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LeeAnn Lands’ book, The Culture of Property: Race, Class, and Housing Landscapes in Atlanta, 1880-1950, recounts the remarkable transformation of Atlanta, a relatively homogenous city as late as mid-nineteenth century, into a sprawling metropolitan area in which various socio-economic divisions became the norm several decades later.

What gave rise to this rapid transition was a distinct new political and financial climate that put an increased emphasis on the cultural significance of home ownership, particularly in the 1920s. Since possessing property was viewed as almost exclusively white privilege, the growth of Atlanta’s residential markets reflected racial and class differences that existed among various segments of the city’s population.

There exists a voluminous body of literature examining U.S. urban and suburban developments. Seemingly focusing on the metamorphosis of one city, Lands’ study is nonetheless valid in the context of national urban history as well.

The book adds to the works of historians Joe Feagin, Andrew Wiese, Olivier Zunz, and others by offering an analysis of how segregationist and racially restrictive regulations came to dominate the entire housing market of a major city in the American Southeast. In Atlanta, Lands argues, the “whites only” sentiment with regards to planning neighborhood infrastructure progressed from an attitude to a local standard to a law.

The long-term significance of LeeAnn Lands’ findings lies in establishing patterns and processes that worked to shape the general construct of white propertied power. This construct is very much alive in today’s United States.

Moreover, Lands concludes, it has transcended the boundaries of economy and politics, becoming a cultural phenomenon instead. White supremacy is permeating many walks of life, from housing arrangements to education to law enforcement, to name a few.

Unafraid to speak loudly about these alarming tendencies within a given city, LeeAnn Lands projects them onto the nation as a whole. A compelling case study, The Culture of Property provides a
comprehensive synthesis of a wide range of issues that plagued Atlanta in 1880-1950 and brings these issues to the forefront of ongoing academic discourse.

The book can be recommended for all public and academic libraries.

-- Reviewed by Liya Deng, Jack Tarver Library, Mercer University

NONFICTION

More than Disney World, beaches, and synchronized mermaids, Florida as paradise evolved from a health sanctuary in the early 1800s to a resort for the Gilded Age rich. It metamorphosed next into a democratized postwar family vacationland, and emerged as the mega-entertainment complexes we know today.

For much of the twentieth century and earlier, Florida offered a wide range of novelties for visitors: recuperative mineral springs, alligator wrestling, frontier villages, and cartoon-themed restaurants.

With lively prose and genuine fondness for the state, historian Tracy J. Revels tells the story of Florida before and after Disney, hurricanes, recessions, and wildfires weakened the dream that transformed itself to meet the leisure expectations of each generation.

Whereas a guidebook might focus on regions or types of attractions, Sunshine Paradise presents the historical and cultural context for Florida’s development as a vacation haven. Both a part of and separate from the cultural South, Florida was no stranger to racial, ethnic, and religious segregation, and Revels addresses these and other blemishes in this honest appraisal.

How did today’s Florida come to be? Advances such as railroads, superhighways, and air conditioning helped Florida develop from an exclusive tropical paradise to the cheap wonderland that democratized vacations for prosperous post-World War II families.

Yet despite the state’s rich natural and historical resources, today’s overpopulation, climate vulnerability, and thirst for innovation threaten all but the most ensconced (and least authentic) attractions. Florida owes some 80 percent of its workforce to the service industry, but tourism’s expansion inspires bickering among residents, developers, and policymakers.

Acknowledging Florida’s love/hate relationship with tourism, Revels ends with an appeal for thoughtful growth in a state economically dependent on its centuries-old vacationland fantasy.

This entertaining, well-documented, and readable history should appeal to general audiences as well as historians and scholars of American, Southern, and popular culture studies.

— Reviewed by Emily Rogers, Valdosta State University Library