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"So Goes the Negro": Race and Labor in Miami, 1940-1963

by ERIC TSCHESCHLOK

IN recent years, numerous studies have probed connections between race relations and organized labor in twentieth-century America. Often, these studies have challenged the notion that the modern civil rights movement began in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation ruling. In their study of race and labor, for example, Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein have argued that the civil rights era began in the 1940s with the mobilization of large numbers of urban, working-class black Americans. During this period, as the two authors have pointed out, the "half million black workers who joined unions affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)" formed the "vanguard of efforts to transform race relations" in America. Specifically, in examining race-related labor issues in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Detroit, Michigan, Korstad and Lichtenstein have illustrated— for those communities— the "centrality of mass unionization in the civil rights struggle."¹

In Miami, Florida, race and labor intersected in many of the ways outlined by Korstad and Lichtenstein. The city's African-American community entered a period of concerted civil rights ac-

Eric Tscheschlok is a doctoral candidate at Auburn University. He would like to thank Professors J. Wayne Flynt and Larry G. Gerber for their criticism and support of this project.

1. Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), 786-811, quotations on 787. For additional studies emphasizing the pre-1954 origins of the civil rights era, see Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York, 1984); Jack M. Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Bloomington, 1987); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York, 1978); Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Reutten, *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Lawrence, Kans., 1973); Richard M. Dalfiume, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," *Journal of American History* 55 (June 1968), 90-106; Peter J. Kellogg, "Civil Rights Consciousness in the 1940s," *Historian* 42 (November 1979), 18-41.

tivism during the 1940s and advocates of biracial unionism figured prominently in this early drive for social advancement. But unlike Winston-Salem and Detroit, Miami never experienced a bona fide labor-based civil rights movement because the drive for interracial unionism never made great headway in South Florida. For blacks in Miami and the rest of metropolitan Dade County, the "mass unionization" to which Korstad and Lichtenstein alluded proved illusory until the 1960s.²

The failure of most of Miami's interracial labor efforts in the 1940s and 1950s was not for lack of trying on the part of the city's black working class. Like African Americans in numerous other communities, black Miamians aggressively endeavored to organize themselves into unions during these years. Nevertheless, several factors combined to frustrate the unionist ambitions of black working people in Miami well into the 1960s.

Foremost among these were the peculiar social and demographic characteristics of the economy and labor market in Miami and in Florida generally. These characteristics made unionization, for whites as well as blacks, a difficult undertaking at best. To begin with, Florida had the highest degree of ethnic diversity of any southern state. Florida's Jewish population, for instance, far and away outstripped those of the other southern states. Cities like Tampa and Miami also contained sizeable Hispanic communities. Similarly, Florida's black population expanded at an inordinately swift rate during the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1920 and 1950, the number of blacks increased from 330,000 to 600,000, with the latter figure accounting for 22 percent of the total state population. Most of this increase resulted from the in-migration of blacks from other parts of the South, especially from neighboring states like Georgia, whose black out-migrants consistently made Florida their destination of choice for the first six decades of the twentieth century.³

2. For a general overview of the civil rights movement in Miami, see Eric Tscheschlok, "Long Road to Rebellion: Miami's Liberty City Riot of 1968" (master's thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1995), 136-98.

3. Raymond A. Mohl, "The Settlement of Blacks in South Florida," in Thomas D. Boswell, ed., *South Florida: The Winds of Change* (Miami, 1991), 112-22; William E. Vickery, *The Economics of the Negro Migration, 1900-1960* (New York, 1977), 177-78; Jerrell H. Shofner, "Florida and the Black Migration," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (January 1979), 267-88.

Southern blacks were not alone in migrating to Florida. After 1920, a steady influx of newcomers from around the country and globe enabled Florida's rate of population growth to exceed that of any other state below the Mason-Dixon line. From labor's perspective, this constant demographic flux, together with the state's deep-seated racial and ethnic divisions; made Florida a challenging environment for organizing. These factors tended to create a segmented and unsettled labor force that held few prospects for mass mobilization and demonstrated fewer signs of solidarity. V. O. Key, Jr., confirmed this situation as late as 1949, noting tersely: "It cannot be said . . . that [Florida] workers pull together effectively."⁴

The structure of Florida's economy, too, acted as a deterrent to organized labor. Florida contained few industries typical of the industrial-era South. Textile mills, mining operations, and heavy manufacturing, which proved at least somewhat conducive to unionization, did not exist in the Sunshine State to any significant extent. Far more prevalent in Florida were smaller, specialized enterprises, such as Tampa's cigar-rolling industry. Composed of skilled cigar-makers, mostly of Latin descent, this industry functioned under conditions not usually considered favorable to industrial unionism. Even Florida's only substantial manufacturing enterprises— the shipbuilding operations in Jacksonville, Tampa, and Pensacola— did not appeal to organized labor as strongly as did similar heavy industries elsewhere in the South. The transient nature of the state's labor force made organizing these industries unusually difficult, as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) discovered when it sought to organize Florida shipyard workers during World War I.⁵

Economically, ethnically, and demographically, therefore, Florida was a southern anomaly. Miami, likewise, was an equally aberrant part of the urban South. Its most distinctive trait was its unique station as a thoroughly twentieth-century New South city. Though incorporated in 1896, Miami did not emerge as a bustling urban

4. V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949), 85-86, 100.

5. Durward Long, "Labor Relations in the Tampa Cigar Industry, 1885-1911," *Labor History* 8 (Fall 1971), 551-59; Durward Long, "The Making of Modern Tampa," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49 (April 1971), 333-45; Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana, 1987), 97-141; Wayne Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political 'Radicalism,' 1919-1920," *Labor History* 9 (Winter 1968), 73-90.

center until the 1920s when the city entered a period of phenomenal growth. By 1930 the metropolitan area embraced 142,000 people. By mid-century Greater Miami claimed just under half a million inhabitants. And only ten years later, the city stood poised to overtake the one-million mark.⁶

In addition, Miami eclipsed most southern cities in its degree of ethnic pluralism. Though only about 20,000 Hispanics, mostly Puerto Ricans, lived in Miami in 1950, the number of Spanish-speaking residents surpassed 100,000 before the close of the decade. And, of course, the city's Latin population mushroomed tremendously amid the Cuban exile migration of the 1960s. Similarly, Miami was home to large numbers of immigrants from the Bahamas and other Caribbean islands. Furthermore, Miami's Jewish community qualified as the largest in the South. Between 1940 and 1950, the city's Jewish population rose from 8,000 to 55,000, reaching 100,000 by 1955. The city's African-American community, meanwhile, grew less rapidly than the Jewish or Hispanic populations. Still, the number of blacks in the Miami metropolitan area almost tripled between 1940 and 1960, totaling just under 140,000 by the latter year.⁷

Clearly, the ethnic and demographic patterns that worked to the disadvantage of organized labor on a statewide level emerged in Miami as well, but with greater intensity. This held true for the city's economic structure, too. In no way did Miami conform to the industrial patterns characteristic of the rest of the urban South. Miami lacked the steel mills and iron foundries present in Birmingham and Chattanooga. The city contained no tobacco factories as in Winston-Salem, nor any coal fields as in Kentucky and West Virginia. The textile and paper mills that dotted the landscape of Georgia and the Carolinas had no equivalents in Dade County. In sum, Miami boasted little manufacturing of any sort. Instead, the

6. Raymond A. Mohl, "Miami: New Immigrant City," in Raymond A. Mohl, ed., *Searching for the Sunbelt: Historical Perspectives on a Region* (Knoxville, 1990), 150.

