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# War on the Bay: Determining the Existence of Watershed Moments within the Shipyards in Tampa, Florida during World War II

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WAR ON THE BAY: DETERMINING THE EXISTENCE OF WATERSHED MOMENTS WITHIN THE SHIPYARDS IN TAMPA, FLORIDA DURING WORLD WAR II

by

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# ABSTRACT

With the Great Depression on one side and prosperity on the other, historians of World War II have debated its effects on American society and have asked if it represented a watershed moment. While the war clearly disrupted American life and opened new opportunities for many, its role as a transformative event remains contested. This examination of the Tampa shipyards utilizes the theoretical and methodological lenses of social history to facilitate an analysis based on a chronological approach. This analysis centers on the situation in Tampa before, during, and after World War II, and in doing so it assesses the historiographical question of the existence of watershed moments, at a micro-scale level, on the shipyards within Tampa, Florida, during World War II.

To my Family and Friends

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# LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

CED: Committee for Economic Development

EDC: Economic Development Committee of Hillsborough County

NAACP: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

PWA: Public Works Administration

TASCO: Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company

USSR: United Soviet Socialist Republic

WPA: Works Progress Administration

# INTRODUCTION: WATERSHEDS AND SHIPYARDS

When Mildred Crow-Sargent recalled her time working in the shipyards during World War II, she spoke fondly of her job and gave some insights into the future that she wanted in the postwar era: "It was a role that everybody enjoyed and looked forward to mostly, but there were other roles that women wanted to play. I wanted to be an oculist…"[1] Nolin Johnson, an African American living in Tampa at the start of the war recalled joining a labor union and achieving higher pay through his membership: "they did have a teamsters union and did let them got in that. But that's far as they could get, but where the money was. That there wasn't but $.75, but that was good…"[2]

These two examples suggest, but do not explicitly state that World War II transformed Tampa; that there was a "before" and "after," with a pivotal shift in social and economic relationships—a watershed moment when gender and race relations entered a new realm in social and labor history. Using Tampa as a case study, this thesis argues that while changes in the lives of individuals, some that they viewed as transformative in their personal lives, the power structure that defined work, race, and gender remained firmly in place. Indeed, political and economic elites used the wartime demands to maintain and enhance the racial and gender hierarchy that defined Tampa and the South.

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[1] Mildred Crow-Sargent, interview by Lisa Craft, March 24, 1999, Reichelt Program of Oral History, Florida State University.

[2] Nolin Johnson Oral History, March 21, 1978, Box 10 (Oral History Transcripts Hargrett - Patterson), Folder: Interviews- Transcripts- Johnson, Nolan [Nolin], USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Project, USF Special Collections, Tampa, Florida; The transcribed oral history with Nolin Johnson was conducted by Otis Anthony as part of a sprawling project about the Black experience in the state of Florida during the early twentieth century. The project and its contents were later turned over to the University of South Florida Department of Anthropology for permanent keeping. Housed within the university's Special Collections department, the project is now known as the *USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Project.*

## The City of Tampa

Tampa, Florida has a rich history that predates its official founding in 1887; however, this thesis is concerned with the history of the city roughly during the first half of the twentieth century and is centered on the events leading up to, during, and after World War II. Preceding World War II, Tampa was in a derelict condition; still reeling from the Great Depression, the city lacked any firm base in industry or manufacturing; the once prominent cigar industry was waning as cigars fell out of favor and the depression affected demand. [3] New Deal programs enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave the city its first opportunities for economic improvement. With assistance from the Public Works Administration, the shipbuilding industry was reignited just before World War II, after having been dormant in the interwar period. After the outbreak of war, shipbuilding became the largest industry and largest employer in Tampa. Manufacturing helped the city's economy thrive as these industries employed the most Tampans, and they introduced much needed money into their pockets. Tampa also experienced the effects of exponential growth due to the military interest in Florida; they found that Florida was perfect for training in all sectors of the military because of its mild climate, flat land, and unparalleled ocean access. The influx of both laborers and military personnel created several crises as the city attempted to accommodate those who arrived. Attempts to quell these crises were often incomplete, inadequate, discriminatory, and dangerous.

## Scope, Research Questions, and Methodology

This thesis asks whether shipyard workers in Tampa experienced lasting and transformative beneficial changes to their livelihoods as a result of World War II, as well as where does this analysis fit within the larger historiography based around the same primary question applied to various scales and locales. With consideration of the established historiography, this thesis focuses on the lasting impact

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[3] Elna C. Green, "Relief from Relief: The Tampa Sewing-Room Strike of 1937 and the Right to Welfare," *Journal of American History* 95, no 4 (2009): 1017.

that World War II had on Tampa, Florida. Using an analysis based on a before, during, and after

structure, this thesis asks whether wartime changes in Tampa had the qualities that, under the

established historiographical definitions, classify them as watershed moments. Secondarily, this thesis

places this micro-scale analysis of Tampa within the established macro-scale historiographies that have

assessed the same primary question at differing scales, and differing locations. This thesis utilizes a rich

source base of oral histories, organizational records, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and census

data among others to facilitate a "history from below" perspective representative of social history. Just

as the historiography of watershed moments has moved away from the national scale analyses, so too

did many historians move away from broad analyses and works on those who were politically,

economically, or socially elite.

## Watershed Moments

In the 1970s, the historiography of the World War II American home front experienced a shift

toward the incorporation of social history. This historiography was based upon new interpretations of

the war as historians looked back upon the conflict to assess its impact at home and abroad. Books such

as Studs Terkel's 1984 *The Good War* represented the establishment of this new wave of thinking

regarding the legacy of World War II that focused on societal perspectives rather than prominent figures

and events.[4] Another work of this period of historical analysis is Allan Winkler's 1986 *Home Front USA*,

which is central to this thesis. In his work, Winkler applied the concept of watershed moments, which

has continued to influence World War II historical thought.[5]

Many historians have staked an argument that watershed moments occurred in some capacity.

This thesis understands a watershed moment as one that is lasting and transformative to an extent that

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[4] Studs Terkel, *The Good War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

[5] Allan M. Winkler, *Home Front USA: America during World War II* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1986).

it becomes a critical point regarding events that follow. However, change is ambiguous and watershed moments could be defined as both detrimental or beneficial. Expanding on the ambiguity of change, definitions of change and watershed moments must be adapted to and understood within the context of certain groups. Change was not an equal occurrence among the groups of this thesis. The following historiography leads toward a general uncertainty of the validity of watershed moments as a concept. Regardless this thesis will look for scenarios that could be considered watersheds. To propose the occurrence of watershed moments within certain analyses, historians such as Winkler assessed the impact of the war on multiple aspects of domestic life during and after the war. Historians of the legacy of World War II have understood that the war may have produced catalysts for change on the home front that dramatically affected the nation for decades following the war and disrupted the status quo. Winkler applied this to the American home front by examining evidence that the war had directly or indirectly produced such lasting and transformative changes. Winkler was not the first examine watershed moments in this context; historians have cited evidence that defended, amended, or refuted this assertion of the war as a transformative moment before his work in the 1980s. Historians like William Chafe initially supported the existence of watershed moments but later amended his assertion; others like Karen Anderson, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti provide strong evidence against the existence of watershed moments.[6]

  The intersection of watershed moment analyses and American labor historiography was a reinvigoration of several earlier analyses on the lasting impact of World War II. The early wave of scholarship on the legacy of World War II American labor emerged in the 1950s and early 1960s in the

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   [6] William H. Chafe, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Karen Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press,1981); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked: A Historical Overview*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981); Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply: A Reassessment of the Role of World War II on Women's Labor Supply," *The American Economic Review* 103, no. 3, (2013).

work of Joel Seidman, and Richard Lester. They viewed the American labor experience as a great success,

arguing that the war strengthened unions with increased membership, patriotism, and stable

relationships with their respective presiding governments.[7]

However, in 1982, labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein countered the prevailing notion of

American labor's great success during World War II with the argument that the carefully crafted labor

force assembled during the war became increasingly ignorant of the political powers that influenced

their livelihoods in the postwar years. Essentially, laborers became distanced from the necessary activism

that maintained the fair labor market of their jobs.[8] Following this scholarship, American labor

historiography began to change when new lenses and methodologies were introduced in response to

criticisms from scholars like Joan Scott, who highlighted the prevailing scholarship that focused solely on

white men. Scott called for the application of gender and race as lenses in the analyses of American

history.[9] Thus, more secondary literature began to focus on groups previously excluded from American

historical literature.

The intersection of watershed moment analyses and gender history is among the most divisive.

Some historians agreed with Winkler's position regarding watershed moments. In 1991, William Chafe

stated that World War II provided new employment opportunities for women, both during and after the

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[7] Joel Seidman, *American Labor: From Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); and Richard Lester, *As Unions Mature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958).

[8] Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Also see Timothy Willard, "Labor and the National War Labor Board, 1942-1945: An Experiment in Corporatist Wage Stabilization" (dissertation, University of Toledo, 1984); Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994); David A. Horowitz, *Beyond Left and Right: Insurgency and the Establishment* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[9] Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 31 (1987): 1–13.

war, which could alter their economic standing.[10] Chafe's position came with conditions however, all of which were the bases of arguments against watershed moments raised by earlier historians. Thus, Chafe and Winkler were in contrast with these historians.

Karen Anderson's 1981 book *Wartime Women* weighed the changes introduced by World War II in relation to the events which followed at the beginning of peacetime. Anderson found that women were more often than not compelled to relinquish the newfound opportunities and roles they had attained during the war years.[11] In 1981, Alice Kessler-Harris dismantled the crux of watershed moments concerning women's roles by explaining that women had always worked. She ascertained that a set of societal changes operating in a cyclical pattern had determined what was traditionally defined as "women's work," and that this pattern had shifted away from manufacturing factory-based employment, towards domestic home duties in the decades preceding World War II. Essentially, women attaining certain employment positions because of the war was neither a novel idea nor the first iteration of women working in general.[12]

In 2013, historians Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti assessed the impact that World War II had on women's labor in America. They acknowledged the initially dominant perspective, one that pushed watershed moments regarding women laborers, while also examining the revisionist perspective that such changes cited as watershed moments were not truly transformative and did not exist in perpetuity.[13] Goldin and Olivetti analyzed both perspectives and found each conditionally plausible. Women who entered traditionally blue-collar positions often found themselves excluded from those

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[10] Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*, 152.

[11] Anderson, *Wartime Women*, 175.

[12] Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked.*

[13] Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply," 257-62.

positions after the conclusion of the war; however, women who entered traditionally white-collar positions tended to remain in their positions after the war.[14]

Indeed, even pioneers of watershed moment analyses reproached the subject matter as it intersected with gender history, with critiques and conditions in mind. Winkler acknowledged the work of others regarding watershed moments, noting that not all was well for women after the war: "Some pointed out that in the pursuit of victory, the United States occasionally failed to live up to its own democratic principles . . . it denied women full equality in both private employment and military service."[15] Chafe meanwhile offered a conditional basis for his claims, stating that real change was dependent, in part, on women maintaining their newfound employment after the close of the war.[16] These issues within the historiography moved scholars to consider regional variations within watershed moment analyses.

Similar to the scholarship on the intersection of watershed moment analyses and gender history, scholarship regarding whether African Americans experienced watershed moments goes back several decades and is certainly not uniform. Several historians have shed light on the evolution of this scholarship, and its role within watershed moment analyses. In 2002, Andrew E. Kersten explained that historians who first analyzed the roles of African Americans found that their wartime experience constituted the definition as a watershed, which brought about advancements in labor, political policy, and social activism. However, Kersten concluded that they often had their wartime advancements

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[14] Goldin and Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply," 257-62.

[15] Allan M. Winkler, "From the Editor: The Homefront Experience during World War II," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 3–4. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163517.

[16] Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*, 152.

stripped away after the war. Kersten went on, stating that not all African Americans benefitted universally from wartime changes, and some found themselves excluded from positive changes.[17]

In 1991, David Roediger introduced the historical dichotomy between white and Black laborers in America, focusing on the struggle of Black labor during World War II and after.[18] His work can be interpreted as a counter to watershed moments; he cited continued difficulties for Black laborers as they were pitted against their white counterparts. Considering this, any transformative change which may have occurred for them during the war was certainly overshadowed in Roediger's research.

The historical consensus coincides with a lack of transformative change enough for watershed moments; however, changes that did occur for African Americans were not ignored. In 2010, Neil A. Wynn's book *The African American Experience during World War II*, acknowledged the wartime changes while pointing out that they were not entirely transformative, watershed moments. Wynn largely classified the wartime experience for Black Americans as separate from transformative changes that characterized the Civil Rights movement. He concluded that the war was best understood as a period that spurred the hopes for equality in the future.[19]

The historiography of Florida, and more specifically Tampa, during World War II mirrors the national historiography in many respects and contains a fair amount of contention. The scholarship on

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[17] Andrew E. Kersten, "African Americans and World War II," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3, (2002), 13-7; Also see Gary Mormino, "Gi Joe Meets Jim Crow: Racial Violence and Reform in World War II Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (1994); Catherine Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," *Tampa Bay History* 17, no. 1 (1995); James A. Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire: African Americans and Florida's System of Labor during World War II," *Sunland Tribune* 19 (1993); and Allan M. Winkler, "From the Editor: The Homefront Experience during World War II," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 3 (2002).

[18] David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class,* (New York: Verso, 1991).

[19] Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

Florida exists as a dichotomy between two differing positions. There is the discussion among historians

centering on the beneficial changes that evolved during World War II versus the acknowledgement of

adverse effects. Recent works helped define beneficial changes brought with the war like the vast

increase in manufacturing especially in shipbuilding, which helped shed the state of its conservative

nature and bring it into a modern era.[20] These historians also stressed the vital importance of the state

as part of the war effort both in manufacturing and military training. Stacy Lynn Tanner maintained that

World War II ended the Great Depression.[21] Other historians like Ellen Babb and Susan O'Brien Culp also

noted beneficial changes; each cited the increase in involvement for women in traditionally male held

employment positions.[22]

Opposition to this beneficial narrative emerged throughout the 1990s; in doing so historians

have highlighted how the war had both beneficial and adverse effects. While Tanner, Babb, and Culp

cited beneficial changes, other historians such as Gary Mormino, Catherine Féré, and James A. Schnur

highlighted increased racial discrimination throughout World War II toward Black Americans within the

systems of labor and wartime legal practices.[23] Lewis N. Wynne also cited the lack of transformative

change, referring to opposition to unionization which increased in the immediate aftermath of the war.[24]

He and Carolyn Barnes also argued that the support for unions in Tampa was temporary, and reverted

[20] Nick Wynne and Rick Moorhead, *Florida in World War II: Floating Fortress* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2011).

[21] Stacy Lynn Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice: Tampa Shipyard Workers in World War II," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 85, no 4 (2007): 423.

[22] Ellen J. Babb, "Women and War: St. Petersburg Women during World War II," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (1994): 43-61; Susan O'Brien Culp, "For the Duration: Women's Roles in St. Petersburg and Tampa During World War II," *Tampa Bay History* 17, no. 1 (1995).

[23] Mormino, "Gi Joe Meets Jim Crow," 23-42; Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II,"; and Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire," 1-10.

[24] Lewis N. Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," *Sunland Tribune* 16 (1990): 12.

after the war.[25] Additionally, Tanner maintained that while the course of World War II saw many women and Black Americans enter employment in previously exclusive positions, widespread notions of race and gender were not altered.[26] In his dissertation on Tampa, Alan J. Bliss, posited that the lack of progress for many Black residents during the New Deal shaped their perceptions of the war years: "For the region's blacks, the benefits of the New Deal were more rhetorical than tangible."[27] Thus, the adverse effects of the war numbered beyond the beneficial effects.

As the national historiography evolved with its own divisive nature, historians advocated for more regional and local analyses. Work among historians continues to attempt to fulfill this request; however, to date, no extensive application of watershed moments has been made to an analysis of Tampa, Florida. This thesis addresses that issue and provides a micro-scale analysis of the city. In doing so, this thesis can determine whether there were transformative enough changes to constitute watershed moments.

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[25] Lewis N. Wynne and Carolyn J. Barnes, "Still They Sail: Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," in *Florida at* War, ed. Lewis N. Wynne (Saint Leo, Florida: Saint Leo College Press, 1993), 100.

[26] Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice," 432.

[27] Alan J. Bliss, "Making A Sunbelt Place: Tampa, Florida, 1923-1964," (dissertation, University of Florida, 2010), 101.

# CHAPTER ONE: A HEAD START TO HARD TIMES

"The bread line often proves to be the dead line . . . There was no escape. Uncontrollable circumstances shoved him on toward the bread line . . . With poverty's bony hand clutching him, he had to fall in line."[28] "The Public Works Administration is 'just about broke.' . . . It is a question how long the program can be maintained. The problem now is how to get more money, if there is any more to get."[29] These examples taken from a Tampa newspaper highlight the poor conditions that many in Tampa faced throughout the Great Depression, a period of economic collpase that began in the 1920s.

