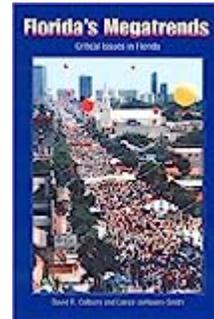




David R. Colburn, Lance deHaven-Smith. *Florida's Megatrends: Critical Issues in Florida.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. viii + 161 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-2532-2.



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As Florida Goes, So Goes the Nation

As Florida Goes, So Goes the Nation

David Colburn and Lance deHaven-Smith have provided us with a small but important volume on Florida's role in American and Southern history, and its role in things to come. To the uninitiated, Florida played only a small role in American history until 2000 when a disputed presidential election made the state center stage for the world's attention as George W. Bush and Al Gore fought for the state's twenty-five electoral votes, which would catapult one of them into the Presidency. Colburn and deHaven-Smith argue that there is more to Florida—past, present and future—than twenty-five electoral votes in a disputed election. Accordingly, the authors set about to trace Florida history and make some projections for the future of the state as a bellwether for the region and nation.

The first three chapters, almost half of the book, are spent retracing Florida's past. The authors do a fine job of condensing a great deal of Florida history since 1865 into fifty-one pages. This section should serve as an excellent primer for people interested in boning up on the key issues in the state's history. The issues that faced Florida

after the Civil War were no different than those facing other Southern states. Military reconstruction, the end of slavery, redemption and the retrenchment of white supremacy, which led to disfranchisement for African Americans, all determined the course of the state's political and social future.

The bulk of this primer, as it were, is spent on Florida since 1900. And the changes in the state since 1900 are nothing if not remarkable. In 1900, write the authors, Florida was largely agricultural and frontier, with most of its population living within fifty miles of the Georgia border. The state's population grew from the region's smallest in 1880 (29,492) to its largest in 2000 (15,982,378). The population explosion did not really begin until the great land boom of the 1920s as Florida went from an undiscovered frontier to a land speculator's paradise. As people rushed into the state to take advantage of the boom, the population also shifted to south Florida. The land boom in Florida foreshadowed the boom and bust of the stock market in the rest of the nation. In many ways the Florida land boom was a precursor of things to come in the 1920s. Wracked by the depression and the land bust, Florida be-

came essentially a ward of the state as the New Deal and FDR kept the state afloat with federal projects and military bases.

Between 1940 and 1970 Florida suffered a clash between the Old South and the New South. The authors contend that Florida's growth and emergence as a New South state was more contentious than elsewhere because of the massive influx of migrants from other states. Demographic changes and growth made the resistance of Old South defenders more determined and pushed the state into open conflict. Although social and political development was slower, the New Deal and the rise of a military-base economy in the state modernized and increased the Florida economy. Thanks to federal spending and the attraction of warmer climes, Florida's population growth averaged 558 people a day between 1945 and 1960.

What caused political and social change in Florida, as well as a milder response to desegregation than most Southern states, was the role of industry and tourism in the state, as well as the continuing rise in population. Leaders pursued expediency over ideology in bringing the state into the modern age and trying to avoid the bitter divisiveness that struck states such as Alabama and Mississippi (which continues to plague those states in the year 2002). Progressive and racially moderate governors such as Reubin Askew and Bob Graham ushered the state into a new era of inclusion and economic growth while also protecting the environment and expanding democracy.

The last half of *Florida's Megatrends* addresses current developments and trends in Florida with an eye to the future of the state and nation. Florida's political system in the 1980s and 1990s prevented it from answering or even addressing tough issues. The clash of political parties for control of the state prevented even the mildest sort of reform for fear of providing campaign fodder for the opposition. By the end of the 1990s the state had seen the rise of a Republican majority in the state house and the end of a recession that had stretched to the late 1980s. With tourism and the explosion of the technology industry, write the authors, Florida was on the mend. But the signs remain ominous. The state's economy continues to depend on tourism and low-paying service-industry jobs. Since September 11, those states which relied on tourism, such as Louisiana and Florida, suffered setbacks. And so did the environment. In a state where people come for the environment, protecting that lure would seem a logical conclusion and course of action. In Florida such has

not always been the case as the tension between humans and their environment is no greater anywhere than in a state that sells itself as a scenic paradise.

The view of Florida's future, posited by the authors, is a Florida that is increasingly non-native and aging rapidly. With seven out of ten Floridians hailing from outside the state, the nature of the population remains in flux. Such population changes portend a resurgence of racial and ethnic tension in Florida as foreign-born people enter that state in massive numbers. Florida's identity mirrors that of the rest of the South. One of the more debated issues among Southern historians in recent years involves what makes the South distinctive. Is it culture, tradition, sports or a score of other issues? Florida again mirrors, and in some ways pre-dates, this issue because of its dynamic demographic standing. The growing population also threatens to stretch government services too thin as 579 people are expected to enter the state each day between 2002 and 2025 (p. 76). The population increase combined with a broad, and growing, diversity has created an ethnic split between North and South Florida. Neither region tends to accept the other as part of "their" state. If the state's population is growing more diverse, write the authors, it is also growing older. Of the 20.7 million people projected to be living in Florida in 2025, almost 25 percent will be of retirement age, making it the oldest state in the nation (p. 84). Since senior citizens are the most politically active of all voters, Florida's elderly population will be more powerful than in most states. Colburn and deHaven argue that the divergence of ethnic and generational groups will also shape and place great demands upon Florida politics in the future, as the defining feature of politics in the state will take the form of competition among interest, generational and ethnic groups.

How will Florida's leaders tackle the problems sure to arrest state development in the future? Look to the past, write Colburn and deHaven. In the twentieth century the most pressing state concern was overcoming racial segregation. Two Florida governors, Leroy Collins and Reubin Askew, led the way in the state overcoming that debilitating condition. By open leadership, pursuing "principled pragmatism," and maintaining a "democratic discourse" with the voters, Collins and Askew helped the state avoid the crippling reactionary impact of other states in the Deep South with regard to segregation and race (pp. 124-126). Bold leadership combined with public involvement and voter education still hold the best chance for Florida's future leaders to navigate the treacherous waters ahead.

In this thin volume, the authors have made a convincing case for Florida's role as a Southern state and as an indicator of future trends in American politics and society. An aging population, increased numbers of Latino and European immigrants, and environmental issues that have yet to be resolved all make Florida more American and more Southern than most have thought. Is Florida foreshadowing what America and the South will become in the near future? No one knows, but *Florida's Megatrends* might very well be "America's Megatrends."

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