7. Raymond A. Mohl, "Ethnic Politics in Miami, 1960-1986," in Randall M. Miller and George E. Pozzetta, eds., *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South* (Westport, Conn., 1988), 144-45; Deborah Dash Moore, "Jewish Migration to the Sunbelt," in *ibid.*, 46; Dade County Council on Community Relations, "Progress Report," pamphlet (1959?), Records of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Race Relations, Record Group 100, Series 226, box 8, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter GACRR Records); Raymond A. Mohl, "Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65 (January 1987), 271-97; Mohl, "Settlement of Blacks," 112-22.

city domiciled scores of small retail firms and tourist-related service industries.

In significant ways, then, Miami differed from the South's leading industrial centers. Owing to these differences, the city's labor institutions developed during the 1940s along lines unlike those of many other urban communities, including those studied by Korstad and Lichtenstein. Miami's labor movement, while spectacular in some respects, nonetheless lacked the dynamism of labor activities in both Winston-Salem and Detroit. Consequently, the degree of black participation in Miami's labor movement, as well as the effectiveness of labor-oriented black militancy, paled somewhat in comparison with those two communities, and with many others.

A primary reason for this was that the American Federation of Labor (AFL) monopolized union operations in Dade County and throughout Florida. The more radical CIO, which worked best in the manufacturing industries so scarce in Florida, never gained a secure foothold in Miami. By the end of the 1930s, in fact, only 1,100 workers in the entire state belonged to CIO organizations as compared with an AFL union membership of 40,000. During the 1940s, CIO campaigns to establish biracial unions in Miami scored a few successes, but these proved fleeting. By 1950, the left-leaning, racially progressive group had faded virtually out of sight in Miami and in many other areas of the conservative cold war-era South.⁸

By contrast, AFL organizations proliferated in Miami during the 1940s and 1950s. The spread of AFL unionism generally opened few doors for Miami's black workers, however, since the AFL permitted its local units wide latitude in regulating their affairs. In race-conscious southern cities like Miami, this policy all but ensured exclusionary and unequal treatment of African Americans by labor organizations. As Wayne Flynt states, "the AFL by guaranteeing its unions local autonomy acquiesced to racial discrimination."⁹ In short, AFL predominance in Dade County meant

8. Gilbert J. Gall, "Southern Industrial Workers and Anti-Union Sentiment: Arkansas and Florida in 1944," in Robert H. Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville, 1991), 232. For the CIO and the South, see Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia, 1988); Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960); Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Sumner Rosen, "The CIO Era, 1935-1955," in Julius Jacobson, ed., *The Negro in the American Labor Movement* (Garden City, N.Y., 1968), 188-208.

9. J. Wayne Flynt, "The New Deal and Southern Labor," in James C. Cobb and Michael V. Namorato, eds., *The New Deal and the South* (Jackson, 1984), 85.

that local unions clung stubbornly to the color line long after barriers of racial inequity began to fall in other social spheres.

Of course, Miami's black community had known labor discrimination long before the 1940s. Since the city's incorporation in 1896, Miami mirrored the rest of the Jim Crow South in embracing a protocol of labor relations that limited craft and employment opportunities for African Americans. By the 1920s, municipal ordinances prohibited African-American craftsmen from plying trades in white areas of the city. Local authorities continued to enforce these strictures as late as the 1940s. Many blacks did work in white communities, but in domestic or manual-labor capacities only. As one field agent for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation observed in the 1930s, Miami blacks were not "allowed to come into [the] white part of [the] business section unless in some servile capacity."¹⁰

Black workers found little solace in organized labor, as trade unions invariably excluded them. At the same time, though, the scope of unionism in Dade County was negligible prior to 1940. Unions existed in Miami, but the city was a far less fertile ground for labor activities than other urban areas in Florida. In industrial shipping centers like Jacksonville, Tampa, and Pensacola, labor unions enjoyed some success in the first half of the century.¹¹ But until the 1940s Miami's economy revolved principally around tourism and thus did not lend itself to the labor-intensive fields that experienced mass unionization in other metropolitan communities.

Changing economic patterns, triggered in part by the onset of World War II, altered this situation in the 1940s as Miami became a more industrialized and economically diverse metropolis. Around 1940, for instance, commercial aviation emerged as a major growth industry in Miami, which soon served as the main hub for Eastern and Delta Airlines and Pan American Airways. Military operations in Miami resulted in improved and expanded aviation facilities, which

10. Paul S. George, "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56 (April 1975), 432-47; Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C., 1930), 323; Dade County District Welfare Board No. 9, "Monthly Report on Defense Developments, May-June 1942," typescript, Part 1, Series 6, box 56, National Urban League Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; L. R. Reynolds, "Florida Trip— Feb. 1-8, 1981," typescript, reel 45, Papers of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, microfilm edition.

11. For organized labor activities in Florida cities before 1940, see Wayne Flynt, "Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (April 1965), 315-32; Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political Radicalism," 73-90.

helped the city become a gateway for civil air travel after the war. Wartime activities also spurred the growth of Miami's once-minuscule manufacturing sector. In 1940, only 3,600 Miamians, or roughly three percent of the local workforce, held factory jobs. A decade later, nearly 15,000 operatives worked in manufacturing capacities, which by then included new war-inspired industries like shipbuilding. Manufacturing expanded further during the 1950s so that by 1959 Miami's industrial sector claimed almost 40,000 employees, who accounted for about 13 percent of the total labor force.¹²

As Miami underwent the transformations incidental to industrial growth, a budding labor movement took shape. The same was true for other cities as well. As David Brody has argued, the New Deal labor relations legislation of the 1930s combined with wartime prosperity and soaring employment rates in the 1940s to create both a legal framework and a social setting conducive to workplace-oriented militancy and mass unionization in industrial regions throughout the country. Miami felt the impact of these developments in the early 1940s when the city's emerging proletariat began demanding a greater collective voice within Miami's workplaces. The pervasiveness of local unionist sentiment became evident in 1943 and 1944, when Florida's attorney general led a right-to-work crusade against closed-shop labor contracts. In a statewide referendum in 1944, Dade County's electorate voted in favor of union security and against the open-shop proposition.¹³ Though the right-to-work forces ultimately prevailed, the referendum signaled the strength of Miami's wartime labor movement.

The wartime unionization of the city's workforce remained largely racially exclusive, however. The AFL dominated labor organization in these years, and with few exceptions AFL unions made obeisance to the prescripts of Jim Crow. Nonetheless, black working people challenged the system of exclusion. The 1940s brought a heightened awareness of civil rights and civil liberties issues to black communities throughout America, and black Miamians

12. Raymond A. Mohl, "Changing Economic Patterns in the Miami Metropolitan Area, 1940-1980," *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida* 42 (1982), 63-73; Gall, "Southern Industrial Workers," 227.

13. David Brody, "Labor and the Great Depression: The Interpretive Prospects," *Labor History* 13 (Spring 1972), 231-44. Other scholars have also emphasized the war's decisive impact upon organized labor, especially in the South. See Flynt, "The New Deal and Southern Labor," 68-72, and F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Gall, "Southern Industrial Workers," 228-36.

aimed to let the labor establishment know it. Hence, African-American workers fought to gain union membership, struggling collectively for what Korstad and Lichtenstein have called "the industrial 'citizenship' that union contracts offered once-marginal elements of the working class."¹⁴ These efforts, often backed by the CIO, and in one noteworthy instance by the AFL, produced some impressive successes. By the same token, though, these successes generally proved impermanent.

