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“THE HERALDS OF THE DAWN:”
A HISTORY OF THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY IN
THE STATE OF FLORIDA, 1908-2019

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Texts and Technology
in the Department of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2019

Major Professor: Scot French
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ABSTRACT

Often overlooked in its contribution to cinema history, the State of Florida has the distinction of being among just a handful of regions in the United States to have a continuous connection with the American motion picture industry. This relationship in turn has produced iconic entertainment that has shaped the state’s image to the outside world, while production spending has served as an important booster for local economies across Florida. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the sometimes cooperative and often contentious dynamics between film and television producers and state politicians have influenced this history of film production in Florida. This can best be understood by examining the ideological divide between the pro-business and anti-corporate factions in Florida’s government. Through a series of interconnected case studies that apply place-based analysis, this project demonstrates how the Florida government and communities have historically interacted with the motion picture industry. While Florida never truly became an “Almost Hollywood” or “Hollywood East,” film producers and state officials were at various times successful in turning the cities of Jacksonville, Tampa, Orlando, and Miami into important centers for film and television production. Yet just as each of these production hubs gained momentum, resistance at the state and local level resulted in the industry’s decline and departure. These moments of cooperation and conflict provide important insights into the specific environmental characteristics that inspired filmmakers to come to Florida, as well as the social-political circumstances that eventually pushed them from the state. With a close scrutiny of trade press sources, periodicals, local newspapers, and the personal papers of filmmakers and politicians, this work explains the varied reasons behind the repeated rise, fall, and occasional exodus of the state’s motion picture industry. This will be achieved by scrutinizing examples that range from policy decisions made by Florida’s government from the turn of the twentieth century on through to the current efforts being made by Florida lawmakers to reinvigorate the state’s production industry.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a 1676 letter to the natural philosopher Robert Hooke, Isaac Newton incorporated a millennia old metaphor to explain his scientific acumen: “If I have seen further it was standing on ye shoulders of Giants.” All apposite academic studies are standing on a succession of incredibly tall scholars. In the case of this project, the Goliath who has without question laid the foundation for all future studies in the area of Florida film history is Richard Alan Nelson. His monolithic 798-page dissertation Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry (1980) was described by author Shawn Bean as his “own version of the King James Bible.” The same sentiment applies toward my use of his work as a point of reference. Beyond his decades worth of research – much of which has been essential in crafting the narrative of this work – Dr. Nelson donated a treasure trove of newspaper clippings, letters, memoirs, photographs, and documents to the Florida State University Library. The ten days I spent in Tallahassee reviewing these documents provided me with enough time to briefly scratch the surface of the sources that this passionate researcher had assembled.

My own research could not have been possible without the diligent support of scholars, researchers, archivists and librarians across the State of Florida. I would not have come close to reviewing the endless array of documents donated by Dr. Nelson without the coordinated assistance of Hannah Davis at the Florida State University Libraries. Jim Cusick of the University of Florida Library, Ben DiBiase of the Florida Historical Society and Lisa Dunbar of the Florida Department of State were each indispensable in directing me to contacts and identifying the collections that I would later incorporate into my research. Isabella Formar of the State Archives of Florida helped me access the various governors’ papers and documents related to the Florida motion picture industry. Jessica Morio and John Wilson at the Jacksonville Public Library assisted in providing me with daily uploads of early editions of the Florida Times-Union
and *Florida Metropolis*. Mitchell Hermann of the Jacksonville Historical Society directed me to a multitude of collections and sources on Jacksonville’s early cinema history. Devan Stuart Lesley and Rita Regan at the Norman Studios Silent Film Museum were generous enough to offer me a tour of their grounds. Barbara Tepa Lupack of the University of Rochester helped in giving me an introduction into the history of film production in Jacksonville. My email exchanges with James Crooks of the University of North Florida and Mark Woods of the *Florida Times-Union* helped me achieve a greater understanding of Jacksonville’s complicated political history at the turn of the twentieth century. Jennifer Dietz, the Archives and Records Manager for the City of Tampa, was an enormous help in providing scans for film programs of motion pictures produced in Tampa in the 1930s. Lou Kramer of the Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Moving Image Archive at Miami-Dade College graciously provided a tour of the facilities and a fascinating backdrop on the long history of film and television production in South Florida. Ashley Trujillo of the HistoryMiami Museum put up with my frequent rescheduling and offered an incredible array of material to help develop the narrative for my third chapter. My conversations with John Lux, the executive director of Film Florida, helped get me up to speed with the ongoing efforts by Florida’s film lobby to win back support in the Florida Legislature.

The institutional support I have received at the University of Central Florida has played a pivotal role in assisting me with the breadth of research I was able to cover. Joanie Reynolds of UCF’s Interlibrary Loan managed to help me track down an incredibly vast array of obscure pamphlets, government papers and documents that I had all but relegated to my wish list. Mary Rubin and Rebecca Hammond of UCF Special Collections provided me with an excellent environment to review delicate documents and pages from Florida’s past. Barry Mauer and Patty Hurter of UCF’s Texts and Technology Program proved to be a frequent source of encouragement throughout my Ph.D. journey. Peter Larson and John Sacher of the UCF History
Department were incredibly accommodating to the demands of my research schedule in regard to scheduling my courses. Jim Clark of the History Department has been an important mentor to me. His “suggestions” on where to apply for grants and scholarships has played a significant role in my development as a graduate student and emerging scholar.

I would like to individually thank each of the members of my advisory committee, without whom this dissertation never would have been possible. Daniel Biltereyst of Ghent University’s Centre for Cinema Studies has set an incredibly high bar of quality scholarship that I hope to emulate in my career as an aspiring film and media scholar. The coffee sessions I had with Phil Peters of the UCF Digital Media Department helped me to untangle a series of incredibly complicated episodes of Florida’s motion picture history into a cohesive narrative. Lisa Mills of the UCF Film Department has continually been a major source of support and encouragement both in my writing and where to showcase my research. Her assistance in helping me track down contacts and listening through every harebrained idea I wanted to pursue allowed this dissertation to truly take shape. My interest in Florida’s motion picture history was initially sparked and inspired by Bruce Janz of the UCF Philosophy Department, who taught one of the first classes I participated in as a graduate student. His support in my research interests has since rippled into a conference series, several articles, and a Ph.D. dissertation. Scot French has by far been one of the most important influences on my graduate career both as a master’s student and Ph.D. candidate. It was on his prompting that I pursued a Ph.D. in Texts and Technology to begin with and without his guidance and grounded perspective on how to conduct a substantial research project, this project never would have taken shape.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who instilled in me a devoted work ethic and a constant curiosity. Since childhood my mother inspired my love of history while my father taught me never to leave a project or promise unfulfilled or unfinished.
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<td>Committee for the Development of the Motion Picture</td>
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<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>Congress of Motion Picture Associations</td>
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<td>EMC</td>
<td>Edison Manufacturing Company</td>
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<td>EPCOT</td>
<td>Experimental Prototypical City of Tomorrow</td>
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<td>FFC</td>
<td>Florida Film Commission</td>
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<td>FMPTPA</td>
<td>Florida Motion Picture and Television Producers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMPTB</td>
<td>Florida Motion Picture and Television Bureau</td>
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<td>Industrial Development Commission</td>
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<td>MPPDA</td>
<td>Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America</td>
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<td>MRMA</td>
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<td>Office of Film and Entertainment</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFC</td>
<td>Reconstruction Finance Corporation</td>
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<td>SHC</td>
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INTRODUCTION: HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

Oldsst of all in its history, it is the youngest of all in its development. But as the facts of Florida’s unmatchable climate, its unrivaled agricultural and horticultural possibilities and its limitless opportunities in commerce and industry become known of all men, it cannot fail to become one of the richest, most populous, and influential in the whole family of commonwealths which make up our nation. The sun of Florida’s destiny has arisen and only the malicious and the short-sighted contend or believe it will ever set. Marvelous as is the wonder-story of Florida’s recent achievements, these are but the heralds of the dawn.

– Governor John Wellborn Martin, 1925

Florida in the Making

On March 26, 1925 the recently inaugurated Florida Governor John Wellborn Martin invited two hundred business leaders, politicians, engineers, real estate developers and economists to meet at the All Florida Development Conference in West Palm Beach. The purpose of the conference was to address the various infrastructural challenges state organizers faced to accommodate Florida’s recent surge in population and uptick in land speculation that had commenced since the Florida Land Boom started two years earlier. It was here that Governor Martin outlined “a program calculated to unify their efforts to stabilize the economic foundations of the commonwealth and to promote a wider knowledge of the sound realities underlying the speculative furor of the time.”

In attendance at this meeting was Frank Parker Stockbridge, a nationally acclaimed journalist, and John Holliday Perry, a millionaire publisher and owner of several major Florida newspapers. With Governor Martin’s endorsement, the two men collaborated to write a series of articles to document the rich history of Florida and examine the impact that the 1923 land boom had on the state. The result of this partnership was a 346-page tome titled Florida in the Making (1926). In addition to providing a heavily researched examination into the history of politics, agriculture, industrial development, tourism, and business across the state, Stockbridge and Perry’s research offers a fascinating living document.

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2 Ibid, x.
of one of the most pivotal moments in Florida’s development. More broadly, the work provides a unique insight into the cyclical nature of progress and regression that has come to define the state’s history. In the first chapter of *Florida in the Making*, aptly titled “History Repeats Itself,” Stockbridge and Perry provide an insightful set of guidelines on how best to write a history of the State of Florida. “The history of Florida today, is the history of what the modern pioneers who have made it inhabitable and accessible have done and how they have done it.” Yet such an approach is just one way to explain the fluid nature of a state constantly in transition. To follow up on their initial statement, Stockbridge and Perry acknowledge, “It is too soon to try to write the history of these latest years except as that of what Florida is today.” In developing a proper assessment of the history of motion picture production in the State of Florida, there is an explicit need to balance an overview of its essential pioneers with an understanding that the past and present politics in the governor’s office and legislature exist on constantly shifting sands.

Governor John Wellborn Martin is a key figure in terms of understanding both the circumstances that led to Florida’s drastic demographic shift in the twentieth century, as well as inspiring the ascendancy of a tourism industry that would go on to define Florida’s history until the present. In November 1924 Martin won a surprise victory in the Florida Democratic Party primary after a decisive runoff election pitted him against former Florida governor and populist demagogue Sidney J. Catts, a former minister who was known as the “Cracker Messiah.” Martin’s election drew a collective sigh of relief from the state’s establishment politicians who had witnessed under the Catts administration a mass exodus of out-of-state businesses interests in response to his ferocious anti-Catholic and anti-immigration rhetoric. In contrast to the divisiveness that came with the corruption, in-fighting, bigotry, and anti-corporate

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3 Ibid, 18.
attitude affiliated with the Catts administration, John Martin called for a balanced representation between Florida’s urban and rural areas and a coordinated outreach initiative to out-of-state investors to come to the state. In his three terms as Mayor of Jacksonville between 1917 and 1923, Martin introduced three recurring themes into his approach to government, “demands for liberality, common sense, and a businessman’s administration.”

Martin’s ability to bridge Florida’s urban-rural divide, combined with his reputation as the state’s “great road building administration,” has historically placed him as one of the most important figures who helped to trigger Florida’s transformation from “from Old South to New South, to Sunbelt South” and as the “catalyst for the emergence of modern Florida.”

In his appraisal of Martin’s time in office, Florida historian William Cash described the achievements of Martin’s governorship as closely resembling “the hero of one of Horatio Alger’s stories so that it made voters believe his election would greatly stimulate the development and progress of Florida.”

Victoria McDonell goes as far to credit Martin’s businessman’s administration as an essential event toward helping Floridians comprehend “the prospects of increased industry and tourism, Florida leaped from its past agricultural orientation into a modern, urban-oriented future.”

It is strange then to fathom that John Martin’s forward-thinking vision of Florida’s destiny as a center for trade, tourism, and economic development, did not include the motion picture industry. At the time film production was the third largest industry in the United States in terms of capital expenditure. During the 1910s and 1920s, film production was only exceeded in importance in terms of cash flow and income by the steel and oil industries. As Jacksonville’s Florida Metropolis reported in May 1916, “The time has arrived where no state or city which

\footnotesize{[9] McDonell, 50.}
has the natural advantages can afford to ignore the fostering of business with motion picture companies.”\hfill 10 Florida’s innate advantages as a haven for film production made it “likely to be one of the biggest factors in the future prosperity of Florida, a factor which gives us an endless amount of free advertising, which is worth millions of dollars to the State.”\hfill 11

Despite Jacksonville’s burgeoning position as the “World’s Winter Film Capital,”\hfill 12 Martin’s 1917 mayoral campaign depended on support from a faction of virulent anti-movie crusaders. The crux of Jacksonville’s 1917 mayor’s race pitted Martin up against the city’s pro-movie incumbent J.E.T. Bowden, who had already established strong business ties with studio heads and film producers interested in bringing their companies to North Florida.\hfill 13 Martin’s election as Mayor of Jacksonville in 1917 led to a sudden collapse in political and economic support for filmmakers in the city and triggered an mass departure of producers from Florida to California.\hfill 14 After the 1917 exodus, businessmen across the state attempted to build new studios to lure filmmakers during the Florida land boom of the 1920s. However, without the public or political support needed to help foster a regional industry, little came of these efforts.\hfill 15

In Governor Martin’s opening message to Florida’s Congress in April 1925, he expressed his views on the how to organize the state budget and economy. “Florida needs capital, and must have it, in the building and establishing of her industries. She needs labor, also, and must have it. One without the other, though in abundance, will not suffice. No statue should be enacted

\hfill 10 Shawn Bean, The First Hollywood: Florida and the Golden Age of Silent Filmmaking (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 92. This quote and the previous statement is drawn from a Florida Metropolis article clipping found in Bean’s book dated May 29, 1916.
\hfill 11 Ibid, 92.
According to Martin, the source for the needed infusion of capital was simple, the legislature needed to revamp the state’s corporation laws. “Consideration should be given to amending our general corporation laws so as to make it attractive for business people to incorporate and transact business in Florida under the most favorable conditions.”17 His legislation would go on to be instrumental toward helping to keep the state financially solvent after a series of disasters unfolded, including the collapse of the Florida land boom and two calamitous hurricanes in 1926 and 1928. The infrastructure Martin established later helped the state endure the trials and tribulations of the Great Depression. His policies also established the circumstances that influenced the state’s post-World War II population explosion, an event described by historian Gary Mormino as “Florida’s Big Bang.”18

Even with Martin’s decided pro-business positions, he remained an ardent opponent of fostering the state’s entertainment industry both during his time as Mayor of Jacksonville and as Governor of Florida. In a 1985 Department of Interior proposal to add the John W. Martin House to the National Register of Historic Places, his politics were described as “a mix of progressive and conservative stands.”19 When asked about this contradiction Martin responded, “Governments should be supported by men and not men by governments.”20 In other words, his disagreement with the motion picture industry was an ideological one, not because of a dislike of filmmakers or motion pictures, but in response to filmmaker’s demands for financial and institutional support from tax payers and civic organizers to support their productions.

An interesting echo of the contested nature of film production in Florida during the 1910s

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17 Ibid, 277-278.
20 Sessa, 260.
and 1920s, was heard in July 2010 when the State of Florida launched a $242 million tax incentive plan to help inspire filmmakers to bring their film and television productions to the state. Over the next four years a slew of major film and television productions proliferated across the state in response to the incentives program to such an extent that by 2014 the allotment had been entirely spent.\(^{21}\) In October 2016, when a group of lobbyists sought to extend the incentives program, Florida Speaker of the House Richard Corcoran launched a decisive anti-incentive policy against what he and Jose Oliva – his successor as Speaker – described as “corporate welfare” and “de facto socialism.”\(^{22}\)

A powerful libertarian-leaning lobby organization known as Americans For Prosperity (AFP), sponsored by Charles and David Koch, provided the maximum number of campaign donations for Corcoran, Oliva, and over fifty members of the Florida House of Representatives who opposed incentives. The AFP also utilized funds to actively campaign against members who spoke out in support tax credits. In a statement reminiscent of John Martin’s philosophy toward the role of government in business, AFP communications director Andrew Malave explained, “It’s not the government’s role to pick winners and losers. The film industry is an important part of the economy, but the legislature should implement policies that benefit businesses across the board.”\(^{23}\)

This ideological divide in Florida politics has consistently proved to be a hindrance to the development of the state’s motion picture industry. At various moments over the past 120 years of filmmaking in Florida, the state’s entertainment industry has positioned itself as a formidable competitor with New York and California. While Florida never truly came close to acquiring the status of an “Almost Hollywood” or “Hollywood East” as certain local movie


\(^{23}\) Ibid.
boosters would like to claim, in 1979 and 2006 it had succeeded in becoming the third largest production center in the United States. The state’s position as a major center for the entertainment industry has continually ebbed and flowed based on the whims of Florida politicians. In his forward to Florida in the Making, John Martin describes the arrival of new industries in Florida as “the heralds of the dawn.” Strangely the dawn that the governor had envisioned contained no place for film production.

Despite the best efforts of politicians opposed to providing assistance to the industry, filmmakers and television producers have played a decisive role in Florida’s development in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These heralds have provided an alternative depiction of the State of Florida and have offered an essential window into how the state has been viewed in the popular imagination. This dynamic has been in effect since the first images of Florida flickered across viewfinders and flimsy screens at vaudeville houses. The purpose of this study is to examine these moments of cooperation and conflict between Florida’s state and local government and the American motion picture industry. This examination into the nature of Florida’s history through the lens of its sometimes supportive and often contentious relationship with motion picture producers and Florida politicians relies on a critical evaluation of a series of specific moments in the development and decline of Florida’s motion picture industry.

**Research Questions**

The story of the relationship between the State of Florida and the motion picture industry contributes several important insights toward understanding how distinct regional cinematic

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In 1979, under the leadership of Governor Bob Graham when Florida became the third largest film production center in the U.S., nearly $43 million in feature films and $40 million in sponsored film and TV commercial productions were shot in-state. In 2006, Florida was ranked third in the U.S. — after California and New York — in the number of film productions shot in-state. That was thanks to a slew of big-budget films made here in the 1990s. But after studios started heading to other countries with favorable exchange rates, such as Canada, states began offering incentives to lure them back. In the arsenal were tax credits, rebates, grants and sales-tax exemptions.

25 Martin, vii-viii.
cultures are formed and interact with the motion picture industry on a national and global scale. Through a series of interconnected case studies that apply place-based analysis, this project sets out to apply a broad historical scope to demonstrate how Florida as an idea has historically been portrayed on the screen and at various times in this history. In utilizing such an approach, it is my goal to uncover the specific regional characteristics that influence the presentation and experience of a specific place on the screen. I intend to do so by examining the ways in which the state’s architecture, climate, culture, landscape, and politics facilitate certain genre-types within visual media that can only either be filmed in or about Florida. To accomplish this, each of the three selected case studies in this dissertation will follow a loose chronological progression to tell a story that begins with the arrival of the first film production companies in Jacksonville in 1908 and continues on through to aftermath of the Florida State Legislature’s decision to scrap the state’s tax incentive program in June 2016.

The first chapter will address the historical debates surrounding Jacksonville’s contentious mayoral election of 1917 and how it has since perpetuated a “founding mythology” of the Florida film industry. The second chapter will shift to Tampa Bay to explore the efforts made by Trenton Collins and the Committee For the Development of the Motion Picture to attract major film production studios to bring their business to Florida during the early 1930s. The third chapter will observe the boom-bust cycle of film production in Miami starting with the iconic television productions of Ivan Tors during the late 1950s and examine how “The Miami Vice Effect” inspired by Anthony Yerkovich and Michael Mann’s Miami Vice influenced identity and economics in South Florida during the 1980s. These events will be juxtaposed against efforts made in Central Florida to turn Orlando’s theme park mecca into a supposed supposed “Hollywood East.” The underlying intersection between each of the examples addressed these case studies will then be brought together in a concluding section that will discuss the circumstances surrounding the ongoing tax incentive debate in the Florida legislature.
and a discussion how runaway productions have since threatened the economic viability of Florida’s motion picture industry.

The first and most important question to toward understanding the purpose of this study is “Why Florida?” For over one hundred years Florida has boasted five basic advantages which proved factors in its development as a film center: (1) Weather/Climate, (2) Transportation, (3) Government Relations, (4) Labor Costs, (5) Land Costs.26 A common denominator between each of the selected moments of crisis is that one, several, or all of these advantages eventually deteriorated and subsequently led to an exodus of major film and television productions from the state. The scope of each example ranges from the community to state level. Because of this dichotomy, in a sense Florida as a region is difficult to define. Florida encompasses an area about the size of the Korean peninsula and is the third most populated state in the United States.

When filmmakers made their first excursions into Florida in 1908, the state’s population was ranked 32nd out 45 with an estimated population of approximately half a million inhabitants, and no major town or city with a population over 35,000 people. Between 1950 and 2000, the state surged from a population of 2.7 million to 15.9 million in fifty years. On the eve of World War II, Florida's population of 1.9 million ranked twenty-seventh nationally and last in the South. By 1950 Florida had become America's twentieth most populous state and the fourth largest in 2000.27 Between 1908 and 2018 the population of State of Florida has grown from under a million to over 20 million people, while cities such as Jacksonville, Tampa, Orlando, and Miami each have emerged as preeminent urban centers in the United States. Moreover, the geographic diversity of the state comprises a landscape that contains 1300 miles of coastline, swampland, cattle ranges, coral reefs, islands, inlets, uplands and over 30,000 lakes.

27 Both the 1890 and 1900 U.S. Census records Florida as ranked thirty-second. In 1890 Florida was ranked 32/42 with a population of 391,422. In 1900 Florida was ranked 32/45 (with the addition of Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah) and a population of 528,542.
This work intends to explain how external factors such as Florida’s geographic uniqueness, its demographic diversity, and kaleidoscope of cultures have each contributed to the conditions needed to inspire an indigenous regional production industry. To do so, the historical progression of the film and television industry in the State of Florida need to be examined with the state’s exponential development over the past 120 years as a backdrop. This approach offers a much-needed contribution into the social history of cinema and an understanding of the multitude of factors that are conducive to the success or failure of regional production industry. These include but are not limited to: administrative shifts in state and local government, climate, demographics, economic development, regional infrastructure, and tourism.

To understand what makes Florida cinema unique from other regional or state cinemas, it is necessary to examine how the image of Florida has been perpetuated by the entertainment industry over time. This project will not provide an all-encompassing definition of Florida cinema, but instead explore the ways in which Florida has been represented through visual media by asking several additional questions such as, “What common themes and tropes are used to distinguish a production that are either set in or about Florida?” As soon as these distinctions are established, the next question raised will ask, “How have production companies at the corporate and independent level set out to showcase and utilize Florida’s unique environment for the purposes of their productions?” Once an understanding how environment and demographics influence the way Florida is portrayed on the screen, the last major question will address, “What factors influenced these interrelated tensions between the entertainment industry, Florida communities, and the state and local government? The overall purpose of The Heralds of the Dawn is to develop an underlying theory on how regional cinemas should be defined and establish a set of guidelines for how similar studies on state and regional cinema can be conducted elsewhere.
Statement of Theoretical Content

The field of film history as a discourse explores the interactions between film, space, and place. Research within this discipline has provided invaluable insights into how specific film cultures have historically operated on a national level. My research contributes to the field by extending the current body of research to examine the economic, aesthetic, and social systems of film to reveal specific regional patterns that exist on the state and local level. This will be achieved by examining the ways in which state and local government, community boosterism, and regional tourism initiatives have influenced the type of visual media narratives that are produced in or about Florida. This is part of an ongoing effort within the discipline to reconcile the multifaceted nature of visual media and its unique interrelation of its purpose as an: art form, economic institution, cultural product, and technology.

The recasting of film history toward studies that examine the experience of cinema has provided a substantial body of literature that addresses the scope of cinema identity as it manifests itself at the local, regional, and national level. One consequence that came about as a result of reframing the study of film to the study of the experience of cinema is that the field has rejected the text-centered methods that evaluate the relationship between the film’s representations within the scope of understanding a given area’s own cinematic identity. To date most of the case studies in the new cinema history have relied on a series of reception studies, oral histories, and mapping projects that showcase the interactions between film exhibition sites and audience reception. What needs to be pursued in greater detail are case studies that explore how the presentation of cinema and the experience of cinema contrast and complement one another. The application of such a combined approach can provide broader insights into the how place and identity are represented and replicated by way of popular media. Through detailing how regional film identities are formed and what makes them distinct from various conglomerate approaches to filmmaking, this work sets out to develop a framework that
observes film history in a manner that both recognizes the useful application of the study of film and the societal implications that emerge as a result of the existence or absence of an active production culture in a given region.

An examination into Florida cinema affords a fascinating intersection between a variety of competing factors relevant to understanding the essence of regional cinema. Environmentally speaking, the combination of Florida’s favorable winter climate, distinctive flora and fauna, along with its political, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity and wide range of competing architectural stylings, make for a landscape like nowhere else on Earth. Florida’s physical uniqueness has consistently been a boon to filmmakers since the 1890s when the first filmmakers traveled to the state to film “actuality” footage of U.S. troops embarking for Cuba to fight during the Spanish American War. Richard Alan Nelson has described this phenomenon as “the image of an other-worldly place that is full of exotic beauty and adventure,” set to the backdrop of “swaying palms and sun-drenched beaches.”28 Florida’s rapid demographic and economic development has since led to an often contentious relationship between the state government and the media industry. Mary Pergola-Parent and Kevin Govern describe this relationship as one that can be chronicled through the interactions between environment, opportunity, economics, law, and policy. In turn they credited the state’s film and entertainment industry as “one of the most significant contributors to Florida’s local, regional, and global image, through depiction of its people, cities, industry, and nature.”29 By observing the intersection between the growth and development of the State of Florida during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries alongside the rise of American motion picture industry media, a better understanding into how distinctive regional cinematic cultures can be better defined.

The method used for such an approach will incorporate pre-existing studies on the nature

29 Pergola-Parent and Govern, 44.
of national and sub-national identities. In Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, he develops the idea of modern construct of the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” which is “always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” Film historian Douglas Gomery incorporates this view to outline an approach to studying national cinemas that is resonant of Anderson’s interpretation of “the anomaly of nationalism.” He argues that “films strongly tend to reaffirm (not challenge) the dominant ideas and beliefs of a society, those ideas and beliefs of the ‘ruling’ class.”

The perspective outlined by Anderson and Gomery creates a useful framework for understanding the inherent tensions that exist between the media producer and the audience consumer. These contrasts are often examined through the lens of visual media purpose in asserting the dominance of an established ruling class. Research from this point of view has since developed a collection of comparative studies that pit a particular region – whether it be on a local, state, or national level – against the production strategies carried out by the Hollywood monolith. Existing literature on the subject has perhaps placed too much emphasis on the showdown between the laissez-faire closed market method conducted by Hollywood toward acquiring their rival markets or the resistance strategies often employed by the dirigisme mixed economies of national cinemas as they strived to preclude Hollywood expansion in order to sustain their own domestic production industry.