## From Boom to Bust

While the crash of the stock market on October 29, 1929, heralded the beginning of the Great Depression for much of the United States, Florida was already experiencing its own difficulties that had begun several years prior. The 1920s are noteworthy for the prosperous years of exponential growth for the state. Additionally, the attractive natural qualities of Florida's landscape became increasingly apparent to anyone who wanted the milder climate away from the harsh winters of the northern United States. With these conditions and access to credit, land brokers began selling immense tracts of empty land, deftly divided into individual plots, to unsuspecting buyers hundreds or even thousands of miles away; to further expedite the process, sales were posted largely through newspaper advertisements. However, the cunning nature of this process was that the newspaper columns that advertised these plots were often vague and misleading; many buyers who thought that they had purchased a piece of Florida's untouched natural beauty and a ticket to their own paradise, found that they were now in possession of a muck-ridden plot unsuitable for any manner of inhabitance or development. Much akin to the financial greater fool theory which operates on the basis of overvalued assets being sold at increasingly higher

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[28] *Tampa Tribune* (Tampa, Fl)*,* July 20, 1934.

[29] *Tampa Tribune* (Tampa, Fl), July 20, 1934.

prices for financial gain, land like this was wildly overvalued and sold off to buyers with the goal of

making immense profits. Though there were unsuspecting buyers who wanted the land to live on, many

of the buyers of these falsely advertised properties were not obtaining them with the intention of

developing the land for their personal use, but rather to resell them at an even higher price point,

hoping for a quick profit.[30] They were in pursuit of a greater fool; essentially, Florida was a goldmine.

Historian Gregg M. Turner analyzed the speculative nature of Florida's land boom; concluded

that the state became the next nationwide frenzy for quick cash. Turner detailed how the boom was

instrumental in the population growth and the creation of cities that would later define Floridian

opulence.[31] Henry Knight compared the allure of Florida with that of California, both sites that "sold" the

Edenic dream of a "natural" paradise. As his research indicates, however, the realization of the Florida

paradise was for whites with money to spare. African Americans were largely limited to socially accepted

roles as cooks, domestics, hotel janitorial staff, or other positions that supported the lavish lifestyles of

new residents and tourists.[32] Christopher Knowlton focused on land speculation and its contribution to

the collapse of the land boom and the Great Depression. As investors arrived from across the country

with the intention to make a profit flipping land, speculation became unsteady and undesirable,

especially when hurricanes threatened to break the fragility of the real estate ecosystem. With so many

involved in the boom, the collapse had nationwide ramifications that factored into the Great

Depression.[33]

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[30] James C. Clark, *A Concise History of Florida* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2014), 155-64, 182-8.

[31] Gregg M. Turner, *The Florida Land Boom of the 1920s,* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2015).

[32] Henry Knight, Tropic of Hopes: California, Florida, and the Selling of American Paradise, 1869-1929 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).

[33] Christopher Knowlton, *Bubble in the Sun: The Florida Land Boom of the 1920s and How It Brought on the Great Depression*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Those who played the land game in Florida faced a formidable natural opponent; buying into the

game came with a catch, some of the harshest widespread weather phenomena naturally occurring in

the United States: hurricanes. The Great Miami hurricane of 1926, with 150 mile per hour winds, ripped

across the southern Florida peninsula, making landfall around Miami and leaving a swath of devastation

in its wake. Striking under the cover of night, the storm destroyed homes and structures throughout the

southern portion of the state; some of those most affected were surrounding Lake Okeechobee where

storm surge from the lake destroyed earthen barriers and took the lives of poor workers whose houses

provided no protection from the deluge.[34] By that point, land prices had started declining; in 1925, many

Floridians worried that the boom was nearing its end. Bad press fed this worry as well when reports of

the widespread fraudulent land sales and over encumbered state infrastructure appeared in northern

newspapers.  By the time the 1926 hurricane dealt its damage, land prices had already fallen into a

decline, the storm merely dealt the killing blow.[35] Additionally, Knowlton recognized the significant role

that the devasting hurricane in 1926 had on the collapse of the boom.[36]

The state economy was weakened prior to the 1926 hurricane with the outbreak of an epidemic

of smallpox in several cities in Florida. The outbreak was first reported in Tampa in January 1926 with

seven cases and by the close of that month, there were 122 cases in the city.[37] Poor responses to the

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[34] Knowlton, *Bubble in the Sun;* Eric Jarvis, "'Secrecy Has No Excuse': The Florida Land Boom, Tourism, and the 1926 Smallpox Epidemic in Tampa and Miami," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 89, no 3 (2011): 321; Clark, *A Concise History of Florida*, 182-8; Bliss, "Making A Sunbelt Place," 44. Based on the currently used Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale, this storm was the equivalent of a strong category 4 hurricane. The required wind speed for a category 5 classification is 157 miles per hour, a relatively small deviation from the recorded intensity.

[35] Jarvis, "'Secrecy Has No Excuse,'" 321; Knowlton, *Bubble in the Sun.*

[36]  Knowlton, *Bubble in the Sun.*

[37] Jarvis, "'Secrecy Has No Excuse,'" 330.

outbreak and widespread failure to curtail the transmission of the disease led to further criticisms from

northern locales. Local governments throughout the state wished to maintain the attractive aura of

Florida to assure a steady stream of tourists to aid the economy and downplayed the crisis.[38]

What little hope remained for the continuation of the land boom was further eliminated in 1928

when another hurricane struck south Florida with near identical intensity to that of the 1926 hurricane.

The Okeechobee hurricane of 1928 struck further north than the 1926 hurricane, this time making

landfall around West Palm Beach; the storm had a much more direct effect on the lowland farming

regions around Lake Okeechobee. Again, poor farmers in ill-equipped shelters were killed when flood

waters rose. Death estimates ranged into the thousands and total casualties into the tens of thousands.[39]

These hurricanes were effectively the death of the land boom in Florida; for investors seeking to sell

land, there was no longer a greater fool waiting to buy.

With the land boom over, state and local officials clung to the traditional economic drivers: citrus

and cattle, on the Peninsula, and cotton and tobacco in the Panhandle. But these industries all had

varying degrees of issues in the late 1920s that contributed to a worsening of the Florida economy.

Cotton prices had fallen after the end of World War I when demand decreased, and they continued to

decrease with the Great Depression.[40] Cotton acreage dropped from 110,562 acres statewide in 1919, to

88,181 acres in 1924. The citrus industry met a similar fate in early 1929 when infestations of

Mediterranean fruit flies were found in Orange County and soon appeared in every major grove in the

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[38] Jarvis, "'Secrecy Has No Excuse,'" 344-5.

[39] Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 24; Eliot Kleinberg, *Black Cloud: The Great Hurricane of 1928* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); for more context on the 1928 hurricane, see Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1937).

[40] Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 65.

state.[41] The 1928-1929 Florida citrus season produced 27,806,000 boxes of citrus or approximately

1,251,270 tons. By the 1929-1930 citrus season, production had fallen to 18,108,000 boxes or

approximately 814,860 tons. In Hillsborough County where citrus was a principal crop, production had

fallen to a mere 141,600 tons.[42] As the center for banks serving citrus producing counties, Tampa's

Citizen's Bank and Trust faced liquidity issues as citrus prices plummeted and rural depositors panicked.

Runs on local banks produced demands on the Tampa institution that brought the bank to near collapse.

It was only saved by an infusion of cash from the Atlanta Branch of the Federal Reserve System.[43]

During the 1926-1927 season, Hillsborough County had 33,467 acres in cultivation, while not as

much as other more agrarian counties like Alachua County, it was still higher than many other counties;

roughly 4% of the county was farmland; Hillsborough was in the same range of farm acreage as Bay,

Bradford, Brevard, Dade, Palm Beach, Santa Rosa, Sumter, Union, Walton, and Washington counties.[44]

Tampa's agricultural significance was enhanced by its location as a port city. Tampa was heavily involved

in the processing, packing, and marketing of goods. Though Tampa and Hillsborough County were not

nearly as entrenched in the cultivation of crops as other counties in Florida, the location of Tampa

proved to be extremely useful for the export of agricultural products. Whether by ship, rail, or truck,

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[41] James Padgett, "Rebuilt and Remade: The Florida Citrus Industry, 1909-1939," (Thesis: University of Central Florida), 41; Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 25.

[42] Bliss, "Making A Sunbelt Place," 45. This statistic includes citrus and other agricultural products as well.

[43] Lesley Mace, "Currency, Credit, Crisis, and Cuba: The Fed's Early History in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 94, no. 2 (Fall 2015: 236-240.

[44] Department of Agriculture of the State of Florida and Nathan Mayo, "Approximate Area in Acres, etc," in *Nineteenth Census of Crops and Manufacturers for the Years 1926-1927* (1927), 8.

Tampa was an integral hub for citrus and other agricultural products.[45] Thus, as agricultural crises occurred, Tampa was affected along with the more agrarian counties of the state.

While the city had experienced population growth until the 1930s, the hard times proved too tumultuous to keep that trend alive; Tampa's population had risen from 94,743 to 101,161, between 1925 and 1930, followed by a period of stagnation and slight population decline to 100,151 by 1935. On a county level, approximately 19 percent of the population was African American.[46] Throughout the 1930s, Tampans dealt with the hard times in varying ways. Disparities between genders and races became increasingly apparent and struggles for equal pay and the ability to unionize became fiercely contested issues among laborers. In the early 1930s there simply was not enough work to go around; while formerly prominent industries like the shipyards were still physically present, they sat idle; Tampa's shipyards had been vital during World War I, but collapsed when the war ended and contracts were withdrawn.[47] It was not until President Franklin D. Roosevelt's time in office that the shipbuilding industry in Tampa would make its rebound.

### Relieving a Stricken City

Prior to Roosevelt's New Deal, the inaction of President Herbert Hoover led many local governments to implement their own relief programs. Florida could not offer direct assistance to those in need but the state made concessions for county governments to offer mothers' pensions although the

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[45] Joe Knetsch and Laura Ethridge, "A Brief Outline of the Agricultural History of Hillsborough County: 1880-1940," *Sunland Tribune* 19, (1993).

[46] Florida Department of Agriculture and Nathan Mayo, "The Fifth Census of the State of Florida taken in the year 1925" (1926), 76-77; Florida Department of Agriculture and Nathan Mayo, "The Sixth Census of the State of Florida" (1935), 78, 88.

[47] Joe Knetsch and Pamela Gibson, *Florida in World War I* (Charleston, South Carolina: The History Press, 2021), 119.

legislature allocated no money to implement the local programs.[48] County-organized relief programs,

created with local tax funds, had very little money. Fortunately for Tampans, Hillsborough County did

offer relief in the form of work; however, those in need could only receive relief work assignments on

few days per week in order to serve as many unemployed workers as possible. The nature of the Florida

economy, with its heavy reliance on agriculture and winter tourism, meant that much of the work was

seasonal. Relief work was an unreliable source of income, assignments could vanish only the next day.[49]

Existing records do not fully explain the various work assignments that local relief programs offered.

Relief programs had a different effect on African Americans who often worked for meager pay

and were usually assigned to do menial tasks. In Hillsborough County, where citrus was grown, Black

workers were typically hired at low wages to pick fruit; however, as a seasonal crop, pickers could only

work during part of the year. African Americans faced many challenges in Tampa as Florida perpetuated

a harsh history of violence against them. In addition to the vast inequalities of the Jim Crow South, Black

Tampans faced the vigilante justice of white supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, which

included intimidation, loss of jobs and housing, beatings, and lynching. Florida had the distinction of

being the state with the highest per capita rate of lynchings in the nation.[50] Violence toward African

Americans was also perpetuated by police as brutality was often dismissed by officials. Decades of this

treatment would later influence some of the events discussed later during the war. As tensions ran high,

race relations reached a boiling point.[51]

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[48] "A Summary of Federal Relief in Florida," *Florida social Welfare Review* 1 (1935): 7; Emma O. Lundberg, *Mothers' Pensions in Florida, 1933* (Tallahassee, 1934), 5-6, 24; Green, "Relief from Relief," 1018-9.

[49] Green, "Relief from Relief," 1014.

[50] Stewart E. Tolney and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

Tameka Bradley Hobbs discussed the harsh system of vigilante justice that persevered in rural

areas of Florida despite the advocacy of Florida governor John Martin in opposition to violence against

African Americans. Hobbs detailed the horrendous punishments that African Americans faced that often

led to their deaths. Notably, Hobbs discussed the transition of Black targeted violence from open and

public to private mob perpetration. Hobbs also details how the ongoing conflict of World War II and the

hypocrisy of racial violence did somewhat force local and state polices to attempt to eliminate lynchings.,

yet violence still occurred. Notably, Hobbs's shift in focus to more secretive lynchings away from the

public eye helps explain how violence against African Americans continued and was difficult to combat.[52]

Robert P. Ingalls argued that vigilantism was the product of the desire to maintain the status quo

of the South. He focused on Tampa as an example of "Old South" sentiments representing the power

structure. Ingalls further delved into the legacy of slavery and the lasting impact that its power structure

had on the power structure of Tampa into the twentieth century. According to Ingalls, the dichotomy

between whites and African Americans into the twentieth century had to do with "Old South" notions of

honor and violence and racism remained as a legacy of the plantation hegemony of slaveowners over

enslaved workers.[53] What the above historians all have described can be attributed to the state of race

relations in Florida in the immediate prewar years. African Americans in Tampa already had odds stacked

against them going into the harsh economic conditions of the Great Depression.

African Americans who came to Tampa in search of work often moved between several jobs

because racism and wages below a life-sustaining level made employment tenuous. Nolin Johnson, a

Black Tampan described his work experience in an oral history archived at the University of South

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[52] Tameka Bradley Hobbs, *Democracy Abroad, Lynching At Home: Racial Violence in Florida,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015).

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

Florida. Nolin Johnson was born in South Carolina on February 1, 1899, in an era in which slavery was still a painful memory in living minds. He came to Florida in 1922, arriving in Tampa in 1925 where he got a job working for the railroads at the Coastline Freight House. Johnson was subjected to discrimination on the part of his white coworkers and superiors, and his time with the freight company did not last long. Johnson recounted an altercation that led to his departure from the freight company which began when Johnson was questioned about who he worked with. His railroad gang leader was a white man that he only referred to as Roy; he conveyed the same to the man asking. The man became irate that Johnson did not properly call his gang leader mister, as the man had expected him to do so. Johnson was chased from the premises after this incident while racist obscenities were hurled at him, and threats of physical violence were made. Following the confrontation, Johnson left the Coastline Freight House, as an example of the power dynamics in the workplace, his remaining pay was withheld from him for several days following his departure.[54]

Johnson's experience is representative of the experiences of countless other Black inhabitants of the city. Struggling to find employment, Johnson participated in some illicit activities to help make ends meet, but the sale of moonshine and bolitas could only do so much.[55] During President Hoover's time in office, Johnson recalled an opportunity for relief work in Tampa. His narration provides a vividly detailed example of how local relief programs worked and what it was like for Black Tampans to obtain work. Relief work took the form of a variety of tasks but as a Black man, Johnson was often assigned to cut bushes and trees in the woods, a backbreaking task performed under adverse environmental conditions and characterized by frequent, sometimes debilitating, accidents.

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[54] Oral History with Nolin Johnson

[55] Bolitas are similar to how modern lottery systems work with a series of numbered balls being drawn; bets were placed on which number would be drawn. The practice was illegal but could be found throughout the city.

Relief work operated within the paradigm of white supremacy and included a pay disparity

between Black laborers and their white counterparts. Johnson and other Black laborers were paid $1.25

per day for the relief work whereas their white counterparts were paid $1.50 per day for the same work.

However, the work itself was only half of the battle for Black Tampans like Johnson. As was mentioned

previously relief work could be obtained for only a few days of the week in order to provide for as many

workers as possible; in Johnson's case it was only two days of the week. At the end of each work day,

laborers waited in lines to collect their money for the work they had done. For Johnson, the YMCA on

Cass Street was the location where he collected his money, which was handed out in fifty-cent

increments. Johnson recalled that late-arriving white laborers cut into the line ahead of Black laborers

who were already waiting in line.[56] Johnson's narrative illuminates the lived experience of Black Tampans

under local relief programs: the limited funding embedded in local power structures and community

racial discrimination practices. The presence of acute need did not alter the ideology and practice of

white supremacy. If anything, it made poor whites more aware of the fragility of their own position and

more ready to defend their right to work, even at the lowest positions.

## The New Deal Comes to Tampa

Local relief programs had their own set of issues yet work like this was a godsend for the people

of Tampa. However, when President Roosevelt entered office he began implementing the various

programs of his New Deal. Local relief was likely funded, at least in part, by Roosevelt's Federal

Emergency Relief Administration beginning in 1933; after 1935 work gradually became replaced by new

jobs from the Works Progress Administration, hereafter referred to as the WPA. By 1935, the WPA

employed thousands of Tampans of all races and genders; however, not without its own issues and

controversies.

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[56] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

Employment of white men remained the primary focus of federal relief programs, but the WPA became a major employer of Tampan women in need of incomes. WPA guidelines for employment for women followed traditional gender expectations and often focused on training and jobs in sewing rooms, typically located in disused factories that once produced other goods like cigars. In the mid-1930s over one thousand Tampa women worked in these sewing rooms while others found work as nurses, teachers, librarians, or cafeteria workers.[57] However, women's employment under the WPA was restricted by predominant race and gender expectations and later by actual WPA rules. Bureaucrats restricted more than one member from the same family from working under the WPA; this excluded many women whose husbands already worked under the program's broad umbrella of employment. If women were married, they were not allowed to apply for WPA work, with no consideration to any particular circumstantial needs.[58] Throughout its run, the WPA never truly embraced women as part of the workforce; they offered women classes in traditionally recognized "women's work" like baby care and homemaking.[59] However, when women could work under the WPA, their pay was less than that of men. Understanding the inequality, the sewing room women struck; one prominent strike on July 8, 1937, saw four hundred women leave their sewing positions and perform a sit in strike to highlight their unfair treatment and pay.[60] This action did gather the attention of the community as a large scale effort to protest their working conditions, yet their intentions were overzealous in scale such that it led to end of the strike. The women failed to garner the support of their fellow workers and ended their strike after

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[57] James Francis Tidd, "Stitching and Striking: WPA Sewing Rooms and the 1937 Relief Strike in Hillsborough County," *Tampa Bay History* 11 (1989)"; Green, "Relief from Relief"; Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 142.