The first large-scale organization of black workers in Miami took place in the early 1940s in the commercial laundry industry, and it occurred under the auspices of the AFL. Spearheading this drive was James Nimmo, a black Bahamian immigrant and member of Florida's Communist Party (CP) who boasted a long history of civil militancy. During the 1920s Nimmo served prominently in the Miami division of Marcus Garvey's black nationalist organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which enjoyed widespread support within the city's large Bahamian enclave. Nimmo's efforts to unionize black laundry and dry cleaning workers in the 1940s were highly effective. The new union did not, however, symbolize a titanic triumph over AFL racial bias. Like the laundry industry as a whole, the union was almost totally black and, hence, segregated de facto. Still, unionization certainly enhanced economic and occupational opportunities for hundreds of African-American workers. Moreover, the success of Nimmo's efforts made Miami one of only four Deep South cities in which the AFL Laundry Workers Union was able to set up shop by the mid-1940s.¹⁵

CIO representatives also had some brief success organizing black workers in the Miami area. During the war years, Dade

14. Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 787.

15. "Testimony of James Nimmo," Dade County Grand Jury, Investigation into Communist Activities in Miami, Florida, October 27-28, 1954, Papers of the Florida Legislative Investigation Commission, Record Group 940, Series 1486, box 6, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter FLIC Papers); "Testimony of James Nimmo," U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, November 29-December 1, 1954 (Washington, D.C., 1955), 7426-48; "Testimony of Edwin E. Waller," in *ibid.*, 7306-307; Raymond A. Mohl, "'South of the South?' Jews, Blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960," forthcoming in *Journal of American Ethnic History*. For the UNIA in Miami, see Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, 7 vols. (Berkeley, 1983-1990), Vol. 3, 513-15, 656-57, Vol. 6, 594-95, Vol. 7, 124, 133-34, 141-42, 166-71; Herbert R. Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York, 1944), 134.

County's Local 59 of the CIO Shipbuilders Union flourished as an interracial body. The union's regional director took special note of "the tremendous success of [the] organization among the Miami Negro workers." Biracial organizing continued in the late 1940s under the direction of the CIO-affiliated Transport Workers Union (TWU), a New York-based outfit seeking to expand nationally. In this endeavor the TWU enlisted the aid of Florida CIO director Charles Smolikoff, who once managed Local 59 of the Shipbuilders Union.¹⁶ According to a 1955 state investigation, Smolikoff was also "the leading Communist in the Miami area" during the 1940s. In hearings before the U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in 1954, several local CP members corroborated this claim, with one commenting that Smolikoff proudly styled himself "to the left of left."¹⁷

About the time World War II ended, the TWU hired Smolikoff and a handful of local labor activists, including James Nimmo, to organize workers in Miami's aviation industry. By 1946 this team succeeded in forming a racially integrated union— TWU Local 500— from employees at Pan American Airways and Eastern Airlines.¹⁸ Black air transport workers proved avid backers of the union movement. Lou Popps, a black Pan Am cargo porter and TWU shop steward, recalled that he and his colleagues joined the union to combat unequal employment practices. The airline, for instance, provided air-conditioned, terrazzo-floored dining areas for its white personnel, while black workers ate in the lounge

16. William Smith to Thomas J. Gallagher, November 18, 1943, Series 5, box 102, Archives of the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America, Historical Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Maryland, College Park (hereinafter IUMSWA Archives); "Testimony of Charles Smolikoff," Dade County Grand Jury Investigation, Miami, Florida, June 25, 1954, box 6, FLIC Papers; Joshua B. Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966* (New York, 1989), 261.

17. Ellis S. Rubin, *Report on Investigation of Subversive Activities in Florida by the Special Assistant Attorney General, State of Florida, in Cooperation with the American Legion, Department of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1955), 32; "Testimony of Louis James Popps," in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7398; "Testimony of Edwin E. Waller," in *ibid.*, 7296-97, 7313.

18. Charles Smolikoff to Douglas L. MacMahon, May 9, June 1, September 1, 1946; Charles Smolikoff to Art Shields, (1946?), all in Local 500 file, Papers of the Transport Workers Union of America, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York City (hereinafter TWU Papers); Freeman, *In Transit*, 261; "Testimony of Charles Smolikoff;" "Testimony of James Nimmo," box 6, FLIC Papers; Rubin, *Report on Investigation of Subversive Activities in Florida*, 30-45; *Miami Herald*, August 6, 1946.

kitchen under “pretty poor conditions.” With a view toward eradicating shop-floor inequality, then, Poppo and his African-American co-workers became the union’s most vocal advocates.¹⁹

By 1948, however, CIO organizing drives began to encounter serious resistance. Like interracial labor campaigns and radical civil liberties causes nationwide, those in Miami suffered devastating setbacks amid the conservative political and racial atmosphere of the early cold war years. Throughout the country, anticommunist partisans questioned the patriotism of almost any human rights, labor, or left-liberal association that voiced dissatisfaction with the status quo. This was especially true in the South, where conservative segregationists cloaked themselves behind a thick veneer of “Americanism” while denouncing civil rights coalitions and militant labor brotherhoods as subversive torchbearers of Stalinism. To southern votaries of McCarthyism, the line between social activism and socialism was not fine, but invisible.²⁰

Cold war politics in Florida conformed to this paradigm, as evidenced during the state’s 1950 U.S. Senate race. The contest pitted veteran New Dealer Claude Pepper against fellow Miamiian George A. Smathers. Pepper had been popular among Florida voters since the 1930s. By the late 1940s however, Pepper’s recent appeals for close U.S.-Soviet relations alienated him from the state’s red-scared electorate.²¹ Smathers, meanwhile, exploited popular anxieties to perfection. His political expressions, according to one scholar, were “weighted with bigotry and with fanatically misleading patriotism,” not to mention considerable antipathy for union-

19. “Testimony of Louis James Poppo,” in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7398-99.

20. For right-wing attacks on leftist and civil rights groups during the McCarthy Era, see Fred J. Cook, *The Nightmare Decade* (New York, 1971); Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York, 1990); Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca, 1964); Harvey A. Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport, Conn., 1981); Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Cranbury, N.J., 1988). For the South specifically, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge, 1969), 170-89; American Jewish Congress, *Assault upon Freedom of Association: The Southern Attack on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (New York, 1957); Irwin Klibaner, “The Travail of Southern Radicals: The Southern Conference Education Fund,” *Journal of Southern History* 49 (February 1983), 179-202; Thomas A. Krueger, *And Promises to Keep: The Southern Conference for Human Welfare* (Nashville, 1967).