In 1989 two seminal articles by Andrew Higson and Vittoria de Grazia infused ideas relating to Benedict Anderson’s “imaginary community” to develop a working theory of how national cinemas are constructed. In Higson’s article, “The Concept of National Cinema,” (1989) he

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31 Ibid, 7.
32 Ibid, 4.
asserts that the “histories of national cinema can only therefore really be understood as histories of crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation.” In other words, Higson focuses on the activity of national audiences and the conditions under which they make sense of and use the films they watch. Social and economic histories of cinema have fixated on the circumstances that allowed for emergence of Hollywood’s hegemony in the decade after the First World War. Although previous studies on the subject have adopted the term national cinema, Higson explains, “the concept of national cinema is used prescriptively rather than descriptively, citing what ought to be the national cinema, rather than describing the actual cinematic experience of popular audiences.” This definition of national cinema emphasizes the experience of cinema as a strategy of cultural (and economic) resistance.

The crisis narrative put forth by Higson grants a useful perspective on the contrasting elements that emerge within a distinct cinematic culture. Another contribution to my research is his suggestion that national cinema needs to be explored not only in relation to production, but also in relation to the questions of distribution and exhibition, audiences and consumption, within each nation-state. In particular the notion that a national or regional cinema should be explored “in relation to the questions of distribution and exhibition, audiences and consumption, within each nation-state.” An important short coming of Higson’s approach, however, is that he places too much emphasis on the concept that the experience of cinema is solely defined by class relations and competing power dynamics. Such a myopic scope loses sight of the way extending factors such as shared history, social, and geographic factors can influence how the idea of national, state, or regional cinema develops.

In contrast to Higson’s assessment of national cinema, Victoria de Grazia’s “Mass Culture and Sovereignty,” (1989) addresses in greater depth the cultural nuances behind the idea

36 Ibid, 37.
37 Ibid, 42.
of national cinema. de Grazia’s national cinema is essentially defined by extracting distinct cultural preferences absent from other national cinemas. She also alludes to the difficulty that comes from attempting to identify an all-encompassing definition of a given national cinema through social definitions alone. “From a cultural perspective, ‘national’ was, at least initially, practically impossible to define: after all, what was innately ‘national’ about say, Italian films produced by aristocratic Roman hobbyists?”

De Grazia’s emphasis on the dynamics that exist within a given national cinema is constructed primarily from a classical Marxist perspective, which in turn was influenced by Douglas Gomery’s call for “an explicit theory of international exchange by which to structure our analysis,” of which he suggests, “Marxist economics provides the most appropriate theoretical framework.” This framework is heavily inspired – and to a certain extent limited to – Antonio Gramsci’s argument that those in power maintain control over both the state and civic, or private, society through two means: hegemony and direct domination.

While class and economics are essential aspects that need to be observed when understanding the underlying tensions that exist within the formation of a given film identity, such studies on the presentation of cinema that obsess exclusively on class constitution run the risk of ignoring the many other external factors that influence identity. My solution is to explain these underlying tensions through conducting a series of regional case studies that address specific moments of tension and cooperation that explore the personal perspectives and motivations that drove filmmakers and politicians to these moments of crisis and cooperation.

The most recent scholarship conducted within the field of film history has been an effort to combine elements of spatial history and cinema studies with the latest developments within the digital humanities. Such projects offer several invaluable insights into the history of specific

film cultures and how they operate on a community, regional, or national level. Yet the multitude of methods and competing perspectives applied in these studies have also given rise to a convoluted “interdisciplinary quagmire.” In their essay “Film and Spatiality,” Les Roberts and Julia Hallam suggest that a solution to this predicament relies on the formation of “a new empiricism in film research that calls for a move away from interpretive studies of cinema texts to embrace different forms of film production and consumption, as well as refocusing on cinema as a site of social, cultural, and economic exchange.” Their call for research into the broader societal and systemic factors that influence the conditions that define particular cinematic cultures, is best carried out through conducting a series of interconnected case studies that explore the distinct idiosyncrasies that distinguish various regional cinema cultures from one another. This approach relies on an understanding of the intersection between the production and consumption of visual media and how these distinctions can be defined as sites of exchange within political, social, cultural, and economic spheres.

The “new cinema history” as outlined by Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, and Phillipe Meers, offers a potential solution to the field’s interdisciplinary quagmire by offering a series of multidisciplinary and multi-methodological approaches through the application of recently deployed digital humanities tools to give us a textured and detailed picture of historical cinema cultures. According to Richard Maltby, the traditional approaches of film history, which primarily existed as a history of production, producers, authorship, and films, suffered from “a discursive weakness that renders it a very clumsy medium for presenting argument and disables it from participating in debates about historical problems.” The “new cinema history” offers a solution through its emphasis on empirical research into cinematic cultures through conducting a

41 Les Roberts and Julia Hallam, “Film and Spatiality, Outline of a New Empiricism,” in Locating the Moving Image: New Approaches to Film and Place, eds. Julia Hallam and Les Roberts (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 1.
42 Ibid, 3.
series of investigations into the “global conditions of production, of technical information and craft and of the multiple and interconnected organizational cultures that characterize the film production industry.” 44 It cautions strongly against the adequacy of a total history of cinema founded on the study of films.45 Instead he argues that historical studies of film should function as “a quilt of many methods and localities.”46 This serves as an essential first step toward untangling the multidisciplinary jumble the field of film history is presently tied up in, as well as offering up a useful set of guidelines on how to navigate the complicated connections that exist between film, space, and place.

*The Heralds of the Dawn* contributes to “the new cinema history” by extending the current body of research to examine the economic, aesthetic, and social systems of film to also explain the ways in which state and local government, community boosterism, and regional tourism initiatives influenced the type of narratives that were filmed *in or about* Florida. This initiative is a continuation of an ongoing effort within the discipline to reconcile the multifaceted nature of cinema and its relationship with the environment it depends on for its narrative forms. Each of these different facets have helped to give rise to a variety of sub-disciplines, specialties, and areas of focus which attempt to examine this relationship with the recognition that at any given time, “film is *simultaneously* all of these things: It is a system.”47 The view of film’s operation as an interconnected system was first proposed by Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery in *Film History* (1985), and has subsequently inspired a wide range of methods and approaches toward addressing the elusive question of “What is Cinema?” Studies that have since emerged set out to address questions that go far beyond demanding a semiotic reading of cinema as a text or the social and economic conditions that influence film production, but instead call for an

46 Ibid, 34.
47 Allen and Gomery, v.
increased focus on the experience of cinema, exhibition practices, and the relationship between memory and film. One of the most successful methods used to address such questions is to develop localized case studies that address the intersection between the production and consumption of films and its relation to the construct of an overall regional identity. Ultimately the recasting of film history toward studies that examine the *experience* of cinema has provided a substantial body of literature that addresses the scope of cinema identity as it manifests itself at the local, regional, and national level. One consequence that comes about from reframing the study of film to the study of the experience of cinema is an overall rejection of text-centered methods that evaluate the relationship between the film as text and its representation within the scope of understanding a given area’s unique cinematic identity.

Starting in the decade of 2000 the field of film history experienced another epistemic change as it shifted focus away from the content of films in favor of a consideration into their circulation and consumption. A key component of this initiative is a push toward an overall “decentering” of cinema studies. In his chapter “Decentering Historical Audience Studies,” Robert Allen castigates film historians who place an excessive emphasis on the metropolis as being “at the center of historical narratives of moviegoing.”\(^48\) Allen’s suggested solution is “the assumption that patterns of movie exhibition and moviegoing found there can be mapped to a greater or lesser degree upon smaller cities and towns in all parts of the United States.”\(^49\) While this approach is certainly important for its emphasis on developing useful case studies on moviegoing patterns in communities outside the urban setting, it remains susceptible to a different type of myopia that Allen rails against. In Robert Allen’s article “Manhattan Myopia” he argues, “If we were forced to choose only one locality to represent the way movies became a part of most communities in America, we would have more reason to

\(^{49}\) Ibid, 21
choose Anamosa, Iowa than New York.”

The problem with Allen’s outlook is that there is an overemphasis on whether or not rural or urban modes of audience consumption that are the most indicative of American cinema cultures. In my master’s thesis City of Superb Democracy, I have suggested a middle way between this dynamic can be achieved by exploring intraurban spectatorship patterns as a means of achieving a broader understanding of how cinematic cultures are formed. Upon further study, I have concluded that such an approach is not the most effective method to explore how regional cinematic cultures are formed. Instead I believe a more effective method can be found by examining the triptych relationship between economic, aesthetic, and social systems and the ways in which they overlap and interrelate with one another through the moving image. To achieve this I will utilize Richard Maltby’s call for new cinema history studies that contribute an understanding of “the complex economic, aesthetic and social systems that might cause certain films to assume the shape that they do.”

Although the preeminence of the Hollywood studio system is emblematic of American cinema, it also “epitomized the enduring capacity of the American ‘empire without frontiers’ to discover, process, and redistribute techniques, styles, and tastes of global provenance.” Without any fixed boundaries and with its increasing transnational ambitions, Higson writes that the Hollywood monolith as it emerged in the 1920s, could “hardly be conceived as totally other, since so much of any nation’s film culture is implicitly Hollywood.” Even Will Hays, the first chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) famously declared, “Hollywood may be physically situated in this country, but it is an international

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50 Allen, “Manhattan Myopia; Or Oh! Iowa! Robert C. Allen on Ben Singer’s ‘Manhattan Nickelodeons: New Data on Audiences and Exhibition,” Cinema Journal 34 no. 3 (Spring, 1995), 78.
52 Maltby, 4.
53 deGrazia, 60.
54 Higson, 39.
enterprise.”55 Hollywood according to Hays, is “in a very literal sense as a world-state.”56 The enterprise of film production therefore was not viewed by audiences as a distinctly American cinema since, as Richard Maltby and Ruth Vasey explain, “Americanness was not seen as a specific national phenomenon but ‘as the very signifier of universal human evolution, subsuming under it all the local currencies of cultural exchange, a limitless melting pot of mores, nationals, and classes.’”57 Through incorporating Maltby and Vasey’s definition of Hollywood, I acknowledge the studio system does not offer the totality of an “imagined community,” but instead simply provides the foreground for a series of interactions, conflicts, and resolutions between Hollywood and assorted “constellated communities,” as defined by Rick Altman.58 This project will instead attempt to determine how place and location influences the development of specific genre types set in different constellated communities and how they are able adapt their films intended for a mass-audience to fit within their own cultural and social preferences.

The “useable past” of Florida’s indigenous production industry has continually pitted Florida either as an aspirational competitor for Hollywood’s mantle as world film capital or as an inimitable environment capable of inspiring extremely personal stories that can only be demonstrated by independent films made on a shoe-string budget. In terms of genre, Florida’s geography provides filmmakers with a fascinating fusion between two of the most recognizable regional genre types in American cinema, “The Western” and “The Southern. The ways in which the state fits into and deviates from established notions of southern and western style cinema further helps to showcase how a study on Florida film can fit within a broader examination into transnational and interregional studies on cinema. While “The South” or “Southern” is a

58 Rick Altman, Film/Genre (London: BFI, 1999), 161.
distinctive genre type that is closely tied to Florida’s its historical role as a frontier state and its social position on the fringes between “The South” and “The West,” provide the groundwork for competing identities that needs to be further explored. According to Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee, the notion of “The South” existing as an “exceptional” region disrupts Anderson’s imagined community by creating a new a national narrative of homogeneity and anonymity, which requires an obligation to forget “the anteriority of the nation.” Whereas Anderson focuses on the importance of the novel as a genre in the formation of a modern national narrative of “homogenous empty time,” Barker and McKee adopt philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s assertion that cinema creates its own version of time through what he calls the “movement image” and the “time-image.”

In other words, the fact certain Southerners subscribe to an imagined community of the Confederate States of America, along with the pervading influence of racial segregation and stark class divisions within the American South, has created a variety of identity pockets that follow many of the same presuppositions that can be connected to descriptions of a national cinema. This idea is reaffirmed in a collectivized image contrasted with the rugged individualism emphasized in the Western film. As Richard Abel explains, although Civil War films had turned some actors into “movie personalities,” none of the actors became identified with the “genre” as “western” stars would. During the formative years of the American motion picture industry, Florida was an aspirational competitor with California to become a major film production center. The genre-specific Civil War films made in Florida “must have played a significant role in joining together disparate peoples in that ‘imagined community’ of reunion culture, in bringing a sense of ‘lived experience’ to the Civil War as a ‘unifier.’”

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59 Jackson, 9.
61 Ibid, 5.
62 Ibid, 125.
“The Western” that would go on to define the early Hollywood Studio system and California’s emergence as a film production center has widely utilized other tropes that are both far more universal and national in the scope of the stories told.

“The Southern” is a genre type that perhaps has an equally important influence as “The Western,” and yet has only very recently been seriously explored for its role in developing a collective American film identity that was subsequently disseminated by Hollywood. In his essay in “Humid Time: Independent Film, Gay Sexualities, and Southernscapes,” R. Bruce Brasell examines the genre and regional tensions that exist between “The Southern” and “The Western.” He asks, “Why not a Southern cinema, in the same way that there’s Southern literature?”63 Just as Anderson emphasizes the contributions of the newspaper and the novel toward developing an imagined community of the nation, the same question can be addressed toward better understanding the ways in which cinema has influenced the imagined community of “The South.” Through an analysis of the films of Florida filmmaker Victor Nunez, whom he considers “the premier Southern audiovisual storyteller,” Brasell explores a recurring genre trope he calls “humid time,” which appears frequently in Nunez’s films and throughout Southern imagery on film. He explains that the concept of “humid time” embodies a form of oppression that results from both the insufferable heat of the South as well as its society.64 It is this association of the South with social oppression that forms an essential comprehension of the Southernscape formed in dramatic feature length films.65 Other common themes within the Southern imagery on the screen can be reduced to archetypes as: “mammies, mobs, mockingbirds, and miscegenation, all to the accompaniment of harmonicas, lone guitars, and capella gospel tunes.”66 In this capacity,

64 Ibid, 293-294.
65 Ibid, 312.
the underlying thesis of Alison Graham’s research involves the exploration of the “white redemption” narrative in Southern films during the Civil Rights era, culminating in the “Gumpified” Southerner as heralding “not only a reclaimed region, but a redeemed race.” The South’s constructed racial narratives that have the most pervasive influence on “The Southern” as a genre type in American film.

The unprecedented box office success of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the enthusiasm with which white spectators greeted Griffith’s disturbing celebration of Jim Crow’s founding principles might well be the most telling indication of the movie’s place and role in Southern identity could be considered the starting point of the “Southern” as a genre type. In applying Deleuze, we can understand D.W. Griffith’s use of the movement-image – crosscutting and montage. For example, in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Griffith attempts to precisely regain a cinematic homogenous, synchronous national “meanwhile” by depicting a series of scenes of whiteness, northern and southern, threatened by what he portrays the destructive force of the a “new black empire.” This is achieved by the film and its source material blatant romanticizing of the Confederacy to create a specific genre type far. What is less known is that Griffith’s formula in *The Birth of a Nation* is preceded by almost six years in Gene Gauntier’s Florida-based Civil War-set *Girl Spy* series (1909–1911) applied to Florida’s geography as an integral part of its action. Susan Doll and David Morrow in *Florida on Film* attribute this series as one of the fundamental turning points in the overall portrayal of the American South on film. Most of the Civil War films made before 1911 were shot in the North and their stories unfolded from the Northern perspective, but the *Girl Spy* series countered the trend by using a Southern heroine, a Confederate point of view, and Southern locations. By the end of 1911, the trend had reversed and more Civil War films were presented from the Southern perspective.”

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68 Barker and McKee, 5.
69 Doll and Morrow, 18.
“Lost Cause narrative” was pervasive in early silent cinema and remained in place until roughly the 1950s when the influence of the Civil Rights movement led to a reevaluation of “The Southern” as a genre type and the “Lost Cause” instead became linked to the mythology of the Old West. According to this perspective, the “Imaginary of the American South” exists in a constantly renewing process of self-creation. Barker and McKee put it this way: “The southern imaginary, therefore, is not a false representation that must be stripped away to see the real South” but instead “a multifaceted, multivalent concept that informs our understanding of U.S. culture, especially in relation to ideas about race, gender, and region”

Although Florida films contributed to various aspects of the “southern imaginary,” its historical and geographical position on the fringes of “The South,” in conjunction with the dramatic demographic shifts the state has experienced during the twentieth and twenty-first century, has helped create its own distinct imaginary. Understanding where Florida breaks from the “southern imaginary” presents an opportunity to explore the interactions between genre and identity in a manner that is not strictly limited to national boundaries. The draw of the “Lost Cause narrative” in cinema’s silent period not only encompassed the pervasiveness of white supremacy in films such as The Birth of a Nation, but also included elements of what Sigmund Freud calls Nachtrichtigkeit, a concept that derives from a sense of nostalgia over the melancholy beauty of a vanishing past. In Alan Bilton’s article “Buster and the South,” he explains how Buster Keaton’s southern films – notably The General (1926) and Steamboat Bill Jr. (1928), relied on the American South to serve as “a synonym of the past rather than a specific geographic location.” This use of the South as a stand-in for the past presaged the mid-century use of the West for the same purpose. According to Bilton, “In many ways it was the South, rather than the West, which furnished early American film with its images of the premodern and the pastoral, a

70 Graham, 133.
71 Barker and McKee, 3.
rural past as yet untouched by the machine age.”\textsuperscript{73} According to this perspective, the “Imaginary of the American South” exists in a constantly renewing process of self-creation. Barker and McKee put it this way, “The southern imaginary, therefore, is not a false representation that must be stripped away to see the real South but a multifaceted, multivalent concept that informs our understanding of U.S. culture, especially in relation to ideas about race, gender, and region”\textsuperscript{74}

This conceptual look into how the “Florida imaginary” is portrayed on the screen and corresponds to Southern and Western genre types also requires an understanding of how Florida’s motion picture industry has progressed over time. As a part of a broader effort toward decentering film history from a strict analysis on the influence of Hollywood, I will address the need for an increased emphasis on localized case regional case studies by exploring the continuous cycle of Florida’s emergence, decline, resurgence, and subsequent boom-bust patterns and how they continue to play out in order to demonstrate how specific local film production industries are created and maintained. This method is demonstrated in Richard Alan Nelson’s \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}. Nelson combines elements of production history and industry analysis in his effort to “discover, describe, and assess” four aspects of the film industry’s relationship with the State of Florida by providing a detailed listing of film companies and studios active within the state and their productions made in Florida between 1898 and 1930.\textsuperscript{75} The relationship between Florida’s state and local government with the American motion picture industry is at the root of Nelson’s examination into the historical progression of Florida’s production industry. “As the industry increases in importance, so do the government-industry relations which develop at this state (primarily in terms of regulation of theaters for safety and moral purposes). Florida’s experience, as will become obvious, illustrates the pitfalls and potential benefits of having government play a facilitative role.”\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 490.
\textsuperscript{74} Barker and McKee, 3.
\textsuperscript{75} Nelson, \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 92.
The facilitative position the state government has played in this progression is rooted in the various tax incentives initiated through the efforts of lobby groups such as the Florida Film Commission (FFC) and the Florida Office of Film and Entertainment (OFE). In order to encourage success at every level, Florida’s government has historically sought to institute major incentives for filmmaking and empower administrative agencies to implement them. The introduction of legislation that benefits filmmakers, as well as easy to use permitting forms, and an abundance of grants and assistance contributed to the past success of Florida’s film industry.77

Recent scholarship on regional cinema industries in the United States have placed an increased emphasis on local case studies that explain the impact that state-wide tax incentives have had on motion picture production in a given state. While many of the histories of motion picture production have been decisively pro-industry and pro-incentives, other regional examples from filmmaking communities that are in the midst of a massive production boom offer an alternative perspective.

Vicki Mayer’s Almost Hollywood, Nearly New Orleans (2017) delves into how the aura of Hollywood film production and construction of a place called ‘New Orleans’ conflict, disrupt, and disable each other – precisely because they repress their underlying power structures. The underlying cultural disconnects between locations and film policy are according to Mayer, are the best way to understand the nature of productions economics. Louisiana’s current position as “The Film Production Capital of the World” demonstrates how cultural economies present a double edged-sword for cultural producers.78 In what Mayer defines as “Disneyomatics,” she argues that such cultural producers have “continued to disrupted resident’s sense of place by allowing tourism and media industries to identify what is authentic local culture, and who can live sustainably from its marketability.”79 While movie boosterism is justifiably one of the

77 Pergola-Parent and Govern, 17.
79 Ibid, 103.
primary motivators behind writing most local production histories, there is a need for less regional bias in the approach. This work will set out to achieve a balance between histories that exclusively set out to promote a region’s connection with the motion picture industry and a critical look at how the economics of motion picture production impacts the community at large.

The specter of Hollywood continues to loom large in most regional case studies and the histories written about motion picture production in Florida. While the “history, culture, social structure, and even geography of Florida easily lends themselves to this most comprehensive of genres,” the external factors that either attracted or repelled productions are themselves an important object of study. This approach places too much emphasis on factors such as genre and Florida’s distinct otherness. It is quite easy to succumb to Nelson’s impulse to compare “Florida’s experience to that of New York and California” as a means to achieve “more definitive conclusions as to why film, and by extension other communications media, developed in the manner that they did.” Much of what has been written about the history of the Florida film industry remains highly speculative and counter-factual. The most frequent and recurring narrative pits film production in cities such as Jacksonville against Los Angeles as “quite literally a tale of two cities,” and frames the history of film production in Jacksonville as two-way struggle between two emerging film centers during the 1910s.

In *The First Hollywood* (2008), Shawn Bean attempts to demonstrate how Jacksonville “was this close to becoming the country’s premiere destination for movie production,” and had certain events gone slightly different, the City of Jacksonville could have wrested control of the American motion picture industry away from “that other film town.” Blair Miller’s *Almost Hollywood* (2003), follows up on Bean’s perspective by stating if he could “venture a guess, it would be that most people have never thought about Jacksonville’s part in the history of

81 Ibid, 4.
82 Bean, 2.
83 Ibid, 2.
moviemaking, much less that it once was a rival of Hollywood.”  

Other Florida-based works such as James Ponti’s *Hollywood East*, which was written at the height of the Orlando film boom in the early 1990s, project a similar emphasis on this dynamic. As Ponti puts it, “Some industry insiders, called ‘bi-coastal’ when they commuted between New York and California, have become ‘tri-coastal’ as they’ve added Florida to their loop. In fact, Florida has become so confident in its role in the film industry that a new nickname has emerged: Hollywood East.”

This examination into Florida film history will emphasize the underlying tensions that have historically exist between how the idea of Florida is presented and experienced on the screen.

To explain these tensions, this work will closely follow the model Vicki Mayer uses to explain the comparative/combative relationship between Hollywood and Louisiana’s motion picture industry. Her method of exploring “the ways in which the aura of Hollywood film production and construction of a place called ‘New Orleans’ conflict, disrupt, and disable each other.” Mayer describes how Louisiana’s cultural otherness “combined with abysmal political and economic conditions fuels the aura of Hollywood: an ephemeral and affective sense that a film economy will resolve long standing social ills and economic disparities.”

Knowing how Florida fits within such this dynamic between local politics and industry demands is essential to understanding the push-pull relationship between the state government and the motion picture industry. While Nelson, Bean, Miller, and Ponti rely on local boosterism to bemoan the loss of prestige and possibility that Florida could have experienced as a film center, Mayer’s portrait of the present-day reality of New Orleans’ interaction with Hollywood offers a different take on such a relationship. Instead she offers a cautionary tale of the negative social impacts that transpire from an area’s position as a film center. In examining the

86 Mayer, 3.
87 Ibid, 10
fragmented identities that are often caused by a mischaracterization of place, this project will
scrutinize the competing concepts that have been established by Florida’s efforts to court the
motion picture industry. Such a challenge can suggest a better understanding of the social agency
of film and television, along with understanding how the presentation and experience of moving
images correspond on the screen.

Research Method

I intend to present this project though a narrative-based approach that will explore the
challenges, debates, and crises that have consistently arisen throughout the history of motion
picture production in Florida. This will be accomplished through a combination of text-mining,
statistical analysis of datasets of films produced at selected moments in Florida’s film history,
and the personal histories of leading figures – past and present – in Florida’s film and television
industry who have worked to foster the development of Florida’s motion picture industry. The
purpose of such an approach is twofold: First, to establish a working understanding of the
relationship between motion picture production industry and Florida’s state and local
government, and to address how reoccurring environmental, social, and cultural thematic
concepts are manifested in visual representations of Florida on the screen.

One major limitation of this project was that the time constraints of the dissertation
time-table prevented me from conducting interviews with various filmmakers, producers, and
crew members that were and are involved in Florida-based film and television productions. If
additional research were to be carried out in this area, these interviews can prove to be an
important supplement toward understanding the ongoing lobbying initiatives to acquire tax
incentives for the Florida film industry.

This project will by no means attempt to define a “total history” of Florida film or make
sweeping over-generalizations about the meaning ascribed to recurring elements portrayed in
films set in or about Florida. Instead my underlying goal is to break from traditional aesthetic
film histories that have pervaded much of the writing on Florida film, while also avoiding an over emphasis on audience *experience* as the basis of the state’s regional film identity. Instead, what I intend to do is develop a series of three separate, but interrelated, case studies that highlight the historical progression of film and television production industry in the State of Florida from the decade of 1900 to the present day. While each example operates independently of one another, they also feed into a wider narrative that attempts to explore how local attributes have contributed to how the Florida imaginary has historically been portrayed on the screen.

Through analyzing selected moments of tension and transition in the relationship between the American motion picture production industry and the State of Florida, this study will demonstrate the factors that influence the way a region is *presented* through visual media and how these images condition the viewer’s *experience* and concept of a given place. Each of the moments selected for this study apply Andrew Higson’s suggestion that histories of cinema cultures should be defined through moments of “crisis and conflict, of resistance and negotiation.” Moreover, by observing the competing forces and identities at work during these selected moments of crisis, the features that ultimately define the nature of the *experience* of Florida on the screen. The conclusions reached within this work are mine alone and are not a reflection of the thoughts and opinions of any of the organizations referenced.

Chapter Outline

Chapter one addresses the circumstances surrounding the efforts initiated by Jacksonville’s “Movie Mayor” J.E.T. Bowden to establish Jacksonville as a major film production hub. Previously the Edison Manufacturing Company sent its subsidiary Kalem Studios to Jacksonville for the 1908-09 winter season. After the wide-spread box office success of *A Florida Feud: Or Love in the Everglades* (1909), the studio decided to establish its winter residence in Jacksonville. In their “Sunny South Series,” Kalem embarked on exploiting

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88 Higson, 37.
Florida’s unique landscape in a variety of locally-themed films. The arrival of Kalem and other producers from the Edison Manufacturing Company helped establish Jacksonville as the “World’s Winter Film Capital.”⁸⁹ Not satisfied with this position alone, former mayor J.E.T. Bowden set out on a mayoral campaign in 1915 that aspired to help Jacksonville become “the New York of the South.”⁹⁰ After winning the most expensive and arguably most controversial election in Jacksonville’s history, Bowden incorporated the Garrick Studio Company’s “Twenty-Seven Hours from Broadway” campaign into his policy toward governance. In the two year period between 1915 and 1917 dozens of film production companies flocked to North Florida upon Mayor Bowden’s invitation.⁹¹ Two years later in 1917, his re-election bid was met with resistance by the supposed “anti-film” candidate John Wellborn Martin. Martin’s surprise victory has often been cited by Florida film scholars as the moment that Florida “lost out” to Hollywood as “the world’s movie capital.”⁹² I intend to challenge the established narrative that surrounds the extent of Jacksonville’s position as “The First Hollywood,” and determine whether Jacksonville’s “failure” to become the center of film production in the United States helped to give rise to Hollywood during the same period. I will also attempt to find out whether Bowden’s loss to Martin was related to his affiliation to the region’s burgeoning film industry or if other extending factors had a greater influence on the voter’s decision. By reevaluating the Florida film industry’s “founding myth” of its status as an “Almost Hollywood,” I hope to clarify the innate advantages and disadvantages filmmakers faced in their decision to produce their films in Florida. The study of the rise and dramatic fall of film production in North Florida during the 1910s offers a stark parallel with the relationship between Florida’s state and local government with the motion picture industry in the present day.