[58] Green, "Relief from Relief," 1021.

[59] "WPA Will Conduct Classes in Dress Designing in Tampa," *Tampa Tribune* (Tampa, FL), February 6, 1936, 4; Green, "Relief from Relief," 1025.

[60] Tidd, "Stitching and Striking," 1, 7-8.

four days after some women declined to continue the strike citing the need for their pay.[61] Historian Elna

C. Green argued that the 1937 sewing room strike was representative of union illiteracy among relief

workers and a lack of widespread unionization acceptance.[62] The WPA also experienced serious issues

with delays in payments that ranged in severity from a few days to several weeks. This caused unrest

among WPA workers beyond women; a three-week delay in pay checks caused a riot of four hundred

workers in Tampa.[63] Available records do not indicate the cause of the delay in payments, however, local

newspapers before this period were commenting on the failure of the WPA to pay.[64] Black women

working for the WPA had issues with the relief system as well; often officials for the program cooperated

with white laborers when issues arose, but when Black women raised their concerns, their positions

among the sewing rooms were eliminated.[65]

By 1935, New Deal programs began to have an effect and the predominant industries of the

state had rebounded from their crises of the late 1920s. At that time, many in Tampa were directly

reliant on the federal government through the WPA. However, another New Deal program founded two

years prior, the Public Works Administration, hereafter referred to as the PWA, offered another lifeline to

the city by means of the revival of its shipping and shipbuilding industries. Nationwide, the American

shipbuilding industry had only constructed two cargo vessels between 1922 and 1935. When considered

with the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, which enabled American shipbuilders to compete within the

global market more easily, the PWA had the ability to drastically change that.

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[61] Tidd, "Stitching and Striking,"; Green, "Relief from Relief,"; Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 141-146.

[62] Green, "Relief from Relief," 1037.

[63] Tidd, "Stitching and Striking," 3.

[64] *Tampa Tribune* (Tampa, Fl), July 20, 1934.

[65] Green, "Relief from Relief," 1027.

In 1938, Ernest Kreher obtained a PWA loan for $750,000 to return the shipbuilding industry to the city.[66] Kreher used the money to construct a drydock and take on an $8 million contract for the construction of four cargo vessels. This process was not without issue; Kreher battled the PWA for years to obtain the money necessary to restore the shipbuilding industry to the city. Kreher had originally come into possession of the Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company in 1917, then called the Tampa Foundry and Machine Works, when he acquired the remaining holdings of the previous owner. Five years elapsed before he would be able to see the company begin a rebound. Kreher applied for a loan from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, RFC, to build the dry dock necessary for building and repairing ships.[67] Having had a request from the RFC for more collateral, Kreher attempted to borrow from local banks in Tampa but was unsuccessful because of outstanding debts the company already carried; Kreher even resorted to offering the majority of his wealth, including the company assets as collateral for the RFC loan.[68] By 1937, Kreher had the full amount of the original loan and the drydock was nearly complete. It was after this that Kreher began the steps toward securing the second loan of $750,000.[69] Immediately employing over two thousand laborers, the newly revived shipbuilding company decreased Tampa's unemployment numbers drastically. Not all was well for the company, however; though the first vessel, the *Seawitch*, was constructed, mismanagement caused the remainder of the contract to go unfulfilled and the company to flounder. Local financier George B. Howell

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[66] Lewis N. Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," *Sunland Tribune* 16 (1990): 2-3.

[67] Charles B. Lowry, "The PWA in Tampa: A Case Study," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 52 no 4 (1974): 363-4.

[68] Kreher to H. M. Waite, deputy administrator, PWA, March 8, 1934, box 74, James Hardin Peterson Papers, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville. Lowry, "The PWA in Tampa," 366.

[69] Lowry, "The PWA in Tampa," 380.

purchased the company in its entirety for $500 and assumed all its debts. Under Howell's leadership and

with large government contracts, the Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company or TASCO, thrived.[70]

PWA work was met with opposition from city officials who disliked the contract stipulation that

mandated the inclusion of Black laborers. PWA regulations also determined the amount that each skilled

or unskilled worker would be paid. Kreher wanted to pay less citing the company's inability to pay what

the PWA mandated, however, the conditions were too strict to ignore.[71] In addition, the PWA stipulated

that labor unions must be recognized and allowed to operate; this was another point of contention in a

city and state with strong antiunion sentiments.[72] Nolin Johnson's recollection of his experiences in

Tampa provide the reality of working under the PWA and within unions during this period. In the mid-

1930s, Johnson worked on cranes and on Davis Island where he made substantially less than white

counterparts.[73] Johnson's narrative highlights the failure of the WPA and PWA to remedy the issues that

plagued the local relief systems that predated them. There still remained a disparity in pay between

white and Black Tampans that the new agencies were not concerned about.

## Unionization and Resistance

Unions have an interesting history in Tampa that partly stems from the once flourishing cigar

industry. Headed by immigrants from Cuba, Spain, and Italy, the industry was woven into a cohesive

workplace identity that was unique among labor during its foundation in the 1880s. Fueled by their own

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[70] *Tampa Tribune*, June 17, 1942; Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 150-1.

[71] U.S. Federal Works Agency, Public Works Administration, Division of Information, *America Builds: The Record of the PWA* (Washington, 1939), 39, 84-5; Lowry, "The PWA in Tampa," 372-3.

[72] Wynne and Knetsch, *Florida in the Great Depression,* 148.

[73] Johnson did not specify exactly what his job responsibilities were regarding his work with cranes; it is unknown whether he operated the cranes, assisted in their operation, or some other set of duties in and around the area.

sense of radicalism, cigar workers formed their own unions, among other social and consumer organizations to provide community-wide support networks. Cigar laborers struck in 1899, 1901, 1910, 1920, and in 1931, throughout the golden age of cigar manufacturing in Tampa; their strong radical identity was as much a part of the industry as the cigars were. "Lectores", "readers" in English, were stationed around the benches where cigar laborers worked and read radical literature to workers. City officials determined that the "Lectores" were the source of labor unrest within the industry and during an already struggling period for the industry in 1931, they banned the practice.[74]

Cigar workers had earned a poor reputation with antiunion city officials and the inclusion of communist writings in the "lectores'" daily readings only confirmed elite views regarding their radicalism.[75] By the time of the Great Depression, the cigar industry in Tampa was dying. The declining economy in Florida and elsewhere reduced demand for more expensive cigars as smokers shifted to cheaper cigarettes. Staunchly opposed to union activity, city officials blamed the industry's radicalism on its decline; essentially creating a scapegoat, they associated their communistic labor ideas with the death of the industry.[76] Tampa was not finished with union activity; the legacy of workplace activism within the cigar industry had lasting ramifications on the later revitalization of the shipbuilding industry. City officials remained leery of union activities, still associating them with the decline of industry, whereas shipyard workers who remembered the cohesive workplace activism of the cigar industry brought those sentiments with them.

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[74] Gary Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985,* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

[75] George E. Pozzetta and Gary Mormino, "The Reader and the Worker: "Los Lectores" and the Culture of Cigarmaking in Cuba and Florida," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no 54 (1998): 12-3.

[76] Pozzetta and Mormino, "The Reader and the Worker," 12; José Yglesias, "The Radical Latino in the Deep South," *Nuestro* 1 (1977): 6.

Many established labor unions did not allow Black laborers among their numbers; unionization

as a broader concept faced serious stunting from city, and company officials. In 1935, a local chapter of

the International Longshoreman's Union was formed to organize Black laborers in the shipyards and

ports. Not originally a Black specific union, the local chapter was nonetheless organized with that

intention in mind for Tampa. Johnson like many others, joined the union shortly after it was formed.[77]

The road to the foundation of that local chapter of the longshoreman's union was not without difficulty.

On the waterfront, Black laborers faced heavy opposition toward any increases in their pay or attempts

to organize their labor. Nolin Johnson was only one of many who had shared their experiences. John L.

Lavelle, the man responsible for the founding of the local chapter of the longshoreman's union for Black

waterfront workers in Tampa also recalled his time as a laborer as having been a tumultuous period.

Lavelle was born in Topeka, Kansas in 1891, and came to Florida in 1916; here Lavelle made decent

money even during the hard times when President Hoover was in office.[78] He acknowledged the ups and

downs for Black laborers at the waterfront, and noted the active opposition that he and others faced in

any attempt at organizing. According to Lavelle, unionization was directly opposed by Clyde Mallory, a

white boss at the yard where he worked. However, at the suggestion of a colleague, Lavelle pursued the

proper channels for organizing a local chapter of the International Longshoreman's Union for the Black

laborers on the waterfront. Though successful at organizing the union in 1935, Lavelle continued to face

harsh opposition from Mallory; his first attempt at bargaining for a pay raise resulted in a meager three

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[77] Nolin Johnson Oral History; a longshoreman, is someone who works in and around shipyards, mainly involving the loading and unloading of cargo with ships in port.

[78] John L. Lavelle Oral History, March 14, 1978, Lavelle 1 3, Box 10 (Oral History Transcripts Hargrett - Patterson), Folder: Interviews- Transcripts- Lavelle, John L., USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Project, USF Special Collections, Tampa, Florida, 1, 3; John L. Lavelle's testimony about his time in Tampa comes from another oral history conducted by Otis Anthony, again part of the African Americans in Florida Project later turned over to the USF Department of Anthropology.

cents for the union members. Lavelle and others would often go days in between work and when they did work, it was for thirty-five cents per hour.[79] Although negotiations produced wages of thirty-five cents per hour for Black dock workers, work schedules were often manipulated to provide workers with only a few days per week. Such manipulation undercut the effect of their successful negotiation. John Wesley Brown, who came to Tampa in 1924, joined the longshoreman's union at its inception and recalled too the meager pay that members received working at the waterfront.[80] Lack of sufficient pay increases were not the only issues that the union members had to deal with; after the union had been organized, Clyde Mallory fired Lavelle and seven other members holding higher positions in the union and who were close to Lavelle from the yard. Presumably this was an outward display of antiunion sentiment and racism. Their termination was later deemed to have had no grounds. Tampa had become infamous for the intense opposition against any implementation of what were deemed socialist practices; a white man named Joseph Shoemaker was beaten and tarred and feathered by Tampa police and the Ku Klux Klan after having been arrested for promoting socialist ideas and union activity in 1935. He was injured to such an extent that he died after nine days in the hospital due to his injuries.[81]

Other cities in the South also contained what was considered socialist and communist movements; in Birmingham, Alabama, the Communist Party, although small, had formed a stable relationship with some poor laborers and unions to promote working class activism. The Cold War would see the Communist Party become ostracized because of the association with the USSR. Their small operation in Birmingham had begun a culture of workplace activism that crossed racial boundaries.

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[79] John L. Lavelle Oral History, 4-5, 11-12.

[80] John Wesley Brown Oral History, 1978, Box 9 (Oral History Transcripts Aikens - Griñan), Folder: Brown Oral History, USF Department of Anthropology African Americans in Florida Project, USF Special Collections, Tampa, Florida, 1,3, 19, 28, 30-31.

[81] Tidd, 2-3; R. Ingalls, "Murder of Joseph Shoemaker: Mark of the Beast," *Southern Exposure* 8, no. 2 (1980): 16-20; Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 100; Green, "Relief from Relief," 2021.

Although radicalism was central to the cigar industry in the 1930s, Tampa failed to have the interracial cooperation of other cities, especially within the shipyards. Furthermore, unions in Tampa were largely suppressed by continued antiunion sentiments.[82] Lavelle faced that same opposition as Shoemaker, at the hands of local police when he was forced into a car and beaten because of his involvement with the union; he was later dropped off in the early hours of the morning far away from his home.[83] Lavelle led the union until 1937, when he left Tampa because he was not making as much money as he thought he would and he no longer felt safe in his position at the yard or as president of the union. Whatever his reasons, rumor spread that Lavelle simply was not up to the job and some members, like John Wesley Brown, believed that he had "chickened out" from the leadership position.[84]

The implementation of the New Deal was met with riots, strikes, and violence across the country as well as in Tampa, though to a lesser extent than industrial cities in northern states.[85] Antiunion sentiment severely restricted the presence of unions and their bargaining power. WPA strikes were not uncommon in Florida as workers fought against their poor treatment and pay.[86] Poised just before the outbreak of war, the narrative above indicates the setting of Tampa and the apparent issues the city and its inhabitants faced going into a war.

## Conclusion

As the 1930s drew to a close, the conflict in Europe and Asia had certainly caught the attention of those in Tampa, along with the rest of the nation. With the most intense changes brought with

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[82] Max Krochmal, "An Unmistakably Working-Class Vision: Birmingham's Foot Soldiers and Their Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 4 (November 2010): 926-7.

[83] John L. Lavelle Oral History, 21-23.

[84] John Wesley Brown Oral History, 28-29.

[85] Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 111.

[86] Green, "Relief from Relief," 1012.

wartime yet to come, it is important to understand Tampa and its shipbuilding industry before the war. While the economy of Tampa had begun recovering from the hardships that predated and continued during the Great Depression, the city still had several crises to address. Where relief work and later WPA work assisted some people of Tampa, there remained not enough work for all of those in need during this period. The roots of racism and misogyny still persevered where Black Tampans and women alike were turned away from positions or relegated to menial tasks for little pay. Any progress concerning women's roles and race relations was at a standstill; women were expected to perform "women's work" and nothing more, with relief work being a prime example centering mostly on sewing. The city's Black population also found themselves faced with the worst conditions of an already poor time; much like women, African Americans found that their relief opportunities were insufficient to meet basic needs and produced no changes in social expectations. Their attempts to make ends meet were difficult, and they faced opposition from many angles; the lives of those like Johnson and Lavelle encapsulate this experience. At the workplace, African Americans faced resistance against any attempts at organizing their labor into a union; when unionization was achieved, gains in pay were small and easily manipulated to undermine advancement, so much so that some union leaders like Lavelle, left their positions citing their expectations having not been met. There remained much opposition to the progress of Tampa from officials, police, and company bosses.

The city's shipbuilding industry was still trying to find its footing in this prewar era. After the New Deal gave the Tampa Shipbuilding and Engineering Company leadership the ability to return shipbuilding operations to the city, mismanagement squandered the opportunity. The advent of new leadership produced more stability at the onset of war yet there remained issues within the industry including disparities in employment, pay, and unionization.

The events of the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s form an important backdrop in understanding how World War II changed  or did not alter Tampa and its people. Examining Tampa

before the war is crucial to understanding the events during World War II and after. At the end of the

1930s, there was the dark cloud of war, looming ever closer.

# CHAPTER TWO: SUNSHINE STATE OF WAR

While many in Tampa expected that the war overseas would eventually bring the United States into the conflict, the attack on Pearl Harbor nonetheless sent waves of shock and horror throughout the city. Historians debate the effects of World War II on the country at various levels between macro and micro scales.[87] When the historiography on the legacy and lasting impact of World War II emerged after the conclusion of the war, preliminary analyses focused heavily on broad macro scales often covering the entire nation. Research that followed the 1970s shift in historiography continued to shrink in scope from a national scale to a more focused regional or local scale. Historians attempted to bridge the gaps in the scholarship by examining the impact of World War II on smaller scales, within which they found that watershed moments may have occurred on a conditional basis based on locale. This analysis, for which this chapter and the following chapter are crucial, attempts to further the analysis of watershed moments at a micro scale. Facilitating this process is the use of a rich base of primary sources including firsthand accounts, newspapers, company missives, local and municipal documents, that show most accurately the experiences of those who lived and worked in Tampa during World War II.

In Tampa, where the local economy had been in a poor state, World War II did indeed bring numerous changes; the war forced several changes upon the residents of the city through direct as well as indirect effects. Long held beliefs on racism, discrimination, misogyny, and anti-unionism were

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[87] Terkel, *The Good War*; Winkler, *Home Front USA*; Seidman, *American Labor: From Defense to Reconversion;* Richard Lester, *As Unions Mature*; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*; Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History"; Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*; Anderson, *Wartime Women*; Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*; Goldin and Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply"; Winkler, "From the Editor"; Kersten, "African Americans and World War II"; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*; Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice"; Babb, "Women and War"; Susan O'Brien Culp, "For the Duration"; Mormino, "Gi Joe Meets Jim Crow"; Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II"; Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire"; Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II"; Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail"; Bliss, "Making A Sunbelt Place."

challenged by increased labor demands yet they perpetuated. Though certainly not new to Tampa,

efforts from company and city officials alike to restrict the freedoms of many of the residents highlight

the nature of war and its utility to those in power to manipulate the least powerful. However, wartime

changes were nuanced and some experienced positive changes while others did not. At the beginning of

the war, the residents of Tampa could not fully comprehend the experiences they would have

throughout the war years. This chapter analyzes the years of World War II and their effect on the

shipbuilding operations in Tampa, including the entrance of women and African Americans into the

industry from which they were previously excluded. This analysis feeds into the overarching thesis

considering the role of World War II as a catalyst for change, especially with the aforementioned groups'

involvement in labor.