21. James C. Clark, “Claude Pepper and the Seeds of His 1950 Defeat, 1944-1948,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 74 (Summer 1995), 1-22.

ism. Thus, during the campaign Smathers cursed a CIO-sponsored black voter-registration drive in Florida as a "dangerous invasion of carpetbaggers." He also blasted Pepper as a Russian sympathizer who was soft on the race question. The election results revealed a great deal about public sentiment in postwar Florida. Despite overwhelming pro-Pepper support from organized labor, Florida left-wingers, and the state's large, liberal Jewish population, Smathers won the Senate seat with ease. As one author has remarked, Florida's white masses solidly backed Smathers's "nigger- and red-baiting" campaign against Pepper.²²

The conservative, anticommunist ethos pervaded Dade County as well. Of course, many Americans envisioned Miami as a liberal hotbed, a cosmopolitan playground for transplanted Yankees and foreign tourists. In 1958, the national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) expressed a nationwide assumption when he billed Miami as "not so intolerant as most cities of the Deep South."²³ This assessment fell short of reality, however. Investigative journalist Stetson Kennedy probably came closer to the mark in 1951 when he dubbed Miami an "anteroom to Fascism." White civil rights activist Ruth Perry painted a similar picture in 1957, observing that Miami had "an appearance of more liberality and freedom than actually exists."²⁴

The McCarthyite spirit was therefore more virulent in Miami than most Americans would have imagined. During hearings in 1948, for example, Dade County solicitors displayed indifference toward death threats made against suspected radicals, but grew irate when witnesses did not supply information regarding Communist infiltration of the local garment industry. Moreover, biracial CIO activities attracted considerable attention from white-supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Having served mainly to intimidate suffrage-minded blacks and to enforce the residential color line during the 1930s and early 1940s, the Miami Klan ex-

22. Robert Sherrill, *Gothic Politics in the Deep South: Stars of the New Confederacy* (New York, 1968), 136-73, quotations on 137 and 150; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York, 1977), 165.

23. James R. Robinson to Mrs. Phillip Stern, October 13, 1958, Series 5, reel 19, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, microfilm edition (hereinafter CORE Papers).

24. Stetson Kennedy, "Miami: Anteroom to Fascism," *The Nation* 173 (December 22, 1951), 546-47; Ruth W. Perry, "Along Freedom's Road," *Miami Times*, June 15, 1957.

panded its repertoire in postwar years to include harassing advocates of interracial unionism. Once in 1948, in fact, white-robed Klansmen paid an intimidating visit to Charlie Smolikoff's home.²⁵

Miami police, meanwhile, hounded local radicals incessantly. In 1943, the city's police chief personally arrested Smolikoff for a vehicle inspection infraction, admitting that the arrest came in response to white complaints about Smolikoff's organizing of ship building workers "in the negro section." Such harassment increased in postwar years, when police targeted CIO organizers as fifth-column subversives. In 1948, Miami lawmen raided the homes of a few local CP members, sometimes without warrants. At the same time, the *Miami Daily News* directed a battery of vicious red-baiting exposes against Smolikoff and the TWU. Writing for the *Daily Worker*, the official organ of the CP of America, Elizabeth Gurlley Flynn impugned this "gutter journalism" as a "lynch campaign" directed against the forces of progressive change.²⁶ Yet, Flynn was too generous in her assessment of the "progressive" TWU. At that moment the union's national leadership was veering noticeably to the right of its original radical moorings. Like many labor groups at this time, the TWU yielded to McCarthyite pressure and attempted to demonstrate its national loyalty by purging its ranks of known Communists. Hence, in 1948 the TWU fired Smolikoff and his team of organizers.²⁷ This action left Miami's interracial union

25. *Daily Worker*, March 3, April 13, 1948; Freeman, *In Transit*, 294. For Klan attempts to intimidate black voters, see Alonzo P. Holly to Walter White, June 8, July 13, 1932, Part 4, Series C, reel 1, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, microfilm edition (hereinafter NAACP Papers); "Miami Klan Tries to Scare Negro Vote," *Life* (May 15, 1939), 27; *Miami Herald*, May 3, 1939; Ralph J. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, ed. Dewey W. Grantham (Chicago, 1973), 199-200, 307-309, 451-52. For Klan efforts to maintain residential segregation, see *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 11, November 17, 1945, February 23, 1946, November 15, 1947. The *Pittsburgh Courier* was a black-run newspaper whose Florida edition offered extensive coverage of events in Miami and enjoyed wide circulation within Dade County's black community. Sam B. Solomon to Millard F. Caldwell, November 3, 1945, telegram; Wesley E. Garrison to Millard Caldwell, May 4, 1946, both in Millard Fillmore Caldwell Papers, Record Group 102, Series 576, box 18, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter Caldwell Papers).

26. *Miami Herald* news clipping, (March 1943?), Series 5, box 102, IUMSWA Archives; Bella Fisher to Civil Rights Congress, July 26, 1948, Part 2, reel 24, Papers of the Civil Rights Congress, microfilm edition (hereinafter CRC Papers); *Miami Daily News*, February 17-19, 22, 24, March 6, 11, 1948; *Daily Worker*, March 3, 1948.

27. Freeman, *In Transit*, 294-317; "Testimony of James Nimmo," in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7443-44.

movement without an institutional base. Consequently, the movement collapsed almost immediately.

More than anticommunism led to the failure of CIO initiatives in Miami, however. For one thing, the structure of the local business economy hampered CIO attempts to effect industry-wide unionization. As F. Ray Marshall has illustrated, the low-skill, small-firm nature of Southern industry served as a stumbling block to organizing efforts throughout Dixie. The same was true in Miami, where manufacturing in the 1940s and 1950s remained the province of small plants that produced simple wares with a low-wage labor force. Moreover, by 1950 only 9.4 percent of the metropolitan workforce—less than 15,000 people—worked in industrial fields that the CIO would have likely considered within its operational purview. Though this level of industrial employment represented a threefold increase over prewar levels, the city's postwar industrial workforce was still comparatively small. The CIO, therefore, whose business strategy revolved around industrial unionism rather than AFL-style trade unionism, tread upon shaky ground in Miami from the start.²⁸

Racial controversy within the CIO also blunted the group's effectiveness. Despite the CIO's egalitarian preachments, there was in Miami some discrepancy between theory and practice in this regard. In 1943, a representative of the Shipbuilders Union flatly declared that the CIO's national anti-discrimination plank should be put aside when confronting touchy racial issues. Too vigorous a push for black rights, this official believed, would cause white workers to boycott the union, thereby undermining its bargaining power. Other unions took similar precautions. Most obviously, the CIO union hall was reserved for whites only, Black union meetings took place in "Colored Town." McCarthyite assaults precipitated further vacillation on racial-advancement issues. One Jewish radical repined in 1949 that CIO-baiting in Miami caused "a general slackening of the fight for Negro rights within the progressive T.W.U. union." CIO tolerance of Jim Crow led to friction between white and black labor activists. Lou Poppo, for instance, rebuked lo-

28. Marshall, *Labor in the South*; Mohl, "Changing Economic Patterns," 66.

cal TWU leadership for its “wishy-washy” stand against segregation and inequality in the city’s airline industries.²⁹

James Nimmo levied similar criticisms. Though himself a Communist, Nimmo believed white CIO organizers overzealously promoted the Communist agenda at the expense of union welfare, not to mention black aspirations for workplace equality. Charlie Smolikoff, for example, repeatedly chided Nimmo for failing to recruit black CP members from the AFL Laundry Workers Union. Nimmo, however, refused to court disaster by preaching communism in an AFL union. He also understood that black workers supported unionism, not for abstract ideological reasons, but for the promise of job security and better working conditions. From Nimmo’s perspective, Smolikoff seemed “all interested in building the Communist Party,” but less concerned about racial issues and general business matters affecting local unions.³⁰

Similarly, Nimmo detected patterns of racial stratification within the CP itself. Though a member of the CP’s executive city committee, Nimmo found himself excluded from many of the committee’s closed-door meetings, summoned “only when . . . needed” for “discussions on Negro problems.” When Elizabeth Gurley Flynn came to town in 1948 to meet with local party chiefs, Nimmo knew nothing of the visit until the next day—when he read about it in the *Miami Daily News*. Small wonder, then, that Nimmo believed the city’s white leftists merely “played up” the theme of racial justice in order to “gain the sympathy of the Negroes to draw them into the party.”³¹

The persistence of racial inequity in Miami’s Left-led labor movement conformed to a pattern common in many southern cities. Recently, in studying labor activities in Birmingham’s iron and steel industries, Robert J. Norrell has determined that the (CIO’s) egalitarian rhetoric was just that. Michael Honey has reached simi-

29. William Smith to Thomas J. Gallagher, November 18, 1943, Series 5, box 102, IUMSWA Archives; Bobby Graff to William L. Patterson, August 17, 1949, Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; “Testimony of James Nimmo,” in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7436; “Testimony of Louis James Poppo,” in *ibid.*, 7398.