⁸⁹ Bean, 46-48.
⁹¹ Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 176.
⁹² Bean, 97-99.
Chapter two explores the “pro-movie” administration of Governors Doyle E. Carlton (1929-1933), contrasted against the New Deal style recovery initiatives of David Sholtz (1933-1937). This will be demonstrated through how each sought to reinvigorate Florida’s economy through different means, Carlton through fostering a thriving tourism and entertainment industry, and Sholtz through incentivizing new industries to come to Florida and developing the infrastructure needed to sustain them. During this time Florida’s suffered a series of successive disasters including the collapse of the notorious 1920s land boom, the widespread destruction caused by the 1926 Miami and 1928 Okeechobee hurricanes, and onset of the Great Depression. Going into the 1930s the state was in desperate need of additional industry and revenue. To assist in this need, in 1931 Governor Carlton formed Committee for the Development of the Motion Picture (CDMP), while the Florida Legislature approved a fifteen-year tax exemption for filmmakers who brought their productions to Florida.93 During Governor Carlton’s term in office, Florida once more became a significant pivot point in the development of the burgeoning talking film industry. *Hell Harbor* (1930) was the first “talkie” produced in Florida – filmed entirely on location in Tampa and. Served as a convincing substitute for Havana.94 Two years later the several questionable film promoters in the Tampa Bay area to pledge they could turn Florida’s West Coast into a “Second Los Angeles.” Through the coordination of CDMP director Trenton Collins, several film producers would make ill-fated attempts to establish studio operations along Tampa’s Davis and Weedon Islands. Yet unprofessionalism and a lack of structural organization caused each of these ventures to eventually fail. As the depression escalated, Carlton became increasingly preoccupied with more pressing economic matters and was unable to accommodate the needs of the CDMP. His successor David Sholtz did what he could to continue to sustain

Collins’ efforts, however by 1935 he withdrew the promotional budget promised to incentivize filmmakers and instead redirected the funds toward other state-wide development initiatives.96

Chapter three delves deeper into questions surrounding how the “Florida imaginary” can be confronted and defined through film and television programs in Central and South Florida. This will first be accomplished through examining the filmography of legendary producer Ivan Tors in the 1950s and 1960s, and through the lens of iconic television programs set in South Florida between the late 1980s and 2010s. These productions introduced the baby boomer generation to the image of Florida as a tropical wildlife paradise, and established Miami as “Florida’s Film and Recording Capital.”97 Tors’ departure combined with South Florida’s economic downturn following the onset of the recession of 1973, film production in South Florida experienced a severe decline. After Ivan Tors Studios transitioned to Greenwich Studios in the 1980s, the South Florida economy received a much-needed shot in the arm with the production of Miami Vice (1984-1990). One portion of this chapter will observe the existential consequences that accompanied recasting Miami as “a sizzling cool, sexy, multiethnic, multiracial, exciting place, at once gritty and gorgeous.”98 The development of film and television in South Florida will be juxtaposed against an analysis of how the collision between local boosterism and state government culminated into Orlando’s so-called “Hollywood East” movement during the late 1980s and 1990s. With the promotion “Hollywood weather without the Hollywood overhead,”99 local organizers sought to attract an ever-increasing number of productions to Central Florida. Yet in an a clear parallel to the over-optimistic outlook expressed out by politicians and filmmakers in Jacksonville during the 1910s, many of these local initiatives

95 Doll and Morrow, 361.
were ultimately victims of their own ambitions. As Ted Kaye, then-Vice-President of Disney’s Orlando studio operations stated at the time, “Orlando will develop into a regional production center. It’s not Hollywood East, it’s Toronto South.”

This portion of chapter three will explore the underlying tensions between Orlando’s position as the “Theme Park Capital of the World” and how conflicting local aspirations brought on the collapse of Orlando’s production industry and left it to “suffer the humiliation of straight-to-DVD sequel infamy, reality television, and commercials.”

The conclusion of this project will reflect on the latest developments within the ongoing incentives debate in the Florida legislature. Between 2010 and 2014 film and television productions flocked to Florida to take advantage of $242 million incentive package offered by the Florida Legislature. After the proposal for additional incentives were turned down, the remaining major Florida-based productions such as Bloodline (2015-17) were either drawn into early cancellation, or in the case of Ballers (2015-present) were forced to relocate to Los Angeles. In contrast Florida’s independent film industry has had a great deal of success in recent years, which unfortunately has further reinforced the Florida legislature’s justification in denying incentives.

Barry Jenkins’ Miami-based Moonlight (2016) has the distinction of being the lowest budget film to ever win the Best Picture Academy Award. A year later Sean Baker’s guerilla filmmaking-style utilized in the Kissimmee-based The Florida Project (2017) yielded considerable attention during the most recent awards season. Altogether, this collection of case studies will set out to unify the common challenges that have been faced by Florida producers since they first arrived in Jacksonville in 1908 and illuminate a much-needed spotlight on the often terse historical and current relationship between Florida’s state government and the production industry.

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CHAPTER ONE: FLORIDA’S ‘HUSTLING CITY:’ RE-EXAMINING JACKSONVILLE’S MOVIE BOOM, 1908-1922

Jacksonville: Florida’s ‘Hustling City.’ A city of opportunity and accomplishment peopled by progressive and public-spirited citizens, who get together and pull together for the public good. An ideal climate for all seasons and will be the most progressive city of the Southland. The city that does things.
– H.H. Richardson, Secretary Jacksonville Board of Trade, 1908

“Shucks Who Cares? It Was Only the Movies”

On an unassuming Sunday afternoon on January 2, 1916, nearly 1,400 Jacksonvillians and forty municipal police officers armed with rubber billy clubs assembled in front of a second-hand saloon in the city’s LaVilla neighborhood. This location was previously part of the city’s “restricted district” and reserved for bordellos euphemistically called “female boarding houses.” Several months earlier Jacksonville mayor John Edwin Theodore (J.E.T.) Bowden had initiated an effort to transform the neighborhood into a burgeoning entertainment district. LaVilla’s lurid atmosphere was a favorite setting for the various film production companies that were based in Jacksonville to depict “all the squalor and hopelessness of chronic poverty” as suggested “in the scenes of the town’s disease breeding slums.” On that particular day the Equitable Film Company, one of a growing number of production studios that had located in Jacksonville for their winter headquarters, placed a casting call for a “mob sequence” for the climatic final scene of their latest production, The Clarion (1916). In the weeks leading up to filming this sequence, Equitable’s onsite manager Clifford Robertson posted several advertisements in the Florida Times-Union calling for a large gathering of men, boys, and women with “whom he wanted to form a mob.” Interest in participating in the mob scene was so enormous that Robertson and The Clarion’s director James Durkin had to open a temporary office at the Hotel Mason arcade in

1 “Jacksonville, Florida’s Hustling City,” Florida Times-Union (hereafter FTU), December 13, 1908, 5.
downtown Jacksonville to accommodate all of the requests. The saloon’s owner further intensified interest by allowing the extras “the privilege of smashing every window in his place as well as the stock of liquor on display in the front end.” Durkin understood that he would attract the largest possible crowd if he timed the shoot to begin just after church had let out, even if this was in blatant disregard for Jacksonville’s Sunday blue laws. The thousand-plus person gathering of volunteers amassed at the intersection of Davis and Monroe Streets. The cameras started to roll and Durkin signaled to the mob to rush down the street “hurling bricks, ticks and every missile they could find.” However the mob’s momentum did not stop after the initial charge and when they reached the saloon, the young men in the crowd rushed the bar and ransacked the two story building in a desperate frenzy to get a drink from the bottles of wine and whisky that were left out as props, they snapped off the necks of the books and “flung away the glass corks without ado.”

This scene of wanton destruction, debauchery and Sunday drinking brought on by the city’s rouge film colony was supposedly remembered by Jacksonvillians as a travesty that mobilized a growing contingent of reformers who sought to eliminate the corrupting influence of those wild and licentious “movie people.” The legacy of “The Clarion Riot” resonated to such an extent that nearly thirty years later in 1954, Florida Times-Union reporter James C. Craig wrote in a retrospective, “Because the mob became unruly and almost uncontrollable, it gave a tainted name to motion picture producing and furnished fuel for those who had opposed the film industry being here all along. From then on opposition to the film producers gained in strength.” Craig’s account of the event solidified “The Clarion Riot” as local folklore and each subsequent history of Jacksonville’s role as a movie colony in the 1910s have relied on this event as the catalyst to explain what brought about an immediate and decisive downturn in relations between the City of

5 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 179-180; Bean 96.
6 Bean, 96.
Jacksonville and its incipient motion picture industry. The political implications of Jacksonville’s mounting disfavor toward the disruptive “movie people” came to a head one year later in a decisive mayoral run-off election that removed Mayor Bowden from office and “ended the honeymoon once and for all.” The need by North Florida historians to depict the city’s relationship with the motion picture industry in such a manner relies on a single definitive event to explain Jacksonville’s precipitous position as a would-be movie capital ignores many fascinating and important insights in regards to what factors most often influence the success or failure of a given regional production industry. However closer reading into the original Florida Times-Union’s account of the filming of the mob scene paints a much different portrait of events than has been previously given.

An article from January 4, 1916 with the title “Mob Destroys Building on Davis Street and the Wrecks Saloon,” at first glance certainly creates the impression of the author’s concern that a dangerous combination of heedless filmmakers and unrestrained civilians could lead to a direct threat against the city’s staunch conservative moral values. However, all it takes is a look at the article’s sub-heading to understand that the Florida Times-Union is clearly on Equitable’s side. “Forty Jacksonville Policemen unable to stop rush of 1,300 men and boys who show hatred of the establishment’s owner. Although they used clubs vigorously – but who cares? It was only movies and the clubs were made of rubber – Each Bluecoat got $5 a week.”

The article then goes to great lengths to clarify for concerned citizens what actually happened during the filming of The Clarion, and made special mention that Clifford Robertson reimbursed the damages to the saloon caused by the filming “to the extent of about $2,000.” To further assure its readers the article shifts to a more tongue-and-cheek tone by speculating, “Maybe the accumulating crowd of spectators along the sidewalks and at the street crossings thought the mob was an awful hard-

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9 Bean, 97.
10 “Mob Destroys Brick Building on Davis Street and Then Wrecks a Saloon,” FTU, Jan 04, 1916, 3.
11 Ibid, 3.
headed one. But shucks, who cares? It was only the movies.”¹²

As far as Equitable and Jacksonville’s movie boosters were concerned, the filming of The Clarion was a tremendous success. The Moving Picture World’s review for The Clarion published in February 1916, expressed awe at the impressive saloon sequence and indicated that James Durkin’s “handling of this mob is admirable.”¹³ Undeterred by any perceived negative reaction from disapproving Jacksonvillians, ten days after “The Clarion Riot,” Robertson, along with dozens of boosters and representatives from each of Jacksonville’s part-time production companies, participated in a “state of the industry” meeting at the Hotel Mason, presided over by the Jacksonville’s primary movie booster, Mayor J.E.T. Bowden. The purpose of the meeting was to extend an open invitation “to the moving picture fraternity of this country to personally inspect the advantages of North Florida.”¹⁴ Bowden’s invitation for New York and Los Angeles film producers to relocate their companies to Jacksonville was the next major step in a cooperation campaign he initiated to increase business and industrial development throughout the city.¹⁵ His efforts to foster year-round film productions in Jacksonville was the latest effort to fulfil his campaign promise to “restore business confidence and create new jobs.”¹⁶ This initiative yielded incredibly positive results, and by 1916 over 1,000 actors and 30 companies were based in Jacksonville on a regular or semi-regular basis.¹⁷

In combination with a supportive local government, the recent upsurge in activity by major production companies such as Metro and Gaumont in Jacksonville, helped to further reinforce North Florida’s position as an attractive winter film production haven and encouraged

¹² Ibid, 3.
¹³ Denig, 1310.
¹⁵ In an open letter republished by the Florida Metropolis on January 22, 1916, Bowden states: “I, J.E.T. Bowden, as Mayor of the City of Jacksonville, Fl., do hereby extend a hearty invitation to the Motion Picture Producers, to make this city their center of production, assuring them a hearty welcome and every co-operation in facilitating their work. Our morning sun permits a longer working day than any other part of the country.”
the city’s movie boosters’ aspirations to turn their city into a permanent production center that could potentially rival or surpass Los Angeles. Despite his promises to bring Jacksonville to national prestige Bowden’s by bringing motion picture production companies to North Florida, his 1917 reelection bid pitted his “pro-movie” administration in an uphill battle against a coalition of “reform” interest (churches, prohibitionists, anti-vice crusaders) led by a thirty-one-year-old upstart lawyer named John Wellborn Martin. The ambitious Martin took advantage of recent fissures in the state’s Democratic Party to consolidate his political message, which railed against the motion picture industry’s presence in the city. According to film historian Richard Alan Nelson, the 1917 mayor’s race between Bowden and Martin was a “referendum on film production in Jacksonville,” and Martin’s upset victory eventually “split the city by removing the area’s major movie booster from power.”

The ignominious decline of Jacksonville’s film industry should also be framed into a broader context of changing industry practices combined with fundamental shortcomings that inevitably prevented Florida from hosting large-scale motion picture productions. Several histories have since been written that follow up on Nelson’s research and provide extensive accounts of Bowden’s role in attracting the industry to North Florida during his two-year term in office between 1915 and 1917. What has not yet been given enough attention is an exploration into the influences that took place within the motion picture industry as they ran alongside with state and local politics. Each of these works have followed perhaps placed far too much emphasis on J.E.T. Bowden’s mayoral administration as an example of a shining moment in Florida’s film history where Jacksonville was in direct competition with Los Angeles in a struggle to become America’s film capital. This highly speculative argument ascribes to a flawed sense of determinism.

18 Nelson, “Florida: The Forgotten Film Capital,” *Journal of the University Film Association* 29 no. 3 (Summer, 1977), 16.
The tenuous claim that if several events had turned out differently – such as the outcome of the 1917 mayoral election – the American motion picture industry would have been centered in Jacksonville instead of Los Angeles is fundamentally unsound. One such example of this narrative comes from Shawn Bean’s *The First Hollywood*, where he positions the motion picture production companies active in Jacksonville against those in Los Angeles as “quite literally a tale of two cities.”20 He goes on to frame the history of film production in the United States during the 1910s as a series of struggles made by an itinerant film industry in search of a homeland. The intensive Florida focus of such histories has in turn framed this search as boiling down to a decisive choice between two emerging film centers: Hollywood and Jacksonville.21 An even more simplistic version of this narrative determines that “The Clarion Riot” in January 1916 triggered a chain reaction that signaled a sense of mounting discontent in Jacksonville toward its film colony.

This frustration culminated a year later with the election of the “anti-movie” administration of John Wellborn Martin. According to such an account Martin’s election decisively led to massive shutdown of studios and a mass exodus to the West Coast. As a result, the industry quickly pulled out of Jacksonville and left Florida’s reputation “tarnished and her relationship with Hollywood was strained.”22 From this perspective, had Bowden had won a second consecutive term as mayor, his pro-movie policies could have established a permanent production industry that eventually would have allowed Florida to surpass California as America’s center for film production. Instead of Beverly Hills, Burbank, or Hollywood, names such as Arlington, Fairfield, LaVilla, Riverside, or Springfield would ultimately become synonymous with the American motion picture industry.23 Much of the recent research carried.

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20 Bean, 2.
21 Ibid, 2.
out on Jacksonville’s early film history have succumbed to the same kind of local boosterism that can readily be found in advertisements and public statements from the 1910s.

This chapter will critically revisit the circumstances that first surrounded the development of Jacksonville’s production industry during the first decades of the twentieth century in order to better understand why it never could have been a viable competitor to Hollywood. The first place to start is with a realistic perspective of what Jacksonville’s position between 1908 and 1918 as the bona fide “World’s Winter Film Capital” actually meant. While the political fortunes of J.E.T. Bowden reveal the existing tensions between local filmmakers and Jacksonville’s citizens, there were many other reasons why Jacksonville never could have been a direct competitor with Hollywood. In fact, if the success of the city’s production industry hinged entirely on the efforts of one individual, as suggested by several Florida film historians, it is a wonder that the industry survived in Jacksonville for as long as it did.

Other scholars have taken on a more realistic approach in their assessment of the nature of Jacksonville’s production industry. Richard Alan Nelson emphasizes several of these shortcomings in his overall assessment of the relationship between the motion picture industry and the state of Florida. He argues that “any civic project in which government and industry are to be partners requires a substantive consensus if it is to at least have the chance to succeed,” and that ultimately government intervention “cannot guarantee success but such involvement can increase the likelihood of success.”

Susan Doll and David Morrow reinforce this view in their position that the sudden change in fortune for Jacksonville’s production industry hinged on political support and an established economic infrastructure and that, “Unlike Jacksonville,

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Hollywood was more willing to become a company town.”26 Robert Jackson offers the most realistic view on Jacksonville’s overall position in early film history. According to Jackson, “To call the enouncement of Jacksonville’s film history a decline would be to oversimplify that history. While the decade before the war was indeed marked by a remarkable flurry of film production, the likes of which no other southern city experienced Jacksonville’s film culture had too brief and volatile an existence to view on any narrow trajectory.”27 While Bowden may have been willing to embrace the motion picture industry with open arms, his political opponents and eventually even his constituents expressed their concerns toward fostering such a relationship.

In order to understand what initially attracted and later repelled film producers from North Florida, it is necessary to explore the various economic, institutional, and political influences at the core of Jacksonville’s relationship with the motion picture industry. The best way to accomplish this is to closely examine how North Florida was portrayed in the industry’s trade press and contrast it against local newspaper’s various promotions and condemnations of the industry. Addressing the circumstances that led to Jacksonville’s rejection of the film industry will offer a better insight into the nature of city and state politics in North Florida during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The best place to begin is to explain how and why the first motion picture companies came to North Florida to begin with.

“272 Days of Clear Cut Sunshine”

In December 1908, a small troupe of about one dozen actors accompanied by six producers and technicians disembarked from New York in the hopes of escaping an especially harsh cold snap in the northeast. They likely rode in a specially catered Pullman sleeping car designed by the Florida East Coast railway to attract wealthy tourists from northern cities to visit the state.”

25 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 498.
burgeoning resort communities in St. Augustine and Palm Beach. Since the end of the Civil 
War, Jacksonville had positioned itself as “The Winter City in a Summer Land” and with each 
passing year the names of rich and famous visitors were regularly added to city’s guest registers. 
During the peak tourist years of the late nineteenth century, hundreds of paddle wheelers, tall-
masted schooners, and steamships plied the St. Johns River, transported northern tourists to their 
final destinations along “The American Rivera.”28 Rather than continuing their overnight train 
journey onward to one of the iconic resorts that had sprouted up further south, the actors and 
filmmakers of the Kalem Company disembarked in Jacksonville. Instead of taking advantage of 
the recreation possibilities offered by Florida’s burgeoning resort communities, the Kalem 
Players were far more interested in Jacksonville’s advertised “272 days of ‘clear cut’ sunlight” 
that were promised in promotions by the city’s boosters.29 On the day the Kalem Company 
arrived in Jacksonville, they were simply one of twenty-five passenger trains that rolled into the 
city daily and a small portion of the city’s nearly 100,000 annual winter visitors.30 Despite North 
Florida’s growing status as a “Winter Mecca,”31 the region by comparison was still a far cry 
from the degree of development found in northern urban centers. Two decades later in 1928, 
Gene Gauntier the studio’s “Kalem Girl,” recalled that the Jacksonville of 1908 “was vastly 
different for the bustling metropolis it is today. The main street was more like a country village 
than the artery of a town containing some sixty thousand people.”32 In comparison to the hurried 
and crowded atmosphere of cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Chicago, 
where most film companies based their headquarters, Jacksonville was in the eyes of this well-
traveled troupe of entertainers just another stop along an endless performance circuit.

30 Wood, 25; 84.
Seven years before Kalem came to Jacksonville, the city was ravaged by a devastating fire that destroyed 2,368 buildings over 466 acres along an almost two-mile radius and left nearly 10,000 Jacksonvillians homeless.\(^{33}\) In midst of the chaotic fire and its immediate aftermath, Mayor J.E.T. Bowden then in his first term (1899-1901) was reported by the *Florida Metropolis* as “one of the busiest men in the city” and was “working with vim to rebuild the city.”\(^{34}\) Jacksonville and Duval County’s position as “the most thickly populated county in the State of Florida,”\(^{33}\) gave the emerging metropolis a vibrancy that emanated a sense of promise that hinted toward its potential as the financial, manufacturing, distributing, and transportation center of the American Southeast. Another major advantage Jacksonville had was its strong sense of civic pride demonstrated through its Board of Trade, an organization that sought diversified industrial development throughout North Florida.\(^{36}\) By 1908, Jacksonville’s increasingly cosmopolitan nature and emerging status as a major economic and industrial force in the New South made the city an incredibly attractive location for artists engaged in an equally promising and emerging entertainment industry.

The ensuing reconstruction effort took an incredible toll on Bowden and although he was “at the zenith of his popularity,” citing exhaustion, he declined a bid for re-election less than a month after the fire.\(^{37}\) Despite the wide spread devastation the city suffered, the subsequent influx of funds and statewide initiatives to assist in the rebuilding efforts helped Jacksonville develop into an “island of development,” which according to historian James Crooks,

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\(^{34}\) James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville: After the Fire, 1901-1919* (Jacksonville, FL: University of North Florida Press, 1991), 8; Bowden was the former mayor of La Villa before its absorption in 1887 and then elected to his first term as Jacksonville’s mayor from 1899 to 1901.

\(^{35}\) Frederick T. Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity, 1513 to 1924* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1925), 225-227; Bean, 23-24. Jacksonville had an estimated pre-fire population of 30,000, this accounts for one third of the city’s total population.

\(^{36}\) Nelson, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry*, 133-5. Other key components of the Board of Trade’s initiatives involved inexpensive land and labor costs, plentiful supplies of building materials, a municipally owned power system which kept electrical rates among the lowest in the country, and abundant sources of water.

\(^{37}\) Broward, 21-23; Bean, 87-88.
“epitomized the aims of the New South.” An essential tension within the burgeoning New South movement relied heavily on the region’s economic transition from a strictly agrarian society toward industrial development. Although the seeds of modernization were planted in the years Jacksonville before the fire, they were only sown in the ash and rubble of the city’s burnt over districts. Future Senator Duncan U. Fletcher took office as Jacksonville’s mayor after Bowden, and presided over an ambitious construction initiative that launched a sixteen-year building boom that turned Jacksonville into the preeminent city of the American South.

Fletcher’s rebuilding plan commenced just as “the ruins from the 1901 fire were still smoking the work of reconstruction was begun and prosecuted with such vigor that today scarcely a scar remains visible.”

“An Important Commercial Crossroads”

When the Kalem Company arrived in 1908, Jacksonville certainly was a city on the rise, but it was still far from fulfilling its aspirations of becoming the superciliously titled “Queen City of the South.” Instead as Richard Alan Nelson points out, Jacksonville in 1908 could instead call itself “Florida’s Hustling City,” at an important commercial crossroads.

The increased activity of the film industry in Jacksonville over the next decade closely coincided with the city’s own enormous growth and urban development. The organization most responsible for boosting Jacksonville’s industrial development during this period was the Jacksonville Board of Trade.

Established in 1884, the Board of Trade was initially formed to help lay the groundwork for

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38 Crooks, 2-3.
39 Crooks, 22-23; Bean, 30-31. Fletcher previously served as Jacksonville’s mayor between 1893 and 1895, he later went on as the U.S. Senator from Florida between 1909 to 1936.
40 Kealhofer, 3-5. These ambitions are further accentuated by Kealhofer: “The development of the port of Jacksonville from a small town to a wide but shallow river, to a metropolitan city handling every year a deep-water commerce worth millions of dollars along a splendidly charted channel, is the story of the efforts of earnest men, foreseeing the possibilities of the magnificent future and bending every effort to hasten its coming.”
41 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 133-134.
42 Kealhofer, 7; Crooks, 4. According to Kealhofer: “The organization has been the chief factor in the upbuilding of Jacksonville and Duval County, and as a result of its work the entire state of Florida has benefited.” Crooks argues: “Private institutions, including the Board of Trade (which later became the Chamber of Commerce), Jacksonville Women’s Club, and black churches, also helped to determine the character of Jacksonville as a New South City.”
improved relations between Jacksonville’s burgeoning status as a metropolis and the state’s largely rural population. The first major initiative by the Board was to increase Jacksonville’s – and by proxy Florida’s – status as a major tourist destination. Within four years of initiating this campaign the Board attracted national attention by hosting the Sub-Tropical Exposition in January 1888. The Sub-Tropical Exposition’s one-acre exposition site offered visitors from far and wide an enormous hall with an electrically lit fountain of stone and coral, with exhibits of Seminole Indian camp, displays of Florida products, an art gallery, two artificial lakes, and a zoo. For several months the exposition was a major draw for visitors to come to Florida’s east coast, and it was twice visited by President Grover Cleveland. However as Jacksonville’s tourist initiative started to gain traction, a devastating yellow fever epidemic raged the city between July and November of 1888, killing 427 people and wreaking havoc on the regional economy.43

Just as Jacksonville recovered from the devastation caused by the epidemic, railroad magnate Henry Flagler initiated the final stages of his million-dollar Florida East Coast Railway Bridge, the first suspension bridge to span the St. Johns River. The purpose of the all steel bridge was to lead winter visitors further down the Florida coast to Flagler’s recently constructed Ponce De Leon Hotel in St. Augustine.44 As Flagler expanded his railroad to St. Augustine and beyond, Jacksonville’s role as a tourist center began to decline. Local interests continued to foster tourist development, but the city lacked the climate and amenities of Palm Beach, Coral Gables, and St. Petersburg, which were far more successful in attracting tourists and land speculators.45 Florida historian Richard A. Martin makes the compelling argument that these two events, combined with the fire of 1901 ultimately “set Jacksonville’s development


44 Wood, 84.

45 Crooks, 150.
back by fifty years” and “paved the way for the problems of the next fifty.”46

As the Florida tourism industry shifted its focus further to the south and west, the Jacksonville Board of Trade set out to reimagine Jacksonville as the trade capital of the American southeast. Jacksonville’s image was subsequently reformatted as “The Gateway City” and boasted that its population and trade exceeded its two other competitors along the Atlantic coast: Savannah and Charleston.47 The commencement of construction on the Panama Canal by the United States in 1904 also placed Jacksonville as an important launching point for shipping along the eastern seaboard. An advertisement by the Board of Trade published in the *Florida Times-Union* described the “remarkable similarity in the geographical location of Jacksonville and New York,” and how the link between Jacksonville and Sanford via the St. Johns River closely mirrors the connection between New York and Albany by way of the Hudson River with “the added advantage of lying at the entrance of the Panama Canal, placing Jacksonville 1,000 miles closer to the gateway between the Atlantic and Pacific.”48 1907 proved to be a turning point in the Board of Trade’s campaign to attract increased industry and settlement in Jacksonville on several fronts. The first was brought on by a state-wide health initiative that boasted to prospective settlers and visitors “total victory over yellow fever,” and proclaimed “Florida, has moved forward greatly in this century, because health and energy are as sure here as anywhere within the United States.”49

During this time Jacksonville expanded on several fronts after Congressional appropriations were secured to aid in the construction of a new railroad terminal and city hall, along with the development of a municipal lighting plan and the deepening of the St. Johns River to coincide with the completion of the Panama Canal.50 In 1907 Governor Napoleon

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47 Crooks, 34.
50 Wood, 25.
Broward unveiled a series of recommendations to the Florida legislature to commence a promotional campaign on the county and community level with the intention of “advertising of their attractions to bring the tourists who frequently became settlers.” To follow up on his settlement initiative, the governor incorporated the City of South Jacksonville, on the other side of the St. Johns River. With a population of 251 in 1907, South Jacksonville was described as “little more than a ‘small dirty place, [with] no paved streets or sidewalks, no lights, and poor water service.” Broward appointed S.M. Scruggs as the first mayor of South Jacksonville in June 1907. However in his short time in office, Scruggs initiated what could be considered the most ambitious public attraction projects attempted in Greater Jacksonville since the Sub Tropical Exposition of 1888. He commissioned the construction of Dixieland Park, a theme park billed as “The Coney Island of the South.” With this announcement the new municipality seemingly overnight established itself as a primary center for popular amusements and entertainment in the expanded Jacksonville metro area.

