air.

A call went out from Sumner for assistance in the face of this "black rebellion," and whites from Alachua County, Jacksonville, and settlements even further away descended on Levy County. Even participants who had taken part in the lynching in Perry the week before traveled to Sumner. Florida Governor Cary Hardee offered to send National Guardsmen to Levy County Sheriff Robert Walker in an effort to restore the peace, but the sheriff declined, saying that he "feared no further disorder." Satisfied with the response, Governor Hardee then went hunting.

The next afternoon, over 250 white men rampaged through Rosewood, burning down the Carrier home, the two remaining churches, and other buildings. The attack carried over into the next two days until there was not a building left standing in Rosewood, save two shops owned by white merchants. To this day, no one is sure how many fatalities were suffered on both sides, with estimates ranging from two whites and six blacks dead to figures much higher. One thing that cannot be disputed, however, is that Rosewood's black families, after escaping through the swamps to safety elsewhere, never returned.

Klan involvement has also been disputed, but at least one report describes the original mob as being "Klan-led," and a participant in the violence later stated that the Klan was "big in Cedar Key." Other accounts tell of Georgia Klan members driving all night to exact revenge on Rosewood the night after the Carrier home shootout.

Exhibit D- Greenwood, Florida (October 18-26, 1934)

On Thursday, October 18th, 20-year-old Lola Cannidy left her home about noon to tend to the family livestock. Her mutilated body was found the next morning on a hillside near her home. Two hours later, Claude Neal, a black man who worked on a nearby peanut farm and lived across the road from the Cannidy house, was arrested and charged with her murder. After his arrest and alleged confession, Neal was immediately moved to Chipley, about 20 miles away. When an angry crowd gathered outside the jail and demanded that the sheriff hand Neal over for immediate justice, Neal was then moved over 200 miles in the next several days, eventually ending up in Brewton, Alabama. But that wasn't far enough.

Just after midnight on October 26th, a mob of over 100 people showed up at the Brewton jail and hauled Neal back to Greenwood. They publicly announced their intention to lynch Neal later that night, between 8 and 9PM, an advance notice of twelve hours. News of the upcoming lynching was given on radio stations across the South, and white people from all over the South were invited. Despite the flood of telegrams requesting him to step in, Florida Governor Dave Sholtz refused, saying that local authorities had the situation well under control.

Unspeakable horrors were inflicted on Neal that day and into the night. An estimated crowd of several thousand men, women, and children gathered to watch the proceedings and cheer the torturers. Children, some no older than toddlers, were encouraged to stab Neal with sharpened sticks. He was also stabbed and stuck with knives, burned with hot irons, shot repeatedly, and then dragged behind a car to the Cannidy home, where a woman reportedly came out of the house and buried a butcher knife in his chest. Then several people drove their cars over him before the mob then moved his dead body ten miles down the road to Marianna, where they hung

him from a tree outside the courthouse. Pictures of his naked, mutilated body were taken and sold for fifty cents, and some tried to make off with Neal's fingers and toes as souvenirs.

The sheriff cut the body down the next day, but a mob soon demanded that it be hung up again. When the sheriff refused, the mob dispersed into the city streets and began attacking any blacks they encountered. After a few hours, the National Guard was called in, and peace was restored to Marianna. Neal's murder became famous for being the last "spectacle" lynching in the nation, but many other less-publicized lynchings still took place in later years.

Exhibit E- Live Oak, Florida (January 2, 1944)

Willie James Howard was a fifteen-year-old boy growing up in Live Oak. He worked full-time at the Van Priest Dime Store while away from school for the winter holidays. For Christmas in 1943, he gave a girl that he worked with a card. When he found out that the card had upset her, he wrote a note to her in an attempt to apologize if he had offended her. This all sounds innocent enough on the surface. But Willie was black, his co-worker Cynthia Goff was a popular white high school student, and her father Phil was a former state legislator.

When Cynthia showed her father the note, he and two friends drove to the Howard home and demanded to know where Willie was. At that moment, Willie walked inside from the backyard. Goff grabbed him, and when Willie's mother tried to pull him away, Goff leveled a gun at Willie's mother. She then let go of Willie to assurances that the white men were just going to take him for a drive and would drop him off later. When the car of three white men drove away with Willie, she wondered if she would ever see her son again.

Meanwhile, the white men went to Bond-Howell Lumber Company and picked James up from work. Then, they drove to the nearby Suwanee River and bound young Willie by the hands and ankles while James watched. According to James, Phil Goff then held a gun to Willie's head and made him jump in the cold river. Phil later testified that he and the two other white men went to cut a switch from a tree so that James could beat his son with it, but while they were away from Willie, he cried that no man would beat him, not them or his father, and slipped into the river while trying to get away.

Willie struggled to swim despite being tied with rope around his wrists and legs, but soon drowned in the river. An attorney who was visiting Live Oak over the holidays when this incident occurred brought it incident to the attention of the NAACP. NAACP attorneys quickly demanded a full investigation of the case from Florida Governor, and Polk County native, Spessard Holland. Holland sent Goff's sworn statement to the NAACP and promised that a grand jury in Live Oak would hear the case, but admitted that there would be "particular difficulties involved where there will be testimony of three white men and probably the girl against the testimony" of Willie's father.

Sworn statements were taken from Willie's parents that disputed Goff's version of what had happened, but to no avail. A verdict was not returned in the trial, and the three white men were allowed to go free. When the NAACP tried to make the case a federal trial, the Justice Department declined to intervene, citing a lack of jurisdiction.

Matrix for Information about Racial Violence in Florida, 1920-1944

Directions: After reading each exhibit, fill out the corresponding boxes with relevant information about each case. When finished, create a symbol for each exhibit and include them on your map of Florida.