30. “Testimony of James Nimmo,” in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7437, 7440-41.

31. “Testimony of James Nimmo,” in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7442-45; *Daily Worker*, March 3, 5, 1948; *Miami Daily News*, February 17-19, 22, 24, March 6, 11, 1948.

lar conclusions regarding CIO operations in Memphis. According to him, "the South's racial etiquette remained firmly in place in most CIO unions" in Memphis, where "racial divisions remained a potent source of [union] conflict, controversy, and weakness." For these scholars the CIO's equivocation on the race question contributed largely to that group's inability to organize Southern industrial workers on any grand scale. They certainly depict the CIO in a far less progressive light than do Korstad and Lichtenstein in their examination of the CIO in Winston-Salem.³²

Critics of Honey and Norrell argue that the two historians underestimate the obstacles facing the CIO in the South. Aside from right-wing repression and handicaps involving the structure of southern industry, the CIO confronted a white culture overwhelmingly united in its defense of the existing racial order. According to these critics, the pressure of this massive resistance, rather than any hypocritical conservatism of the CIO, accounted for accommodationist Jim Crowism in southern CIO unions. As Judith Stein states in her study of labor in Birmingham, "the wide gap between union principles . . . and attitudes prevailing in the surrounding city, diluted practice." Likewise, Rick Halpern has shown that in Fort Worth's packinghouse industry the CIO fought earnestly for black shop-floor rights, while declining to challenge southern racial conventions outside the workplace as a simple matter of survival. These studies suggest that Honey and Norrell misjudge the extent to which the CIO could have realistically won civil rights for southern blacks. Popular opposition to black social progress, not the policies of unions themselves, explained the temporary condition of interracial unionism in Dixie.³³

On a related note, some historians have pointed out that the practice of racial separatism did not cost unions black support. Bruce Nelson, for example, has found that black shipyard workers

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32. Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986), 669-94; Michael Honey, "Industrial Unionism and Racial Justice in Memphis," in Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, 135-57, quotations on 146 and 147; Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana, 1993).
33. Judith Stein, "Southern Workers in National Unions: Birmingham Steelworkers, 1936-1951," in Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, 183-222, quotation on 195; Rick Halpern, "Interracial Unionism in the Southwest: Fort Worth's Packinghouse Workers, 1937-1954," in *ibid.*, 158-82. See also Alan Draper, *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968* (Ithaca, 1994), 9-14.

in New Orleans and Mobile continued to back the CIO Longshoremen's Union despite its acquiescence to discrimination because they saw unionism as a source of benefits previously unattainable. Given this fact, Alan Draper has suggested that the CIO's equivocation on race represented an "astute" course of self-preservation in the race-conscious South. At any rate, Nelson and Draper, like Halpern and Stein, have exonerated the CIO from culpability for its failings in the South.³⁴

The foregoing arguments shed some light on the CIO situation in Miami. As mentioned earlier, the structure of the economy and the city's unique ethnic mixture provided a less-than-ideal setting for industrial unionism. Clearly, attacks from the political Right proved detrimental as well. Also, like CIO leaders elsewhere, those in Miami feared that strong agitation for racial equality would result in charges of "nigger unionism" by working-class whites. Further, black Miamians, like African Americans in other communities, supported the union movement despite its meek stance on civil rights. Even James Nimmo admitted that most black workers thought the CIO and CP were "doing a great job in assisting the Negroes."³⁵

Nevertheless, the racial policies of Miami's CIO had a more damaging impact than Draper and like-minded scholars acknowledge. As the objections raised by Nimmo and Lou Poppo plainly illustrate, CIO ambivalence on racial matters caused disaffection among Miami's leading black labor organizers. This dissension scarcely aided the cause of interracial unionism. Moreover, CIO accommodation to Jim Crow divested its organizing activities of the committed moral vision needed to sustain a true social movement. Thus, as Honey and Norrell conclude in their studies of Memphis and Birmingham, CIO organizations in Miami indeed bore a share of the responsibility for their own failings. That no union-anchored civil rights movement emerged in Miami during the 1940s was, at least in part, a consequence of labor's own volition.

34. Bruce Nelson, "Class and Race in the Crescent City: The ILWU from San Francisco to New Orleans," in Steven Rossworm, ed., *The CIO's Left-Led Unions* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), 19-45; Draper, *Conflict of Interests*, 12. See also Alan Draper, "New Southern Labor History Revisited: The Success of the Mine, Mill, and Smelters Union in Birmingham, 1934-1938," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (February 1996), 87-108.

35. "Testimony of James Nimmo," in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7441.

The course followed by local CIO organizers after their dismissal from the TWU further illustrates this point. For a brief period, Smolikoff, Nimmo, and their circle of associates attempted to continue their biracial organizing activities from within the ranks of Miami's newly founded chapter of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC). This organization sprang into national existence in 1946 through the merger of three agencies that promoted racial equality, labor rights, and civil liberties: the National Negro Congress, the International Labor Defense, and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties. Miami's CRC branch came into being in 1948, when several local Jewish radicals organized the chapter in response to conservative assaults upon Miami's leftist community.³⁶

A composite of militant blacks, labor rights advocates, and left-wing and predominantly female Jews, the local CRC employed a variety of interracial mass-action tactics to call public attention to the ignominy of Jim Crow in Miami. The group's CIO contingent worked mainly in the area of black labor rights, challenging the exclusionary policies of AFL unions and seeking to form new biracial labor organizations. Thus, by 1950, the CRC established a Greater Miami Right to Work Committee to combat racially restrictive labor practices, especially in local construction industries, which employed a large segment of Miami's African-American workforce.³⁷

These efforts stalled at times, however, as the CRC experienced the same racial cleavage that earlier rent CIO and CP leadership. To the dismay of CRC coordinator Matilda "Bobby" Graff, most of the group's labor activists refused to link their "fight in the shops" with the broader "political struggle for civil rights." The old CIO organizers worked to unionize black laborers but, once again, demonstrated little commitment to the overall theme of race advancement. This was telling, as Smolikoff and his band no longer answered to cautious union bosses anxious over political flak and potential white backlash. Instead, they belonged to an organization whose avowed purpose was to sustain a massive, labor-oriented civil

36. Gerald Horne, *Communist Front?* 13-36; Lawrence S. Wittner, "The National Negro Congress: A Reassessment," *American Quarterly* 22 (Winter 1970), 883-901; Charles H. Martin, "The International Labor Defense and Black America," *Labor History* 26 (Spring 1985), 165-94; Bella Fisher to Civil Rights Congress, July 26, 1948, Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; Mohl, "South of the South?"