Richard Alan Nelson has elsewhere argued that “Jacksonville became a film center by accident.” The basis of this claim primarily rests on extraordinarily cold winter of 1908 and the pioneering spirit of Kalem Company producers Frank Marion and visionary director Sidney Olcott. After taking a closer look into the efforts made by the Jacksonville Board of Trade in the decades leading up to Kalem’s arrival, it becomes apparent that the city facilitated the conditions needed for an increasingly itinerant early film industry. In his history of Jacksonville published in 1925, local historian Frederick T. Davis contradicts Nelson’s assertion in his view that

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52 Wood, 251.
53 Ibid, 251. Six months after the first election was held, and John F. White defeated Scruggs as mayor.
54 Bean, 5; Glenn Emery, “Dixieland,” The Jacksonville Historical Society, accessed February 19, http://www.jaxhistory.org/portfolio-items/dixieland/. The park provided a myriad of attractions ranging from a 160-foot rollercoaster, a merry-go-round called a “Flying Jenny,” an ostrich park, and nearly 20,000 electric lights to keep the entertainment going well into the evening.
“Jacksonville did not spring up by accident. A careful analysis shows that the forces operating in its behalf in the beginning were founded on sound principles of climate, health, and location for trade.” The same principles that established the city as a major trading center can certainly be applied to the efforts made by Jacksonville’s boosters toward bringing motion picture productions to the region. Instead of operating as “Florida’s Hustling City,” Jacksonville could be seen as an up-and-coming metropolis that had an unchecked ambition to become “The World’s Winter Film Capital.” In order to better understand the reasons why North Florida eventually factored in so importantly in the next stage of the development of the motion picture industry, it is necessary to understand the dramatic changes in film production, distribution, and exhibition that took place during the cinema’s “transitional era” between 1907 and 1915.

“The Kalem Invasion”

According to Charles Musser, “The year 1907 was a key turning point in cinema’s history, as pressures created or magnified by the nickelodeon boom transformed screen practices at almost every level.” This transformation can certainly be seen in the significant changes the industry experienced over the next two years. The production of films in 1907 was still a handcrafted amusement industry, trying in vain to keep up with the rapidly expanding market. That year only about 1,200 films – most of which were one reel or less – were released in the United States, and of those only about 400 were American-made. Between 1907 and 1908, just as the Jacksonville Board of Trade and Governor Broward initiated an aggressive industrial expansion and settlement initiative in North Florida, the motion picture industry experienced a series of major disruptions that drastically restructured the way in which films

56 Davis, History of Jacksonville, 500.
were produced and consumed by audiences. These changes had a direct influence on Kalem General Manager Frank Marion’s decision to send his company to Jacksonville in December 1908. This push to relocate to Florida was part of a wider initiative to shift the locus of the motion picture industry away from the Greater New York metro area.

The first major factor was the explosion in the number of storefront theaters in urban centers across the United States in the period between 1905 and 1907. This change in the place where films were viewed by audiences allowed working class and eventually middle-class audiences to have even greater access to more motion pictures than ever before. In New York, a city-wide ordinance allowed storefront theaters to be licensed as common shows, with a fee of only twenty-five dollars as opposed the five hundred required for vaudeville shows and theatrical productions. Other major cities soon followed New York’s lead and a massive proliferation of minimally regulated nickelodeon theaters appeared across the U.S. By 1908 there were over 600 nickelodeons with an estimated 400,000 tickets sold with $6 million in revenue per day in New York alone.\(^{59}\) In order to maximize profits and terminate the supremacy of foreign films on American screens, The Edison Manufacturing Company sought to consolidate control over the American motion picture industry in an effort to bring an end to a decade-long period of intensive competition and legal disputes. The Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC) comprised a patent pool of all major American film to control the distribution and supply of film stock.\(^{60}\) It ended the domination of foreign films on American screens, standardized the manner in which films were distributed and exhibited. Yet the upsurge in the number of films as a result of the corporate consolidation caused by the Edison trust, moral crusaders also started to lash out against the social influence the movies had on immigrant and working-class audiences.\(^{61}\)

Throughout this period the Kalem Company was decisively swept up in this ongoing industry-wide transformation. The company was formed in early 1907 by distributor George Kleine and producers Samuel Long and Frank Marion, the company’s name being an amalgam of the names of its three founders. Early on the company sought to distinguish itself from other emerging production companies by filming “outdoor scenes that were actually filmed outdoors rather than in front of crudely painted scenery.” Kalem’s desire to incorporate natural landscapes into its films as well as a marked shift toward creating historical “actuality” films became a major draw for actors and directors interested in extending the storytelling possibilities the new medium could provide. A major cost cutting measure applied by the Kalem company was that it relied on location shooting, which served as a way to accommodate growing audience demand “that movies aspire to reality.” During the summer of 1907 the company received an even greater creative boost when director Sidney Olcott and actress Gene Gauntier defected from the Biograph Company to join Kalem.

That summer Kalem shot several historically-themed films on location in upstate New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. According to Gene Gauntier, the Kalem Company’s most popular films were “Western” and “Southern” stories. In these places “taverns doubled for western saloons, for Civil War recruiting stations, and dozens of other sets.” The indoor scenes for the Civil War-set The Days of ’61 (1907) was filmed on location in Connecticut, while the battle scenes were shot on the grounds of St. John’s Military Academy in Manlius, New York. As Gauntier recalled, “With this environment, plus costumes and props, we turned out pictures which were things of beauty even in those crude days.” The company did suffer a serious

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64 Ibid, 55.
65 Bowser, 24-25.
66 Gauntier, 184.
67 Ibid, 184.
setback in December 1907 when Gene Gauntier’s adaptation of Lew Wallace’s *Ben Hur* (1907), which at the time was “the most costly one reel scenario in the history of the business,” was sued by the Wallace estate and the book’s publishers Harper and Brothers for not securing the motion picture rights for the novel. As Terry Ramsaye colorfully explains, this caused Kalem to be “sued with great completeness and vigor.” Although the final court decision was not passed down until 1911, the cost of the legal battle over *Ben Hur* placed Kalem on unsure footing for much of 1908. Despite the company’s legal issues, the financial success and nation-wide popularity that came from *Days of ’61* inspired Frank Marion’s to create even more Civil War-themed films. Kalem’s absorption into the MPPC the same week as their arrival in Florida was not coincidental. The additional financial and legal security provided by Kalem’s membership in the Edison Trust helped the company pursue on-location filming for a proposed a series of Civil War films as a part of their “Sunny South Release.”

Ultimately it was a combination of the company’s dire financial situation, an innate need to distinguish itself from other MPPC companies, and Frank Marion’s established mission to create authentic films on location that collectively contributed to company’s stay in Jacksonville during the winter of 1908 and 1909. Tony Tracy argues, “This move was not only an attempt to escape the physical (and photochemical) challenges of filming in New York’s subzero temperatures but also to further set their productions apart from what Marion described as the theatrical’ films of their competitors.” Terry Ramsaye described the push toward location-based filmmaking, as the moment when the “motion picture world was widening its horizons. It had outgrown the little rooftop studios of Manhattan and now was fairly started toward making in reality ‘all the world’s a stage.’” The Kalem Company’s experiments with outdoor location-

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68 Ramsaye, 462-463.
70 Bowser, 152-153.
72 Ramsaye, 507.
based filmmaking first in Florida and later abroad, would go ‘on to become a catalyst for the
decentering of the motion picture industry during cinema’s transitional period.\(^{73}\) Gene Gauntier
remembered, “Kalem’s invasion of Florida inaugurated the custom of traveling far for effective
backgrounds, which created a sensation in the industry.”\(^{74}\)

Jacksonville by no means was the only location that companies such as Kalem would
have sent their troupes to shoot exterior locations during cinema’s transitional period. Especially
with the impending fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War and increased audience interest in war
dramas, itinerant production companies not only made films \textit{about} the South but actively utilized
authentic locations in Texas, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, and other Southern states.\(^{75}\) In
Florida other productions were filmed in Miami and Tampa, while St. Augustine also emerged as
an important “satellite movie colony” for North Florida-based productions. Jacksonville had
rapidly become the city of choice for producers due to its position as a transportation hub and its
role as a center for manufacturing, distribution, and finance.\(^{76}\) During its first winter in
Jacksonville, the Kalem company selected Jacksonville’s Fairfield neighborhood, nearby to the
then-defunct Dixieland Amusement Park.\(^{77}\) They settled into the nearby Roseland House, “a big
rambling ramshackle old hotel set in three acres of ground, on the banks of the St. John’s River.”
The adjacent ostrich farm was regularly used for battle scenes, horseback stunts, and frequently
to replicate the jungles of Africa and Southeast Asia. While the nearby Strawberry Creek and its
tributaries was described by Gauntier as “a true picture of tropical Florida, with its swamps
bayous made impenetrable by water hyacinths, banks lined with live oaks whose beards of
Spanish moss hung in silver festoons to delight the heart of the photographer.”\(^{78}\) The Kalem

\(^{73}\) Bowser 152-153.
\(^{74}\) Gauntier, 168.
\(^{75}\) Nelson, “Movie Mecca of the South,” 38.
\(^{76}\) Doll and Morrow, 2; Graham, 160.
\(^{77}\) Nelson, \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 210. Nelson describes the decline of Dixieland Park
“wasn’t a sudden death, but when the Bostock Arena left in the spring of 1908 the heart seemed to have gone. The
theater found competition with the Duval and Orpheum Theaters and closes in 1909.”
\(^{78}\) Gauntier, 169; Nelson, \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 138; Doll and Morrow, 27.
Company’s first winter in Jacksonville was essentially a bare bones operation. There was no allowance in the production budget for property men, carpenters, or wardrobe facilities. Instead each actor was expected to take on specified tasks in the case of an emergency, while the director’s duties were considered “the hardest and most nerve-wracking” in ensuring that the production ran smoothly. An essential component of Sidney Olcott and Gene Gauntier’s efforts in the director’s seat was also to make “social contacts with hospitable Floridians” to ensure the support needed to complete their productions.79

Kalem’s first winter in Jacksonville was an enormous success, with several widely popular productions shot on location and sent back to New York for processing and national distribution. The overwhelmingly positive theatrical reception of Kalem’s Sunny South Releases brought the stock company back to Roseland for second winter season in 1909-10. During the intervening eight months, their “Florida Series” premiered to national acclaim. On one hand the first release in the “Florida Series” is considered to have been a revelation in the American motion picture industry. A Florida Feud: Or Love in the Everglades (1908) is considered to have influenced the creation of “The Southern” genre type. In 1909 alone the film inspired eighteen additional photoplays that mixed scenic locales and strongly-honed parables of moral right and wrong which tapped working-class audience interests and tastes. Kalem’s emphasis on the Confederate “Lost Cause narrative” reversed the Northern perspective of American Civil War films and established a trend that inspired later groundbreaking films set in the Civil War era such as The Birth of a Nation (1915) and Gone With the Wind (1939).80 By the end of that winter season Kalem’s profits had already reached $5,000 a week, and its status “continued to rise with the MPPC.”81 Kalem director Kenean Buell, who later became the company’s exclusive producer of Civil War films, reasoned that the Confederate perspective was preferred

79 Gauntier, 169-170.
80 Nelson, 141-143; Nelson, Lights! Camera! Florida!, 17; Doll and Morrow, 18.
81 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 126.
since the “Southern stockholders in the Kalem Company were in the majority,” but also that audiences in the North were “now all or nearly all interested in the Southern version, and that of course they please the Southern people.”

Although Kalem’s Florida-made releases attracted national attention and helped to create a major cinematic genre, it received a cool reception from Florida natives. The negative portrayal of the North Florida’s “cracker” population in *A Florida Feud* infuriated some Jacksonvillians, and for period of time made director Sidney Olcott “very unpopular with the civic authorities.”

To the troupe’s surprise, their reliance on local support that second winter was met with an unexpected pushback. According to architectural historian Robert C. Broward, the tensions that emerged from this early Jacksonville release was simply a precursor to “the ambivalent interplay between the native Floridians and the new industry that would be reflected through the years in a continuing love-hate relationship.”

Another controversy between producers and Florida locals was stirred up after another Kalem release titled *The Cracker’s Bride* (1909), which was accused of exploiting the region’s population as “misshapen, shuddering, disgusting, and revolting.”

The *Florida Times-Union* and *Metropolis* did not report on Kalem’s return in the winter of 1909—the acting troupe is impossible to determine. However as will later be argued, the animosity of the depiction of the Florida cracker in such films would later heavily factor into the circumstances that brought about Jacksonville’s decline as a motion picture production center.

10, so the degree of the tensions between Jacksonville’s self-described cracker population and

The national success of the Kalem Company’s Civil War films, especially Gene Gauntier’s *Girl Spy* films (1909-11), helped establish Jacksonville as a viable production center.

84 Broward, 222.
These films helped to establish Gene Gauntier as one of the first great “picture personalities.” After leaving Jacksonville once again in April 1910 Kalem Company departed for Ireland to develop an “Irish Series” that utilized many of the same regional practices developed through the company’s “Florida Series” productions. As the company’s Irish unit was set to return to the United States, Frank Marion decided to extend Kalem’s genre offerings further by splitting the company into multiple units. Meanwhile in California, an upstart director with the Biograph Company named D.W. Griffith was hired to film the multi-reel *In Old California* (1910) with the enthusiastic local support of a small village on the periphery of Los Angeles. Inspired by the perceived atmosphere of cooperation in Hollywood and other Southern California communities, in December 1910 Marion sent one crew to Glendale, California, with instructions to construct temporary studio facilities to produce “historical Indian subjects.” He reduced the company’s Florida unit to ten members for the 1910-11 season and sent Gauntier along with the remainder of the Florida crew to Ireland for the summer of 1911. Kalem did return to Jacksonville that following winter, but by that time the grounds around the former Dixieland Amusement Park had become increasingly crowded as other production companies sought to exploit Florida’s unique landscape and Florida’s unique position of having “the sunniest winter climate in the Eastern United States.” Just as Southern California had started to attract permanent studios in and around Los Angeles, North Florida had begun to do the same surrounding Jacksonville.

**North Florida’s Landscape and Environment on Film**

While the Kalem Company was initially drawn to Florida to take advantage of the region’s natural landscape for location-based filming, their other MPPC affiliates saw an

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87 Tracy, 81.

opportunity to purchase cheap land to build up their production facilities. In the winter of 1909-1910, the Lubin Manufacturing Company’s manager Sigmund Lubin sent his acting troupe to follow Kalem to Florida while he oversaw the construction of a new studio for his company’s headquarters in Philadelphia. Lubin and several other companies passed through Florida during this period and to them Jacksonville was simply a stopping off point as they continued to push onward to Cuba or the Bahamas. Florida’s position as a gateway to the Caribbean helped to expand the Edison Trust’s activities both within the state but also into the West Indies and beyond. The primary motivation for this southward thrust was to meet increased industry-wide demand for one and two-reel subjects. To sustain this demand production companies had become increasingly dependent on the early cinema’s most necessary natural resource: natural sunlight.

The 1909-10 season also witnessed the first marked transition in the exhibition of films from the nickelodeon to the movie theater. The need to produce films year-round to an ever-expanding audience in a constant quest for new stories and subjects proved to be a catalyst for the production industry’s westward and southward thrust during that winter season. Terry Ramsaye explained in *A Million and One Nights*, “When the murky days of the autumn of 1909 settled down on the studios of New York and Chicago, the picture makers went hunting sunshine” and “soon after the birth of the motion picture theatre, tentative exploring expeditions to sunnier regions began, including Florida, Cuba, and California.” Prior to the development of expensive lighting systems, indoor studio work relied on available sunlight through glass roof skylights. The demand for content put an increased amount of stress on companies in cities that were limited in the number of films they could produce due to limitations from winter weather.

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89 Ibid, 145-146.
90 Ramsaye, 532.
91 Sargent, 9; Nelson, “Movie Mecca of the South,” 39. To better clarify the need for glass studios during this period, Epes Winthrop Sargent gives the following description of the early design: “A glass or daylight studio is one provided with a lazed roof through which the light is admitted. Generally, one side is also of glass as well. Daylight is the natural an even illuminant for photography, and daylight is used where possible, but it is not unusual to provide electric lights for use on dark days or gain light effects.”
The demand by movie exhibitors for a year-round production schedule, combined with the clarity of Florida’s natural sunlight during the winter months proved to be a significant draw for traditional studio operations as well as location-based productions.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 86-87. As Nelson explains, “Along with climate and high sunshine percentage during the winter and spring, the intensity of the sunlight in the lower latitude had a determining factor. Atmosphere was free from dust and other contaminants which screen out ultra-violet lights.”} Jacksonville historian Daniel Pleasant Gold observed in 1929, the motion picture industry in the 1910s played a crucial role in perpetuating the so-called rivalry between Jacksonville and Los Angeles’ production industries at the same time. “It was during this period that Jacksonville made an effort to compete with Los Angeles as the center of the motion picture industry, contending that the sunlight of Florida was equal in photographic prosperities if not superior to California’s.”\footnote{Daniel Pleasant Gold, \textit{History of Duval County Florida} (St. Augustine: The Record Company, 1929), 207.} Location based companies such as Kalem consistently praised Florida’s function as a useful stand in for various tropical locales and natural settings that required few alterations. In addition, the climate in North Florida was hospitable almost year-round, and movie producers saw opportunities to film outside, in Spanish moss draped forests, on white sand beaches, on tropical islands just offshore and in St. Augustine.\footnote{Susan J. Fernandez, and Robert P. Ingalls, \textit{Sunshine in the Dark: Florida in the Movies} (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), 3.} The area’s sub-tropical landscape was highly suited for the Selig Polyscope Company, which settled in the former Dixieland Park and ostrich farm grounds in October 1910. For their production of \textit{Lost in the Jungle} (1910), the company brought 160 trained animals including elephants, tigers, lions, camels, and horses to the city with the intention of recreating tropical environments for their adventure films. Selig also hired a group of Native American actors from their Western stock company to appear in “authentic Seminole roles” in an effort to offer another locale to their popular Western films. Selig’s jungle adventures and Seminole War films were a financial success and the studio were exclusively reliant on Florida as a setting.\footnote{Nelson, \textit{Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 149; Nelson, \textit{Lights! Camera! Florida!}, 20; Doll and Morrow, 27.}
By this time the whole of North Florida had become a playground for increasingly intrepid production companies interested in creating new and exciting storylines that incorporated their new environment to the fullest. In January 1910, as the Lubin Company pushed southward toward the Bahamas, the crew spent two days at the iconic Florida House in St. Augustine to shoot sequences for *A Honeymoon Through Snow to Sunshine* (1910). As the title suggests, the film’s narrative progresses alongside the physical movement of the honeymoon couple from a barren winter landscape to a tropical paradise. The notion of portraying Florida as a place of transformation and renewal rapidly became yet another major overarching theme in films that utilized Florida as a backdrop.

A notable example of a film that best includes Florida as an essential part of its narrative can be found in the Vitagraph Company’s *A Florida Enchantment* (1914), where St. Augustine’s Ponce De Leon Hotel is portrayed as a place of literal physical transformation. Since *A Florida Enchantment* is among a small handful of surviving Florida films from the silent period, it has since taken on near-mythic status. Based on an 1896 novel and later play of the same name and later described as “a gender bending comedy of manners,” the film follows a young woman from Manhattan as she visits her aunt and fiancé in Florida. Upon arriving she has an argument with her fiancé and swallows a seed that “changes men to women and vice versa.” The film’s gender-bending aspects along with the ready availability of restored prints has allowed for numerous readings into its text and has fostered several decades of passionate debates in the LGBTQ community over the intended meaning ascribed to the couple’s transformation. Film scholar R. Bruce Brasell proposes that the couple’s transformation was “not so much biological as sociopsychological.” While his argument is convincing in his reasoning that the metaphor of the

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96 Graham, 11.
98 Ibid, 12.
transformation was rooted in the cultural assignments and social expectations of Edwardian era men and women, the story’s use of Florida as the location where the transformation takes place is significant in its establishment of an important archetype that will be incorporated into Florida films for generations to come. Just as compelling as the film’s divergence from other so-called “temporary transvestite films” popular from the period, is that “the city of St. Augustine got to play itself, not some faraway, fictitious locale.” According to Susan Doll and David Morrow, “the setting provides a key to understanding the film in another capacity – as a chronicle of a specific moment in Florida’s history: The Gilded Age Hotel boom.”

As more studios set themselves up in North Florida, the allure of the state’s image as a landscape of escape attracted filmmakers to the state as much as its climate and environment. Florida was no longer seen by visiting studios as only a stand-in for other more exotic locations, but instead the state’s unique history, culture, and environment proved to be enough of a draw on its own. In terms of architecture the Spanish Colonial and Moorish Rival stylings of Florida’s resort communities – financed by railroad magnates like Henry Flagler – were actively sought after locations by film productions that wanted to depict glamorous settings for audiences that increasingly clamored for films that “conjure images of exotic beauty and adventure.” While Florida’s resorts and historic sites offered film productions a range of distinctive backdrops to meet audience demand for the sublime, Jacksonville’s building boom also provided a vibrant urban atmosphere few other cities in the New South could match. An unexpected byproduct of the Great Fire of 1901 was that the ensuing building boom that followed had turned Jacksonville into the inspired image of a modern city. Before the fire, Jacksonville could boast one six story block and three buildings that were over three stories tall, but over the next fourteen years the construction of upwards of 10,000 buildings allowed the city to spread out in nearly every direction.

99 Graham, 50.
100 Doll and Morrow, 8-9.
102 Kealhofer, 3; Crooks, 5. This boom brought with it new skyscrapers, churches, department stores, a city hall, a public library, and movie theaters among other new construction.
Architectural historian Robert C. Broward argues that while “Jacksonville’s building boom mirrored the national and local prosperity of the times,” the tension between the agricultural and industrial sectors that was common in the emerging centers of the New South, indicated that the city’s “material growth and the need for cultural growth was not yet evident.”  

Henry John Klutho was the literal architect of the new Jacksonville that emerged from the rubble after the Great Fire. He arrived in Florida from New York serendipitously enough during the summer of 1901. He envisioned the city as on the pathway toward becoming a modern metropolis where “foreign languages were commonplace because of the many international vessels in port.”

The city’s seemingly uncheckered growth came to a sharp decline with the onset of an economic recession and overall decline in trade following the onset of war in Europe during the summer of 1914. In response to the sudden slowdown, Jacksonville’s city politicians sought to attract new industries to foster continued growth and development. Several factions emerged in the debate over the direction of Jacksonville’s future, which also revived the long existing inter-party strife in Florida’s Democratic Party since the end of Reconstruction. Jacksonville’s position as a burgeoning metropolis placed the city at the epicenter of a deeper political divide between corporation and anti-corporation in state politics. The political and economic tensions that existed in Jacksonville in this period came to a decisive head during the controversial Mayoral election in 1915. The return of J.E.T. Bowden to the mayor’s office that year further inspired a decisive push by the city government to keep motion picture production companies in Jacksonville full time. However, the unresolved tensions within city and state politics would also inadvertently bring about a dramatic and decisive decline in the region’s production industry.

103 Broward, 107.
104 Broward, xiv; Bean 63, Doll and Morrow, 38.
Going into 1914, Jacksonville’s previously uncontested position as the “World’s Winter Film Capital” had become tenuous at best. Although the MPPC-affiliated studios such as Kalem, Lubin, Selig, and Edison had established inroads with the North Florida community, few of these companies remained in North Florida any longer than they needed to. With the onset of a local recession in 1914, the Jacksonville Board of Trade became increasingly interested in attracting production companies to boost the local economy. In January 1914, the previously rootless Kalem Company strengthened its ties with Jacksonville by erecting a permanent studio at a cost of nearly $20,000.106 The Kalem Company’s decision to build a studio in Jacksonville (it already had studios in New Orleans and Glendale) was far more representative of the increasing demands for multi-reel film productions that emerged in the last phase of cinema’s transitional period, in particular the demand for sophisticated single story subjects that exceeded forty-five minutes or longer. The mounting scope of motion picture productions increasingly demanded large-scale community development. The needs for an operating studio community in 1914 included vast enclosed stages, prop and wardrobe rooms, with processing labs, and homes for studio workers. In March 1914 the Board of Trade sponsored a municipal advertising film called Jacksonville in Motion. Director Ernest Day coined the slogan “Get in the movies and boost Jacksonville,” in an effort to showcase to would-be production companies “all the busy and interesting parts of the city.”107

Over the next few months a series of advertisements in the Florida Times-Union and Metropolis extolled the virtues of Florida’s landscape and winter climate for a diverse range of productions as well as the cooperative relationship between the production companies and

107 “‘Get in the Movies and Boost Jacksonville,’ is the Slogan,” FTU, March 16, 1914, 9.
Jacksonville community. In order to maintain this relationship, Jacksonville relied on the economic viability of the Trust manufacturers. At the same time a number of independent film producers sought the coveted “Made in Jacksonville” label. A May 1914 Florida Times Union article explains that productions with the “Made in Jacksonville” label can give the city “the sort of publicity that attracts favorable attention to the state and the vicinity about Jacksonville so the city proudly includes the studios among its worthy enterprises.” The article went on to state that the movie people in Jacksonville had made “hundreds of friends, personally and on the screen” and that the “establishment of the studios here has been a vast benefit to the city in many ways.” This effort to attract additional motion picture productions to Jacksonville culminated in October 1914 when, with the slogan “anything which helps Florida helps Jacksonville,” the Jacksonville Board of Trade sent out an illustrated booklet that highlighted the city’s virtues as “headquarters for motion picture companies, especially during the winter season.” This invitation became a key talking point as shot in January 1915 as the most controversial mayor races in Jacksonville’s history began to heat up.