<div align="center">**Changing Tides**</div>

On a statewide scale, Florida changed perhaps more than ever before; by the close of 1941, the

state was much healthier economically. Just as wide tracts of empty land were desirable during the land

boom of the 1920s, Florida's natural qualities became increasingly desirable for the war effort. Given the

generally flat topography, mild climate, land availability, and unparalleled access to the Gulf of Mexico,

Caribbean Sea, and Atlantic Ocean, Florida was once again a goldmine not for winter vacationers or

money-hungry investors, rather for the military seeking to transform the state into a war machine of

unprecedented scale. By 1942, there were 172 military installations statewide spread between rural and

urban areas based on their purpose.[88] Tampa hosted three sites during the years of World War II, MacDill

Field, Drew Field, and Henderson Field. MacDill Field, still in operation as MacDill Air Force Base, was the

main installation in the city as Drew Field and Henderson Field were classified as auxiliary sites. Neither

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[88] "Florida in World War II." *National Park Service*, October 3, 2022,
https://www.nps.gov/casa/learn/historyculture/florida-in-world-war-ii.htm.

Drew Field nor Henderson Field exists in any capacity as a military site today; the land where Drew Field

was located now houses Tampa International Airport, and the land where Henderson Field was located

now houses suburban sprawl, the University of South Florida, and Busch Gardens Tampa.[89] Between the

three sites, thousands of personnel were stationed in Tampa, MacDill housing up to 15,000 troops at any

given time in its wartime operation. Drew Field, though an auxiliary site, contained as much as 25,000

military and civilian personnel. Throughout the war, the three bases were the home of several air units

that consisted of all manner of planes including Lb-30s, B-17s, B-26s, and B-29s. The bases were the

home of transitional training exercises, like bombing runs, after which the planes and men would ship

out to the Pacific Theater via the south Atlantic to Australia. Planes would have been flown to the

Philippines if not for the expansion of Japanese forces. Other units went on to bomb enemy forces in

Europe, notably units that trained at MacDill were responsible for destroying land routes to prevent

Germany from reinforcing the coast of France.[90]

     While World War II sent several thousand of Tampa's eligible men to the military, and others

sought better employment in defense industries, over 30,000 people came to the city throughout the

war to work. Shipbuilding outpaced other means of employment by a vast margin, but countless

positions in transportation, communication, city services, and the food industry needed to be filled as

well. Shipbuilding had an adverse effect on other industries when the pay surpassed any other industry

for civilians.

     As Tampa shifted to an economy centered around the wartime industries in the city, notably the

shipbuilding industry, an immense amount of labor was needed to meet the demands of federal

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[89] Abraham Scherr, "Tampa's MacDill Field during World War II," *Tampa Bay History* 17, no. 1
(1995): 1-5.

[90] Scherr, "Tampa's MacDill Field during World War II," 1-10; Steve Contorno, "Drew Field's
World War II past comes alive in new Hillsborough tax collector office," *Tampa Bay Times,* August 17,
2015.

contracts for ships. Shipbuilding in Tampa began with TASCO as the only company; however, the industry

soon swelled to include several other companies, all of which became inundated with contracts to

produce vessels of all sorts. From Navy escorts and concrete ships to tugboats and barges, the

shipbuilding industry in Tampa had christenings and launches weekly as the war progressed, usually

lauded in city and company newspapers. TASCO produced Navy ships though not the large battleships

and aircraft carriers that defined the Navy in this era. Hooker's Point is most famous for its production of

concrete ships made entirely of cast concrete sections poured and cured at the yard. Matthew

McCloskey noted the inexpensive production of these ships when the concrete plant was nearby, and

steel became more of a premium. He also noted the Florida climate allowed for the curing of concrete

year-round.[91] Concrete ships were utilized by the navy as auxiliary vessels in warehousing and shipping

capacities; they were later an integral part of the allied invasion of Normandy, France. Tampa Marine and

Bushnell-Lyons, two smaller shipbuilding operations, engaged in the construction of support vessels like

tugs, ferries, and boats designed for the transport of vehicles in shallow waters.[92]  The labor

requirements to keep the process on schedule were unprecedented for the area; as more men enlisted

in the military to train and deploy overseas, the labor pool shrank such that company bosses were forced

to acquiesce and look elsewhere to meet their labor demands.

Married women were not initially considered for employment; publications supported this

notion, especially company newsletters which often noted the marriage of female employees and their

departures from the company. This also served as a reinforcement of gender roles in labor. However, as

labor demands grew again beyond what the aforementioned groups could sustain, married women were

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[91] "Concrete Ships to be Built Here as Experiment," *Tampa Daily Times*, June 11, 1942.

[92] Lewis N. Wynne, "Still they Sail," 5-6.

needed to fill open positions to maintain production schedules.[93] Company bosses often did not want to

hire women and attempted to avoid the scenario by any means possible, however, women did enter the

shipyards as skilled laborers after attending vocational schools; schools were operated locally, and other

training could be obtained on the job. Though never matching the numbers of men in the labor force,

women nonetheless made up a crucial component in the war industry that essentially sustained the city

for the duration of the war. Men who worked at the shipyards were exempt from being drafted into

military service. National magazines like *Life* often ran propaganda pieces displaying how men who

worked in defense industries were fighting for the same cause as those who were fighting in the military;

the pieces convey the necessity for men in both positions. Prominent ads often featured men working in

war industry alongside those serving overseas in the military.[94] The *Tascozette* also lauded its male

employees for their contributions to the war effort. Not only was it good employee retention, but it

reinforced gender roles, as women were not often celebrated for their work; the difference in their

portrayal is discussed later. Open celebration of male defense labor also mitigated any public outrage

over men not joining the military.

Black laborers faced greater opposition regarding work at the shipyards. Though some did gain

employment at the shipbuilding companies, most were in positions of unskilled labor like cooks, and

janitors. The few who did hold skilled labor positions were not allowed entry into the skilled labor unions

which operated within the shipbuilding companies, rather they were relegated to the Black labor union

which organized by industry rather than skill: the Longshoreman's union.[95]

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[93]  Kelley Duda, "It's a Man's World: Women's Entrance into Male Spaces during World War II in Florida," (Thesis: Florida State University, 2013): 41.

[94] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 20, General Motors, "Working…Fightin…," *Life,* advertisement, July 27, 1942, 10.

[95]  Nolin Johnson Oral History.

## Wartime Labor

Beyond the influx of military personnel, one of the most apparent changes was that of industry. While the shipbuilding industry was revived in the years before the war in an attempt to remedy the ailing economy of the city, World War II initiated a new level of activity. TASCO's prewar history is enlightening in this regard. The war effort demanded the rapid growth of the industry far beyond what had been established by Ernest Kreher in 1938, after he secured a PWA loan; Kreher had bought the company and its assets in 1917. Once local financier George B. Howell assumed control of the yard after Kreher's mismanagement that nearly spelled the company's demise, TASCO quickly became the largest single employer in Tampa. The high demand for ships in terms of numbers and variety meant that TASCO would not remain the sole shipbuilding company in Tampa for long. It was joined by the Hooker's Point Yard in 1942 followed by the Tampa Marine Company and Bushnell-Lyons. Under the goad of wartime necessity, each company engaged in the swift production of hundreds of ships, tugboats, barges, and other miscellaneous vessels.[96]

Tampa's shipbuilding industry reinvigorated the labor market. While marginalized groups did work within the companies that operated at the shipyards, their positions and pay differed greatly based on their race and gender. Though the immense labor demand, which grew during the first several years of the war, consistently pressed company bosses to recruit more laborers, there were vastly unequal opportunities despite federal mandates that also forbade the exclusion of laborers based on race or gender. The inequalities in pay for women, African Americans, and white men are discussed at length later.

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[96] Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice." For more on Ernest Kreher and George B. Howell, their origins, and their significance in TASCO's build up to its wartime prominence, refer to chapter one.

Black laborers did work in the shipbuilding industry preceding the war, but the efforts of white

union laborers, unions from which African Americans were excluded, saw the termination of 500 Black

workers and the demotion of the majority of the remaining 100 in 1938.[97] This speaks about the failure

of interracial unionism among shipyard workers; the desire to maintain white supremacy superseded the

desire to unionize. This preceded the implementation of executive Order 8802 which mandated the

inclusion of African Americans in wartime industries. Often, Black men who responded to the demand

for labor were turned away as a result of this ongoing opposition; In 1943, twenty-four carpenters from

Columbia, South Carolina, travelled to Tampa in response to an advertisement calling for carpenters; the

men were turned away from employment; though the exact reason was not given, their race likely

played a role.[98] Black workers were often restricted from skilled employment in shipbuilding, even

though white women were allowed to work in some skilled labor positions.[99] Nolin Johnson worked at

the shipyards as a "helper," likely a subservient position that undervalued his skill level, throughout the

entire war. He recalled that despite the urgency to complete ships, Black workers faced discrimination in

claiming overtime pay.

> See the government had it fixed where we had to work for a certain amount, or when they gave it to you. They wouldn't even pay us overtime, we had to work straight time. Yeah, straight time, we had to work straight time, no overtime. If you work eight hours its eight hour, holiday was a holiday, I mean the same money. They never got no overtime. That's they way it was. That's the way that shipyard was running.[100]

Essentially, Johnson explained that while the federal government mandated that Black workers be hired

in defense industries, that is where their assistance ended. Black workers were then at the mercy of

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[97] Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 2-3.

[98] *Atlanta Daily World,* May 21, 1943; Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire," 6.

[99] Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail."

[100]  Nolin Johnson Oral History.

company bosses who could discriminate on pay, job position, and working hours. In addition, Johnson

recalled when his union at the shipyard struck; he cited that their pay was not raised appropriately. As a

Black man, Johnson did not belong to any of the skilled labor unions at the yard, but he was a member of

the general labor Longshoreman's union chapter for African Americans that had been established by

John L. Lavelle in 1935 which he had joined shortly after its formation. That union represented several

shipyard workers in various positions whereas other unions, particularly skilled unions would not admit

Black laborers. Johnson recalled how the union was sometimes ineffective compared to skilled labor

unions like the boilermakers' union,

> But they said they wasn't going to let them have that money that time. Well you
> couldn't join the union, so you had to stay in that labor union, that's all you got…See
> there's boilermaker, they wouldn't let no colored people get in the boilermaker. Colored
> people had to stay in the same thing right there…they did have a teamsters union and
> did let them got in that. But that's far as they could get, but where the money was. That
> there wasn't but $.75, but that was good where these people was making a dollar and
> something, they didn't get none of that.[101]

Johnson recalled having as much as $.93 per hour in pay while at the shipyards while white men and

women were often making in excess of one dollar per hour. Raises for Black laborers did not happen

often and required dedication to remaining with the company according to Johnson who recalled raises

only occurring after six months of work in the same position.[102] Executive Order 8802, which mandated

the inclusion of African Americans in wartime industries could only reach so far; while many Black

workers like Johnson were hired at the shipyards, they faced discrimination on the job site. The federal

government appeared to demand equality in hiring Black and white Americans in defense work, but

their treatment in wartime industries differed greatly. Black workers all-too-often were relegated to

positions as helpers, cooks, or janitors.

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[101] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

[102] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

Incipient racism appeared in company efforts designed to show compliance with federal

requirements on war industry hiring. TASCO, the largest of the shipyard companies, operated a company

newspaper throughout the war: the *Tascozette*. Seldom were Black laborers included in the pages of the

paper, but when they were, there was an air of mockery disguised in the words of the columns. One such

example comes March 30, 1944, in a small column that featured William Lewis, a Black janitor at the

company. In this section which includes a picture of an unsmiling Lewis there are a few sentences which

refer to him colloquially as "trouble" and state that he is around 67 but does not know how old he is. The

language casts Lewis in an all-too-frequent characterization as socially unaware of his age and mocks his

lack of power to change his economic and social status by labelling him as "trouble." In reference to his

picture, the short article claimed that Lewis said he did not know how to smile when he was

photographed.[103] Later that same year on August 31, 1944, two more Black employees were featured,

again unsmiling with nothing more than a few short sentences denoting their positions in the company

lunch room.[104] Whether it can be said that their demeanor for their photographs reflects their

experiences at the company is unknown. What can be said is that the efforts of Black workers at TASCO

were hardly recognized in their company newspaper, all while countless white workers including women

were lauded for their work, such examples appeared in the paper often; the columns featuring Lewis and

the other two Black workers offer an interesting juxtaposition to other white company employees

featured in the newspaper who almost always appeared smiling.  These men are not being honored for

their contributions to their company, rather they are being used as examples for the reinforcement of

roles that African Americans were expected to fill. Furthermore, the language used is condescending and

reaffirms the notion that Black workers were lesser and would not extend past the social barriers of Jim

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[103] "Steady Gait," *Tascozette* (Tampa, FL), March 30, 1944.

[104] "Robert Coleman, Guide Hamilton," *Tascozette* (Tampa, FL), August 31, 1944.

Crow. Executive Order 8802 only got African Americans into defense industries; the positions they held there were entirely up to company bosses. Whatever expectation the federal government held for equal employment for African Americans with whites was lost after the minimal requirements of the aforementioned executive order were reached. The experience of Black Tampans' inclusion in wartime industries was far from an equal opportunity; many were led by a promise that was broken from the start.

As the war progressed, more women replaced men in labor positions within the shipbuilding companies. This is not unique to Tampa, the same can be said of the shipbuilding industry in other cities in Florida, and across the country. However, unlike Black men, white women did enter some skilled positions within the shipbuilding companies. By 1943, at least 20 percent of laborers at TASCO were women. At neighboring Hooker's Point, more women were joining the company from vocational schools operated locally than men; in 1943, 97 women were hired versus 82 men.[105] Women were employed as riveters, and electric welders among other positions. However, as women entered into the shipbuilding industry in Tampa, it should be noted that this largely meant white women. Though Black women did work in manufacturing during the war, there are limited sources detailing that Black women were employed within Tampa's shipbuilding industry. Gary Mormino, and Ellen J. Babb have cited that job opportunities in Tampa were very exclusionary toward Black women; this included the shipbuilding industry.[106] While advertisements called for women to work, women were reminded that traditional "women's work" in laundries still helped the war effort.[107] This covert language effectively targeted Black

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[105] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 34-5; "Vocational Training for War Production Workers," State Defense Council, Series 419, box 52, folder VOC 1943.

[106] Gary Mormino, "Here's Why Florida's African American History during World War II Matters," *Tampa Bay Times*, July 27, 2023; Babb, "Women and War," 46.

[107] *St. Petersburg Times*, June 6, 1943.

women excluding them from the same opportunities as white women, especially considering laundry

work adhered to racial and general roles for Black women.[108] Susan M. Hartmann further acknowledged

the gains of women in some fields, though she specifies that white women were those gaining new

positions.[109] Mary Glenn Horton was one such Black woman who did get a job in the industry; she

worked late at Hooker's Point as a welder's assistant.[110] This scenario fits the historiography that several

historians have pointed out, that Black women faced the most challenges among marginalized groups on

the home front. Karen Anderson's research on Black women in America during World War II fits these

findings accurately; Anderson found that Black women often only obtained positions in the shipbuilding

industry if the shipyard was government owned. Anderson notes that the war experience for Black

women revolves around the fact that social and economic barriers remained a constant challenge

throughout the war, more so than Black men, or white women.[111] Ellen J. Babb, writing on St.

Petersburg, agreed that Black women faced ongoing challenges that largely relegated them to low-

paying menial jobs that fit social expectations, especially those in the South.[112]

Shipbuilding was a dangerous occupation. With more new laborers entering into the profession,

safety was stressed by both TASCO and Hooker's Point to ensure that production remained high. Workers

were often subjected to long hours, and unfamiliar tools and tasks; furthermore, the pressure to work at

high speed to meet demand contributed to accidents like cuts, burns, sprains, breaks, loss of limbs, and

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[108] Babb, "Women and War," 46.

[109] Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 87-88.

[110] Mormino, "Here's Why Florida's African American History during World War II Matters."

[111] Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers during World War II," *The Journal of American History* 69, no 1 (1982): 90, 97.

[112] Ellen J. Babb, "A Community within a Community: African-American Women in St. Petersburg during World War II," *Tampa Bay History* 17, no 1 (1995).

death. Though safety was a concern for company bosses, their primary consideration remained a desire to keep their output flowing to complete contracts continuously. Company newspapers focused on the monetary losses as consequences for accidents; subsequently, they often featured safety columns and implemented incentive programs to ensure safety.[113]

In order to maintain the high output of ships to meet the demand, employees worked long hours in dangerous positions. Steel ships were constructed from prefabricated components that were brought together at the yards and assembled. Laborers, welders, and riveters, perched high on gantries, assembled the component parts of the ships. Working in the heat of the Floridian sunshine, laborers could get substantial burns from the heat of the steel on which they worked.[114] Others watched as their coworkers met tragic deaths due to the dangers of the work; some fell to their deaths, while others were electrocuted. In one case, a young man died when he fell into a vat of acid used to treat the steel components to prevent rust.[115]

The regular reporting of accidents made all those who worked in the industry aware of the risks of their employment. Wartime necessity and higher wages pushed laborers to put aside any worries they might have had. Many laborers had a sense of commitment to their work through the influence of wartime propaganda. They figured that they were enduring the labor intensive and dangerous work for the sake of the country and their friends and families, some of whom might be fighting in faraway places. Propaganda targeted women especially, to suppress any reservations about wartime work, establishing firmly that they were working to support their husbands and other men overseas. Several posters and

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[113] Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice," 435-6; "Accidents in 1944 Cost Four Billion," *Hooker's Point Log* 3, no 4 (1945), 28; "Safety," *Tascozette* 1, no 11 (1942).

