

Florida Before DeSantis

What We're Fighting to Get Back

Florida didn't always look like this. Before Ron DeSantis transformed the state into a national laboratory for authoritarian governance, Florida was known as the 'Sunshine State' for more than its weather — it was a place of cultural vibrancy, environmental leadership, and civil liberty. Here is what we're fighting to get back.

The Environment

- Florida once led the nation in environmental protection. The Everglades restoration project — the largest in U.S. history — was a bipartisan achievement Florida was proud of.
- Under DeSantis, Florida removed the phrase 'climate change' from state energy policy in 2023. The state that faces perhaps the greatest direct threat from rising seas officially stopped planning for it.
- Red tide, algae blooms, and water quality crises have worsened. The \$700 million in environmental land acquisition funding that existed under previous administrations has been redirected.

Education

- Florida was once home to nationally recognized public schools and one of the most respected state university systems in the country.
- HB 1069 (2023) gutted classroom instruction on race, gender, and sexuality. Teachers report avoiding entire subjects out of fear of prosecution.
- New College of Florida, once a nationally ranked liberal arts institution, was taken over by DeSantis appointees and transformed — faculty were fired, enrollment collapsed, and its accreditation was put under review.
- The State Board of Education now controls what books can be in school libraries, what teachers can say, and what history can be taught.

Civil Rights and LGBTQ+ Protections

- Florida municipalities including Miami, Orlando, and Tampa had robust anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ+ residents.

- The 'Don't Say Gay' law (HB 1557) eliminated classroom discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in early grades, later expanded to all grades.
- The Stop WOKE Act attempted to restrict how race could be discussed in workplaces and universities. Federal courts repeatedly struck it down as unconstitutional.

Democracy and Voting

- Florida's independent elections office — once a model for other states — was dismantled. DeSantis created a dedicated election police force, the first in the country.
- New voting restrictions targeted drop boxes, mail-in ballot requests, and third-party voter registration groups — organizations that helped register hundreds of thousands of Floridians.
- A 2023 law made it harder to get citizen initiatives on the ballot, a direct response to Floridians who successfully voted to restore felon voting rights in 2018.

The Press and Free Speech

- Florida passed SB 1220 in 2023, making it easier for public figures to sue media organizations — a law widely seen as designed to chill journalism critical of DeSantis.
- The 'Stop WOKE' Act prohibited certain types of speech in university classrooms. Federal judges called it a First Amendment violation.
- Protesters in Florida now face enhanced criminal penalties under HB 1 (2021), passed after racial justice demonstrations in 2020.

The Florida we're fighting for is real — it existed, and it can exist again. Every election is a chance to take it back.