As the Board of Trade issued its formal invitation to prospective motion picture production companies to bring their operations to Jacksonville, J.E.T. Bowden surprised voters by announcing his plans to run against incumbent mayor Van C. Swearingen. In his campaign announcement, he pledged that if reelected “he would run the city like a business.” Bowden attacked Swearingen on the anti-vice campaign and his supposed membership in the controversial Guardians of Liberty, a secret organization known for espousing strong anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic rhetoric. The race between Bowden and Swearingen can also be considered a metric of the broader political turmoil persistent in Florida politics since the end of Reconstruction. The underlying divisions within Florida’s Democratic Party comprised of two
primary factions, the “Antis” or anti-corporation Democrats (which Swearingen subscribed to), and the “Straight outs” or corporation Democrats (which J.E.T. Bowden adopted as his political base). According James Crooks, the city’s “response to the mayoral leadership of Swearingen and [then] Bowden pointed to a split in the Jacksonville white community,” and demonstrated that Jacksonville’s elections relied on an oscillating “swing group of voters shifting first in one direction and then another, generally avoiding extreme positions on either side.”

The continual political push and pull between the Antis and Straightouts in both Jacksonville’s and Florida’s state government left a fraught foundation for attracting any potential long-term business ventures. Even Napoleon Broward’s seemingly progressive tourism and settlement initiatives were limited to white Southerners from the immediately surrounding states of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. A 1907 report from Benjamin E. McLin, the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture reinforces the blatant xenophobia espoused by the Antis during this period. In his report McLin described the influx of Italian and German Catholic immigrants as being “of the lowest order; socially, they are without recognition. Politically, they make up all the isms that afflict all peoples and menace all governments; they are the breeders of socialism and anarchism and are enemies of all forms of government control.” This extreme position was also applied by the Antis against North Florida’s incipient motion picture industry, which they considered also comprised of the same so-called “menacing elements that this faction of the Democratic Party was staunchly outspoken against.” While a vocal subsection of

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115 Crooks, 64. Crooks further elaborates on the divisions between the differing factions by explaining: “A substantial number of citizens wanted an open, tolerant city for business and pleasure. Another group wanted a moral city reflecting traditional Protestant Christian religious values. These people not only opposed prostitution but also gambling and the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Further, many of them saw Catholics and Jews as threatening their traditional community values.”
118 Ibid, 38.
Swearingen’s supporters were inspired by fears of possible foreign influence that could come with the increased presence of northern business interests, several of Jacksonville’s most influential northern emigres expressed a different set of concerns over Bowden’s supposed get-rich-quick campaign promises. Most notably, Jacksonville’s preeminent architect and New York transplant Henry John Klutho expressed concern in an editorial “that the mayoral candidate Bowden was insensitive to the needs of Jacksonville and an opportunist.”119 Instead of taking the time to form a reasoned response, Bowden often reacted to criticism with emotion instead of political expediency. This can be seen in the swift legal reaction he took against Klutho’s editorial, which according to Robert Broward “in no way indicated he even vaguely understood the architect as a professional.”120

The tense race between Jacksonville’s former and incumbent mayor came to a head during the first Democratic Primary on January 26, 1915. Aside from Bowden and Swearingen, roughly ninety second-tier candidates also ran for the Democrat nomination. That evening, the results were tallied on a massive screen draped over the outside the Metropolis office. In between each election update the screen played the latest Lubin and Kalem releases for the nearly 8,000 Jacksonvillians who gathered to witness the results of the contentious ninety-two-man race. Although Swearingen won the plurality of the election, the margin was narrow enough that a run-off election was called between him and Bowden for the following month. After the run-off was announced, Bowden ran a letter thanking voters and stating he sought to serve as mayor “for all of Jacksonville.” The results of the Second Primary election were first announced to audiences at the Orpheum Theatre and Keith Vaudeville show and proclaimed Bowden’s victory over Swearingen by a fifty-eight percent margin. The following day he issued a four-word

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119 Broward, 200.
120 Ibid, 200.
message to his constituents: “Just Easy Times Boys.”

In order to restore business confidence and create new jobs in aftermath of the city’s war-time recession, Bowden outlined an ambitious jobs program in coordination with the Board of Trade. One major component of this initiative called for an aggressive effort to attract motion picture productions to North Florida.

One week after Bowden’s victory against Swearingen in the run-off election, the Jacksonville Board of Trade formally changed its name to the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. The coordinated efforts between the mayor’s office and the Chamber of Commerce also led to the establishment of a permanent Motion Picture Commission “to look after the interests of the producing companies and to assist them in obtaining sites and equipment.”

The underlying premise of the initiative was to encourage complete cooperation with arriving production companies while also seriously undercutting the day-to-day expenses that productions in California and the Northeast incurred. The first major victory scored by Bowden and the Chamber of Commerce came in October 1915 when the Thanhouser Film Corporation announced its plans to open a production branch in Jacksonville instead of California. The company’s president Edwin Thanhouser complemented the Chamber of Commerce for its persuasiveness and promised that his Southern branch would invest over thirty thousand dollars in constructing an elaborate glass and steel studio. As an additional boon to the city’s recession economy, he also announced that the daily payroll would exceed one thousand dollars, and in the process put nearly one hundred skilled people to work at all times. According to Thanhouser, aside from the persuasiveness of the Chamber of Commerce, the location of

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121 Davis, *History of Jacksonville*, 390; Robert Cassanello, *To Render Invisible: Jim Crow and Public Life in New South Jacksonville* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2013), 126; Woods, “In 1915 Bordellos Became a Key Issue in Voters Choice For Mayor.” The top four results of the first primary election was as follows: Swearingen – 1,541, Bowden, 1,366, Johnson 1,103, Grunthal 258. The second primary run-off between Bowden and Swearingen on February 23 had the following results: Bowden – 2,655, Swearingen – 1,888. Since Florida was part of the “Solid South” during this period, the Democratic Primary was the only election that truly mattered. In June 1915 the mayoral election between Bowden and Socialist candidate I.C. Baldwin was decided by a seven to one majority.


123 Gold, 208.

124 Nelson, “Movie Mecca of the South,” 44.
other studios in the city also influenced his decision in selecting Jacksonville.\textsuperscript{125} Any perceived rivalry that may have manifested during this period between North Florida and California was echoed in subsequent promotions carried out by Bowden and the Chamber of Commerce. Thanhouser also expressed his expectation that very soon other studios would likely locate in Jacksonville, he foresaw “the time when this city will become the Los Angeles of the Southeast as a moving picture center, pointing out that Los Angeles and many sections of California hold the moving picture industry above all others in value and revenue.”\textsuperscript{126} This quote is especially instructive in terms of understanding how Jacksonville was perceived by the motion picture industry at the advent of its most pronounced period of activity. While Bowden and the Chamber of Commerce continued with their concerted effort to convince the motion picture industry to “quit Los Angeles,”\textsuperscript{127} the majority of producers even among companies that actively promoted the city, often viewed the Jacksonville not as a production capital but instead an important secondary location for their east coast operations.

Although beyond the scope of this study, there is a definite need to for a more in-depth look into the efforts carried out by J.E.T. Bowden and the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce during period between 1915 and 1917. This topic offers the potential for many fascinating insights into the community-wide efforts initiated to attract major film producers just as the MPPC experienced its dramatic decline. It also covers a period when the major studios on the west coast began their campaign of corporate consolidation that would eventually establish the center of the American motion picture industry in California. For now, the more pressing question to ask is not why the North Florida production industry “lost out”\textsuperscript{128} to Los Angeles, 

\textsuperscript{125}Nelson, \textit{Florida and the Motion Picture Industry}, 164-165; Miller, 76-77.
\textsuperscript{126}Miller, 77.

\textsuperscript{127}“Florida Invites Producers,” \textit{Motography}, February 19, 1916, 412. In this promotion in a popular trade magazine Bowden advised the people of Jacksonville in his statement that companies with annual payroll of $30,000,000 threatened to quit Los Angeles on account of just such practices and if Jacksonville is to win the patronage of the motion picture people through their building plants in Jacksonville it is essential that the city profit through the mistakes of other cities by avoiding these troubles.

\textsuperscript{128}Graham, 146.
but instead why Jacksonville’s status as a secondary studio location declined so drastically in 1917? In all, calculations from various trade journals, newspapers, and local records provide evidence of more than fifty different film production companies that were active at one time or another in Jacksonville between 1908 and 1918. The largest uptick in production activity took place after Bowden came into office in June 1915 and then rapidly fell after his ill-fated bid for re-election in February 1917.129

During this same period, several major production companies established studios along the banks of the St. Johns River in South Jacksonville near the site of the former Dixieland Amusement Park. It should also be noted that South Jacksonville Mayor William Meyers played an equally important role in creating an atmosphere of cooperation and actively sought to provide the conditions necessary for major studio productions. One stand-out event that helped to establish South Jacksonville’s position as a major studio center came in November 1915 when the Gaumont Company, on the heels of Thanhouser and fellow French-based studio Pathe, established operations near the Thanhouser Studio. Shortly after setting up shop, Gaumont’s General Manager Richard Garrick placed a call for 5,000 to 6,000 extras to be ferried across the St. Johns to Dixieland for a theater scene for his film *The Actor* (1916). Garrick dispersed nearly $600 between 555 for extra actors featured in his film. The scale of the scene and the efficiency of the production’s single day shoot certainly captured the imagination of Mayor Meyers as well as those living in the greater Jacksonville area. As the *Florida Times-Union* reported, “It was an unusual day for Jacksonville and a treat for those who availed themselves of Mr. Garrick’s invitation. When night came there were nearly 6,000 citizens who knew more about motion picture making than they had ever read, dreamed, or thought about and some longing for a career.”130 The arrival of large-scale professional producers along with the prestige and financial

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129 Jackson, 29.
130 “Between 5,000 and 6,000 Saw Gaumont Pictures Made and Well Known Stars Perform,” *FTU*, November 29, 1915, 9.
possibilities they offered, inspired businessmen, would-be entertainers, and local politicians throughout the Jacksonville Metro area.

“Jacksonville’s Film Colony”

The best way to explain the factors that brought about the rapid decline of motion picture production in North Florida in 1917 is to examine the rivalry between the Anti and Straightout factions within Florida’s Democratic Party. A sudden shift in Florida politics that started with the gubernatorial election of 1916 played a far greater role in attracting and eventually repelling the motion picture companies than the actions of any single motion picture production company could. Understanding the circumstances of this shift will can also explain the multitude of political and economic influences that continue to define the relationship between Florida politicians and the motion picture industry into the present day. Jacksonville journalist E.T. Hollingsworth wrote extensively during this boom period for both the *Florida Times-Union* and *Metropolis*, as well as the popular trade presses on the goings on of the various production companies in the city. He even oversaw the publication of a weekly “Jacksonville’s Film Colony” in the Sunday editions of the *Florida Times-Union*. Depending on whether he wrote for the local newspaper or industry trade presses, Hollingsworth’s articles fluctuated between demonstrating to skeptical Jacksonvillians the benefits that had come from hosting a rapidly increasing number of production studios, while in the trade presses he portrayed an atmosphere of municipal and communal cooperation toward allowing filmmakers to conduct large-scale crowd scenes, complicated stunts, and disruptive car chase sequences. The overall effort made by the local press to downplay any perceived destruction or disruption caused by the mob scene in *The Clarion* at the very least demonstrates that Jacksonville’s journalists were staunchly in favor of a thriving motion picture industry in their city.
The perceived tensions between the motion picture industry and Jacksonville’s citizenry was not the result of the disruptive nature of the studios active within the city. Instead, these tensions and eventual exodus of the motion picture industry from North Florida was inspired by two key events. The first was a seismic shift that occurred within the American motion picture industry following the breakup of the MPPC in 1915. This event was then followed by with a dramatic change in the established order of Florida’s Democratic Party with the gubernatorial election of 1916 and combined to make motion picture production in Jacksonville unsustainable. The fate of the MPPC hinged on the outcome of the decisive Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Motion Picture Patents Co.* (1915), which formally declared that the Edison Trust was in violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust law and directly led to the breakup of the MPPC. The collapse of the MPPC, which between 1908 and 1915 included the most active companies in Florida, caused the region to lose its most frequent winter guests. Although Mayor Bowden’s administration had by the time of the ruling managed to gain significant traction in terms of attracting new studios to the city, few of these Florida studios had any important links to these major events reshaping American motion picture industry. Meanwhile Florida’s state government wrestled with its new position in relation to the increasingly consolidated industry. According to Thomas Hoffer, “The most persistent reason for failure was the lack of affiliation with the rising vertical integration occurring outside the state.”

Since most of the articles produced by the local newspapers and trade presses that discussed motion picture productions in Jacksonville between 1915 and 1917 were overwhelmingly dominated by local boosters and industry promoters (in the case of Hollingsworth, he was both), it is difficult to determine the degree of discord or the overall

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concerns discussed that existed among Jacksonvillians who might have been less than star-struck by the “movie people.” In turning to papers outside of Jacksonville during this time, there does seem to be less of a rose-colored tint and instead presented a less than favorable perception of the Bowden administration. A January 23, 1917 editorial in the Weekly Miami Metropolis, published less than two weeks before the primary race between Bowden and John Martin, expresses a damning indictment against Bowden’s pro-corporate policies and accuses both the Florida Times-Union and Metropolis of gutless collusion. The editorial was written in response to Bowden’s bid to authorize a $25,000 city-county general fund to promote industrial development, where he cited his success in attracting year-round production studios as the basis for increased expansion. The anonymous author expresses a deep-seated concern against the biases presented in the Florida Times-Union since it was “owned by the interests at 26 Broadway, New York City,” and the Metropolis, which “zealously stands by the rascals who have filled their purses at the expense of the happiness and safety of Jacksonville citizens.”133

The editorial goes on to lament, “There is not a single publication in the city that would dare to tell the truth about what is the matter with Jacksonville.”134

This begs the question of what was happening in Jacksonville during the lead up to the election? While moderate critics of Bowden such as Henry Klutho had accused him of being a hustler and an opportunist, extremists within the Anti-S wing of the Democrat party took a much more aggressive stance against the continued industrial development of North Florida. The question also then becomes to what extent did these concerns carry over to discussions related to the motion picture industry? Richard Alan Nelson acknowledges that although Bowden’s

133 “Mayor Favors Appropriation by the City and County For an Advertising Campaign,” FTU, July 29, 1916, 7; “Jacksonville in the Grip of Corruption,” Weekly Miami Metropolis, January 26, 1917, 4; Nelson, Florida and the Motion Picture Industry, 234-235. In the week before the primary Bowden outlined the financial success his privately conscripted $2,000 budget that his movie committee had to date been able to yield. “Probably there are few residents who realize that for an expenditure of $2,000 last season we secured the presence of motion picture concerns whose payroll was $50,000 per week. But we would not have had all that additional money in circulation here if we hadn’t spent some money to get it! Now if a $2,000 investment will bring us a $50,000 weekly payroll what will an expenditure of $25,000 or even $50,000 in intelligent publicity do for the upbuilding of industrial Jacksonville and agricultural Duval?”

defeat “alone would not have destroyed the local industry,”\textsuperscript{135} and that the 1917 mayor’s race served as a “referendum on film production in Jacksonville.”\textsuperscript{136} It should also be understood that the activities of the increasing number of production studios in the city during this time were a symptom instead of the cause of Bowden’s political downfall.

Before 1915, the MPPC-affiliated productions provided Jacksonville with a steady one-way cash flow from the company’s corporate headquarters directly into the pockets of shopkeepers, realtors, hotel managers, police officers, and Jacksonvillians interested in a day’s extra work. After a series of lawsuits under the Sherman Anti-Trust act lead to the break-up of the MPPC in 1915, numerous fly-by-night independent operations briefly appeared in Jacksonville, and as rapidly as they had attracted the interest of would-be investors, they disappeared without the slightest hope of return financial or otherwise. Shawn Bean derisively compares these “piker promoters” or “stock jobbers” to “the northern carpetbaggers that came South during Reconstruction.”\textsuperscript{137} Suspicion toward unlicensed film promoters served as the basis for much of the Antis distrust against the motion picture industry. Because Jacksonville’s position with the motion picture industry was inexorably tied to the distribution networks in New York, the ascendancy of the California studios all but doomed Jacksonville’s chances of sustaining major motion picture producers from permanently establishing in North Florida. Nelson argues that both “Jacksonville and New York were sacrificed as production centers to consolidate on the West Coast where economic controls could be more efficiently maintained and where conditions were ideal.”\textsuperscript{138}

Jacksonville’s comparable proximity to New York, advertised by the Mason Hotel as less than “Twenty-Seven Hours from Broadway,”\textsuperscript{139} indirectly led to the industry’s downfall. Since

\textsuperscript{135} Nelson, \textit{Florida and the Motion Picture Industry}, 46.
\textsuperscript{136} Nelson, “Florida: The Forgotten Film Capital,” 16.
\textsuperscript{137} Bean, 94.
\textsuperscript{138} Nelson, \textit{Florida and the Motion Picture Industry}, 189.
\textsuperscript{139} “Home of the Screen Club,” \textit{Motion Picture News}, November 4, 1916, 2877.
the Jacksonville studios did not have their own processing laboratories or distribution exchanges in the city, the companies were entirely dependent on sending their footage north to New York for editing and distribution. In contrast, the five-day train journey from the east coast to California required studios there to be entirely self-sufficient. This advantage factored in heavily in Los Angeles’ favor during the period of industry-wide consolidation that took place after the breakup of the MPPC and coincided with the decline of New York as a production center. The only chance the Jacksonville industry had of sustaining even a part-time regional industry would have been to develop a massive production and distribution infrastructure supplied by local capital.

“Preyed Upon By Misrepresentation”

It can be argued that the circumstances that contributed to Bowden’s decisive loss in the 1917 mayoral race were put into place one year earlier with Sidney Catts’ stunning upset victory in the 1916 governor’s race, an election the New York Times called “one of the most spectacular gubernatorial campaigns ever waged in the United States.” Catts won without money and only “with the aid of a Bible and two revolvers.” The demagogue pastor from Alabama was denied the Democratic Party’s nomination even after he won his party’s primary. In a move modeled after Theodore Roosevelt’s Bull Moose campaign in 1912, Catts instead ran an insurgent campaign as the Prohibition Party’s nominee. Throughout the campaign Catts reveled in his affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan and The Guardians of Liberty as the foundation for his base of Florida cracker constituents. As Sidney Catts’ biographer Wayne Flynt explains, he was “an intuitively accurate observer of the cracker mentality,” and in particular the state’s agricultural sector’s increasing suspicion of industrial growth became a talking point that was able to tap into a constituency that had until that point been ignored by the establishment.

140 Spehr, 5.
142 Ibid, 37.
This anti-establishment position was continually reinforced throughout his administration that “the Florida cracker had three friends: Jesus Christ, Sears Roebuck, and Sidney J. Catts.” Riding on his surprise victory as a Prohibition candidate, the party’s most conservative elements quickly aligned under Catts. By February 1917 the new “Cattocrat” wing of Florida’s Democratic Party swept through the state’s municipal elections. According to Florida historian William Cash, after the election of Sidney Catts “there was little heard of the old ‘corporation’ and ‘anti-corporation’ issues of other days.” The upending of the established political order within the state and local politics was then repeated in the campaign strategy carried out by the upstart lawyer John Martin. He was especially popular among the “reform” minded Democrats, which associated the film industry with other types of vice including prostitution, while also catering to the racism and xenophobia of the Cattocrats. On a personal level Martin’s grievances against the motion picture industry had less to do with the bohemian lifestyle of the actors and filmmakers residing in the city, but instead over the fact Bowden had received thousands of dollars in campaign donations from film producers. One such fundraiser took place on December 20, 1916, where Richard Garrick rallied the city’s studios in support and declared that Mayor Bowden was personally “responsible for the bringing of the motion picture industry to this city and that he would be glad to contribute to his campaign.” Martin reacted bitterly against the film industry’s support of Bowden. While he may not have personally been against film production in Jacksonville, Martin “did not want them to get into local politics.”

Although Martin’s political position neither fit neatly into either the Anti or a Cattocrat category, he did seek to implement a similar scorched-earth approach as Sidney Catts had during

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144 Flynt, 121-122.
146 Jackson, 32.
148 Nelson, Florida and the Motion Picture Industry, 46.
the 1916 gubernatorial race. Capitalizing on his stance as a political unknown and outsider, Martin was able to synthesize a message that appealed directly to the Antis desire for social and moral “uplift,” combined with the Florida cracker’s xenophobic concern over undesirable foreign influences. In a series of direct appeals to the people of Jacksonville, Bowden expressed his support of the motion picture industry not as a key campaign issue, but instead as an expression of the successes his pro-business administration had to date provided for the city. In an open letter published in the Florida Times-Union he exclaims, “In partial fulfilment of to promote extended development of local business enterprise, I did interest, among other industries, a rich, thrifty, cultured and delightful community of incoming producers of moving picture film companies and players.” He follows this statement up with an outline of the financial prosperity the industry had in recent years brought to the city. “Ignoring considerations of culture and refinement, valuable as they are, can we yet afford to ignore and disparage a cash payroll of $40,000-$50,000 a week from the film industry in order to exclude some mighty good new citizenship from our midst?”

The day before the Democrat primary on February 6, Bowden pled to his constituents that they should, “Think and reason with yourself, see if it would not be foolish to make an experiment now while Jacksonville is on the upward road to prosperity, the financial and moral interests of the city are being protected most thoroughly.” In this final appeal Bowden issued a warning to voters that Martin’s supporters had “been preyed upon by misrepresentation and harangues that have nothing to do with municipal government and should have no part in government.” Bowden’s pleas seem to have fallen on mostly deaf ears and following day Martin won a decisive victory against Bowden by a margin of over 800 votes and in June 1917

149 “Open Letter to the People of Jacksonville,” FTU, January 21, 1917, 8; Miller, 114-116.
150 Ibid, 8; 114-116.
151 “Mayor Bowden Being Villainously Attacked by Candidate Martin in the Same Manner as Martin Attacked United States Senator Fletcher Three Years Ago,” FTU, February 5, 1917, 3; Bean 99; Miller, 116-119.
152 Ibid, 3; 99; 116-119.
ran unopposed in the General Election. Far from being a “referendum on film production in Jacksonville,” the 1917 mayor’s race is an effective meter of the changing dimensions of Florida politics that took place under the Sidney Catts administration. After 1917 Jacksonville and Florida as a whole experienced a combination of infrastructural regression, a rise in social conservatism, and financial stagnation. This change was brought on by a multitude of internal and external factors due to mismanagement and corruption. In terms of motion picture production, the staunch anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism of the Cattocrats and organizations like the Guardians of Liberty kept the Hollywood studios from utilizing the studios that sprouted up in South Jacksonville even as a secondary location. The U.S. entry into World War I in April 1917, combined with a federally imposed wartime rationing, caused many of the marginal producers based in Jacksonville to either go out of business or become absorbed into larger studio conglomerates. A shift in how films were produced, reactionary city politics, price gouging against producers carried out by Jacksonville merchants, the refusal of banks to finance Florida-made pictures, the devastation of the 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic, a succession of freezes that same winter, and a general apathy by producers all combined to drive filmmaking in North Florida to the West Coast.

Two weeks after the Bowden’s loss, Richard Garrick announced his intent to leave the city and closed his studios. This included abandoning his proposal to build a massive $500,000 film processing plant and distribution exchange on Union Street. Following the announcement of Garrick’s departure, the city’s banks followed up by denying filmmakers loans for their productions. The timing of Garrick’s announcement was by no means coincidental. His close affiliation with the Bowden administration was well-known and now that he was faced with an antagonistic city government and a mayor with a penchant for holding a grudge, his business

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153 Davis, 304. The final results of the February 6, Primary was Martin, 2,890 and Bowden, 2,056.
154 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 46-47.
155 Ibid, 176, 183-184; Bean, 99.
prospects in Jacksonville were quite bleak. The speed of Garrick’s exit could suggest that he likely had one foot out of the door anyway. The lost potential of the Union Street Studio could have given North Florida’s production industry has given credence to the apocryphal notion that the “city’s fate was sealed with the election of 1917.”\textsuperscript{156} While it is true that without J.E.T. Bowden in office the movie booster movement in Jacksonville ultimately became “leaderless and floundered,”\textsuperscript{157} it is perhaps too much to reason that the fate of the entire North Florida production industry hinged on this single event. Even without Bowden and Garrick, the Chamber of Commerce still actively sought to maintain the studios it had attracted as well as draw in additional business. The Kalem Players remained through the 1917-1918 winter season, before financial difficulties caused the company to relocate to California and eventually fold altogether.

Shortly after the departure of the Garrick company, Henry Klutho a former Bowden detractor, bought the property along Dixieland Park and set out to develop a million-dollar studio facility capable of housing forty different production companies.\textsuperscript{158} If successful Klutho’s Fine Arts City could have helped sustain North Florida’s position as an important regional center of production and not a direct competitor with Hollywood. Robert C. Broward goes as far as to imply that during the Bowden administration the citizens of Jacksonville “were not prepared emotionally or intellectually to deal with the opportunity that the motion picture industry offered,” and that ultimately it was Klutho who “realized the potential importance of local movie studios for Jacksonville.”\textsuperscript{159} Broward’s aggrandizement of Klutho’s Fine Arts City and its role in Jacksonville’s film industry succumbed to many of the same issues prevalent in the studies that have overemphasized the role of the Bowden administration. Additional research into the efforts made to develop Fine Arts City can certainly be instructive into the complicated position the film

\textsuperscript{156} “Filmed in Florida: Then and Now,” Clipping from The Florida Motion Picture and Television Association, June 1978, in Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library, Folder 114: Jacksonville, Failure to Keep Industry in City.
\textsuperscript{157} Nelson, Florida \textit{and the American Motion Picture Industry}, 498.
\textsuperscript{158} Bean 99-102.
\textsuperscript{159} Broward, 222.
industry existed within Florida politics during the late 1910s and early 1920s. Klutho, who was very likely a supporter of Martin’s administration, considering his previous disagreements against Bowden, met with no direct resistance by the city council or the mayor’s office when he set out to construct Fine Arts City. While the studio failed to hold the big producers such as Thanhouser or Garrick, Klutho was successful with the smaller companies that remained in Jacksonville through the early 1920s.\textsuperscript{160}

The U.S. involvement in the First World War made Klutho’s German ancestry an increasing liability, especially after anti-immigrant organizations such as the Guardians of Liberty had embedded itself in the Sidney Catts administration. In a public statement shortly after the U.S. entry into the war, Governor Catts declared to his constituents that the ‘German Catholic’ monks in Pasco County had an arsenal and were planning an insurrection in support of Kaiser Wilhelm II, after which the Pope would take over Florida and relocate the Vatican to Tampa Bay.\textsuperscript{161} The anti-German and anti-Catholic paranoia espoused by Catts and his constituents and the reactive boycott of German-made products prevented Klutho’s Fine Arts City from gaining any significant traction from in-state investors. This combined with the economic slowdown that came with the post-war recession made it increasingly difficult for Klutho to attract investors and fund his production.