Place/Date	Briefly describe the reasons for this incident.	In 2-3 sentences, what happened in this incident?	Was there any Ku Klux Klan involvement in this incident?
Exhibit A			
Exhibit B			
Exhibit C			
Exhibit D			
Exhibit E			

Lyrics to “Strange Fruit” by Billie Holliday

**SOUTHERN TREES BEAR A STRANGE FRUIT
BLOOD ON THE LEAVES AND BLOOD AT THE ROOT
BLACK BODY SWINGING IN THE SOUTHERN BREEZE
STRANGE FRUIT HANGING FROM THE POPLAR TREES**

**PASTORAL SCENE OF THE GALLANT SOUTH
THE BULGING EYES AND THE TWISTED MOUTH
SCENT OF MAGNOLIA SWEET AND FRESH
AND THE SUDDEN SMELL OF BURNING FLESH!**

**HERE IS A FRUIT FOR THE CROWS TO PLUCK
FOR THE RAIN TO GATHER, FOR THE WIND TO SUCK
FOR THE SUN TO ROT, FOR A TREE TO DROP
HERE IS A STRANGE AND BITTER CROP.**

--Music and lyrics by Lewis Allan, copyright 1940

Concentrate on the imagery in this song. What do you think is the “strange fruit” that the singer continues to refer to?

Assessment

The following question could be given as a project or homework assignment used to assess the knowledge gained from this lesson:

“On May 23, 1994, Florida Governor Lawton Chiles signed into law House Bill 591, otherwise known as the ‘Rosewood Bill.’ A year earlier, Daryl L. Jones, a state senator from south Florida, introduced legislation that would: pay reparations to the survivors of the Rosewood incident for the trauma they endured and for the property they lost; establish a state university scholarship fund for the families and descendants of the Rosewood residents; and require the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to interview any surviving witnesses to determine if any criminal proceedings could still be pursued.

Though the original version of the bill did not pass the Florida legislature, it was resubmitted the next year. There was much opposition from several legislators who claimed that since the attack on Rosewood had occurred over seventy-one years before, any claims for damages would be subjected to the statute of limitations. But the bill passed the second time around, first by a count of 74-41 in the House, and then by a tally of 26-14 in the Senate.

The bill appropriated \$2 million for the above-mentioned initiatives. It was determined that all known perpetrators of the crimes committed that week in January 1923 were deceased. However, compensation for property loss and/or emotional trauma resulting from the destruction of Rosewood was provided to 172 people in sums ranging from \$220 to \$450,000. The total amount of compensation was \$1.85 million.”

Question: Should the surviving victims of the Rosewood incident, and their descendants, have received monetary compensation for an incident that happened 71 years before the compensation was approved? If “yes,” then should the state of Florida, and other states around the nation, be liable for damages and emotional trauma caused by racial violence in earlier eras? What should be the determining cut-off date for which any claims prior to that date are not compensated? If “no,” then should the actions of the people responsible go unpunished? Should anything be done to remedy the losses of property and well-being that took place?

*Write a 1-2 page essay explaining your reasoning for your response. Be sure to cite at least one other incident covered in this lesson in your response. Ten bonus points will be given if you can cite any other incidents in American history in which a group of people received monetary compensation for mistreatment at the hands of the U.S. government (hint: “World War II”).

Other Assessment Questions

- 1) For what reasons did over a quarter of a million African-Americans move from the South to the North during the Great Migration?
a. better wages b. better social conditions c. to escape racial violence d. all choices are correct
- 2) True or false. By the time that the United States entered World War I, blacks in both the North and the South were being persecuted.
- 3) Read the following paragraph and then answer this question: how can infer through the provided information that the Ku Klux Klan began as a racist organization, and not just a “hilarious social club?”

Young ex-Confederate soldiers in Tennessee first organized the Ku Klux Klan in 1866. Their purpose was to organize a secret “hilarious social club,” to “have fun, make mischief, and play pranks on the public,” with the objects of their pranks typically being recently-freed former slaves. These men had their wives sew together outfits to make them look like ghosts. Then, these white-robed and hooded Klansmen would terrorize blacks by appearing as the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers who had risen from their graves in order to wreak vengeance.

- 4) True or false. The Ku Klux Klan was successful in gaining national prominence in 1915 because it accepted as members people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, as opposed to the former version of the Klan, which only allowed white Protestant men to join.
- 5) True or false. Though the Klan has enjoyed moderate popularity in some regions of the United States, it has never had much acceptance in Florida, largely due to the large number of ethnicities present in Florida.

Resources

Colburn, David R. "Rosewood and America in the Early Twentieth Century." The Florida Historical Quarterly, vol. 76, no. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 175-192.

Ingalls, Robert P. Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936. The University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, TN (1988).

Jones, Maxine D. "The Rosewood Massacre and the Women Who Survived It." The Florida Historical Quarterly, vol. 76, no. 2 (Fall 1997), p. 193-208.

Newton, Michael. The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Florida. University Press of Florida: Gainesville, FL (2001).

www.directblackaction.com/roserep.htm -State Senator Daryl L. Jones' speech to the Black Reparations & Self-Determination Conference in Wash., DC, on June 11, 1999

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/> -"Strange Fruit" history

<http://www.nathanielturner.com/lynchingclaudeneal.htm> -the lynching of Claude Neal

<http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/howard.html> -Lynchings in Florida

<http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/terror/k.html> -Ku Klux Klan

<http://www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/african/2000/lynching.htm> -photos of lynchings

Film: "Freedom Never Dies: The Legacy of Harry T. Moore"
(<http://www.pbs.org/harrymoore/synop/vorder.html>)