37. Bella Fisher to Len Goldsmith, December 16, 1948; William L. Patterson to Bobby Graff, August 13, October 4, 1949; Bobby Graff to William L. Patterson, August 17, December 12, 1949; Greater Miami Right to Work Committee, "An Appeal to Reason," mimeographed bulletin (1950?), all in Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 25, 1949; Mohl, "South of the South?"

rights movement. Yet, they balked at this mission, which led to disputes with some CRC Jews, like Graff, and black activists, like Nimmo. National CRC leaders were equally displeased. In a letter to Nimmo, the director of CRC branches recommended greater efforts to carry the movement to "Negro working people" and their white working-class allies—something that Smolikoff's CP-CIO coterie had clearly failed to do.³⁸

CRC hopes for a joint labor-civil rights movement held no real prospects for success, however, as the organization received a swift deathblow from the political Right. On account of the group's pronounced interracialism and commitment to civil equality, the CRC was from its inception a constant target of harassment and repression by the KKK and the Miami police. Owing to its radical slant and to the Communist tendencies of its pro-labor elements, the CRC also fell victim to the right-wing political demagoguery of the early cold war era. Conservative officeholders, reactionary civic clubs, and a hyperpatriotic press all attacked the CRC as a Communist-front organization, putting the group on the defensive and undermining its effectiveness. This "hysterical baiting," as Bobby Graff called it, exacted a heavy toll. By mid-1950, Graff could report that right-wing segregationist interests had driven her group into oblivion.³⁹

The destruction of the CRC marked the end of the radical-led drive for biracial unionism in Miami. AFL unions reclaimed their hegemony, trampling the unionist aspirations of most African Americans. During the McCarthy era, in fact, the city's conservative leadership accorded flag-waving AFL organizations carte blanche to tighten racial controls. In the early 1950s, therefore, union officials were allowed to dictate the curricula of black vocational schools in Dade County. Predictably, labor leaders compelled these schools to offer training in traditional "colored" trades only, so that black graduates could not compete in white-dominated fields.⁴⁰

Gross racial proscription in local building trades typified the difficulties would-be black unionists faced in Miami during the 1950s. Throughout the first half of the decade, not a single construction-related union admitted black applicants, no matter how

38. Bobby Graff to William L. Patterson, March 31, August 17, 1949; Milton Wolff to James Nimmo, March 3, 1950, Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers.

39. Bobby Graff to Leon Josephson, March 4, 1949; Bobby Graff to William L. Patterson, March 31, August 17, 1949, May 4, 1950, all in Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; *Miami Daily News*, March 16, 1949; Mohl, "South of the South?"; Horne, *Communist Front?* 190-95, 252, 257.

40. Warren M. Banner, *An Appraisal of Progress, 1943-1953* (New York, 1953), 63.

highly qualified. This left black craftsmen, who were determined to work as skilled mechanics in Miami despite color bars, with little recourse but to form their own unions. By the mid-1950s, therefore, black plumbers, electricians, carpenters, painters, stonemasons, roofers, hod carriers, and other building tradesmen had all formed their own unions. Generally, these organizations served as segregated auxiliaries of the regular all-white unions.⁴¹

These Jim Crow unions had difficulty conducting business. Discriminatory hiring hall practices, for instance, limited the scope of employment for African-American unionists. Invariably, white union bosses enforced "gentlemen's agreements" restricting black operatives to job sites in "colored" districts while reserving all work in white areas for whites. During the mid-1950s union managers violated these covenants whenever business in white areas tapered off, however, "furloughing" black artisans so that out-of-work whites could find employment in black neighborhoods. Under these circumstances, noted local NAACP counsel Howard W. Dixon in 1954, black tradesmen received only "a modicum of work."⁴²

Black unionists encountered other roadblocks. Since Jim Crow locals were not chartered by the AFL, they offered black workers only second-class membership status. Workmen in "colored" auxiliaries paid union dues to the main local, but they seldom received voting rights or other privileges that AFL labor contracts secured for white union members. Furthermore, not one of Miami's segregated unions allowed its black members to receive apprenticeship training, effectively denying them access to the craft opportunities and vocational instruction that prepared white operatives for career advancement.⁴³

41. Howard W. Dixon to Herbert Hill, March 25, 1954, Part 13, Series A, reel 3, NAACP Papers; Florida Council on Human Relations, "Negro Employment in Miami," *New South* 17 (May 1962), 8.

42. Howard W. Dixon to Herbert Hill, March 25, 1954, April 22, 1955, Part 13, Series A, reel 3; Herbert Hill to Boris Shishkin, June 7, 1954, Part 13, Series A, reel 11, NAACP Papers; Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Florida: Constitutional Principle vs. Community Practice, A Survey of the Gap in Florida* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 24-26, 40.

43. Greater Miami Right to Work Committee, "An Appeal to Reason," Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; Howard W. Dixon to Herbert Hill April 15, 19, 1954; Herbert Hill to Howard W. Dixon, May 28, 1954, all in Part 13, Series A, reel 3, NAACP Papers; Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Florida*, 24-26.

Black building tradesmen did not accept such discrimination passively, however. Until around 1950, blacks actively backed the CRC's Greater Miami Right to Work Committee in its campaign to end AFL restrictions that "denied [blacks] the right to earn a livelihood." Once the CRC collapsed, though, black workers were left without an organizational base through which to pursue their aims. This organizational void persisted through the early 1950s. African-American craftsmen could have turned to the local branch of the NAACP during these years, but did not for good reason. Until the mid-1950s Miami's NAACP leadership proved meek, timid, and all but dormant in its civil rights advocacy. As CRC chief Bobby Graff reported in 1949, the Miami NAACP was "in very bad condition" with an "'Uncle Tom' leadership" that "want[ed] no participation in any kind of struggle."⁴⁴

This situation changed in 1954, however, when a new NAACP president, Father Theodore R. Gibson, infused his organization with a more aggressive spirit. An Episcopal priest, Gibson emerged as Miami's preeminent black activist in the 1950s and 1960s. In transforming the NAACP into a forceful voice for racial justice, Gibson enjoyed the aid of another activist preacher, Reverend Edward T. Graham. Minister of the largest Baptist church in Miami, Graham led several social protests in the 1940s as head of Miami's Negro Service Council, which served as the forerunner of the Greater Miami Urban League. Not surprisingly, Gibson and Graham were the foremost leaders of the black freedom struggle in Miami during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, black voters rewarded the two clergymen for their service by elevating them both to the Miami City Commission.⁴⁵ As soon as Miami's NAACP adopted a more activist stance, the city's black construction tradesmen looked to the association as a new base from which to challenge discriminatory labor policies. In early 1954, Samuel W. Perry, business manager of Miami's all-black trowel-trades union, appealed to the NAACP to assist the workmen he represented in securing equal labor rights. The newly invigorated organization enthusiastically accepted the invitation, launching a workmen's

44. Greater Miami Right to Work Committee, "An Appeal to Reason;" Bobby Graff to William L. Patterson, July 9, December 12, 1949, Part 2, reel 24, CRC Papers; Mohl, "South of the South?"