[114] Ila Graves interview conducted by Stacy Lynn Tanner, January 15, 2005, p. 113, Reichelt. Program of Oral History, Florida State University.

[115] "Tasco Welder, 29, Is Electrocuted Changing a Light Bulb," *Tampa Daily Times*, June 26, 1943; "Fall Into Acid Vat at Shipyard Fatal," *Tampa Daily Times*, November 24, 1941.

advertisements (see figures 1 and 2) detail the message that wartime jobs were for the benefit of their families, married women were especially vulnerable to such propaganda.[116] Some propaganda posters like figure 2, gave the impression that women were not joining the workforce of their own choosing, rather out of national necessity; thus, when the necessity waned, women were promptly ushered out of the defense workforce.

## Labor and Unionization during the War

The wartime prominence of Tampa's shipbuilding industry brought unionization to the forefront. Workers had been granted the right to unionize under the New Deal's Labor Relations Act (1935). Shipbuilding companies were private enterprises with a history of anti-union actions, but they operated on government contracts and the federal government supported unionization. On paper, unionization should not have been an issue, but local leadership resisted unions. Unions were the enemy of some of Tampa's highest officials. Mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey staunchly opposed the implementation of unions, especially the CIO which sought to unionize skilled and unskilled laborers across industries. Chancey was also notoriously racist; in his press releases, he often blamed African Americans for issues in the city. The unionization of unskilled workers would mean a large body of Black laborers would gain union support. TASCO leader George B. Howell was also antiunion. A local businessman, Howell opposed union operations, though federal mandates called his antiunionism into question when the alternative was the loss of millions of dollars in ship contracts. Howell did, however, have the support of Florida Attorney General J. Tom Watson who, also antiunion, attempted to undermine union operations in the

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[116] Lawrence Wilbur, *Longing Won't Bring Him Back Sooner…Get a war Job!* poster, 1944. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.; John Newton Howitt, *I'm Proud…my husband wants me to do my part*, poster, 1944. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

shipbuilding industry via lawsuit to end closed-shop practices at the shipyards.[117] By contrast, Matthew

McCloskey did not share in the antiunion sentiment of his competitor. Hailing from the North,

McCloskey's Hooker's Point Yard utilized a unionized labor before it was mandated.[118] Other cities in the

South like Birmingham, Alabama, did have strong skilled labor unions, and interracial ones at that, dating

back to the Great Depression that strengthened during World War II. Under the Congress of Industrial

Organizers, the CIO, coal miners unionized and later included ore miners, and steel mill workers.

Birmingham unionization would reach its strongest point in the late 1940s when the International Union

of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, known as Mine-Mill, together with the Communist Party USA

formed a stable alliance.[119]

As the war progressed and more women replaced men in traditionally male dominated

workplaces and positions, the question regarding the admission of women into labor unions was

addressed but not without its own opposition, this time from the unions themselves. Faced with growing

ratios of women to men in the spaces where the unions operated, unions had to face the reality that

women needed to be allowed to join. The local chapter of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers

was among the first to admit women into their ranks; shortly thereafter, a decision was made within the

national leadership of the union to address the rising numbers of women at a national level and nullify a

decades old ban on women in the union.[120]

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[117] Associated Industries of Florida (Jacksonville, Fla.). *Bulletin from the Associated Industries of Florida regarding Executive Order 8802 and its effects, 1942.* 1942-08-05. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

[118] Wynne, "Still They Sail," 10.

[119] Krochmal, "An Unmistakably Working-Class Vision," 925-6.

[120] Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," 8-9.

Women were needed in other industries as well; the U.S. Employment Service Office advertised the need for meteorologists, welders, upholsterers, and pilots. Wartime propaganda targeted women to join in whatever industry needed more laborers in their area. Posters like (see figure 3) "The more Women at work the sooner we Win!" were made by the War Manpower Commission to convey what positions needed to be filled.[121]



*Longing won't bring him back sooner...*
**GET A WAR JOB!**
**SEE YOUR U. S. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE**
WAR MANPOWER COMMISSION

Figure 1 A War Manpower Commission poster for women whose husbands were at war overseas. Lawrence Wilbur, Longing Won't Bring Him Back Sooner…Get a war Job! poster, 1944. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. public domain.

Women were also called upon to harvest crops when others had gone to war or sought out more stable employment opportunities elsewhere that had opened up because of the state of war. By 1943, more women than men were working in agriculture in Hillsborough County.[122] Women could take preparatory courses in welding, radio, and shipbuilding. MacDill Field also offered courses on aircraft

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[121]  Alfred T. Palmer, The more women at work the sooner we win!, poster, 1943. Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, Hyde Park, New York.

[122] Culp, "For the Duration," 10.

repair to women who could then use their newly learned skills on site in exchange for credit toward

completing the courses.[123] Vocational schools were operated throughout the region; often, their

operation was directly influenced by the federal government through the War Department. In a letter to

Florida Governor Spessard L. Holland Director of Civilian Training, William H. Kushnick expressed his

concern over women working at shipyards and the need for proper training. Kushnick was also

increasingly wary of women and men working alongside each other. In what can only be described as

stereotypical thinking, he feared women would lose sight of their work at the opportunity to fraternize

with their male coworkers.[124]



Figure 2 A War Manpower Commission poster meant to convince women to work in needed defense industries. John Newton Howitt, I'm Proud…my husband wants me to do my part, poster, 1944. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. public domain.

Women's roles had become multifaceted in this time of war; though they were called upon to fill

needed positions in several industries beyond that of just shipbuilding, they were still expected to be

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[123] Babb, "Women and War," 45-6, 48.

[124] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 36; William H. Kushnick to Governor Spessard L. Holland, April 24, 1943, Series 419, box 54, file OWI 42-45, State Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.

mothers and homemakers. On that point, childcare had become an issue with so many mothers working in wartime industries. Unemployed women were urged to help do their part and watch over the children of others, while some had their children living with them during the summer months and away with older relatives during the school year.[125] In some cities, various organizations began to focus primarily on childcare for working mothers. In Tampa, the Hillsborough County School Board organized nursery care for children whose mothers worked in wartime industry; in Jacksonville where the shipbuilding industry also thrived, the *Jacksonville Journal* advertised that nursery care schools had opened and were in need of volunteers to assist them. Only some of the shipbuilding companies gave any indication that company bosses had any outward concern about childcare.[126] TASCO was one of those few which did promote local nursery schools and afterschool programs for working women with children.[127] Though the federal government provided assistance with childcare for wartime industries, examples were few; there is no indication that Tampa or Jacksonville received any federal aid on the matter.

Propaganda often focused on women's beauty and femininity even though they were in unusual environments in wartime industries; in the poster by Alfred T. Palmer, though she is assembling aircraft components, the woman depicted has painted fingernails and is wearing jewelry (see figure 3). Company newsletters also remarked on women employees' appearances while their male counterparts were lauded for their contributions to the company and to the war effort. The *Tascozette* featured women in its issues regularly, but they were recognized for their beauty and femininity or were included at events like ship christenings and launches. With wartime rationing, women became the target of

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[125] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 82; Babb, "Women and War," 46.

[126] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 82; "Patriotic Women Guard Tots as Mothers Fill War Jobs," *Jacksonville Journal*, October 12, 1943; "Nursery School Cares for Children of War," *Jacksonville Journal*, October 28, 1942. Doris Weatherford, *Real Women of Tampa and Hillsborough County: From Prehistory to the Millennium,* Tampa, University of Tampa Press: 2004.

[127] "Tasco Women," *Tascozette* 4 no. 6 (September 28, 1944), 12.

advertisements pressing for their continued conservation of materials and for the planting of home

gardens to supplement their food supply (see figure 4). Women raised funds for bond drives through

various organizations in and out of their workplaces. The *Tascozette* frequently posted columns

advertising for more bonds to be purchased throughout the war. Outside of work, women raised money

through community organizations like the Tampa Navy Mothers' Club whose meeting minutes records

detailed a steady increase in treasury funds during the war.[128] Other women's groups collected and

organized supplies for those in need.[129]



Figure 3 A War Manpower Commission poster displaying what positions were available for women.
Alfred T. Palmer, The more women at work the sooner we win!, poster, 1943. Franklin D. Roosevelt
Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, Hyde Park, New York. Public
domain.

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[128] "Box 1, Folder: Tampa Navy Mothers' Club Minutes 1938-1947," in *Tampa Navy Mothers' Club Records*, University of South Florida Special Collections, Tampa, Florida.

[129] *Tampa Daily Times,* December 7, 1942.

As the war was coming to an end, women were fired, or asked to leave their positions at the shipyards and return to their homes to resume "women's work."[130] They were asked to return to home duties or secretarial positions which had come to embody the work that was suitable for women. Despite such an immensely tumultuous period which saw women entering traditionally male spaces, efforts to repress changing gender roles prevailed. Though women had proved themselves worthy and capable, the public perception remained that they belonged at home as wives and mothers. It is ironic that such a great effort would be made to push women out to make room for returning servicemen when the shipbuilding companies would cease operations shortly after the war with a lack of contracts to keep them operating.



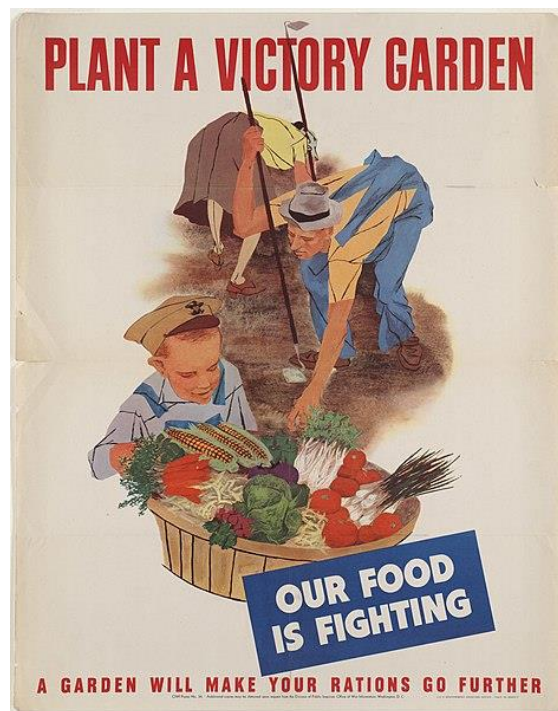Figure 4 A poster depicting the creation of a victory garden, a common suggestion to supplement rationed goods that were needed for the military. U.S. Government Printing Office, Office of War Information. Plant a victory garden. Our food is fighting, poster, 1943. Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts. Public domain.

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[130] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 44; Babb, "Women and War," 60. For more, see chapter 3.

## Conclusion

World War II had a profound impact on Tampa; everyone felt the effects, whether direct or indirect. The onset of war brought immense growth to the shipbuilding industry, but its new opportunities were not shared equally. Though TASCO had become the largest employer in the city, along with the other shipbuilding companies, the largest industry in the city, countless Black laborers were denied the opportunity to work there or within the shipbuilding industry at all. Those Black Tampans who secured employment in the shipyards did not engage in heavy manufacturing, and their contributions to their respective companies went largely unrecognized. Marginalized groups including African Americans and white women faced difficulties in gaining the support of unions within their workplaces. Though women did gain entry into local industrial unions, Black workers at the shipyards did not. Consistently, the wartime emergency was used as justification for the continuation of discriminatory practices throughout the city. The wartime era in Tampa is deeply nuanced and those who lived through it had their lives changed dramatically at the individual level. But at the institutional level, pre-war expectations for African Americans and white women remained firmly in place.  War work was just that: a response to a national crisis, not an opportunity to address social inequalities.

This examination of the war years in Tampa has exhibited the abundant challenges that many in the city faced; in essence, these struggles to break through social and economic barriers were very much alike the challenges that predated World War II. Federal requirements that might have formed the basis for change had little impact. The demands of the war overwhelmed the potential for change. Southern cities, like Tampa, had generations of experience in maintaining the status quo, the hierarchical organization that privileged white men over women and African Americans. The anti-union sentiment of the New South survived even the wartime mandates of the Roosevelt administration and Tampa unions gained no lasting advantage. The lack of a lasting impact only serves as evidence of the power of pre-

existing systems that limited the social movement of both women and African Americans. Even an event

so immense as World War II could not change that in Tampa.

# CHAPTER THREE: THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF WARTIME AND THE HOPES FOR THE

# FUTURE

The labor experience at the shipyards during World War II was surrounded by a slew of changes that were all intertwined to form the wartime experience in Tampa. The war brought about a housing crisis, new justifications for discrimination against African Americans, and a firm resistance to changing gender roles. Some in the city began to voice their expectations for the post-war. This chapter analyzes the social changes that occurred throughout Tampa alongside those growing expectations for the future. Though many still faced challenges during the war, social and economic barriers had been tested against the changes brought with wartime.

## All Work and No Stay

As labor demands grew beyond what Tampa could provide for, the influx of laborers into the city to meet those demands quickly overran the available housing creating a dramatic shortage. Initially, Tampa struggled when faced with the problem of solving its housing crisis. Tampa did have some hotels available, and in order to mitigate ill-effects of the lack of available space, room rates were strictly controlled by the Office of Price Administration, and the Office of Rent Control. However, despite these efforts to standardize hotel availability, a thriving black market formed in the city that funneled illicit money to hotels in exchange for filling vacancies.[131] Nearby St. Petersburg had more available housing space than Tampa, to accommodate the surplus of workers at the expense of complex scheduling of transportation.[132] Tampa was not unique in facing the challenges of a lack of housing; World War II

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[131] Wynne and Moorhead, *Florida in World War II,* 49.

[132] "St Petersburg to Shipyard Bus Service Set Up," *Tampa Daily Times*, June 26, 1943; "St. Pete Bus Service to Relieve House Shortage Here," *Tampa Daily Times,* June 25, 1943; "New Bus Schedule for War Workers Near Completion," *Tampa Daily Times*, June 28, 1943; Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice," 440.

created a vast shift of the American populus from rural to urban areas as people sought work in

emerging wartime industries. Though wartime industries varied depending on location, cities that

contributed to the war effort through these industries, like mining, smelting, aircraft construction,

munitions production, and shipbuilding, all experienced varying degrees of housing shortages.

Private efforts proved somewhat fruitful, Matthew H. McCloskey, owner of the Hooker's Point

Yard, constructed a housing development adjacent to his own company; however, his newly built

development was available for only the employees of his company, others were still without luck on the

matter.[133] Municipal attempts at a remedy were proposed as well, including plans to convert unused

factories with viable space into living quarters, much like the WPA annexation of unused factories for use

as sewing rooms. Unlike the WPA, however, these plans were never made reality, as the price of

renovations to unused buildings to convert them into living spaces proved much too costly for the city to

undertake the venture.[134] Rather, city officials led by Mayor Robert E. Lee Chauncey, leased several acres,

and created a municipal trailer park. Likely only small travel trailers with not much more than a bed, they

boasted a relatively low rent cost for those who needed housing. However, tenants found that each

individual unit was lacking its own bathroom or laundry capabilities; rather, there were shared facilities

for these necessities. Thus, this attempt at solving this housing problem is largely considered to be a

failure, especially considering the development never reached its full tenant capacity.[135] Many rented

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[133] Lewis N. Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa during World War II," *Sunland Tribune* 16 (1990): 5-8. The available sources do not indicate what living arrangements were available in McCloskey's development.

[134] *Tampa Tribune,* November 14, 1942.

[135] "Trailer Park Housewives Fill Labor's Ear with Their Gripes," *Tampa Daily News*, December 23, 1943; *Tampa Tribune,* November 6, 1942; November 14, 1942; November 19, 1942; January 15, 1943; January 18, 1943; March 18, 1943; April 4, 1943; April 5, 1943; April 11, 1943; "Trailer Park Homes Will Be Opened Monday," *Tampa Daily Times*, January 17, 1943; Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," 7-8; Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice," 442; Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail," 96.

rooms in the homes of others; it is plausible that some did so to avoid the less than desirable trailer accommodations.[136]

The housing crisis in Tampa affected all laborers in the city but some were affected more severely than others, namely, African Americans. Black residents who either already lived in Tampa or had moved to the city in pursuit of employment found that their housing opportunities were fewer considering the already severe lack of available housing. African Americans were likely excluded from both the municipal and private attempts to mitigate the housing crisis for shipyard workers. City officials recognized that Black city residents were in dire need of housing as well; plans to construct $2.3 million worth of low-cost houses, five hundred homes, were announced in conjunction with the Federal Public Housing Authority in 1943. Officials recognized the necessity for housing essential workers, yet racial segregation still won out; subsequently, several of the planned structures were cancelled when it was realized that they would be in close proximity to a predominantly white development.[137] The same issue arose again in 1945 when a housing development originally intended for Black Tampans was reduced in size and then reassigned to include housing for both whites and African Americans. The *Tampa Tribune* reported that the Black newspaper in Tampa, the *Tampa Bulletin,* had mentioned this issue and criticized the perpetual use of the war emergency as an excuse for the restriction of Black housing: "We think this war emergency argument is something conveniently used to deny negroes [sic] the opportunity that is rightfully theirs to live in this new project." The excerpt implied that Black Tampans were extremely dissatisfied with their lack of housing options.[138]

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[136] *St. Petersburg Times,* March 16, 1943, *St. Petersburg Times,* March 18, 1943; *St. Petersburg Times,* April 4, 1943; *St. Petersburg Times,* June 5, 1943; Babb, "Women and War," 47.

