

# Rosewood 1923

Levy County, Florida

## In Sixty Seconds

**Before.** Rosewood was a self-sufficient, predominantly Black town in Levy County, Florida. Residents owned homes, a sugar mill, a general store, two churches, a school, and a Masonic lodge. Many worked at the nearby cedar mill in Sumner; others farmed or operated small businesses of their own.

**What happened.** On January 1, 1923, a white woman in nearby Sumner claimed a Black man had assaulted her. Over the next week, white mobs, numbering in the hundreds and including KKK members from neighboring counties, attacked Rosewood. Every structure in the town was burned to the ground.

**Who did it.** Organized white mobs, joined by KKK members from across the region. The Levy County sheriff deputized some of the attackers. No local or state authority intervened to protect Black residents.

**After.** The entire Black population fled, never to return. The town ceased to exist. No arrests were made. The Florida legislature did not acknowledge the massacre until 1994, when it approved \$2.1 million in reparations, the first such payment in U.S. history for racial violence.

## The Named

### Sam Carter

A local blacksmith and the first Rosewood resident killed. He was tortured for information about where other Black men might be found, then shot and hung from a tree.

### Sylvester Carrier

Music teacher and marksman. Defended his home through a night-long siege. Killed multiple attackers before being overwhelmed. His resistance bought time for the women and children inside to escape.

### Sarah Carrier

Laundress and matriarch. Taylor's own employee. She was killed when the white mob besieged her son Sylvester's home, where women and children had gathered for safety.

### Minnie Lee Langley

age 8. Escaped with her family into the swamp. Testified before the Florida legislature seventy years later, in 1993, as part of the hearings that led to reparations.

## For Discussion

1. Rosewood was unusual in that it was self-sufficient, predominantly Black, and rural rather than urban. What conditions made Rosewood possible in the first place, and what role did its distinctness play in the decision to target it?
2. Florida's 1994 Rosewood Compensation Act was the first state payment for racial violence in American history. What made Rosewood reparable at that moment when comparable claims in Tulsa, Elaine, and Ocoee have not succeeded? What about the Rosewood case was legally, politically, or rhetorically different?
3. The town ceased to exist after the week of attacks. Survivors scattered. The question of whether to rebuild was never seriously posed. What determines whether a destroyed community is rebuilt, and how do those determinants compare in the cases of Rosewood and Greenwood?
4. Gary Moore's 1982 St. Petersburg Times investigation broke sixty years of silence. What conditions in 1982 specifically enabled that reporting, and what does the sixty-year delay reveal about what survivor families carry privately when there is no public account?
5. The Rosewood scholarship fund has now funded descendants' education for more than three decades. When reparations take the form of scholarships rather than direct cash, what does that form express, and what does it leave out?

## Primary Sources

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3. Moore, Gary. "Rosewood: Legacy of a Massacre." *St. Petersburg Times*, July 25, 1982.
4. Rosewood Compensation Act. Florida Legislature, Chapter 94-359, Laws of Florida, 1994.
5. University of Florida. Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, Rosewood Collection.