45. Raymond A. Mohl, "The Pattern of Race Relations in Miami since the 1920s," in David R. Colburn and Jane L. Landers, eds., *The African American Heritage of Florida* (Gainesville, 1995), 326-65.

rights campaign to "bust" the gentlemen's agreements and to integrate the city's lily-white craft unions. For several months, a team of NAACP officers, including Graham and the group's national labor relations secretary, Herbert Hill, met with black union agents and local AFL representatives to press the issue of integration. These negotiations soon brought positive results. In autumn 1954, Sam Perry's trowel tradesmen successfully merged into the established Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers Local 7 of Dade County.⁴⁶

Yet, integrationist efforts failed in most other areas. Unions representing carpenters, painters, tilers, sheetmetal workers, and nearly all other building tradesmen held firmly to the color bar, refusing to admit qualified black mechanics. In 1955, therefore, the NAACP could report that the AFL carpenters union had not "lifted any color ban" but instead had "provoked more economic discrimination." By the same token, union leaders continued to enforce covenants preventing black artisans from working outside "colored" areas. And, not infrequently, union officials maintained this arrangement by compelling contractors to refuse jobs to black workmen. In 1955, for example, when one contractor attempted to employ African-American carpenters on a "white" project, he was informed by the AFL's business agent that "he'd better lay off if he didn't want something to happen to his building." Even the newly integrated bricklayers local adopted a policy prohibiting the use of interracial work details.⁴⁷

Miami's NAACP chapter doubtless planned to escalate its workmen's rights campaign in order to emend these injustices, but attacks by Florida McCarthyites soon precluded this possibility. Persecution of Miami's leftist community by no means ended with the dissolution of the CRC in 1950. As one writer for *The Nation* observed in 1955, a strain of "grass-roots McCarthyism" pervaded the Miami area throughout the early 1950s. In 1954, for instance, both

46. Howard W. Dixon to Herbert Hill, March 25, June 2, August 21, 1954; Herbert Hill to F. A. Rodriguez, December 3, 1954, all in Part 13, Series A, reel 3; Herbert Hill to Howard W. Dixon, June 8, 1954; NAACP, "Negro Mechanics Admitted to Ex-Lily-White Florida Union," press release, September 2, 1954; NAACP, "Dade County AFL Union Steps Up Integration," October, 21, 1954, press release, all in Part 13, Series A, reel 11; Herbert Hill to NAACP Executive Secretary, memorandum, September 7, 1954, Part 13, Series A, reel 20, NAACP Papers.

47. Herbert Hill to Howard W. Dixon, September 15, 1954; Howard W. Dixon to Herbert Hill, March 26, April 22, May 2, 1955, all in Part 13, Series A, reel 3, NAACP Papers; *Miami Herald*, February 18, 1955.

HUAC and a Dade County grand jury conducted hearings to ferret out local Communists. A year later, the Florida Attorney General's office launched a similar crusade against subversive operations in the state. During all these investigations, Miami labor radicals and old CRC leftists, including Graff, Smolikoff, and Nimmo, endured unrelenting harassment. County inquisitors even jailed Smolikoff briefly after he invoked his Fifth Amendment rights during grand jury proceedings.⁴⁸

Against this backdrop, Miami's NAACP branch pressed for black inclusion in local labor unions. Though far more moderate than the CIO or the CRC, the NAACP was nonetheless inviting trouble. By the mid-1950s, Florida segregationists, like those throughout the South, had come to see anticommunist rhetoric as a potential means to forestall civil rights gains for blacks. According to guardians of white supremacy, any group that challenged the established order was dangerously un-American. Hence, Miami's now-militant NAACP chapter was bound to encounter the same right-wing molestation that debilitated local CRC and CIO affiliates in the 1940s.

Indeed, in 1956 state lawmakers created a body to carry out this mission—the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC), which was headed by former Klansman and staunch white supremacist Charley Johns.⁴⁹ Ostensibly, the Johns Committee was intended to keep subversive state groups in check. In reality, the FLIC functioned as a conservative weapon to stifle civil rights activism in Florida by attempting to expose the state NAACP as a Communist-front organization, and the committee made Miami's NAACP branch its primary target. In 1957, FLIC witch-hunters began a six-year crusade in Miami to “show a definite tie-up between the Communist movement and the NAACP” in Florida. Year after year, the FLIC subjected Miami NAACP members to batteries of hearings and high-pressure interrogations, hoping, as the leader of

48. Frank Dormer, “The Miami Formula: An Exposé of Grass-Roots McCarthyism,” *The Nation* 180 (January 22, 1955), 65-71; Leslie B. Bain, “Red Hunt in Miami: Who Formed the Posse?” *The Nation* 179 (August 7, 1954), 110-12; Mohl, “South of the South?”; “Testimony of James Nimmo,” in HUAC, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Florida*, 7426-48; “Testimony of James Nimmo”; “Testimony of Charles Smolikoff,” box 6, FLIC Papers; Rubin, *Report on Investigation of Subversive Activities in Florida*, 38-52; *Miami Herald*, September 1, 1954; *Daily Worker*, September 16, December 23, 30, 31, 1954.

49. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3rd ed. (Durham, N.C., 1987), 340.

Miami's CORE affiliate noted, "to smoke out reds in the NAACP."⁵⁰ By 1959, both Gibson and Graham found themselves on trial for contempt, with Gibson's case reaching the U.S. Supreme Court. A 1963 directive by the Court finally ended FLIC harassment of the Miami NAACP.⁵¹

Unlike some embattled NAACP groups elsewhere, Miami's NAACP branch never ceased functioning during its red-baiting ordeal. The costs of combating McCarthyite witch-hunts nonetheless placed a "heavy financial burden" on the Miami NAACP, while the whole affair precipitated a temporary drop in membership for the organization.⁵² These developments forced Father Gibson and his associates to reduce the scope of their activities. From the late 1950s through the early 1960s, the Miami NAACP concentrated almost exclusively upon matters of school integration, black voter registration, and integration of public accommodations.⁵³ Hence,

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50. Theodore R. Gibson to Miami NAACP members, March 3, 1958, Series 1, box 3, Robert W. Saunders Papers, University of South Florida Library, Tampa (hereinafter Saunders Papers); Shirley Zoloth to Gordon Carey and James Robinson, (November 1959?), Series 5, reel 19, CORE Papers.
51. *Gibson v. Florida Legislative Investigation Committee*, 372 U.S. 539 (1963); *Graham v. Florida Legislative Investigation Committee*, 126 Southern Reporter, 2d Series 133 (1960); Robert W. Saunders to Roy Wilkins, memorandum, June 22, 1959; Robert W. Saunders to Rutledge Pearson, (1963?), both in Series 1, box 1, Saunders Papers; *Miami Herald*, February 5-26, 1957, February 8-28, March 1, 1958, March 27, 1963; *Miami News*, February 7, June 18, 1958, March 27-28, 1963; *Miami Times*, March 8, 1958, April 11, 1959. See also Steven F. Lawson, "The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee and the Constitutional Readjustment of Race Relations, 1956-1963," in Kermit L. Hall and James W. Ely, Jr., eds., *An Uncertain Tradition: Constitutionalism and the History of the South* (Athens, 1989), 296-325.
52. Theodore R. Gibson to Miami NAACP members, March 3, 1958; Helen M. Berkmann to Robert W. Saunders, March 10, 1958, Series 1, box 3, Saunders Papers; Lawson, "The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee," 316.
53. For the Miami NAACP and school integration, see *Southern School News*, July 1956, 2, September 1958, 9; *Miami Herald*, August 19, September 14, 18, 1958; NAACP, Miami Branch, "An Open Letter to All Negro Parents of School-Age Children in Dade County," mimeographed typescript, (1957?), Series 1, box 3, Saunders Papers; Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Florida*, 14; *Gibson v. Board of Public Instruction of Dade County, Florida*, 272 Federal Reporter, 2d Series 763 (1959). For the Miami NAACP and black voter registration, see Robert W. Saunders to Theodore R. Gibson, March 27, 1959; Robert W. Saunders to John M. Brooks, December 18, 1959, both in Series 1, box 1, Saunders Papers. For the Miami NAACP and the fight to integrate public facilities, see Edward T. Graham to Theodore R. Gibson, August 8, 1960, LeRoy Collins Papers, Record Group 102, Series 776, box 33, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee; *Miami News*, June 7, 1956, April 11, 1960; *Miami Herald*, March 5, April 12, 1960; *Miami Times*, June 16, November 17, 1956, August 17, 1957, July 23, August 6, 20, September 3, 1960.