In 1922 Klutho closed Fine Arts City and abandoned his attempted second studio in Arlington. He sold the property to Richard Norman, an independent producer, who also purchased the site of the former Lubin/Eagle Studios and went on to develop the first (and ultimately the only) studio dedicated entirely to the production of race films during the silent period.\textsuperscript{162} According to Richard Alan Nelson, “After the failure of Fine Arts City, Jacksonville

\textsuperscript{160} Nelson, \textit{Florida and the Motion Picture Industry}, 229-231.
\textsuperscript{162} Broward, 236-237; Bean, 108; Barbara Tepa Lupack \textit{Richard E. Norman and Race Filmmaking} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 146-147.
never again offered a serious challenge to California, and it soon became a forgotten rival to Hollywood.”

Rather than explaining how “Jacksonville loses to Hollywood,” the deck was stacked against North Florida production industry from the start. Even if Klutho’s Fine Arts City was unsuccessful in reviving the previous scope and scale of Jacksonville’s movie boom during the Bowden administration, the subsequent success of the race films produced by Richard Norman Studios during the 1920s indicates that North Florida still had the potential of sustaining an influential regional production industry. The pro-business administrations of Governor Cary Hardee and then ironically Governor John Martin (who defeated Catts’ bid for a second term in the 1924 gubernatorial election), helped to create an environment conducive for the development of a viable entertainment industry throughout the state. The opening of Miami Studios in Hialeah in 1922 initiated a major surge in motion picture production in South Florida over the following four years, until the devastation of the 1926 hurricane devastated the local economy and pushed the industry out of the state. The subsequent slowdown within the state’s economy that came first with the end of the Florida land boom and later with the onset of the Great Depression could make it seem that any future potential of developing a regional production industry in Florida would be doomed. Yet in the darkest years of the Great Depression a tense alliance between a Tampa real estate developer and the governor’s office would produce a partnership that shifted the center of motion picture production in Florida to Tampa Bay and in the process attempt to turn Florida’s west coast into “a second Los Angeles.”

163 Nelson, Florida and the Motion Picture Industry, 193.
164 Nelson, “Florida the Forgotten Film Capital,” 16
165 Doll and Morrow, 36.
166 Nelson, Florida and the Motion Picture Industry, 241.
CHAPTER TWO: “AS IF BY MAGIC:” TAMPA BAY ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A “SECOND LOS ANGELES,” 1913-1967

What the picture industry has done for Los Angeles and the State of California it will do for the State of Florida. Where the production of motion pictures is located population increases as if by magic. It will indeed bring new life to the state. I am convinced that motion pictures can be produced in Florida at a great saving.
– Edward Alexander, United Film Corporation, 1932

“Ghostly Rhetorics and Melodramatics”

At 8:00 PM on June 25, 1963, the night sky along Tampa Bay was engulfed in smoke and flames. A massive fire had broken out along a stretch of industrial ruins along Weedon Island on the northeastern portion of the Pinellas Peninsula. That night seven units of the municipal fire department arrived to contain the blaze as it consumed a large warehouse owned by the Florida Power Corporation. Although the firefighters arrived on the scene within fifteen minutes after the fire was first reported, the warehouse already had completely burnt to the ground. St. Petersburg Fire Chief W.B. Thompkins reported the following day that even if units had arrived earlier, little could have been done to fight the blaze since there were no fire hydrants available in the surrounding area. The building’s most recent owner previously had complained that the warehouse was “dry as tinder,” and “a disaster in the making.”

Due to the building’s remote location on the island, firemen could do nothing to prevent the fire from spreading to the other nearby structures. The fire was visible for miles along the peninsula and attracted hundreds of onlookers accounted for the largest number of people to gather near the site in nearly thirty years.

The last time Weedon Island experienced such a bevy of activity was during a thirteen month stretch in 1933 and 1934, when the same neglected warehouse functioned as a state-of-the-art soundstage for the Sun Haven Studios Film Corporation. Also known as Kennedy City,

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1 “Pinellas in Group that Will Promote Movie Production,” St. Petersburg Independent (hereafter SPI), August 31, 1932, 10.
the studio complex represented the apex of a series “Film City” promotions attempted by Florida-based real estate promoters to turn Florida’s West Coast into a “second Los Angeles.”

In a retrospective on the history of Weedon Island, Fred Wright of the *St. Petersburg Independent* recalled that after the fire all that was left of Weedon’s film heritage were the “ghostly rhetorics and melodramatics of movie actors and camera men who had the dubious honor of making three of the worst movies in cinema history.” As the fire smoldered and the rubble of the warehouse was cleared, the last remaining free standing building on the former studio grounds was an abandoned hangar of the once lively Grand Central Airport. In 1964, the Poster Art and Display Company bought the surrounding property and used the old hangar to make its parade floats. The company also purchased the old control tower and used it as a warehouse. Then on the night of February 16, 1967, the control tower burned down, and destroyed the Christmas decorations that had been stored there by the St. Petersburg Merchants Association. With the destruction of the control tower and the abandonment of the old airplane hangar, the final remnants of Tampa Bay’s long-lost movie heritage were extinguished.

The desertion of Sun Haven Studios in 1934 marked a decisive end to a four-year initiative carried out through a flimsy coalition of displaced Hollywood producers, struggling real estate promoters, and local politicians to attract new industries and revenue during a period remembered as “Florida’s desperate years.” Enthusiastic movie boosters felt that establishing Florida as a major center for the entertainment industry could help the state recover from the economic devastation caused by the state-wide collapse of Florida’s 1926 land boom and the

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5 Pinellas County Department of Environmental Education, *The Weedon Island Story* (Tarpon Springs, FL: Department of Environmental Lands Division, 2005), 35.
1929 Wall Street crash. In the end, only three films were made at Kennedy City/Sun Haven between 1933-34 and altogether several dozen low to mid-budget productions were completed along Florida’s west coast in the early 1930s. Although the films made along Florida’s Gulf Coast during this time are by no means significant in the scope of American film history, the story behind the production of these films provides a compelling story of a state-wide initiative to attract film producers to Florida in the midst of an important moment of transition in the history of American motion picture industry.

Similar to the situation that took place in Jacksonville in 1916 and 1917, between 1930 and 1934, Tampa’s movie boosters sought take advantage of the instability in the industry by attracting these recently disenfranchised producers, directors, and actors to set-up part-time and eventually permanent operations within the state. The arrival of sound solidified the oligopoly established by the eight major Hollywood studios and eventually paved the way for the Golden Age of the Hollywood studio system. At the height of their influence the “Big Five” and “Little Three” controlled almost 95 percent of the motion picture industry’s overall revenue.7 As the Hollywood majors made their final push for supremacy over the global film market, the need to construct sound stages to accommodate the implementation of new recording technologies combined with a displacement of veteran studio executives, created a moment of decentralization within the American motion picture industry that had not been seen since the introduction of feature films. The California and Los Angeles city governments became increasingly antagonistic to motion picture producers through excessive taxation, land restrictions, and moral crusades, the Florida legislature and Governor Doyle Carlton (1929-1933) approached Trenton Collins, a Tampa advertising and real estate executive, to bring motion picture production back

to Florida. In late 1931 Collins convinced Carlton to oversee the formation of a state advisory group called the Committee for the Development of the Motion Picture Industry (CDMP) with the mission to reinvigorate the Florida film industry from the state’s ongoing attitude of “benign neglect.”

In the epilogue to Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, Richard Alan Nelson briefly outlines a short overview of suggested case studies from the “post-1930 period of Florida’s motion picture and television history,” and suggests “areas of possible interest for future researchers.” The study of the efforts to attract motion picture producers to Tampa Bay during the 1930s is in effect an attempt to answer Nelson’s question of, “What can we learn about the roles of government and industry in media enterprises from a review of Florida’s motion picture history that is applicable to current conditions?” In his collection of primary source materials donated to the Florida State University Archives, Nelson compiled a vast assembly of materials that ranged from the correspondences between Trenton Collins and Governor Carlton, a diligent assembly of newspaper clippings that chronicled the rise and fall of efforts to establish Florida’s west coast as a center of film production, and various biographical recollections from leading filmmakers, businessmen, politicians and industry personalities who were active in efforts to establish a permanent production industry in Florida during the 1930s.

This chapter sets out to expand on the resources already compiled by Nelson as well as answer his call for additional study on a pivotal moment in the relationship between the Florida state government and the motion picture industry. Although the efforts initiated by Collins and the CDMP eventually went up in flames (literally), the legacy of the efforts made by the Florida state government toward establishing an environment of cooperation with local business interests established a cycle of periods of intense promotion and development, followed by decline and

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9 Ibid, 464; 497.
neglect in subsequent decades to come. The combined failure on the part of the state government to dedicate serious attention or funding to the encourage the industry’s development, false commitments made by producers who were either amateurish or outright incompetent, and an improvement in relations between the Hollywood majors each collectively doomed any serious attempts- made to re-establish Florida as a major production center. The lessons from Florida’s failure to create a permanent or part-time production industry in Tampa Bay during the 1930s provide a grim outline that would later be followed in the boom-bust cycles in the development and deterioration of motion picture (and later television) production in Miami and Orlando in the decades to come.

The Dusters and Flivvers

In the 1880s Tampa Bay experienced a period of rapid development when Henry Plant sought to develop a railroad and hotel system along Florida’s West Coast that would rival the efforts of Henry Flagler on the state’s East Coast. The semi-friendly rivalry between Plant and Flagler inspired the development of the state’s east coast through Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railroad and the west coast with Plant’s Atlantic Coast Line Railroad (ACLR). Following the completion of the ACLR and Tampa Bay Hotel in 1891, Tampa’s population skyrocketed. When Plant invited Sanford to attend the opening of his Tampa Hotel, Sanford responded by asking “Where is Tampa?” By which Plant replied, “Follow the crowd!” By 1910, the City of Tampa experienced a 596 percent population increase as the greater Hillsborough County area emerged as one of the most rapidly developing regions in the United States. With the growth

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11 William T. Cash, *The Story of Florida* (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc. 1938), 824; Dunn, *Yesterday’s Tampa*, 21. Tampa had 15,838 residents by 1900, and by 1910 37,782. Between 1900 and 1930 the population of Hillsborough County alone increased from 36,013 to 159,208, and if Pinellas County had not been cut off in 1911 it would have had the largest number of inhabitants in any county in Florida.
of the tourist industry sparked by the development of Plant’s hotels and railways, Florida’s west coast sought to attract new industries, including the burgeoning motion picture industry.\textsuperscript{12}

The first moving images recorded in Florida were shot in and around the Tampa Bay in 1898. Filmmakers arrived in Tampa document the departure of 30,000 U.S. servicemen as they embarked for Cuba during the Spanish-American War for film newsreels such as \textit{U.S. Calvary Supplies Unloading at Tampa, Florida} (1898).\textsuperscript{13} These “actualities” were designed to showcase the nation’s preparation for war. The “visual newspapers” produced by the Edison Manufacturing Company (EMC) were subsequently displayed in vaudeville houses, kinescope parlors, and storefront theaters across the United States.\textsuperscript{14}

They gave most Americans their first images of America’s southern frontier. As images of Florida flickered across viewfinders and projected screens in vaudeville houses, viewers were immersed into an alien world far removed from their own neighborhoods or hometowns. The films made in Jacksonville during the 1910s further provided audiences with the exotic and sublime of the Florida imaginary. As Kalem and other EMC-affiliated companies began to set up winter headquarters in North Florida, Tampa Mayor Donald McKay sought to take advantage of Tampa’s reputation as an “open city” in which gambling, alcoholic beverages, and prostitution were permitted. These efforts carried over toward McKay’s efforts to create an entertainment district modeled after Jacksonville’s LaVilla neighborhood. Between 1913 and 1919, filmmakers from the Jacksonville film colony would occasionally make excursions to Florida’s West Coast, while several aspirational producers set out to establish their own independent studios in Tampa.

\textsuperscript{12} Dunn, 19-20. The Tampa Board of Trade was formed in 1885 by Dr. John P. Wall. In his first year as director, Wall accomplished six major development initiatives in the greater Tampa area. (1) Lead a movement in support of City water works. (2) Advertised for and attracted ice factories here to serve a fast-growing fish industry. (3) Spurred governmental action to erect a bridge across the Hillsborough River, a community requirement Plant demand before he would build the Tampa Bay Hotel in Hyde Park. (4) Brought to Tampa its first major industry—cigar manufacture and underwrote the $4,000 needed for the land bought by V. Martinez Ybor. (5) Brought the struggling First National Bank from Jacksonville to Tampa. (6) Government support for claims on land formerly occupied by Fort Brooke.

\textsuperscript{13} Charles Musser, \textit{The Emergence of Cinema} (New York: Scribner’s and Sons, 1990), 224, 261.

\textsuperscript{14} Jonathan Auerbach, “McKinley at Home: How Early American Cinema Made News,” \textit{American Quarterly} 51 no. 4 (December, 1999), 815.
The first production company to “heed the call of Tampa” was the World’s Best Film Company – a subsidiary of Carl Laemmle’s, which came to the city in 1913 to capture “authentic backgrounds to make stirring jungle pictures” with Captain Jack Bonavita, a world-renowned animal trainer.15 During the production of Wizard of the Jungle (1913) Bonavita and producer Frank Whitman made contact with several local investors to form Tampa Films Inc. Willis Powell, the secretary of the Tampa Board of Trade excitedly proclaimed in the Tampa Morning Tribune in May 1913, “The prospective films, instead of carrying money out of the city will bring money into it making a draft on picture shows of the forty-five states for a share of the dimes the picture show takes in.”16 Although the company produced several short subjects with limited success, Tampa Films’ overall lack of organization and inability to attract a national distributor set the tone for the failures of other would-be film ventures along Florida’s Gulf Coast in the years to come. With the advent of feature films, motion picture production had become “one of the most popular sports in the country.”17 This also meant that more than a few less than savory individuals had increasingly become attracted to motion picture production. In the early 1910s several industry insiders sent published warnings to communities that invested in these “home pride” companies. Companies such as Tampa Films Inc. exploited its host region’s unique environment and investment capital without any real intention of following through with plans for distribution of its films. E.D. Horkheimer of the Balboa Amusement Producing Company cautioned would-be investors, “Lots of people have lived to regret their investing in ‘dusters.’ Unhappily, there have been many flivvers among the picture companies.”18

15 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 243-244. Nelson provides on pages 244-269, an extended overview of the activities of film companies active in Tampa Bay during the early 1910s.
16 “$10,000 Is Subscribed For Moving Pictures,” Tampa Morning Tribune (hereafter TMT), May 1, 1913, 2. Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 244-247.
17 Ibid, 249.
18 E.D. Horkheimer, “Some Interesting Financial Facts,” Motography, December 18, 1913, 1280. Other colorful terms that were widely applied during this period included: “Blue Sky Fakes,” “Skyrocket Financiers,” “Picture Pikers,” “Wildcat Schemers,” “Quick Buck Artists,” and “Movie Fly-by-Nighters.”
While Tampa’s first dalliance in attracting the motion picture industry ended in abrupt failure and thousands of dollars siphoned from would-be investors, on the other side of the bay in St. Petersburg, future mayor Al Lang began his campaign to establish Florida’s Gulf Coast as a “tourist mecca” through the St. Petersburg Major League and Amusement Company. With this venture Lang and other civic leaders invested between $20,000 and $50,000 to build a series of baseball stadiums with the intention of ensuring “Florida would become the center of the spring training world.”

In the winter of 1913, Lang negotiated with the Washington Nationals and St. Louis Browns to spend their spring training in St. Petersburg. The buildup of the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area as a spring training center for major league baseball also coincided with the state legislature and Governor Park Trammell’s creation of a State Hotel Commission to encourage the development of Florida’s rapidly expanding tourism industry and regulate newly arriving businesses such as baseball and the state’s incipient motion picture industry. The Trammell administration’s efforts to toward monitoring unchecked promotions and fly-by-night ventures called for “a strengthening of corporation laws to protect the public against wildcat schemes,” which included “a law prohibiting watered stock in the future.” These two actions had an important impact on future relations between Tampa Bay and the motion picture industry for several reasons, though it was not immediately apparent. Park Trammell’s regulatory reforms were rolled back by his successor Sidney Catts, however the efforts made by the State Hotel Commission would in the years come continue to ramp up their efforts to encourage film producers to come to Florida in the hopes of increasing tourism to the state.

In the midst of the tensions that emerged between the film industry and Los Angeles in January 1916, combined with Jacksonville Mayor J.E.T. Bowden’s efforts to attract producers

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19 Charles Fountain, *Under the March Sun: The Story of Spring Training* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29. Over the next ten years more Major League Baseball teams arrived in the Gulf Coast region, and by 1925 St. Petersburg baseball was put further on the map with the coming of the New York Yankees.


21 Cash, 570.

to North Florida, Tampa Mayor D.B. McKay pledged his support through the *Tampa Times* (which he was also the editor) to ensure “South Florida would soon become the ‘movie’ center of the country.” McKay’s ad initiative was answered by comedian William “Smiling Bill” Parsons and actor Paul Gilmore, who were able to take advantage of Florida’s loose state incorporation laws to form the National Film Corporation of America. Parsons and Gilmore proposed to build a $300,000 facility in Jacksonville in 1915, but when the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce refused to provide an upfront inducement, they took their proposal to the Tampa Board of Trade. With the endorsement of the Mayor and other civic leaders, Parsons and Gilmore next made a hard press to prominent businessmen in the city to invest $1,000 worth of stock in their company and an additional 200,000 shares bought by middle class Tampans at five dollars each.

Shortly after their $300,000 goal was reached, Gilmore abruptly left the company and by June 1916 it had been discovered that Parsons had sold nearly $102,000 of his shares in National’s stock. The studio building that he and Gilmore had raised the funds for went into receivership after Parsons refused to return to Florida. Instead a negotiated settlement was made for partial repayment to their defrauded stockholders. Altogether thousands of dollars were lost in the ill-fated venture and any further attempts made to recoup the misspent funds through litigation ended with Parsons’ mysterious death (a supposed suicide) in 1919. This second attempt at fostering an industry through “frenzied promotion and disastrous collapse” became emblematic of Tampa Bay’s film production industry during the 1920s and 1930s.

Following the election of Sidney Catts in 1917, his administration set out to lift his predecessor’s restrictive state wide regulations of investment and fundraising practices. This legislation opened the floodgates for another wave of “film flivvers”- poorly crafted product

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24 See Nelson, “‘High Flyer’ Movie Finance and the Silver Screen: The Rise and Fall of the National Film Corporation of America.” *Film & History* 13,4 (December 1983), 73-83, 93. Here Nelson gives a far more detailed account of the shady dealings carried out by Parsons and Gilmore.
productions made strictly for investment purposes – to descend into the state. The promoters of these type of films known as “dusters,” were drawn to Tampa in the wake of the sudden collapse of Jacksonville’s motion picture production industry in 1917. Among the most notorious of these film “flivvers” was a former Florida East Coast Railroad photographer named Harry Kelly. He initially entered the industry in 1915 with the Eagle Manufacturing Company in Jacksonville. After the Eagle property was sold to Henry Klutho in 1917, Kelly disappeared from the public record for two years, and resurfaced again in Tampa in July 1919 with a new company. In a Tampa Morning Tribune advertisement, he announced the formation of the Superb Film Corporation and his plans “to construct a new mammoth studio facility in Tampa,” which would “do the developing and printing for any other companies which may desire to locate in the city.” He called for “inducements” from the leading citizens of Tampa including the head of Tampa’s First National Bank to produce a featured cityscape called Tip Top of Tampa, a hastily put together film that starred investors from Tampa’s Kiwanis Club. By September 1919, Kelly had attracted enough local capital that he could afford to purchase a forty-acre site in Palma Ceia Park for his studio and developing plant.

In a hearty endorsement from the Tampa Tribune, the Board of Trade called for a campaign of cooperation to ensure the success of Kelly’s venture. This inexorable link between tourism and the motion picture industry promoted by the State Hotel Commission can be found in an October 1919 proclamation, “With the early completion of the studios, we see an added interest to the visit of many visitors this winter, men and women, who are ‘fans’ when it comes to the movies and who

26 “Superb Film Corp. to Locate in This City,” TMT, July 23, 1919, 16; Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 285-286. The article follows much of the same promotional pattern found in Jacksonville’s push to bring in studios between 1916-17. “The existence of well-equipped studios, he said, is one of the principal attractions which draws moving picture companies to Los Angeles, and it is also the principal reason why big companies have not been coming to Florida points. Many companies coming to Florida have had to send their films to New York to be developed and have thus been kept waiting at great expense. There is no reason why Tampa should not become the center of a very large moving picture industry, employing thousands of persons and meaning the expenditure of millions of dollars annually.”
will welcome the opportunity to see the movie man and the movie star in their native lair.”\(^{28}\)

Whether or not Kelly actually intended to construct his studio is up for debate. According to Richard Alan Nelson, “Kelly, in the end, simply was unable to deliver.”\(^{29}\) Upon further evaluation of Kelly’s motives and especially the circumstances surrounding several of his later ill-fated promotions, it can be argued that he was first and foremost an opportunist who saw in Tampa an assembly of politicians and businessmen blind in their optimism that each new investment would bring their city closer to becoming a major production center.

With perpetual construction delays and without a professional acting troupe, Superb folded without producing a single film. Several months later in September 1920, Kelly rebounded with a concerted campaign in popular trade presses to establish an extensive location referral service based in Tampa for producers interested in filming on location in Florida. Despite his previous missteps, he was able to garner support from the directors of the boards of trades in communities across the Gulf Coast to form the Florida West Coast Association. Kelly’s plan was to circulate a series of photographs he had taken or collected from potential film location sites and have them circulated between prominent film producers in New York and California. Initially Kelly received a warm reception in the trade presses. An October 1920 *Moving Picture World* article went as far as to call his location finding service “a bomb brought from Florida,” and pledged the question, “Will ‘coast’ mean Florida West Coast?”\(^{30}\) Yet just as his promotional campaign garnered momentum, Kelly hesitated in his follow through. Most likely the reason for Kelly’s hesitation was that the Tampa Board of Trade had refused to advance him the $4,000 needed to pay for the film negatives for the pictures he intended to distribute to producers. Further suspicions were raised by board member Charles H. Brown over the fact that Kelly had adamantly

\(^{28}\) “A Welcomed Industry,” *TMT*, October 14, 1919, 8.

\(^{29}\) Ibid, 288.

\(^{30}\) “Will ‘Coast’ Mean Florida West Coast?,” *Motion Picture World* (hereafter *MPW*) October 23, 1920, 1066; Nelson, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry*, 292.
insistent that the city finance the construction of a large studio complex before any major studios were attached to produce their films in Florida. Relations between Kelly and the Tampa Board of Trade soon deteriorated to such an extent that by November 1920 he abandoned Tampa and attempted to establish his film plant in Jacksonville.

In spite of his defection and lack of follow-through on previous proposals, Kelly returned to Tampa in April 1921. He next approached the Board of Trade with a proposal to secure 750 acres of land on Tampa Bay for use by the recently reformed Florida West Coast Studios syndicate. Interested in the proposal, but skeptical of Kelly’s reputation and his refusal to name the New York financiers who would invest in part of the venture, the board still committed $150,000 for the purchase of a 350-acre site suitable for use by affiliates within the Florida West Coast Association. In the end this proposal also ended in empty promises and without any concrete accomplishments, with the exception of a series of promotional news releases.31 What is most astounding about the shady dealings carried out by promoters such as Parsons, Gilmore, and Kelly, is not that their schemes ended in failure and thousands of dollars in ill-advised investments, but that in spite of all warning signs, Tampans time and again were perpetually willing to place their faith in promoters who had no verifiable financial backing. Either these investors were blinded by optimism, hoodwinked by promising sales pitches, or they severely underestimated the amount of effort it would take to establish a permanent regional film industry. In the aftermath of the 1917 mayoral election and the subsequent failure of Henry Klutho’s Fine Arts City in Jacksonville, it was quite natural that the center of gravity of motion picture production in Florida shifted down the Atlantic Coast Line to Tampa Bay. In spite of the city’s ill-executed promotions, its promotional office served as an effective model for future incarnations of state-supported film offices.32

32 Thomas Hoffer, “Florida’s Film History Re-Examined,” in Essays in Florida History (Tampa, FL: Florida Endowment for the Humanities, 1980), 66.
Florida’s Land Boom and Bust

Richard Alan Nelson describes the history of Florida as a film center from the 1920s through the 1940s, as “essentially a dreary story of stock fraud, studio failure, and over optimistic hopes.” However this is only one part of the story. Without question the state was continually let down by one undelivered promise after another by self-acclaimed producers, but this time was also a period of incredible coordination on the state and local level to encourage migration, tourism, industrial development, and unprecedented economic growth. While Florida’s hopes as a film production center were once again dashed, an important by-product of the efforts to attract producers to the state was the development of a distinct state-wide identity reinforced through promotional ads for tourists and the proliferation of roadside attractions for a growing number of tin-can tourists interested in exploring the state’s tropical wonders. Florida was no longer just a playland for the extraordinarily wealthy who could afford to ride along Plant and Flagler’s railways to their carefully planned resort communities. The influx of middle-class vacationers during the 1919-1920 tourist season also inspired several land schemes formulated by local real estate developers. Tourists would purchase a lot during their visit to Florida and then sell it off the next for a tidy profit, usually with enough profit to cover the cost of their winter vacations.

As the property values on unused and undeveloped acreage continued to grow with unchecked growth, local property “plungers” took advantage of rising property values of businesses or lots to buy in well-located subdivisions, and then sell them off for a small fortune. This time of unprecedented property speculation across the state presented an opportunity where in the State of Florida and the City of Tampa (by then Florida’s second largest city) were able to facilitate new subdivision communities and attract new industries.

33 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 487.
Between 1910 and 1920 the state’s population increased by 28.7 percent and although internal improvements declined under the Catts administration, private business efforts toward state-wide infrastructure had positioned Florida for another major population surge in the decade to come. While Florida and California maintained percentage rates of population increase above the national average in each decade since 1870, by the mid-1920s with the increases in development and land speculation, it appeared as if Florida might surpass California as the most rapidly developing state in country.35

The 1920 gubernatorial race pitted Van C. Swearingen, Jacksonville’s former mayor and Attorney General under Sidney Catts, against lawyer Cary A. Hardee, a member of the supposed “Florida courthouse gang.” A self-described “bourbon conservative,” Hardee railed against Swearingen’s efforts to seize control of private companies on behalf of the state government. He also orchestrated a proposal to attract new industries to address the state’s growing labor crisis that emerged after the mass exodus of the state’s African American population to escape the upsurge in racial violence facilitated by Catts’ white supremacist rhetoric.36 Hardee’s election victory and Sidney Catts’ failed bid to win a seat in the U.S. Senate that same year heralded a new phase of economic development and political cooperation throughout the state, which according to Florida historian William Cash, can be considered a moment where Florida could “enjoy great material progress.”37 Although the state experienced economic stagnation during the post-war recession of 1920-21, in its aftermath investors noted that financial conditions in Florida were far better than New York or California, which because of its larger population had been more severely hit by the slowdown. In a lengthy interview given to Forbes magazine in October 1921, Charles Faircloth of the National City Bank of Tampa credited the steep learning curve Tampa’s citizens experienced in dealing with fly-by-night promoters during the 1910s as a

35 Cash, 567; 577; Nelson, The Economic Development of Florida, 46. By 1920 Florida’s population was 968,470.
37 Cash, 578.
major reason for the stopgap measures put in place that allowed for region’s economic recovery.