[137] *Tampa Tribune,* October 7, 1943, December 23, 1943; Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail," 97.

[138] *Tampa Tribune,* January 3, 1945.

Thus, the housing crisis continued for the duration as private and municipal efforts continuously fell short of bringing any real resolve to the situation. Workers bounced between the options at hand, many resorting to renting rooms in the homes of others. The wartime emergency was used as a constant scapegoat for restricting the housing of African Americans, even though inequitable housing for Black citizens predated the war, and solutions targeting whites did not sufficiently solve the crisis anyway.

Women had their own difficulties in finding housing for their families when they took positions in defense industries. Many rented out rooms in the homes of others as space became a scarce commodity. In neighboring St. Petersburg, individual realtors submitted lists of available rooms to the federal rental office which then provided lists of defense workers and families who needed accommodation. Women who lived and worked around the shipbuilding industry also became concerned with the numerous young men who came to train and work in the military in Tampa. These women, typically concerned mothers, wanted to dissuade soldiers from interacting with their daughters outside of their planned events. The Defense Mothers organization planned events for young men and women like dances, and dinner parties. Young women who wanted to volunteer for the organization had to display a sound moral character before they could be deemed allowed to participate in any sponsored events. The organizations events were deemed wholesome fun for young men and women that avoided dangerous activities that contributed to the city's already poor reputation. The young women likely had to show moral character to prevent the spread of venereal disease and prostitution. Many women also feared for the treatment of their daughters by men who were stationed in Tampa. Curfews were set for children under the age of 16 to prevent juvenile delinquency and to curb the fear that underage girls would be seeing soldiers. The so-called wholesome fun was also an attempt to combat the latter issues and mitigate dangers in interactions between young women and soldiers. Thus, considerable efforts were made by women to maintain the safety and security for themselves and their families during the war.

## Wartime Discrimination

Beyond the issues of finding adequate housing in Tampa during the war, there were the experiences of those who lived and worked in the city. Black residents of Tampa faced a multitude of difficulties that stemmed from decades of racism and discrimination under Jim Crow. During the war, local police often raided predominantly Black neighborhoods and made arrests based on little to no evidence; no exact laws were likely cited in these instances, and the process was referred to as the work-or-fight and the work-or-jail rules.[139] Any person detained under the former would have to provide sufficient proof of employment and if they could not, they would be threatened with military service. The threat of military service is problematic in that Black units in the military were limited in the number of men they could accommodate; once full, no new men could enlist. The stronger threat was that the arrested individuals faced imprisonment unless they could prove their employment status. These rules were often enforced to meet labor demands that were undesirable for others; Black Tampans were relegated to some of the lowest or harshest work. Often it was agricultural needs that had to be met as others left the industry for more stable and higher paying positions in the city.[140] In one instance in 1943, eighteen individuals were arrested and told to work at the shipyards, or if they refused, they would work on city stockade crews. According to the *Tampa Morning Tribune,* the prosecutor in the matter regarding the eighteen individuals wanted to, "…clean up this class."[141] Work-or-jail rules operated in a similar manner, but rather than threaten arrested individuals with military service, they were threatened with

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[139] Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 4; Culp, "For the Duration," 11.

[140] Culp, "For the Duration," 11.

[141] *Tampa Morning Tribune,* August 10, 1942; *Tampa Morning Tribune,* November 27, 1942; Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire," 1; Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 4; Culp, "For the Duration," 11.

prison sentences. If family members objected, they too were threatened with arrest. This enforced labor

typically can be viewed as a wartime extension of the earlier convict leasing system in which African

Americans were arrested on charges that did not always apply to whites and "leased" to industries,

mining, or large agricultural firms. Around Tampa in the other parts of Hillsborough County, agricultural

needs had risen as other workers left that industry in favor of more stable and higher paying wartime

employment within the city.[142]

Black military units were stationed in Tampa. Many found that their treatment was unfair and

that their accommodation was unsatisfactory. A degree of racial tension had risen partly from the

displeasure of Black soldiers. They were trained mostly in the South where they were largely relegated to

worst parts of military installations often with dirt floors and no means of removing sewage other than

manually.[143] While few reports of Black soldier-led violence in Tampa remain, Tallahassee can provide

more context. Tallahassee, as another military town during World War II, reported patterns of violence

from Black soldiers that began in 1942 when they "rioted" through predominantly Black Frenchtown.

Town/soldier altercations stemmed largely from segregationist practices that limited the freedoms of

Black soldiers and from frustrations among Black soldiers over their living conditions and failure to

deploy them to war zones.[144]

The outsized concern over weekend violence perpetuated by Black soldiers on leave combined

with anticipated violence as the war moved toward its conclusion. Military and state officials thought it

necessary to draft secret plans to deal with race riots should they occur. Only having been declassified in

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[142] *Tampa Morning Tribune,* June 14, 1942; Raymond O. Arsenault, *St. Petersburg and the Florida Dream* (Norfolk: Donning Company, 1988), 304-5; Culp, "For the Duration," 11.

[143] Jon Evans, "The Origins of Tallahassee's Racial Disturbance Plan: Segregation, Racial Tensions, and Violence during World War II," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2001): 351.

[144] Evans, "The Origins of Tallahassee's Racial Disturbance Plan," 355-8.

1993, the documents outlining how Tampa would proceed if riots broke out are all prominently marked

as secret on the top and bottom of the opening pages; presumably few knew of their existence prior to

their declassification. The plans laid out a carefully crafted explanation for the media that would have

been issued to explain the situation, this was followed by a list of buildings and businesses and their

locations marked sensitive areas. This essentially gave the plan organizers a detailed map of the city and

its vital resources; the list included locations such as newspaper publishers, radio stations, police

departments, power plants, water pumping stations, gas plants, and telephone and telegraph companies

with each to have a dedicated guard during any conflict.[145]

The general plan operated on a three-step process by which the armed forces in the city, made

up of city police, county police, and state police placed under military control, would section off the city

and separate the races such that whites could be safely evacuated,

> …Rapid mobilization of city police, sheriff's forces and State Highway Patrol to quell
> disorders in progress, and to rapidly furnish information that threatened disorder might
> be checked…The Mayor of the City, City Manager or Chief of Police, the one first
> available, acting first by radio and them by all other means, shall call upon all citizens to
> immediately report to their representative homes and places of business and there
> remain pending further announcement…Quick and effective segregation of the races.
> The three principal areas in which Negroes reside in the City of Tampa [are] indicated on
> the attached map as Sector A, Sector B and Sector C. All whites will be promptly
> evacuated out of Sectors A, B and C and all colored persons will be promptly evacuated
> into the nearest of the three areas. The three designated sectors are hereby constituted
> refuge areas for Negroes; the remainder of the City, refuge areas for whites.

Furthermore, the plan called for uniformed police to form picket lines between the borders of Sectors A,

B, and C and neighboring white neighborhoods to protect those neighborhoods and prevent any Black

residents from leaving those sectors,

> The purpose of the picket lines herein described being to isolate first, that part of
> Sectors A, B and C bordering on white settlements, thereafter, as soon as available
> manpower will permit, all of the above sectors for the purpose of preventing any

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[145] "Racial Disturbance Plan," District No. 5, Fourth Service Command, State Defense Council, box 57, ser. 419, RG 191, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

Negroes from leaving the Sectors and any white persons from entering the Sectors until law and order be fully restored.

Essentially, the above plan calls for the quarantine of the city's Black population until the conflict was deemed resolved.[146]

This plan was representative of the white response to anticipated violence from Black soldiers. As the war wound down many Black soldiers had become agitated at not being utilized for any real purpose and for their poor treatment on the bases where they were stationed. Black soldiers were moved frequently from one base to another for the duration of the war rather than serving any purpose in the conflict. As this continued late into the war, many Black soldiers grew tired of this treatment. The irony lies with the secretive means of dealing with the fallout of harsh systemic racism and discrimination rather that making genuine and open attempts to combat the source of tensions in the first place. Tampa was not alone in having such a plan, other cities like Orlando, Tallahassee, Miami, and Jacksonville, had similar plans all drafted in secret in case of racial conflicts. The beginning of the plan cites the increased racial violence across the country as the reasoning for the plans' creation.[147]

Again, the reasoning behind the creation of these plans was due in part to anticipated violence. However, Tampa was no stranger to violence on the part of soldiers in the city. While some contemporary sources in the city did report on violence caused by Black soldiers, it may have been an erroneous justification for creation of the plans. Based on firsthand accounts, soldiers, regardless of race were careless and destructive. Nolin Johnson recalled how Black soldiers did cause trouble in Tampa during the war, but his manner of speaking seems to indicate that it was not racially motivated, rather a part of the larger issue of violence from young soldiers in general,

> Well, all I know when they just coming through, it was a crowd just coming through, they was just coming through. Burning up, they wasn't beating or hurting nobody, just coming

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146 "Racial Disturbance Plan."

147 "Racial Disturbance Plan."

through, right there where I was living…Just for the hell of it, all I know. I didn't know what they were doing it for neither, just wanted to raise hell, all I know. Just wanted to raise it, when they were fighting, just wanted to get into it.

Furthermore, Johnson stated that these violent instances did not occur within white areas, clouding the actual likelihood of Black violence specially targeting whites, as the plans anticipated. Others, like John Wesley Brown, also remembered the soldiers' violence not being entirely noteworthy,

> There might have been a little scuffle… MacDill Field…Well, then during that time, you know, them soldiers was in and out of town… out there. Well, I think they had a little scuffle among the a… police and them soldiers [and] civilians [during] that time, but I don't think amounted to too much. You know, it wasn't too much.[148]

Thus, it would seem that violence by Black soldiers did not differ significantly from what was common among young soldiers of all races on their trips into Tampa. White soldiers often damaged property and engaged in fights on weekend leave. Local community groups organized dances and other events hoping to provide what they considered "wholesome" recreation opportunities to avoid the violent disturbances and property damage that characterized entertainment associated with the bars and saloons of the city. These firsthand reports certainly attribute the incidents to soldiers rather than men of certain races.

A 1943 FBI report on the racial conditions in the country signed by J. Edgar Hoover noted an incident from April 1942 at the shipyards between white and Black laborers that was stopped by company guards. The report concluded that it was likely that there was no outside influence on the incident, rather that it was an isolated incident classified as a "personal altercation."[149] The report further detailed that some unrest among Black Tampans may be due to the rising calls for equality

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[148] John Wesley Brown Oral History

[149] "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States," Federal Bureau of Investigation, United states Department of Justice, Washington D. C. September 24, 1943; the report does not indicate at which shipbuilding company that the incident occurred.

among the races, the Double-V movement. The increased social unrest stemmed from wartime realizations that the enemy, in Nazi Germany, operated on a principle of racism; this juxtaposed the systemic racism on the home front that African Americans wished to combat. The FBI report evoked a familiar trope that northern newspapers were immediately to blame for influencing the thoughts of Black southerners and introducing the dissatisfaction with their current situation.[150]

Some violence involving Black soldiers in Tampa was skewed by the press because of their race, rather than their role as soldiers within a wartime context of rowdy, young servicemen; the instigations of such violence were often muddied. It is fortunate that one such example captured by the prominent newspapers in Tampa, both white and Black, is still available; the Black newspaper that was prominent during World War II, *Tampa Bulletin*, later called the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, has very few remaining available fragments from the wartime years. The occurrence, in February 1944, began when a Black soldier swore at Army Captain T. L. Tedford who was directing traffic. When Tedford ordered the arrest of the Black soldier in question, other Black soldiers arrived to prevent the apprehension of the soldier who had reportedly used the foul language. Though a large crowd materialized and surrounded the suspect, the combined forces of the local police and military broke up the crowd and removed the soldier to the nearest police station. Both the *Tampa Daily Times* and the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported the remainder of the incident; the latter under the headline "Civil and Army Police Quell Rioting Negroes,"

> ...a huge mob, estimated at more than 4,000, assembled about the station and demanded that the man be released. Calls for help were broadcast and three armored riot cars...all city patrol cars...and sheriff's deputies rushed to the battle scene.

Police, heavily armed and numbering over 100, faced the crowd until they left the scene,

> Faced by the menacing guns of Army men, the Negroes finally dispersed and police immediately closed every saloon, juke joint, restaurant, theater and store on the street.

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[150] "Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States."

> Twenty-four Negroes were taken to the City Jail for trial…on charges of creating a disturbance and inciting a riot.[151]

The angle from the aforementioned newspapers paints a picture of wanton disregard for the law on the part of the Black crowd; however, this is not the only angle from which this incident was reported. The *Tampa Tribune* ran quite a different column regarding the incident under the headline, "Innocent Church Leaders Arrested." This angle, from the prominent Black newspaper paints a picture not of wanton disregard for the law, but of wanton racism and discrimination toward the African Americans involved. The clipping highlights how it was expected that race relations would improve yet instances like this have occurred. Most notably, the clipping emphasizes the arrest of church leaders from nearby Beulah Baptist Church, who had become ensnared in the fracas,

> Those of us who were beginning to believe we were approaching a day wherein a minority group would be protected instead of being subjected to terrorism, and that racial feelings were ebbing, in an effort to create a united people, were sharply awakened by the men who represent this city…How can we expect to even hope for victory with such treatment meted out to innocent Negroes of Tampa Sunday night?[152]

This incident is further evidence of the skewed portrayal of racial violence in wartime Tampa. While it would be easy to regard this as an isolated incident, much of the violence that came to define the wartime years, violence that is cited as the need for the disturbance plans, is of this nature; with roots in racism and discrimination. The Double V movement emerged when African Americans on the home front realized that the basis of their fight against racism in the United States could have succinct parallels to the fight against Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime; after all, the Nazi party operated on a fundamentally racist agenda.

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[151] *Tampa Morning Tribune*, February 21, 1944; *Tampa Daily Times*, February 21, 1944; *Tampa Morning Tribune,* February 22, 1944; *Tampa Daily Times*, February 22, 1944; Mormino, "G.I. Joe Meets Jim Crow," 34-5.

[152] *Tampa Bulletin* clipping in Papers of the NAACP, roll 12, 181.

Spearheaded by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, the Double V movement was not only the result of uncanny parallels between the fight overseas and that back home, but from the discrimination faced at home. African Americans were abundantly aware of their fight to gain equality during the war. In another rare surviving clipping from the *Tampa Bulletin,* the author denotes the advancements made thus far (1945) but notes that much trouble remained in their collective fight against discrimination from a national level.[153] As instances of wartime discrimination perpetuated, the NAACP became involved in some more high-profile cases across the country, some of which originated in Tampa. One such case involved a young Black man, Edgar Flowers who was falsely accused, tried, and convicted of raping a white woman, Catherine Oaks.

In November 1941, Catherine Oaks, the wife of a MacDill Field serviceman, was raped in her apartment by an unknown assailant.[154] Her description subsequently led to Flowers's arrest five months later. Flowers was only 20 years old at the time of his arrest.[155] After his arrest, police did not disclose to him the charges for which he had been arrested; they drove Flowers around for several hours, after which they brought him in and fingerprinted him. At this point, Flowers was accused of raping Catherine Oaks under the false evidence that his fingerprints were found throughout Oak's apartment. Under duress, Flowers confessed to the crime because he feared that the police might harm his ill and pregnant wife, or that he himself would be lynched. The state argued its case against Flowers largely on his forced confession with the addition of a shoe as evidence which later was found to be false evidence. Because of these circumstances, Flowers was subsequently found guilty and sentenced to death.[156]

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[153] Thyra Edwards, "Are 'Race Relations Advisors' Helping or Hindering the Advance of the Negro?" *Tampa Bulletin*, April 21, 1945.

[154] Fere, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 9-10.

[155] .*Flowers v. State,* Casetext Inc., 2020, https://casetext.com/case/flowers-v-state-43, 1.

[156] Fere, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 9-10.

It is here that the NAACP became involved, seeking to appeal the original verdict in the Florida

Supreme Court.[157] NAACP lawyers for Flowers cited the confession as being inadmissible on the basis

that it was delivered under duress. The majority of justices in the Florida Supreme Court affirmed the

original verdict, but their opinions were not unanimous.[158] Two justices, including Chief Justice Rivers H.

Buford, dissented to the official opinion of the court to affirm.[159] In their dissenting opinion, Chief Justice

Buford and Justice Armstead Brown questioned the validity of Flowers's confession and the admissibility

of a shoe as evidence. Though the dissenting justices had questioned the confession, they acknowledged

that it had been admitted to the original lower court by appropriate means.[160] Regarding the shoe

evidence, the dissenting justices found that the original court had erred; they cited the state's own

witness who disproved the possibility that the shoe left at Oaks's apartment could have belonged to

Flowers, noting that Flowers had indeed purchased a pair of shoes of similar type, but had done so after

the rape of Catherine Oaks had taken place that November 1941.[161] After the guilty verdict was affirmed,

Flowers's lawyers may have asked Florida governor, Spessard L. Holland, for a reduction of Flowers's

sentence from death to life imprisonment.[162] Despite their efforts, Edgar Flowers was executed by means

of the electric chair on June 26, 1943.[163]

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[157] Fere, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 10.

[158] *Flowers v. State,* Casetext Inc., 7.

[159] *Flowers v. State,* Casetext Inc., 7.

[160] *Flowers v. State,* Casetext Inc., 11.