the group essentially discontinued its workmen's rights campaign during this span. Understandably, then, Miami's African-American workers made little headway in organized labor at this time.

In the late 1950s a handful of Miami unions did voluntarily desegregate. With the exception of the hotel employees union, these groups embraced few African-American workers. Even the hotel workers union refused to refer blacks to jobs unless employers specifically requested black workers.⁵⁴ The overall picture was even more bleak. In 1963, Robert W. Saunders, field secretary for the NAACP's Florida State Conference, remarked: "As labor goes, so goes the Negro."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, labor did not "go" at all well for African Americans in these years. At the end of the 1950s for example, a county-wide human rights audit sponsored by more than a dozen Greater Miami civic groups found that "unions composed of highly skilled workmen with apprenticeship systems exclude[d] Negroes" as a matter of official policy. As of 1962 and 1963, in fact, not one of the 1,500 people engaged in apprenticeship training programs in Dade County was black. By 1968, the number of black apprentices in Miami had climbed to only four.⁵⁶

In the early 1960s several state agencies documented the extent of racial bias in Miami unions. A 1962 study by the Florida Council on Human Relations found that Miami locals exhibited "a generally negative attitude" toward the idea of biracial unionism. Most unions barred blacks from membership or "adhere[d] to strict segregation."⁵⁷ The Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights made similar observations in 1963. The committee detected blatant patterns of color-based exclusion in many locals, while reporting that gentlemen's agreements remained pervasive in building-trades unions. Further, during interviews with the committee, many union officials made no pretense of masking their racial prejudice. When committeemen inquired into the absence of African-American electricians in Miami, the di-

54. American Civil Liberties Union of Greater Miami et al., "Tenth Anniversary Universal Declaration of Human Rights," Community Audit of Human Rights in Greater Miami, pamphlet, December 10, 1958, box 8, GACRR Records; Florida Council on Human Relations, "Negro Employment in Miami," 8.

55. "The Negro in Florida," *Florida Trend* 5 (February 1963), 19.

56. "Tenth Anniversary Universal Declaration of Human Rights," box 8, GACRR Records; Florida Council on Human Relations, "Negro Employment in Miami," 6-7; Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Florida*, 23; Philip Meyer et al., *Miami Negroes: A Study in Depth* (Miami, 1968), 50.

57. Florida Council on Human Relations, "Negro Employment in Miami," 8.

rector of the electricians apprenticeship program responded that blacks simply "lack[ed] the technical understanding of electricity" and were "not interested in hazardous work." A plumbers union spokesman, meanwhile, indicated that black apprentices were not welcome in his field due to the "close physical association required for instruction."⁵⁸

By the early 1960s then, black Miamians were scarcely better off with respect to their position in organized labor than they had been two decades earlier. As the Miami NAACP noted in 1963, "union bias" and other discriminatory "conditions . . . in the ranks of labor" persisted with considerable vigor.⁵⁹ Change was coming, however, but not until the civil rights movement reached its peak in the mid-1960s. Only then did the pressure of black activism, federal civil rights legislation, and affirmative action measures combine to create opportunities for African-American advancement within organized labor.

Ironically, the movement that finally succeeded in opening union doors for Miami blacks placed little emphasis upon labor issues. In fact, the civil rights movement of the 1960s had few connections at all with earlier labor-related activism. This observation runs counter to recent arguments made by scholars who see definite links between the radical, labor-associated social reformism of the 1930s and 1940s and the later civil rights crusade. In studying Communist activists in Depression-era Alabama, for example, Robin D. G. Kelley concludes that CP radicals "indirectly contributed to the 1960s revolution." Though recognizing the civil rights campaign as a "new movement," he insists that it was nonetheless rooted in the radicalism of the past.⁶⁰

Kelley probably overstates the case. In most southern communities, the links between the two movements were less certain. Even Korstad and Lichtenstein, who depict the Communist-connected CIO in Winston-Salem as an effective bastion of true racial progressivism, do not detect a residual radical impact upon North Carolina's civil rights movement. The earlier union-centered activism, they contend, was "a very different sort of civil rights movement"

58. Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Report on Florida*, 23-25.

59. NAACP, Miami Branch, *News Letter* 1 (May 1963), p. 2, in Series 1, box 3, Saunders Papers.

60. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990), 228-31.

than the one that followed it. Indeed, the “voices of black protest” that sustained the labor-based movement of the 1940s “played little role in the new mobilization” of the 1960s.⁶¹

The same was true in Miami. The CIO and CRC campaigns of the 1940s bore little relation to the church-based protests of subsequent decades. The black church, together with independent race-advancement groups such as the NAACP and CORE, supplanted labor unions completely as the institutional base of the black freedom struggle. Activist ministers, like Theodore Gibson and Edward T. Graham, emerged as the new leaders in the fight for racial justice. Joining the black clergy were middle-class professionals such as Albert D. Moore, an insurance agent who chaired Miami’s CORE group, and Dr. John O. Brown, a physician who held leadership positions in both CORE and the NAACP. None of these figures had ties to radical labor causes.

By the same token, the prominent CIO organizers and CRC leftists of the 1940s had no connection with Miami’s civil rights movement. For instance, Charlie Smolikoff, James Nimmo, and Bobby Graff all left Miami in the mid-1950s run out of town by McCarthyite witch-hunters. Smolikoff and Graff even fled the country briefly, seeking refuge in Mexico and Canada respectively.⁶² They left no legacy to the next generation of social activists. Indeed, participants in Miami’s civil rights struggle purposefully eschewed the radicalism that Smolikoff, Graff, and Nimmo embraced. This contributed in no small measure to the success of Miami’s civil rights movement. Red-tainted groups like the CIO and CRC made easy targets for McCarthyite segregationists. Attacking the black church and its allies, however, was akin to assaulting respectable, even mainstream, American values: Christian ethics, simple justice, non-violent protest. Jim Crow’s cause stood no chance against these odds. This conceptualization goes far in explaining why a black freedom movement not specifically concerned with labor matters could strike down Jim Crow unionism, while earlier labor-affiliated reformers failed to establish a genuine movement, or even to curtail the scope of labor discrimination.

61. Korstad and Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost,” 800, 805, 811

62. Mohl, “‘South of the South?’”