Shortly following the departure of Harry Kelly in October 1920, a coalition was formulated between the Tampa press, bankers, members of the Board of Trade and other civic organizations “to rid Florida of the fake promotion salesmen requirements on any promoter intent on selling shares of their company in the State of Florida.” Faircloth and his supporters next outlined a bill for submission to the Florida Congress initiated a series of legislations to reform investment practices. At the same time as this bill was drawn up by Faircloth, Tampa Mayor D.B. McKay abruptly stepped down from office and the city’s charter was redrawn to operate under a city-manager form of government, with Charles H. Brown as Tampa’s first Mayor-Commissioner. Despite this overhaul in Tampa’s political system combined with the reforms initiated by Faircloth’s legislation, the effort to promote responsible investment practices by the city’s bankers and businessmen also created the structure necessary for the state-wide frenzy of land speculation that would dominate business and politics in Florida during the first half of the 1920s. The Florida land boom had begun.

In his Ph.D. dissertation, Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and Its Environs During the 1920s (1950), Frank Sessa details the first comprehensive examination into the factors that related to the causes behind the Florida land boom. Sessa argues, “Money was attracted by land and its improvements alone, not by oil deposits, motion picture studios, or by potential or growing industries” and that both “oil and movies were suggested but were of little consequence.” More recently in his book Fade-In Crossroads (2017), film scholar Robert Jackson has argued that “the Florida land boom itself came to be conflated with the brief
heyday of Florida’s film industry.” While Jackson’s emphasis on the film industry’s influence on the Florida land boom is perhaps an overstatement, Sessa’s swift dismissal of the motion picture industry’s place in the facilitation of land purchases during this period should also be addressed. The state’s lack of organized infrastructure or even a fully-functioning road system was brushed aside by promoters as a development issues that would inevitably be resolved through further speculation and investment. In their promotional *Florida in the Making* (1926), Frank Parker Stockbridge and John Holliday Perry credit the land developers’ active in the state for “the creation of the cities, of farm communities, of vacation resorts, where nothing existed before that creative genius of America is finding its highest and most satisfying expression; and the rewards are proportionate to the creative effort and capital expenditure involved.” They predicted “by the middle of the twentieth century Florida is destined to be one of the three or four most densely populated states in the Union, with at least ten million permanent inhabitants.”

The assumption on the part of speculators that development would immediately follow investment or that dividends would be met before a proposed project was even completed, became a source of incongruity instilled the downfall of many promising projects, including plans to build motion picture production studios on Davis and Weedon’s Island. One major shortfall of the real-estate boom was that since funding was easily secured based on the paper promises of new towns and subdivisions, investors would then buy tracts of land without any intention of living in them and often without ever seeing them. The rampant speculation and unregulated property values brought Florida into a depression almost three years before the national depression began.

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42 Nelson, *The Economic Development of Florida*, 42. To a large extent, Florida’s in-migrants were the out-migrants of Georgia and Alabama. Out of some 277,100 native white residents in Florida in 1900, some 185,500 were born in Florida. Georgia and Alabama were the two states that provided half of the total in-migrants. By the 1920s, the increased numbers hailed from northern states, such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.
43 Stockbridge and Perry, 293.
44 Ibid, 298. Florida’s population was 2,771,300 in 1950. The state surpassed Stockbridge and Perry’s ten million in 1980, while it became the fourth largest state by the 1990 census, and third by the 2010 census.
The unrestrained speculation across the state created an increasingly volatile market for speculators, but it also forecasted an environment of hope and expectation for an era of prosperity and development unparalleled in Florida’s history. In his first address to the Florida legislature, recently elected Governor John Wellborn Martin – who had previously defeated J.E.T. Bowden in Jacksonville’s divisive 1917 mayoral race – announced his pledge to bring increased investments and industries to the state. Martin proclaimed, “Florida needs capital, and must have it, in the building and establishing of her industries. She needs labor, also, and must have it. One without the other, though in abundance, will not suffice…No statue should be enacted inimical to either.”\(^{46}\) He also considered “amending our general corporation laws so as to make it attractive for business people to incorporate and transact business in Florida under the most favorable conditions.”\(^{47}\) In order to facilitate the favorable conditions needed to ensure the expansion of business prospects and encourage further settlement, the state’s road system needed to be organized. He called for the paving of more than 1,500 miles of state highways, and thousands more miles of local roads. The proposed road network eventually secured Martin’s legacy “as the great road building administration” and heralded a period of unprecedented settlement across the state.\(^{48}\) Nowhere in Florida was this rapid growth more prolific and frenetic than on Florida’s west coast.

In 1925 Tampa’s population was neck-and-neck with Jacksonville and by the end of the year it became Florida’s most populous city.\(^{49}\) Across the bay in St. Petersburg, the cost of building permits increased from $2.8 million in 1920 to $24 million in 1925.\(^{50}\) While the boom extended elsewhere across the state developers understood, “More fortunes have been made in these last

\(^{47}\) Ibid, 277-78.  
\(^{48}\) Cash, 588.  
\(^{49}\) Stockbridge and Perry, 184. The State census of 1925 gave Jacksonville 95,486 population, Tampa 94,808, and Miami 71,419. Since that census was taken each of the three cities has made extensive territorial additions, and each of the two cities, Jacksonville and Tampa, claimed in the Fall of 1925 a population of above 130,000.  
\(^{50}\) Pinellas County Department of Planning, *Historical Background of Pinellas County, Florida* (Clearwater, FL: Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners and Pinellas County Planning Council, 1968), 27.
six months on Tampa real estate than all the acquaintances of our lifetime made until six months ago. Tampa is the luckiest of the Florida cities and she is bettering her luck by making the most of it.”

It did not take long before Tampa’s good fortune attracted the ambitions of developers interested bringing motion picture production to the area. Unlike the flivver promoters of the 1910s, the efforts that made to establish a production center in Tampa during the 1920s were not initiated by disenfranchised producers, but instead by aspirational realtors who had little to no knowledge of the inner workings of the motion picture industry. These realtors believed that encouraging an incipient motion picture industry could serve as a draw for tourists, which would lead to the construction of more resort communities, housing settlements, and create thousands of jobs in the service sector.

J.H. Meyer, the head of sales for the Sun City Holding Company was one such developer. He believed that by boosting the motion picture industry on the Gulf Coast he could help speed up development on a tract of land he held along the Little Manatee River in the town of Ross, Florida. In establishing a production center in Ross, Meyer felt “certain that within a year it will be a thriving community” and “has every element needed for the building of a formidable city.”

Meyer’s proposal also called to build a $300,000 studio complex that would contain “a departure from the conventional studio” by providing a “visitor’s gallery from which guests may witness the filming of the silver screen celebrities and any studio work.” To supplement the costs for his supposed “open to public studio,” Meyer drew up a grid of streets and boulevards in honor of well-known stars, directors, and production companies which he hoped would serve as an enticement for them to invest in Sun City. He then appointed industry veteran Ernest Shipman as the president and manager of Sun City Motion Picture Studios and director David M. Hartford as supervisor of productions. Shipman, who previously worked for the defunct Klutho Studios in Jacksonville,

51 “Would You Like to Know About the Remarkable Opportunities or Investment in Real Estate in and Around the Beautiful and Rapidly Growing City of Tampa, Florida?,” Miami Herald, November 3, 1924, 12c. For more information the motion picture industry during the Florida land boom see: Nelson, “Florida: The Forgotten Film Capital,” Journal of the University Film Association 29 no. 3 (Summer, 1977), 16.
was initially hesitant to become involved in another film venture in Florida. However, after L.P. Dickie of the Tampa Board of Trade wrote a letter endorsing the development Sun City as “amply financed for all needs,” and Hartford’s *Blue Waters* (1924) was successfully completed in the Tampa area, he felt compelled to join the venture.\(^5^4\) Meyer assured investors that his company would solely rely on outside investment and “would not allow any speculative stock promotion in connection with any Sun City activities.”\(^5^5\) In the end the only investment the Gulf Coast community was expected to make in the new studio was an emotional one. More than 1,500 people attended Sun City’s ground-breaking ceremony on October 8, 1925. The event was complemented further with a special oration given by Tampa Mayor-Commissioner Perry G. Wall.\(^5^6\) In an effort to further prop up relations between the studio and the Tampa community, producer W.E. Macarton announced his intention that the “members of the company will live in Tampa and will make daily trips to the Sun City studio.”\(^5^7\)

In December 1925, Meyer had commissioned a series of full-page advertisements in newspapers across Florida. The promotion called for an exclusive tour of the development property on January 5, 1926 with assurances that interested buyers would “not be embarrassed by ‘high pressure’ sales methods as we do not permit this.”\(^5^8\) The catalyst for would-be investors was that motion pictures were supposedly already being made at Sun City and that arrangements “are now being made for the beginning of activities on a large scale and at an early date picture producers of

\(^5^2\)“Realize Life Ambition at Sun City Building,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune* (hereafter *TST*), April 26, 1925, 9F. Ross was located about twenty-four miles south of Tampa.


\(^5^5\)“This is Sun City,” *SPT*, July 12, 1925, 16. This article also contains a map of the proposed community development planned created by the Development Engineer firm Brush and Bondy on May 25, 1925. The lots were priced between $1,000 to $3,500. The community would include sidewalks, curbing, hard-surfaced roads, electricity, running water. The advertisement also boasts that over one million dollars’ worth of property had been sold between April and June 1925, largely to St. Petersburg residents.

\(^5^6\)Nelson, *Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry*, 300-301. Streets were laid out in a grid to honor stars, directors and production companies such as: Griffith Avenue, Gish Drive, Chaplin Drive, Vidor Avenue, Universal Drive, and Pathe Place.

\(^5^7\)“Movie Studio Near City To Be Dedicated,” *Tampa Daily Times* (hereafter *TDT*), October 8, 1925, 1.

\(^5^8\)“Reservations Can Now Be Made! For the Opening of Sun City’s Motion Picture City,” *SPT*, December 6, 1925, section 9, 1.
national reputation will be producing pictures at Sun City.” The efforts made by the Sun City Holding to establish community ties to the Gulf Coast attracted hundreds of prospective buyers from the Tampa and St. Petersburg area. These efforts were a creative loophole used by Meyers so he could get around the regulatory legislation and avoid regional corporation laws. As the surge in land purchases continued, the community’s overall enthusiasm for the proposed film community increased. To build on this goodwill, the Ross post office officially changed the town’s name to Sun City on February 16, 1926. By this time the alleged construction on “countless residential and business lots adjacent to the shiny new Spanish-styled studio had been bought and sold repeatedly, almost every time at a profit.”

Since there are no surviving records from either Meyer’s personal correspondences or from the Sun City Holding Company, it is difficult to speculate exactly how serious the company’s intentions were in overseeing the film manufacturing portion of their land holdings. According to Richard Alan Nelson, the collapse of the Florida land boom and the ensuing stock market crash of 1929 were the primary reasons why Sun City was unable to establish itself as “the film capital of the nation.” Such a sweeping conclusion perhaps places too much of an emphasis on the relations between the land boom and the deterioration of studio activities in the area. The downturn in land sales along the Gulf Coast started in January 1926 when thousands of investors in properties throughout the state failed to make their second payments on the lots they had purchased. It can be argued that the state wide land bust started in Tampa even earlier, when the prices for developer Dave Davis’ speculated community along Depot Key collapsed. In October 1925, he had sold nearly eighteen million dollars in lots through promissory notes, but by early 1926 he had only collected $30,000 from would-be buyers. In late 1925 the Davis Island project

59 Ibid, 1.
61 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 301.
had been considered by auditors as “one of the soundest projects in the state,” but within a few months the lack of return on investment caused Davis to sell his property at a major loss to the Stone and Webster Company. Karl Grismer has elsewhere argued that despite the warning signs given with the failure of the Davis Island community, the severity of the land bust was not fully comprehended until the end of 1926. The most compelling evidence that the failure of Davis Island did not signal a statewide collapse comes from the fact that Stone and Webster would not have purchased the islands for their $2.5 million price tag “if they knew the full extent of the land bust.”

On the other hand, the sudden collapse in land values on Davis Island is instructive toward understanding the situation in Sun City. Just as purchase shares in the first property developments began to default, the Sun City Holding Company announced plans to host its first tours of their film community and a month later the town of Ross had formally changed its name to Sun City. Another proposed community two miles north of St. Petersburg was sponsored by New York-based producer Harry P. Carver. He sought to establish Studio Park, a subdivision community “predicated upon the motion picture industry at Hollywood, California, Culver City and Universal City.” Similar to Meyer’s relation of Sun City to Tampa, Carver’s Studio Park sought to link itself to St. Petersburg, which he declared “now seems destined to be the metropolis of the Southland.” Similar to the earlier fly-by-night misadventures common in the 1910s, Carver ultimately never broke ground on his proposed studio, and his proposed Pinellas Film company produced one film in Cuba before folding in January 1926. As the property values surrounding the Davis Islands continued to fall and as other proposed ventures to establish production studios along Tampa Bay ended in empty promises, Sun City continued on with its property transfers well into 1927. The studio at Sun City went mostly unused with the exception of two short comedies,

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63 Grismer, 256-258. Davis committed suicide by jumping from a ship after fleeing for Europe to escape prosecution.  
64 “Studio Park at St. Pete Will Be Converted Into Moving Picture Colonies,” TMT, August 16, 1925, 8G.  
65 “H.P. Carver Sponsors Move to Make Florida Film Land,” MPW, October 3, 1925, 382
which supposedly were only produced to protect Meyer from fraud charges.\textsuperscript{66} It appears that by mid-1926, even as the studio activities had all but ceased, speculation and advertisements for lot purchases were still in full effect. Instead it can be argued that J.H. Meyer saw his studio as little more than a gimmick to encourage speculation and increase property values. This lack of order at Sun City caused Shipman and Hartford to leave before they started work on any productions.

The 1926 land bust was simply incidental to the inevitable failure of speculative film cities to attract permanent motion picture production companies from establishing themselves in Florida. Ernest Shipman issued his own words of caution to producers while assessing the situation at Sun City is especially insightful. He warned that, “Glorified cameramen prosing as producers, and small-time actors representing themselves as directors, have imposed on the time and hospitality of Florida, who resent being misled much more than losing the few dollars invested.”\textsuperscript{67} Unlike the situation in Jacksonville, where a shift in state and local politics led to the deterioration of production possibilities in North Florida, the Tampa Bay region during the 1920s had both a supportive political and economic environment that was perfectly conducive for motion picture production. What the region lacked during this time were producers or filmmakers who had the skills, knowhow or business acumen needed to attract productions to Florida. Once the land bust was in effect, the prospects for the planned film communities along the Gulf Coast long since passed. The economic conditions after the bust caused numerous industrial concerns in Tampa’s business community. In December 1927 the Tampa government incorporated a new city charter and D.B. McKay returned to the mayor’s office to preside over the elimination of the city manager style government. This reorganization of the Tampa Board of Trade and Tampa’s First National Bank may have helped buffer from the full brunt of the onset of the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{68}


\textsuperscript{67} Grismer, 332.

\textsuperscript{68}
The “blackest day in the history of Tampa” came on July 17, 1929 when Citizens Bank and Trust Company, one of the city’s largest banking institutions, failed to open its doors for business, along with five smaller affiliated banks. Depositors across the city in one fell swoop lost their entire savings, and nearly ten million dollars in assets disappeared from its citizenry.69 When Wall Street’s Black Thursday stock market crash on October 24 heralded the onset of the Great Depression, Florida’s depression was already in full effect. However, two major upheavals within the American motion industry would once more inspire a coordinated effort to attract motion picture producers to Tampa during its “desperate years.”70 The introduction of Warner’s Vitaphone triggered a period of tremendous upheaval in the Hollywood studio system, which in turn lead the displacement of long-established motion picture talent producers. The dearth of industry interest and professional talent was most likely the greatest roadblock toward the establishment of a production center along the Gulf Coast during the 1920s. In July 1932, Sun City was sold at a public auction for one hundred dollars (including a power plant valued at $100,000), the movie studio was razed, and its bricks were sold for a paltry $1500.71

“Riff-Raff and Human Jetsam”

The sudden rise in the number of experienced and well-funded independent producers coincided with the election of Tampa-based lawyer Doyle Carlton. In an effort to bring in new industry and income to the state’s fledgling economy, Carlton and his administration saw an opportunity to attract these displaced producers and build a “third motion picture center located in Florida at any cost the movie executives decide is best for the purpose.”72 In June 1929, one month before the failure of Tampa’s Citizens Bank and Trust Company triggered the economic freefall throughout the state, real-estate developer and community organizer Trenton C. Collins

69 Dunn, Yesterday’s Tampa, 23.
70 Ibid, 23.
71 Ibid, 302; Underwood and Vasilev, “Sun City.”
72 Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 19 November, 1931, Box 936, Folder 15, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
sent a letter of invitation to the Inspiration Company Unit of United Artists with the suggestion that director Henry King’s “talkie” be filmed in Tampa. King then secured the rights and funding to adapt Rida Johnson Young’s novel *Out of the Night*, a romance set on a secluded island in the West Indies. Since the title of the novel had already been used as a title for several other, King decided to retitle his film *Hell Harbor* (1930), which he felt better captured the story’s lurid atmosphere. Acclaimed silent film actress and rising star Lupe Velez was cast by King in the film’s leading role. Several days later in an effort to effectively utilize an environment conducive to *Hell Harbor*, King announced his intention to follow through on Collins’ invitation and bring his million-dollar production to Tampa.

A week later, King had arrived in Florida and immediately started to scout locations along Tampa’s Rocky Point. King and his casting staff met with the swashbuckling performers who regularly participated in the local Gasparilla Pirate Festival along with 120 local Tampans for a dress rehearsal for a scene set along a waterfront pirate’s den. King was especially impressed that “when attired in character garb, the Tampans working on the studio lot were almost perfect counterparts of the riff-raff and human jetsam found in any Caribbean seaport.” King further ingratiated himself to the Tampa community by then opening his “honky tonk” dress rehearsal to the public, who reveled in bootlegged Cuban rum and danced the La Rumba well into the evening. Over the following week King shot additional location footage and after he plotted out the rest of the production called for Lupe Velez to come to Tampa. Trenton Collins coordinated with King and Carl Brorein, the president of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, to host a massive reception to be held at Tampa’s Floridian Hotel upon Velez’s arrival.

The city was in a stir as Collins received inquiries concerning the banquet from all parts of Florida and the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported, “Motorcades will come from every principle

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73 Trenton Collins to All Members of State Committee For Development of the Motion Picture Industry, 18 May, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives, Doyle Carlton Papers.
74 “Henry King Selects ‘Hell Harbor’ as Title of Next Film,” *Hollywood Filmograph*, August 31, 1929, 26.
75 “‘Hell Harbor’ Extras Revel in Honky Tonk,” *TMT*, September 13, 1929, 18.
city of the west coast section to join thousands of Tampans in giving Miss Velez an enthusiastic
greeting.” 76 Recently elected Governor Doyle Carlton made arrangements to travel to Tampa to
preside over a reception along with Mayor McKay to greet Velez at Union Station on Sunday
September 15. Members of Tampa’s Cuban community were especially drawn to Velez’s star
power and excitedly anticipated her ten-week stay. Apprehensions toward Velez’s “high hatted”
reputation for being temperamental was a source for anxiety for Tampa entertainment writer
Harry Hartley. He expressed his concern that she was known to “tweak her nose at dignitaries
and kisses them the next. There is no method of anticipating her reactions any more than a
mortal can forecast the weather.” 77

Hartley’s concerns over how Velez might respond to meeting with Governor Carlton and
her Tampa well-wishers proved to be unsubstantiated. Even though she had just disembarked
from her Seacoast overnight sleeper train, she sparkled with a bright smile in her jade green
dress and heels as the bright September sun shined down on the five thousand Floridians who
had gathered at Tampa’s Plant Park for “the biggest, most cordial greeting of all her life.” 78
Velez was especially impressed by the attention that was given for her arrival in Tampa. She
remarked this “was the first time she had ever been officially greeted by a governor,” while
Carlton expressed, “How glad he was that she had come to Tampa to star in the first big sound
picture made in this state.” 79 Carl Brorein in turn, expressed to the governor his hope that Hell
Harbor could become “the state’s debut into the motion picture industry.” 80
Ultimately the biggest breakout star from Hell Harbor turned out to be the City of Tampa itself.
Henry King declared that while filming The White Sinner in Italy, “Mussolini gave us the run of
the kingdom. We thought the limit of cooperation had been reached. But Tampa has gone even

76 “Jam Expected in Park as Lupe Velez is Welcomed Here,” TMT, September 13, 1929, 18.
78 “Lupe Velez Gets Big Hand as Thousands Attend Receptions,” TMT, September 16, 1929, 1.
79 “Governor Greets Fiery Mexican Actress as She Arrives in Tampa,” TMT, September 16, 1929, 1.
80 “Lupe Velez Gets Big Hand as Thousands Attend Receptions,” 1.
further.”\footnote{Governor Greets Fiery Mexican Actress as She Arrives in Tampa,} He marveled that the goodwill established between the Tampa community and United Artists would carry over long after production on \textit{Hell Harbor} finished. However the film received a less than stellar critical reception. Film critic Mordaunt Hall’s review in the \textit{New York Times} criticized King’s sluggish pacing and erratic use of sound gimmicks, “together with the frequent stretches of ineffectual and intrusive comedy, causes the film to be somewhat tedious.” The saving grace according to Hall, was the film’s Florida-filmed backdrop. He suggested that because of the film’s “glimpses of the shore and sea, it is never so hopeless.” Hall praised the Florida location as “a series of beautifully photographed scenes rather than a drama of greed for gold and pearls.”\footnote{Lupe’s Latest,” \textit{Broadway and Hollywood Movies}, (June, 1930), 11. For other reviews of \textit{Hell Harbor} in the trade presses see: “Reviews of the Best Pictures,” \textit{Screenland} (April, 1930), 85; “Henry King’s ‘Hell Harbor,’” in \textit{Exhibitor’s Herald World}, March 22, 1930, 6.} The only major newspaper to endorse the film was none other than the \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, while the trade press provided special mention to \textit{Hell Harbor} for “the distinction of having been made completely outside studio walls, most of the scenes having been shot in a romantic setting outside of Tampa.”\footnote{Mordaunt Hall, “The Screen; The Girl and the Pearls,” \textit{New York Times}, March 28, 1930, https://www.nytimes.com/1930/03/28/archives/the-screen-the-girl-and-the-pearls-fairbankses-not-to-leave-films.html.}

The “Discovery” of Silver Springs

Another early public relations success that coincided with the filming of \textit{Hell Harbor}, came with a series of underwater short subjects produced at Silver Springs. The park was purchased in 1924 by Carl Ray and Shorty Davidson in the midst of the Florida land boom and onset of the first wave of tin can tourists to the sunshine state.\footnote{Lu Vickers and Cynthia Wilson-Graham, \textit{Remembering Paradise Park: Tourism and Segregation at Silver Springs} (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015), 3-5.} Over the next twenty years tourism to the springs increased from 11,000 to 800,000 visitors per year, as the uncanny clear waters at Silver Springs became one of the largest tourists draws in the state. Davidson attributed large part of this success was due to the “discovery” of Silver Springs by the motion picture
industry. “Not until the movies discovered the possibilities that lay under our crystal-clear waters did Silver Springs mean much outside Florida. Until then, Silver Springs was a sort of glorified picnic park and beach, popular only with the people of this section of Florida.”

The clarity of the water made Silver Springs a prime location for underwater films. Initially newsreels from Paramount filmed small vignettes of professional swimmers and divers eating meals underwater while the camera was encased in a waterproof container. These underwater exploits made news on their own volition, and by the late 1920s, the newsreels companies were the first to take notice of the spring’s underwater film potential. Silver Springs first came to national attention when acclaimed sportswriter Grantland Rice produced his two-reel ‘talkie’ Crystal Champions (1929) featuring several gold-medal Olympic swimmers, including future Tarzan the Ape Man, Johnny Weissmuller. Shorty Davidson later recalled that the novelty of the underwater sequences combined with the onscreen charisma of the film’s breakout star, Weissmuller, “really put us on the movie map of the world” and made “our name, and more especially, the remarkable clarity of our water, became known around the world.”

In an effort to build on the goodwill established between the productions of Hell Harbor and Crystal Champions, Trenton Collins filed a proposal to the governor’s office to form a Committee for the Development of the Motion Picture (CDMP). In his proposal Collins argued that as a result of hosting Henry King and the sixty-five staff and cast members affiliated with the production, Hell Harbor helped to employ hundreds of Floridians for periods that ranged from a few days to almost four months. In total, Inspiration-United Artists spent nearly one million dollars either in the construction of sets, salaries, and day-to-day expenses in Tampa and

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85 Richard A. Martin, Eternal Spring: Man’s 10,000 Years of History at Florida’s Silver Springs (St. Petersburg, FL: Great Outdoors Publishing Co., 1966), 159.
88 Martin, 160.
St. Petersburg. To attract futures productions Collins issued numerous petitions to production studios and newly independent producers to film their next project on location in Florida. Although initially “these efforts brought indifferent results, it did have the advantage of keeping Florida constantly before the producers and directors.” Collins’ hard press eventually paid off and the following year in November 1930 he successfully convinced director Tay Garnet of R.K.O.-Pathe to film tropical scenes for The Prestige (1931) along the Myakka River, south of Tampa. In the end, Garnet spent close to $100,000 in daily expenses to support his thirty-member cast and crew, while the production relied on local labor to build the sets and seventy-five Floridians were employed as extras.

Collins’ campaign to attract major producers to Florida coincided alongside a series of upheavals in the motion picture industry that inspired the first fully coordinated state-wide effort to establish Florida as a major production center. The policies of the Carlton administration, combined with the election of Robert Chancey as Tampa mayor in 1931, once again shined a spotlight for film producers toward Florida’s west coast. While the United States descended into the worst years of the Great Depression, overall domestic film production fell off by 16 percent between 1930 and 1931. This brought on an overall drop in prices for international exports of American films and caused a nearly 50 percent decline in revenues for Hollywood’s majors and minors alike.