[161]  *Flowers v. State,* Casetext Inc., 11.

[162] Fere, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 10.

[163] Vivien Miller, "'It Doesn't Take Much to Convict a Negro': Capital Punishment, Race, and Rape in Mid-Twentieth-Century Florida," *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 21, no. 1 (2017): 36.

The NAACP wanted to set a precedent with this case as it dealt directly with a forced confession. Though unsuccessful, their involvement is highly representative of the growth of activism during the wartime years and the Double V movement. Some wrote to the NAACP regarding issues faced in and around the city, including issues at MacDill Field. When a young Black soldier was killed, another close to him wrote to the NAACP for help in investigating the incident. In his letter, the soldier detailed the death and expressed his view that it was murder. In fact, the note appears to have been written in a quick hand cursive, but the word "murder" was written differently as if deliberately.[164] The Double V movement lived on throughout the remainder of the war with increased NAACP involvement and rising membership among Floridians. The confrontations over work, the actions of soldiers on leave, and the assertions of false arrests indicate that little had changed for Black Tampans.  Jim Crow reigned, but now he was supported by military police as well as local law enforcement. Discrimination ran rampant during the war and many African Americans were targeted under the excuse of the war emergency. Efforts for progress beyond such difficult times were suppressed by white authority.

## Venereal Disease

Black women were targeted as the agents of venereal disease, a scourge that plagued military bases across the country regardless of the racial or ethnic composition of the local population. With such a great influx of people into Florida, the threat of venereal diseases became a large concern for urban and suburban communities, especially those like Tampa, where wartime industries and military operations brought thousands of young men and women to the city. Florida had already gained a poor record concerning venereal diseases. Prior to World War II, Florida had the highest death rate caused by venereal diseases in the United States.[165] When the necessity to control the spread of venereal diseases

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[164]  "Letter to Walter White of the NAACP about the killing of a black soldier at MacDill field in Tampa," *Florida Humanities Council,* *https://fcit.usf.edu/wwii/race.php.*
[165] Claire Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," *The Florida Historeal Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (2012): 99.

arose, syphilis was the largest concern. Syphilis was the top concern because of its highly contagious

characteristics as well as its various debilitating effects which included paralysis, insanity, and death.[166]

Essentially, syphilis had the potential ability to severely hamper military operations. Though arrests were

made of both men and women, women ended up being disproportionately targeted versus their male

counterparts, and of those women, the majority were African American. Men were seen as integral to

the war effort, thus targeting them for the disease issue was to be avoided. Men were treated but not

often arrested, women were arrested, then treated. Limited availability of healthcare for African

Americans, both before and during the wartime period, contributed to noticeably higher infection rates,

and provided a plausible explanation as to why they had noticeably higher infection rates, but the

empirical evidence was largely ignored in favor of general stereotypical thoughts of inferiority and racial

predispositions to the venereal diseases.[167] Newspapers, like the *Tampa Daily Times* claimed that of

those who had contracted venereal diseases, between 45 and 50 percent of them were African

Americans. Mayor Chauncey continuously placed the blame on Black Tampans for the spread of venereal

disease.[168] Other newspapers reported that of the arrested women, few white women tested positive,

whereas nearly every Black woman did test positive: "Very few white women and practically every Negro

woman arrested on vagrancy or prostitution charges have venereal diseases, Sheriff Tucker said

today."[169] Police often raided bars and arrested Black women on the suspicion that they carried the

venereal diseases; they were tested at the city stockade.[170] State law allowed for this process to take

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[166] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 88.

[167] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 89.

[168] *Tampa Times,* September 1, 1943.

[169] *Tampa Tribune,* October 17, 1942.

[170] Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II," 4.

place legally, however unjust. Women could be held for a period between three and five days without

habeas corpus. After their testing, if they were found to be infected, they were given treatment.[171]

Originally, standard treatment consisted of a seventy week-long course of injections. Thirty consecutive

weekly shots of arsenic (now recognized as a carcinogen) were given into the arm immediately followed

by forty consecutive weekly shots of a bismuth solution into the hip.[172] As treatments became more

efficient, they also became more dangerous as the toxicity of the arsenic in the injections adversely

affected the infected individuals such that they required regular monitoring. In 1943, when a more

intensive treatment facility opened in Ocala, Florida, the treatment was shortened to ten weeks.

The treatment facility in Ocala was more similar to a prison than a medical facility; fences and

barbed wire were employed to keep patients contained. The facility was mostly used for individuals who

were labelled as untrustworthy to carry out the remainder of their treatment unsupervised after

symptoms subsided which could occur as quick as a few weeks after the beginning of treatment. After

the treatment facility in Ocala began operating in 1943, the arrest rate of individuals suspected to have

been carriers of venereal diseases rose dramatically, as local law enforcement agencies then had access

to housing for those individuals.[173] When penicillin was found to be effective at treating venereal

diseases including syphilis, arrests had already fallen but treatment remained largely with the use of the

aforementioned chemicals. Penicillin, however, remained difficult to come by until World War II was in

its twilight months. After the availability of penicillin became more widespread, arrests of individuals

suspected to be carriers of venereal diseases rapidly became low enough to be considered negligible.[174]

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[171] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 86.

[172] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 101-2.

[173] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 102.

[174] Strom, "Controlling Venereal Disease in Orlando during World War II," 103.

More work needs to be done regarding the decline of venereal disease rates in Tampa toward the end of the war and immediately after. Plausible causes include the increased availability of penicillin, the decline of young servicemembers coming through the state, and the lack of accurate reporting and media attention as the war wound down.

Venereal disease was a much-discussed issue across the nation, especially in towns around military bases. Communities adopted a variety of strategies for dealing with the very real public health issue that affected the fighting effectiveness of troops. In Florida, and the South, the strategy focused primarily on singling out Black women as the principal source of the disease. The focus on Black women rested on racial tropes that depicted them as overly sexualized temptresses of innocent (white) men. The solution was to arrest them, incarcerate them without trial, and hold them in an isolated place for more than a year while administering dangerous and sometimes deadly drugs. As peace seemed imminent, the problem seemingly miraculously declined and almost disappeared.

Though seemingly three disparate topics, these issues of housing, discrimination, and venereal disease, all succinctly show the effects of World War II on Tampa. These three topics help display the inequality that plagued the city. While everyone felt the effects of the war, they were vastly different depending on gender and race. Continuously, African Americans were faced with the reasoning that the ongoing discrimination that they were faced with was the result of the ongoing war emergency. The lack of housing, discrimination, and venereal disease control efforts can all be linked back to the common scapegoat of the war emergency. In addition, the above topics all demonstrate how reporting by white officials and white newspapers facilitated a racist and discriminatory agenda in Tampa.

**Prosperity After Crisis**

After the end of World War II, Tampa, like the rest of the country, experienced rapid demilitarization. Dependent on a defense industry and the presence of military bases, the city developed strategies to remain prosperous. In creating a plan for the postwar era, Tampa laid the foundations for a

new economy based on development and tourism, an economy that city elites believed would encourage prosperity while maintaining racial and gender constructs.

Though it was acknowledged that the end of the war would reduce the necessity for shipbuilding, many thought that the industry was strong enough to persist as a permanent feature of the city's economy. Throughout the late 1940s, 1950s, and into the 1960s, city officials debated and battled to maintain and grow Tampa such that it would be a thriving center of business and industry for west Florida just as other cities like Miami and Jacksonville were for their respective regions. However, shipbuilding's permanence in Tampa was only a hope and its demise was far from gradual; both the Navy and Maritime Commission had cut back order for vessels by August 12, 1945, though World War II had not technically ended yet as Japan had not yet surrendered. Within days, TASCO announced a cutback in its labor force of 2,000 workers at the yard. By August 17, McCloskey announced that all contracts with his Hooker's Point Yard had been withdrawn. Labor force reductions at the shipbuilding companies occurred rapidly often by the thousands.[175] Historian Robert Lewis argued that wartime manufacturing in the South either reinforced the prevailing economic structure or "built an extremely fragile and unevenly developed economic base that did not last beyond the end of the war."[176]

While plans for city growth are not uncommon throughout the country, city officials were planning for the growth of Tampa in its most literal sense. Plans for the annexation of surrounding suburban areas had been brewing for years but city officials faced opposition from residents who opposed the movement; those opposed cited the seedy and corrupt reputation that Tampa had become unfortunately known for. The residents of the areas proposed to be incorporated struck down the

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[175] Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail," 103.

[176] Robert Lewis, "World War II Manufacturing and the Postwar Southern Economy," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no 4 (2007): 840.

measure repeatedly in 1947 and again in 1951.[177] After several failed attempts, the measure was passed

in 1953, subsequently the city limits expanded greatly more than doubling the area of the city (see figure

5). After the city expanded, further efforts for city growth were then centered around the revitalization

and redevelopment of the stagnated central downtown area. It is also likely that city officials wanted to

capitalize on GI Bill money from returning servicemembers who were ready to build homes.

Other means of securing Tampa's economic prosperity predated the end of World War II; of

those, perhaps the most influential was the Economic Development Committee of Hillsborough County,

the EDC. The EDC had a set of goals which centered around the general economic wellbeing of the city.

Originating as a part of the national efforts to prevent the country from falling back into a depression,

the EDC was formed with the National Committee for Economic Development, the CED, in mind.

However, the EDC had much more comprehensive goals suited to the local area which outperformed the

CED's goals that had not translated well from such a large macroeconomic scale. Additionally, the EDC

went well beyond the scope of other like committees from other cities and locales across the nation,

including metropolitan planning, engineering, and municipal budgeting.[178] When the EDC was formally

founded on August 6, 1943, an assortment of top business officials was selected to be among the

committee leaders, including George B. Howell as president. Under his leadership, the EDC laid out three

distinct goals for the city after the end of World War II: lowering freight rates servicing Tampa, the

transfer of wartime industry into peacetime industry, and employment for returning military service

members.[179] Though an ambitious goal, lowering freight rates was likely next to impossible for a city

organization such as this to accomplish.

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[177] Robert Kerstein, "From Annexation to Urban Renewal: Urban Development in Tampa during the 1950s and 1960s," *Tampa Bay History* 19, no. 1: (1997).

[178] Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 138-41.

[179] Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 143.

The board members of the EDC owe much of their success to the actions of municipal planning consultant George W. Simons Jr., who had been contracted with the City of Tampa before America's involvement in World War II to organize plans for the future prosperity of the city. Simons had made a name for himself as a successful city planning consultant in Jacksonville before he was contracted by the City of Tampa; his plans were of a grand scale which included the means to ensure the availability of affordable housing, public green spaces, urban renewal, and attractive centers for industry. Though these improvements are beneficial on the surface, they likely excluded any nonwhite residents of the city. Much of Simons's plans were dashed by the complications of wartime demands but when the concerns shifted toward postwar prosperity for Tampa, and the EDC had been formed, Simons's influence rose again. Simons proposed grand scale plans for the improvement of the city, notably, he focused on the clearing of slums in the city and the redevelopment of the small, outdated homes dating back to the boom of the 1920s which no longer suited the city's evolving population. Again, Simons's plans left out the interests of African Americans. Much his earlier plans, many did not come to fruition, yet they, and much of the EDC's activities in urban renewal in Tampa, displayed an acknowledgement and dedication to the rising middle class. However, Simons's plans and those of the EDC made ignored the systemic racism that had plagued the city, nor did they confront its existence at all.[180]

One of the EDC's biggest concerns was the transformation of the shipyards. The EDC understood that the shipyards would cease their utility once the war was over and much of their production would abate. They wished to have the port united under one common organization. After a lengthy process of

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[180] George W. Simons Jr. Major Street Plan, City of Tampa, Florida, Including Rules and Regulations for Subdivisions and Interim Zoning Ordinance. Jacksonville: Simons & Sheldrick Company, 1941; George W. Simons Jr., Zoning Plan: City of Tampa, Florida, Including Extent and Nature of and Trend of Blighted Areas; Transportation and Transit; Regional Aspects of Problem (Jacksonville: The Simons Sheldrick Company, Municipal Engineering, Research, and Planning, 1942); George W. Simons, Jr. Final Report of Comprehensive Plan: City of Tampa, Florida. Jacksonville: The Simons-Sheldrick Co., Planning Engineers, 1945, p. 197. GWS Papers, UNF; Minutes of the Public Works Committee of the EDC, July 26, 1944, p. 2-3 (Mayor Hixon Papers, Box 8, Folder 71, CTARS). Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 194-5.

legal red tape, planning, opposition from some, and support from others, the EDC pushed the bill which

would create such an organization in May 1945. On October 16, 1945, the bill passed at the state level,

and the Hillsborough County Port Authority was created, later becoming the Tampa Port Authority.

Within days the EDC was disbanded in Tampa.[181]
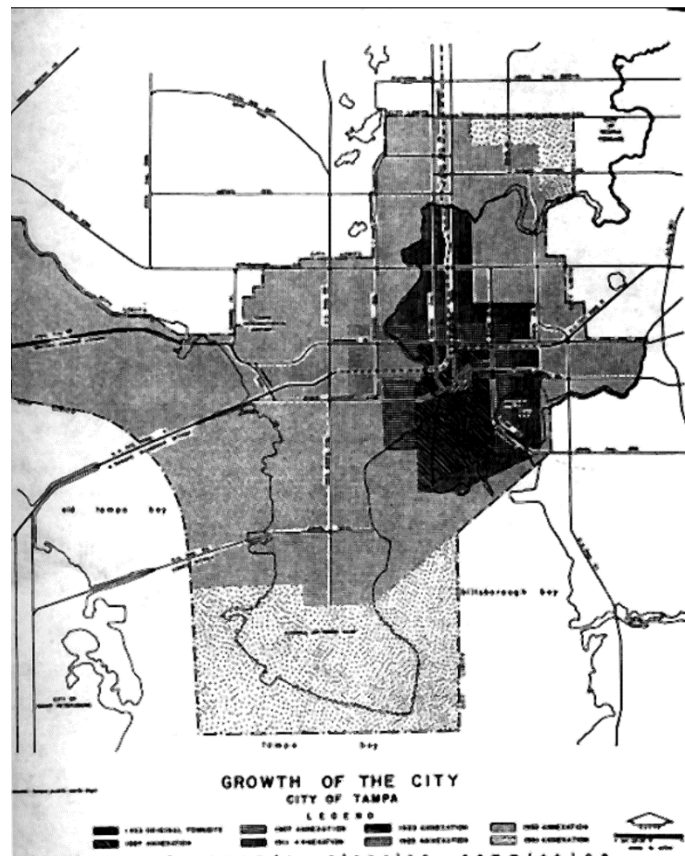


Figure 5 A diagram from the Hillsborough County Planning Commission detailing the expansion of the
city limits in 1953. The area in black is the city before expansion, the area in gray (originally small dots
though image quality has suffered from its age) is the added area after the expansion measure passed in
1953. Robert Kerstein, "From Annexation to Urban Renewal: Urban Development in Tampa during the
1950s and 1960s," Tampa Bay History 19, no. 1: (1997), 5. Public Domain.

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[181] Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 168-70.

Partly because of the efforts of city officials and committees like the EDC which were tasked with ensuring the growth and prosperity of the city, Tampa experienced immense growth in population following the close of World War II. The population had expanded from 108,148 to 124,476 between 1940 and 1945 respectively. Between 1950 and 1960 the population of Tampa had grown from 124,681 to 274,978.[182]

If Tampa planners ignored African American input into postwar schemes for prosperity, they at least nominally included white women in discussions on the future of the city.

### How the People Moved On

As World War II wound down, committees were formed to address the growing concern over the postwar era. For example, one notable committee questioned how women should move forward after so many had entered previously male dominated spheres. It is clear that the organizers of the committee had no intention for a discission of outcomes beyond the continuation of prewar gender roles; in addition, there seems to have been no effort to include working women in the discussion either. The *Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems* was held at Hotel Hillsborough in Tampa on Wednesday, February 21, 1945. The organizers of the event knew that the war was drawing to a close. Committee members came together to understand the new roles that the war may have produced for women in Tampa and how they would go forward with those changes in mind. Some committee members noted that World War II existed as proof that women were equipped to handle traditionally male dominated employment positions; as such, they called for an end to discrimination on the basis of sex.[183]

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[182] Florida Department of Agriculture and Nathan Mayo, "The Seventh Census of the State of Florida, 1945," (1946), 74; U. S. Census Bureau, "Florida, Table 1.—Population of Counties, Urban and Rural, 1960; U. S. Census Bureau, "Florida, Table 2.—Population of Counties, by Census Divisions, 1960-Con.."; Gary Mormino, "Tampa at Midcentury: 1950," *Sunland Tribune* 26: 1.

[183] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems," February 21, 1945, folder: 2016.068.008, WWII, Tampa Bay History Center, Tampa, Florida.

The committee was not uniform in its opinion and different positions were made apparent with each session. Some members who claimed they were operating for the best interest of women seemed to undermine that position continuously with their speech. As part of one session, the *Address on Finance*, speaker Victor H. Northcutt argued that women had neglected to seek solutions for post war financial uncertainties. He commended the women in attendance yet referred to them as a pressure group, a notion that they only succeed in achieving their goals when others do not exercise their voices enough.[184]

B. C. Stafford delivered the *Postwar Industrial Relations Address*, in which he made claims that the vast majority of women wished to leave their newfound employment opportunities and "return to their home duties." Stafford did not provide evidence of systematic research on the views of women, nor did any of the women in attendance comment on his position.[185] On the topic of labor unions, Stafford claimed that he supported organized labor but contradicted his own opinion thereafter. In his view, big labor unions operated against the public interest; however, he was not in support of any government intervention in union proceedings.[186]

Additionally, many panel members who spoke at length seemed much more concerned with returning service members than how women would proceed in post-war Tampa. Like Stafford's ambiguous opinions, another speaker whose name is not listed, claimed that he believed that it was not unpatriotic for women to remain in their new employment positions, after having been questioned by a

[184] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems."

[185] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems."

[186] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems."

woman on the panel. The speaker welcomed women who had had newfound employment opportunities to remain in those positions. However, he cited polls which indicated that women did not wish to remain in these positions and would rather leave the workforce or change employment.[187] Again, like Stafford, the speaker in this instance gave no evidence whatsoever as to where the metrics for the polls he cited originated.

It is likely that the conference did not actually include any working women who would face the issues of postwar employment. Rather, the speakers of the conference used their platform to push women back to lives of domesticity. They were not alone, magazines, including *Life* and *Ladies Home Journal*, attempted to subvert any change of gender roles through carefully worded advertisements that acknowledged women's wartime work but also steered them back to a life of home duties. One such advertisement by The Hoover Company featured a woman dressed in an apron with rolled up sleeves; the text of the advertisement hints that once the war is over and factories are no longer concerned with assembling war industry products, vacuum cleaners, among other appliances, will provide women with new tools to benefit that transition.[188] National magazines were not alone in pressing rhetoric concerning women's expected return to home life after the war. Local newspapers like the *St. Petersburg Times,* published occasional articles that featured women who expressed their desire to return home after the war. Reading about other women who voiced this opinion provided a supportive narrative that most women were expected to follow. It is unlikely that newspapers would have featured women who were adamant at retaining their wartime positions.[189]

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[187] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems."

[188] Hoover, "Nobody's going to call me a softie!" advertisement, *Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1943.

[189] *St. Petersburg Times,* April 18, 1943; Babb, "Women and War," 48.

Oral histories suggest that some women were more ambivalent about returning to traditional household work. In Jacksonville, Fannie Hutchison remarked that she had worked at Wainwright's shipyard, until it closed and fired all women from the company; Hutchison seemed to emphasize that her fate was the same as other women despite having been ensured by others that she would not be fired, "I worked 'til it closed down and they said, 'You'll work right on, they won't fire you.' But I went out with the rest of 'em…"[190] Others like Mildred Crow-Sargent expressed their expectation and desire to return to home life, but their longing for other opportunities continued after the war, "It [home life] was a role that everybody enjoyed and looked forward to mostly, but there were other roles that women wanted to play. I wanted to be an oculist…and at that time women were not admitted to medical school, it just was not done."[191] In Jacksonville as well, newspapers featured articles on women wishing for a return to home life, further reinforcing the established gender roles, and suppressing any change of those roles.[192]

What is perhaps most interesting about the aforementioned conference, yet not surprising, is its exclusion of any other races or ethnicities beyond the presumed white; the panel members made no effort to discuss those of other races and how they would move forward.[193] Nolin Johnson's narrative continued into the postwar era. Working at the Tampa shipyards throughout the duration of World War II, Johnson had saved up enough money to purchase a lot in the city to build a home; by 1946, Johnson had saved $1,700 which he used to buy his lot for $250 and the building materials for $1,250.[194] After

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[190]  Fannie Hutchison interview by Peggy Dorton Pelt, June 24, 1992, 5, Reichelt. Program of Oral History, Florida State University; Duda, "It's a Man's World," 42.

[191] Mildred Crow-Sargent, interview by Lisa Craft, March 24, 1999, Reichelt Program of Oral History, Florida State University; Duda, "It's a Man's World," 43.

[192] Duda, "It's a Man's World," 42-3.

[193] Transcript of "Consultation between Women Leaders and Business Managers on Post-war Problems."

[194] Oral History with Nolin Johnson.

leaving the shipyards that year, Johnson went on to work at a chemical plant where between his long

shifts, he found time to work on building his new home. However, as Tampa grew, urban renewal

projects often targeted and resulted in the displacement of low-income residents like Black or Latin

Tampans.[195] The aforementioned "slum" clearance targeted these neighborhoods. This is perhaps what

happened to Nolin Johnson in 1974, when the City of Tampa purchased his home, presumably under the

authority of eminent domain. Johnson was compensated $15,000 for his home with which he used to

purchase his next home in full.[196] Johnson considered himself lucky, as many had their homes destroyed

with little or no compensation. With the city focused on expansion and development, Johnson said that

finding a job was much easier after the war. However, not all was well in the city for Johnson and other

Black residents.

The 1950s and 1960s were a tumultuous period in American history namely for African

Americans who were in the midst of the battle to gain the constitutional rights they deserved as citizens.

Johnson's testimony of that period included several allusions to the struggles that he and other Black

residents of Tampa experienced. Johnson recalled when he and other Black residents were restricted

from voting for certain political candidates, via the Democratic Party's white primary.[197] This was much

alike the political climate of the city just a few decades earlier, during the Great Depression, when the

white Municipal Party was in control of primary elections. Their aim was to effectively ensure that votes

from Black residents were irrelevant and that Democratic candidates would win every election. The

white primary ended in Tampa in late 1945 when Florida Secretary of State R. A. Gray issued a directive

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[195] Kerstein, "From Annexation to Urban Renewal: Urban Development in Tampa during the 1950s and 1960s," 1.

[196] Oral History with Nolin Johnson; this oral history with Nolin Johnson was conducted in 1978 in the home that Johnson bought with the money given as compensation for his original home built in 1946.

[197] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

affirming the Supreme Court decision again them.[198] As political power in the South shifted in the years following the war, restrictions on Black voting remained.[199] Johnson also recalled efforts to push Black Tampans out of city limits so that they would be paid less for work; outside the city, labor only paid $1.50 an hour compared to $2.00 an hour within the city.[200] In doing so, the city could continue their plans to clear "slums" and perpetuate white supremacy.

Perhaps the most telling of all from Johnson's testimony lies within what was not said. Throughout the interview, Johnson touched on physical violence aimed at Black Tampans only briefly and does not go into great detail outside of those few anecdotal instances. However, when questioned directly about whether he remembered any lynching, he immediately claims that he does not remember: "No, I can't remember. No I can't remember no lynching, not right now. No, I don't know, no lynching, I can't remember it right now."[201] The tone of Johnson's response seems to indicate that he did remember something but would not talk about it. As mentioned earlier, there are records of lynching; it is plausible that Johnson knew of some people who had been lynched, or those who were threatened. Available records detail five lynchings that occurred in Hillsborough County.

## Conclusion

While the advancements of some made during the war are not to be denied, there was considerable effort to return those who had made wartime gains back to their prewar statuses. These efforts went far beyond the city or county level. On unionization, J. Tom Watson, the Attorney General of

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[198] Pam Iorio, "Colorless Primaries: Tampa's White Municipal Party," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2001): 313.

[199] Bliss, "Making a Sunbelt Place," 62-63

[200] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

[201] Nolin Johnson Oral History.

Florida had maintained a very anti-union position throughout his tenure and announced his intention to enforce the state's right-to-work legal status soon after rapid demilitarization brought layoffs throughout several key wartime industries including the shipbuilding industry. The amendment that made Florida a right-to-work state had been passed during the war but could not be enforced due to widespread federal contracts and mandates calling for the use of unionized labor.[202]

Though shipbuilding had expanded rapidly and was a major employer during the war, the industry could not adapt to a lack of demand for military watercraft. The post-war era also came with its own issues regarding women and Black Tampans in that concern for returning service members quickly outshone any concern for how others who remained on the home front would adapt to the post-war era. White women were expected to return to their home duties while African Americans were expected to fall back in line with the racial segregation and discriminatory systems of the pre-war era.

Wartime violence presented a nuanced scenario. While violence did occur, its origin is muddied by the angle from which it was reported. Black soldiers were indeed causing trouble in Tampa, yet so were white soldiers. It seems emphasis was placed upon the Black soldiers because they were Black, when their actions could have been much more accurately attributed to their positions as soldiers. Other incidents clearly stemmed from instances of racism and discrimination in which the actions of others instigated the violence, yet only the actions of those who were involved and Black were recorded and punished by law.

Although the Double V movement had success in other regions, its effects on Tampa during the war are unclear due to the scarcity of remaining wartime Black newspapers which would have featured such articles. However, there is enough evidence from other available materials that detail the increased

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[202] Lewis N. Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II," Sunland Tribune 16 (1990): 12.

activism of the movement. The NAACP in Tampa clearly had a presence through their desire to set legal precedents, and their function as a resource for Black Tampans when racial tensions were high.

Women were uniformly pushed out of the workplace at the end of the war; both newspapers, and officials pressed the narrative that women belonged in the home. Though some might have wanted to remain, their opportunities were slim and they certainly were not represented by the press. From all angles, women were forced to regress to their prewar. statuses.

Thus, the predominant theme in Tampa at the end of the war and immediately afterward was one of regression and repression. Attempts were made at all levels to return all those who had made any wartime advancements back. While some historians like Nick Wynne called wartime race relations placid in Tampa, if anything, the above chapters demonstrate that race relations were far from placid. Efforts to return women to the home, quash unionization, and suppress the financial and social advancement of African Americans are apparent.

However, this is not to say that Tampa was devoid of any watershed moments. The explosive growth that the city experienced as thousands of workers and their families immigrated into Tampa to either train at its military facilities, or to work in its wartime industries, is a direct effect of World War II. The surge in population growth was not a temporary effect as so many other effects were; rather, the population plateaued before again growing exponentially in the 1950s as a result of the city plans for expansion which again, were a product of the war's effects on the city.

# CONCLUSION: WATERSHEDS IN SHIPYARDS?

Fundamentally, this thesis asks if World War II produced any watershed moments within the shipyards in Tampa, Florida. Certainly, the city had changed quite a lot throughout the decades that this thesis focuses on, but whether those changes were lasting and transformative is more problematic.

Regarding the shipbuilding industry, there can be no doubt that it served to save what was an economically ailing city in an area where the previous centers of industry were faltering; Tampa was unlike other more industrial locales throughout the country such as the automobile industry in Michigan, or steelworks in Pennsylvania. Southern states like Alabama had firm industrial bases in cities like Birmingham where steel and coal mining united workers of all races into relatively strong unions given that they operated in the South.[203] Tampa's importance to the citrus industry was strong, yet the agricultural crises of the late 1920s and early 1930s contributed to the overall economic crises. Even the famous cigar industry suffered as preferences changed to cheaper cigarettes and city officials staunchly opposed the workplace radicalism that had characterized the industry. The shipbuilding industry jumpstarted the economy of Tampa, but the industry did not have a place in the postwar era. Demilitarization and a lack of civilian utility led Tampa's shipbuilding companies to cease operations shortly after the end of hostilities.

The shipbuilding industry was thoroughly entrenched in the battle for unionization, and though progress was made on that front, antiunion sentiments won out. Opposition from officials of the city and state had existed in the pre-war era and were only temporarily put aside when federal contracts called for the inclusion of unionized labor; once those federal contracts dried up and the war emergency was no longer an obstacle, officials returned to their widespread opposition to unions.

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[203] Krochmal, "An Unmistakably Working-Class Vision," 925-6.

Black Tampans were subjected to discriminatory practices as the scapegoats of the war emergency. Their gains during the war were few compared to others with continued disparities in pay, treatment, employment opportunities, and union opportunities. By 1945, MacDill Field was home to over 3000 Black service members, yet only one was an officer; moreover, that officer was a chaplain.[204] While some women did make advancements during the war, they were compelled and expected to return to their home lives in the aftermath of the war. As Claudia Goldin and Claudia Olivetti found, blue-collar working women were stripped of their new employment, the same is found in Tampa, where women working in the shipyards did not remain in their positions.

The justification for regional biases provided by the war emergency was extended to the immediate aftermath of the war. While attempting to reassert control, local and state officials used the war emergency as a convenient explanation as to why some people experienced change, but also why that change could not persist. In their eyes, World War II was a unique scenario which demanded a unique response; once over, situations could regress to their prewar statuses. While the war emergency was used to suppress progress during the war, it was also used to suppress progress made after. With the war over, opportunities dried up and adherence to social roles was expected. Women were expected to return home and take care of husbands, homes, and children. If they wished to remain working, it was within already acceptable "women's work" positions such as nurses, or secretaries. African Americans were expected to continue living within the social constraints of Jim Crow; they were expected to only hold positions as cooks, janitors, helpers and unskilled laborers, to be lesser than whites. Unions were expected to dissolve, if not they faced harsh opposition from local and state officials, now without the protection of federal mandates.

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[204] Gary Mormino, "Here's Why Florida's African American History during World War II Matters," *Tampa Bay Times*, July 27, 2023.

In some respects, Tampa is very representative of the rest of the South apart from specialized regions. Many other southern cities could not convert their wartime manufacturing to sustainable post-war economic strongholds; one of the few exceptions being the petrochemical industry in the gulf regions of Texas and Louisiana. Historian Robert Lewis understood the South as having returned to a low-wage, nondurable goods-based economy that was apart from the national postwar economic structure of high-wage, durable goods.[205] Perhaps Lewis sums it up best: "The barriers to the labor market may have been dismantled, but the scarcity of well-paid employment in new manufacturing sectors continues to be daunting for workers."[206]

Considering the work of other historians referenced throughout this thesis, and the historiography that they have all contributed to as their works have intersected with watershed moments, there is not sufficient evidence to make the claim that World War II represented a watershed moment on shipyard workers in Tampa. Though shipyard workers experienced many changes, none of those trends were lasting enough to fit the established historiographical definitions for watershed moments. These findings harken back to the opening quote, that the war emergency was often used as a tool to deny the progress of those in need.

However, as a city, Tampa did experience a watershed moment; the explosive growth of the city by population and area was a direct result of World War II. Furthermore, that growth, as a part of a national trend toward urban and suburban expansion, was transformative and lasting: a watershed moment. In this context, this change is understood as affecting all Tampans, not only the marginalized groups that are central to this thesis. Though this analysis is at a local level as recommended by past

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[205] Lewis, "World War II Manufacturing and the Postwar Southern Economy," 840.

[206] Lewis, "World War II Manufacturing and the Postwar Southern Economy," 865.

historians, this work may not fully bridge the gap, between national and local analyses, that they have alluded to.[207] However, there remains a wealth insight gained by this exercise.

These findings are not to say that there was not a modicum of change throughout Tampa, just that it was not the transformative change that constitutes the definition of a watershed moment. World War II was a large enough conflict that it did change the perceptions of many Americans on various aspects of their lives. The war sowed the seeds for transformative change that would occur later. Women's roles were changed, albeit not immediately after the war, and many African Americans had a new weapon to combat racism with in that of the common enemy of Nazi Germany. Thus, the war did not directly cause transformative changes throughout Tampa, but it did begin the trend for changes later. World War II changed individuals' lives, but not the institutions in which they lived. The social and economic barriers within which the analyzed groups lived continued to restrict their lives after the end of World War II. Thesis barriers were essentially continually supported by white authorities both at a state and community level.

Much of this later change came with the leadership of veterans returning from World War II. As veterans of all races returned home, they had new outlooks on life that would then influence later landmark changes of the 1950s and 1960s. Changes began with the military, when President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948, in which he desegregated the military. Many of the social expectations for people in the South were challenged by the thoughts of these returning veterans. Though the expected roles were limits again immediately following the war, the lasting impact that the war had on its veterans, ultimately assisted in breaking down those roles.[208]

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[207] Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*; Anderson, *Wartime Women*; Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*; Goldin and Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply"; Kersten, "African Americans and World War II"; Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*.

[208] For more on the role of veterans in changes that occurred after World War II, see Jennifer E. Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

The history of watershed moments is unique in itself. In its beginnings, broad analyses were made to assess the legacy of World War II and from those analyses it was determined that the war did indeed represent a watershed moment.[209] Following these analyses came the work of those historians who saw their flaws and accurately pointed out inconsistencies that invalidated the broad claims for watershed moments.[210] As the scopes of research shrank to smaller regions or locales, or focused on marginalized groups instead of the entire populus, nuance was introduced. From that nuance, it has become more difficult to claim that watershed moments have occurred. Just as past historians have pointed out the inconsistencies in the effects of World War II on the American people, so too could a future historian with further resources find inconsistencies in this work. Watershed moment analyses may have reached a limitation on their efficacy; claims of watershed moments are generalizations based on evidence, however, there is an equally likely opportunity that some evidence contradicts the claim. Just as the evidence cited in this thesis cannot support a claim of a watershed moment for shipyard workers, future scholarship may raise new questions about transformative moments.

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[209] Terkel, *The Good War*; Winkler, *Home Front USA*.

[210] Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*; Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History"; Anderson, *Wartime Women*; Kessler-Harris, *Women Have Always Worked*; Goldin and Olivetti, "Shocking Labor Supply"; Winkler, "From the Editor"; Kersten, "African Americans and World War II"; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*; Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice"; Babb, "Women and War"; Susan O'Brien Culp, "For the Duration"; Gary Mormino, "Gi Joe Meets Jim Crow"; Catherine Féré, "Crime and Racial Violence in Tampa during World War II"; James A. Schnur, "Caught in the Cross Fire"; Wynne, "Shipbuilding in Tampa During World War II"; Wynne and Barnes, "Still They Sail"; Bliss, "Making A Sunbelt Place."

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