As early as August 1930, several small-time independent producers sought to strike out on their own as the industry became increasingly fractured in the midst of the volatile economic environment. Following the completion of Hell Harbor, Edward Alexander – an affiliate of

89 Trenton Collins to All Members of State Committee For Development of the Motion Picture Industry, 18 May, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives, Doyle Carlton Papers. Collins notes, “The majority of this money going to building supply houses, hotels, restaurants, retail stores, public utilities, local automobile transportation, and labor.”
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
Henry King – broke with Inspiration-United Artists and formed the United Film Corporation. Unlike the flivver promotions carried out by Harry Kelly, William Parsons, and Paul Gilmore fourteen years earlier, Alexander’s approach was much more cautious and discreet. He first announced his plans to build “the finest and most up-to-date sound studios and color photography lab” along Florida’s Gulf Coast, which he described as “admirably adapted to the production of good pictures and is of the firm belief that at least a part of the picture industry can be brought to Florida in the next few years.”93 In order to attract additional support for his venture, Alexander relied on a letter writing campaign to prominent investors and politicians and refused to publish his intentions until he definitively decided on a final location. In his endorsement to Governor Carlton, Tampa based businessman Samuel Borchard expressed that Alexander’s plan “looks to me like a real honest to goodness motion picture studio that Florida will be proud of and glad to offer to the motion picture world.”94

By November 1931, Alexander’s efforts had garnered the support needed to build his proposed studio, but he was able to find a staunch ally in Tampa real estate developer Trenton Collins. He closely watched as cities such as Atlanta, Chicago, and St. Louis made lucrative overtures to bring producers to their cities and strongly believed that Tampa could offer far more than any of its immediate competitors. In a letter to Governor Carlton, he expressed his preference for Tampa, but also an openness to attracting film productions to the state at any cost. “Quite naturally, my own interests are in the West Coast, but this is a matter in which personal interest must be forgotten, to get the third motion picture center located in Florida, at whatever point the movie executives decide is best for the purpose.”95 Collins’ proposal was exceedingly

93 Samuel Borchard to Doyle Carlton, 20 August, 1930, Box 936, Folder 14, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
94 Ibid.
95 Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 19 November, 1931, Box 936, Folder 15, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives. The most famous of these dissenters were David O. Selznick and Walt Disney, however numerous other top industry leaders throughout the period also sought to establish their own subsidiary companies.
well timed. Whereas in 1930 only small-time producers such as Henry King and Edward Alexander, expressed any interest in establishing production headquarters outside of California, by the end of 1931 many of the leading executives and top distributors for each of the major studios deserted their parent companies to strike out as independent producers. The collapse of the Florida land boom caused a state-wide depreciation in property values, which was actually quite attractive to newly independent producers who sought to avoid the enormous cost overhead attributed to California’s higher than average labor costs and property values.

In his inaugural address, Doyle Carlton proclaimed “industrial development must be encouraged,” which could be accomplished by an enticement of industry by tax remission for a period of years, if they were not competitive with existing industries in the state. This was part of his overall imitative to furnish “a home market for our produce and employment for labor.”96 As of 1931, Carlton had little to show in terms of economic recovery in a state that had been depressed since 1926. At this point Carlton reiterated his inaugural message and defined his essential task as “one of maintaining government, paying obligations, and reducing property taxes.”97 The potential for attracting a home market for film production in Florida appealed greatly to his laissez-faire approach to business regulation. Carlton himself was a Tampa native, and also notably represented Dave Davis in a series of lawsuits filed against him in the fallout of his failed development plan on Depot Key.98 Perhaps influenced by his experience in representing Davis, Carlton’s role as an administrator appeared to oscillate between a passionate local promoter and a cautious realtor determined not to see the state succumb to same kind of empty promises that had hurt it in the past.

In the second half of 1931, the City of Tampa was once more plunged into a period of political upheaval that would have a major influence on Collins and Carlton’s efforts to bring filmmakers to the Greater Tampa region. In June, the wildly popular multiple term Mayor D.B.

97 Ibid, 262.
98 Grismer, 256.
McKay announced his decision not to seek reelection in the forthcoming September election. He included his announcement in his final budget proposal in which he stressed that in his remaining time in office he would make it his “imperative duty to give the tax payers all possible relief,” and as a result his proposed budget “is not simply ‘cut to the bone,’ but we have gone through to the bone to the marrow. It will require the most careful adherence throughout the coming years.” The controversial budget proposed by McKay became a key point of contention when his selected successor T.N. Henderson ran against Robert Chancey in the Democrat primary in September. Despite McKay’s popularity, many business leaders and real estate speculators saw the tax cuts and reduction in expenditures on public improvements as a threat to their speculative land values.

In what was considered the most contentious election in decade, Robert Chancey won a suspicious victory against Henderson. A split between Tampa’s municipal police and sheriff’s office resulted in both sides arresting nearly fifty voters in each camp for attempted fraudulent voting, while at the polling station voters found that the names of council members and other city administrators in the Henderson faction had their names crossed out with red ink. After Chancey and his faction were carried into city hall, he and Tampa’s newly elected city commissioners bonded the city for $13 million for necessary public improvements and interest payments on the bonds were taking most of the city’s depression depleted revenues. Since the city could not meet its payrolls Chancey proceeded to slash the police and fire departments, reducing their budgets by $100,000 a year. Several fire and police stations were closed, and other city departments were similarly cut. To relieve the strain the city’s merchants finally agreed to pay a special tax on gross business.

99 “Mayor Repeats He Won’t Seek Another Term,” TDT, June 26, 1931, 1, 10A. This statement required a slash-and-burn approach to the city budget. McKay promised a $29,649,142 reduction in expenses over four years.
100 “Chancey Wins By 1569,” TMT, September 2, 1931, 1-2. 96 men were arrested under fraudulent vote charges, many of the arrests taken place between municipal police and sheriff deputies.
101 Grismer, 282-283.
“An Independent’s Paradise”

Chancey’s reliance on federal relief funding through President Hoover’s Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) may have helped to keep Tampa’s economy afloat, but his city-wide tax on gross business revenue had major consequences for Trenton Collins’ efforts to establish a motion picture production center in Tampa. On December 19, 1931, Governor Carlton officially endorsed Collins’ proposal for the CDMP and Collins immediately set to work with Edward Alexander to film a series of promotional travelogues to attract New York and California filmmakers to Florida. Collins next initiated a letter writing campaign to the State Hotel Commission (SHC) along with the mayors and mayor-commissioners of each of Florida’s major cities, drafted several write-ups for the associated press, and made contact with several more independent producers interested in assessing the conditions in Florida.

One of the first producers to respond to Collins’s letter campaign was Lloyd Hammond, an independent producer based in Detroit. Hammond was previously involved in a movement to attract roughly thirty percent of Hollywood production to South Florida. Hammond provided Collins with important advice on how get producers to invest in Florida. “No one or two high powered promoters financing individual productions is going to help the industry in Florida. The foundation must be properly laid and well planned, and must have the cooperation of the state, if this is done there is no reason why Florida could not in a few years’ time, surpass California in the production of pictures.”

He was just one of several independents Collins was able to reach in his initial promotional campaign. Over the coming months Tampa continued to attract the attention from several major motion picture executives displaced during the 1931 industry-wide shakeup.

102 J.C. Huskisson to Trenton Collins, 19 December, 1931, Box 936, Folder 15, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives. CDMP members: John Alsop (Jacksonville), E.P. Owen (Jacksonville), R.G. Patterson (Pensacola), C.N. Reeder (Miami), Walter W. Rose (Orlando), E.A. Smith (Sarasota), Hal Thompson (Tampa), Trenton C. Collins (Tampa).

103 Lloyd Hammond to Doyle Carlton, 26 December, 1931, Box 923, Folder 34, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
In March 1932, Collins landed his first whale with Chester Beecroft, an industry veteran with an impressively long resume that dated back to his employment with Thomas Edison’s General Film Company in 1914. Beecroft also had the distinction of being the only film producer licensed by the War Trade Board to distribute American films in Europe during World War I and was instrumental in establishing Paramount’s supremacy in Hollywood during the 1920s. After breaking with Hearst Cosmopolitan Company in early 1932, Beecroft set out to form his independent production outlet. Along with fellow independent Eugene Spitz, the two men met with Collins and they took an extensive tour along Florida’s West Coast. For undisclosed reasons Beecroft and Spitz experienced a falling out during the trip, but in the end, Beecroft expressed his interest in the abandoned coliseum on Davis Island as the site for his studio. Upon his return to New York, he formed Beecroft-Florida Movie Studios and obtained the lease with the option of purchase to unfinished facilities on Davis Island valued at $100,000. In a resonant echo of Jacksonville’s promotions during the 1910s, Beecroft boasted that his new studio’s proximity to New York (twelve hours by air and thirty-six by train), “will make a special bid for activities by eastern independents who cannot go to the coast and who cannot produce up north during the winter because of winter conditions.” In other words, Beecroft-Florida set out to create a self-proclaimed “Independent’s Paradise” in Florida.

With a decline in municipal cooperation in Tampa and limited support from Tallahassee, Collins decided that his best option to gather additional government support would be to deceler

106 Jack Alicoate, ed., *The 1933 Film Daily Yearbook* (New York: The Film Daily, 1933), 144. In a full-page advertisement Beecroft describes Davis Island as, “The most superb residential development in all Florida, with its marble swimming pool, golf course, fountains, country clubs, cameo villas, and graceful architecture.” He addresses producers in a promotion similar to those described by Jacksonville’s boosters in the 1910s: “Producers: Beyond the requirements of our own feature productions we have ample space to rent, or we will estimate and build your production. But whether you use our facilities or not, come to Tampa to make your pictures. We will gladly give you time and money saving help. 1,000 locations suited to every variety of story already charted and at your service.”
the state industry into multiple locations.\textsuperscript{107} Governor Carlton in the meantime had become increasingly distracted by stemming the state-wide economic crisis to give CDMP the attention it needed. At the same time, just as Trenton Collins’ efforts start to bear fruit, the Florida state government began to pull back in its support. Collins admitted that his campaign had “progressed to a point which none of us had expected to attain for two or three years.”\textsuperscript{108} The state legislature was unable to keep up with all of Collins’ requests and the number of moving parts needed to keep the momentum needed to bring in new producers. After the Florida Chamber of Commerce declined his request for $1700 to fund a promotional travelogue to help attract producers based in New York and California, Collins went on the offensive with an appeal to the Florida League of Municipalities to take the lead in funding support to the CDMP. At the same time the Chancey administration in Tampa issued a series of corporate taxes that brought Beecroft-Florida to the edge of insolvency. In his appeal Collins warned, “In places where the industry was previously active (Jacksonville) a grasping public has formed the habit of extracting very sizeable fees if a private home, estate, or acreage is to be used in the filming of a scene.”\textsuperscript{109} He lambasted the shortsightedness of Tampa politicians and businessmen who failed to recognize “a picture filmed in a temporary Florida location would release sums ranging anywhere from $25,000 to $300,000 in the locality chosen for the production of that particular picture.”\textsuperscript{110}

Although in 1929 Doyle Carlton was eager and ready to travel to Tampa to show the state government’s support for \textit{Hell Harbor}, three years later the toll of the Great Depression projected “an indication of ineffectiveness” toward his administration. In a private message to Trenton

\textsuperscript{107} Trenton C. Collins, “Florida Seeking New Industry,” \textit{Florida Municipal Record} (April, 1932), 7. In his full quote: “The motion picture industry recognizes there must be a third production center somewhere between California and New York.” Atlanta, St. Louis, Detroit, Denver, and Milwaukee are all making strenuous efforts to establish themselves. There are no state funds which can immediately be diverted to the cause, but the work must be carried on unceasingly for the next six or eight months, by which time the committee is confident that a sufficient number of permanent studios will be in actual production in the State to influence other producers and directors to do likewise.”\textsuperscript{108} Trenton Collins to John H. Brown, 24 March, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.


\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 8.
Collins from J.C. Huskisson, Doyle Carlton’s personal secretary, he followed up with his own personal support and frustrations at the lack of coordination. “Just between you and me, this city will freely tell you how very proud we are and how very interested they are in the state institutions located here, but conversation is cheap and when it comes to putting out money they are very slow to do so, though they may come through eventually.”\footnote{\textsc{J.C. Huskisson to Trenton Collins, 2 April, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.}} Collins responded by sending out another appeal to the governor outlining the need for state cooperation and the appearance of support to encourage further investments. He argued that if his promotion campaign continues to develop “as I anticipate, there will be a vital need for a ‘Will Hays’ in Florida and you are the logical Will.”\footnote{\textsc{Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 5 April, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives. \textit{Will Hays} was the first chairman of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) from 1922-1945. In this capacity he played an essential role during Hollywood’s Golden Age as a liaison between the federal government and Hollywood.} Shorty after this exchange, Carlton experienced a change of heart and joined Collins at a Movie Ball held at Beecroft’s Florida Studio. Carlton even presided as a judge at a bathing beauty contest that Beecroft had organized at the event.\footnote{\textit{Notable to Attend Florida Movie Ball,” \textit{Film Daily}, April 29, 1933, 2.}} Two weeks later, Carlton called for a meeting in Orlando with the mayors of six major Florida cities to discuss locations for additional studios to be built throughout the state. Because most of the state and municipal budgets were tied up in depression-related relief programs, Carlton suggested that each community offer their own promotional incentives such as special plane service, real estate promotional offerings, and investment in the studios by local banks and businesses. The meeting ended with a prolific prediction: “We took the orange and citrus fruit trade from California because we are nearer the east, now watch us take the studios.”\footnote{\textit{Florida Isn’t Kidding,” \textit{Variety}, May 10, 1932, 3.}}

Despite Florida’s increased visibility and Carlton’s participation at various events and functions, the Florida legislature refused to provide the necessary funding for the CDMP’s ongoing
efforts. In a follow-up to the May 1932 meeting held in Orlando, Collins sent a series of letters to
the mayors of every major Florida city with a plan to divide up the costs to continue to court
producers to establish themselves in Florida. Building on assurances from established industry
producers such as Lloyd Hammond and Chester Beecroft, Collins reiterated his belief that if his
campaign continued on its current trajectory that by the end of 1932, “Florida should actually
have a goodly share of America’s third largest industry.” Since December 1931, Collins spent
nearly $3000 out of his own pocket to host visiting producers in Florida as well as travel to
California and New York to meet with studio executives. In the end, the state government would
not as much as reimburse the costs of his tolls for his commute across the Gandy Bridge. In his
appeal, he also reminded the mayors “your entire citizenry, is interested in the early and
complete success of this movement. The unselfish cooperation and financial support of every
city are needed, if we are to achieve our goal quickly.”

Collins received a less than enthusiastic response from Florida’s mayors and redirected
his effort for funding to Ben Bostein of the State Hotel Commission. In his proposal he requested
a stipend of $400-$500 per month for eight months, which he argued could provide a boon for
Florida’s fledgling tourism industry. “The work of the Committee is about half done and it seems
almost criminally negligent to stop now, but unless funds with which to carry on are provided,
that is exactly what will happen.” Collins next sent a message to Ross Norton, an executive for
the Seaboard Air Line, to secure funding for his long-proposed travelogue. Meanwhile Edward
Alexander set out to solicit funds from local business owners and interested producers to fund a
film survey of Pinellas County that could be distributed to producers across the country.

115 Trenton Collins to Mayors of the State of Florida, 18 July, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives
116 Ibid. The steel and concrete bridge spanned a distance of two and a half miles, making it the longest automobile toll bridge in the world at that time. The original price to cross the bridge was $.75 for an automobile and driver.
117 Trenton Collins to Ben Bostein, 18 August, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
Just as the funding for the travelogue was about to be secured, Collins received a confidential letter from Lloyd Hammond who warned that Edward Alexander did not have any verifiable credentials in the motion picture industry. Hammond, who was based in Detroit, remembered Alexander from a few low-end productions and his involvement in a promotion for a police safety picture for the Detroit Municipal Police Department, but beyond these productions, Alexander did not have any actual industry experience. As Collins’ options to secure funding for the CDMP were exhausted, he reached out to Doyle Carlton to see if any additional funding could be allocated. Carlton at this time was in the middle of a prolonged series of pardon board hearings and was unable to prioritize a meeting. Without anywhere else to turn, Collins begrudgingly called for a meeting with Tampa Mayor Robert Chancey. To his surprise, the meeting went better than expected. It ended with a plan of action to turn the defunct Tampa Bay Hotel into a combined studio and hotel for motion picture personnel. Collins then suggested that Chancey and Carlton join him on a trip to Hollywood at the end of September to meet with producers who might be interested in purchasing the building for a studio. Both men ignored his request and Collins again redirected his focus to appealing directly to producers. Collins was clearly in over his head and cut adrift by the state’s boosters.

Even without coordination from the city and state governments, in October 1932 the CDMP landed its first major production studio and initiated negotiations with Al D’Agostino of R.K.O. Studios to establish a stock company that would be permanently based in Florida. Yet due to lack of decisive action and uncertainty as to where the studio would be located, the deal rapidly deteriorated. D’Agostino soon experienced the same frustrations as Collins in attempting

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118 Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 22 August 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
119 Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 2 September, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
120 Dunn, *Yesterday’s Tampa*, 24. Eventually Mayor Chancey secured funding for renovation to the Tampa Bay Hotel after the Works Progress Administration was implemented in 1933 and provided funding for its conversion into become the present site for Tampa University.
121 Al D’Agostino to Trenton Collins, 27 October, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
to coordinate with state and municipal officials in Florida to lock down details. He asked Collins in an October 27 letter, “Am I taking too much for granted in seeking a producing proposition for your State? I have spent considerable time and a little money on wires, etc., in introducing to producers the idea of Florida and I hope my efforts will not be in vain.”

Collins sought to make a last-ditch attempt to take advantage of Chester Beecroft’s contacts in New York, and even managed to get the governor’s office to provide a $200 stipend for his travel expenses.

In the end Collins’ expedition to New York did little to attract the interest of major producers. As Carlton’s time in the governor’s mansion wound down, the influence of the CDMP also began to wane. The governor reflected, “Possibly I can be of more aid when I have cast aside my official duties after the first of the year. I believe there are real possibilities in the motion picture industry and am anxious to see the work carried on.”

He suggested “a State Motion Picture Committee would be a better title than Motion Picture Department, as that legally is something established by the Legislature.”

In January newly elected Governor David Sholtz and Florida Chamber of Commerce set up its own Special Motion Picture Committee (SMPC) and Trenton Collins’ involvement as Florida’s preeminent promoter took a backseat. The most significant legacy Carlton and Collins was the authorization of a fifteen-year exemption from state and local property taxes to provide for filmmakers who decided to film their productions to Florida. This was the first recorded example outside of California of the use of tax incentives by a state government to draw film productions to their state. Yet by the time these incentives were put into place, efforts to attract California and New York-based producers to Florida were severely discredited by the erratic promotional schemes of a fly-by-night producer named Aubrey Kennedy. His ambiguous attempts to turn St. Petersburg into the “Hollywood of Florida.”

122 Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 15 November, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives.
123 Doyle Carlton to Trenton Collins, 15 December, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives.
124 Doyle Carlton to Trenton Collins, 19 December, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives.
125 Trenton Collins to Maurice Kann, 17 April, 1933, Box 278, Folder 4, Florida State Archives.
126 Nelson, Lights! Camera! Florida!, 53.
127 “Stage and Screen Veteran to Start Dramatic School in Elks Auditorium Here,” SPI, August 18, 1933, 4.
proved to be a national embarrassment that ended Florida’s chances of establishing a permanent production industry for the next fifty years.

“A Good Place to Visit, But Don’t Come to Stay”

After Doyle Carlton left office in January 1933, he was succeeded by David Sholtz, who defeated former governors John Martin and Cary Hardee in a decisive runoff election. A self-described protégé of Franklin Roosevelt and the son of Jewish German immigrant parents, Sholtz represented a decisive shift in Florida’s political infrastructure. In a break from Doyle Carlton’s fiscal conservatism and the malevolent racism and anti-Semitism of former governors such as Sidney Catts, David Sholtz positioned himself as Florida’s “New Deal Governor.” While Carlton refused any form of federal assistance from the RFC, Sholtz actively pursued federal aid through any means necessary. During Roosevelt’s first one hundred days from March to May 1933, he was able to cobble together a series of grants from a wide variety of Roosevelt’s alphabet soup initiatives. Sholtz also developed a state employment service, where he sought to reinvigorate businesses across the state, and by the end of his time in office reduced relief cases by 75 percent. His effective infusion of government funds and state regulation turned the state’s nearly two-million-dollar deficit to a surplus of nearly half a million by 1937.128 Florida historian William Cash reflected that as a result of the efforts made during Governor Sholtz’s administration “Florida was in considerably better financial condition than it had been since the depression began.”129

Richard Alan Nelson lumps both Doyle Carlton and David Sholtz together as governors who were “willing to endorse the committee’s work as long as expenses were minimized, but they refused to provide more than basic operating funds through a cumbersome requisition procedure.”130 This statement can correctly be applied toward Doyle Carlton’s administration and

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129 Cash, 590.
130 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 466; Nelson, Lights! Camera! Florida!, 54.
the especially stingy Florida legislature of the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{131} The same cannot be said for Sholtz’s drastic overhaul of state spending during his time in office. Using Tampa Bay as a point of focus, the contrasts in both governors’ approaches to tourism and attracting out of state business could not be more different. In 1930, the St. Petersburg’s city council erected a sign at the city limits that said, “A Good Place to Visit But Don’t Come to Stay.”\textsuperscript{132} Yet by the end of 1933, with the help of a massive infusion of state and federal assistance, the city’s tune drastically changed. While Carlton and Tampa Mayor D.B. McKay depended on a slash and burn approach to keep a balanced budget, Sholtz and Robert Chancey utilized a $750,000 loan from the RFC to fund city-sponsored WPA projects. This loan ultimately helped Tampa receive several much-needed civic improvements. This included the conversion of the vacant Tampa Bay Hotel (which was previously considered the site for a film studio) into the home for Tampa University, as well as the construction of the Grand Central Airport on Weedon Island.\textsuperscript{133}

Even with the much-needed infusion of government funds for infrastructure and public relief, the Sholtz administration was initially hesitant to follow through on his predecessor’s efforts to bring the motion picture industry to the state. In a March 1933 quote to The Film Daily, Sholtz denied any “printed rumors that the State of Florida is negotiating with Hollywood producers and offering to finance wholesale removal (sic) of film industry to Florida.”\textsuperscript{134} However a month later the Florida Chamber of Commerce decided to add motion picture development to its activities. It appointed St. Petersburg-based real estate developer Fred Blair as chairman. Although Collins and the CDMP continued their promotional efforts during the transition to the Sholtz administration, it appears that by April 1933 Collins was all but resigned to have Blair and the Chamber of Commerce’s SMPC take over. In a letter to Maurice Kann, the

\textsuperscript{131}Trenton Collins to Doyle Carlton, 29 December, 1932, Box 60, Folder 18, Florida State Archives.
\textsuperscript{132}Dunn, Yesterday’s St. Petersburg, 118.
\textsuperscript{133}Grismer, 282; Dunn, Yesterday’s Tampa, 23-24.
\textsuperscript{134}“Florida Governor Says State Won’t Back Film Ventures,” Film Daily, March 27, 1933, 1.
editor of *Film Daily*, Collins attempts to clarify on Sholtz’s statement that the state government was not interested in attracting filmmakers to the state. He explained, “There is no financial structure ready to throw quantities of gold into the production pot, but we will assist responsible executives to secure necessary financing, or at least part of it.”

In his letter Collins described “the friendliest feelings” between the CDMP and SMPC. It appears that David Sholtz’s preference for direct government oversight caused the SMPC to receive preferential treatment.

Perhaps frustrated by the lack of funding and support he received under the Carlton administration, or simply ready to move on to another venture, Collins reinvested himself full time into his advertising firm and later served as President of Florida West Coast Associates and the Tampa Advertising Club. Collins appears to have been quite supportive of Blair and his efforts. In his final letter as chairman of the CDMP, he tells Maurice Kann, “Mr. Blair has the reputation of going aggressively, but conservatively after anything he undertakes.”

The pinnacle of Collins’ efforts with the CDMP came through several months later in July 1933 when his proposed fifteen year exemption from state and local property taxes for film producers who filmed in Florida, was officially approved by the Florida Legislature. By then Florida’s state government also received additional assistance through the WPA to develop the financial structure necessary to attract large-scale productions to the state. Regrettably the timing for the additional funding and tax credit initiative could not have been worse. By the time all elements of state-sanctioned support had been put in place, a series of mismanaged proposals to establish a permanent production center near St. Petersburg would effectively discredit any future attempts to turn Tampa Bay into a second Los Angeles.

The trouble started in January 1933 when film producer Aubrey Kennedy announced his

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135 Trenton Collins to Maurice Kann, 17 April, 1933, Box 82, Folder 4, Florida State Archives; Nelson, *Lights! Camera! Florida!*, 53. In *Lights! Camera! Florida!* Nelson claims the SMPC was formed in 1935, however correspondences dating to April 1933, indicate the organization was active by this time and effectively eclipsed the efforts of Trenton Collins and the CDMP.

136 “Ad Club Here South’s Leader,” *TDT*, October 9, 1937, 2.

137 Trenton Collins to Maurice Kann, 17 April, 1933, Box 82, Folder 4, Florida State Archives.

plans to construct a new state-of-the-art studio on Weedon Island. Despite Collins’ willingness to share information with Blair, he did not take the time to warn him about Kennedy’s reputation as an unreliable promoter. Al D’Agostino had previously sent a short note to Trenton Collins warning him about Kennedy’s plans to build a sound stage in Florida. In the note D’Agostino describes Kennedy as “beyond a doubt the best producer in this business when sober,” but he also made sure to also add that Kennedy’s reputation for unreliability and drunkenness all but entirely blacklisted him from Hollywood by 1932.139

When a wave of displaced producers began to arrive in Florida on the wave of Collins’ promotional imitative, Kennedy had joined a growing number of displaced producers who sought to redeem their reputation and establish their own independent operations in Florida. Kennedy first came to Florida in 1915 with the Serial Film Company. During Mayor Bowden’s campaign to attract film studios to North Florida, Kennedy was one of Jacksonville’s most outspoken boosters.140 However after the collapse of local support with the election of John Martin in 1917, Kennedy seemed to have soured on his experience in Jacksonville, which he later described in a May 1932 correspondence to Trenton Collins as “disastrously discouraging.”141 He complained that the Jacksonville merchants were prone to exploit filmmakers with severe price gouging on goods and services. “The cost of production was exorbitant, and I could hardly wait to get back to New York to cut out my expenses and live up to my budget.”142 Although initially disinterested in Collins’ letter writing campaign, Kennedy had come around by October 1932. That month he initiated a search for a potential location to build a sound stage and studio city.

Upon learning that Kennedy had started to scope out locations, Al D’Agostino warned Trenton Collins that Kennedy had “been mixed up in quite a few production schemes in the past,

139 Al D’Agostino to Trenton Collins, 29 October, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
140 “Kennedy Declares Jax to Be Logical Producing Center,” Florida Metropolis, April 9, 1916, 8; Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 172.
141 Trenton Collins to All Members of State Committee For Development of the Motion Picture Industry, 18 May, 1932, Box 204, Folder 18, Florida State University Archives.
142 Ibid.
which never got beyond the money spending stage. I feel this is a bum promotion down there at this time and will do a lot of harm.”

Despite D’Agostino’s warning, Collins either was unwilling or unable to do much to obstruct Kennedy’s plans to establish a production studio in Florida. Though it appears that by April 1933 Collins had more or less caught on to Kennedy’s unsavory dealings. The impetus for his letter to Maurice Kann was to correct Kennedy’s erroneous claim in the trade presses that he had been appointed as a technical advisor by David Sholtz. From this correspondence it appears that by this time Kennedy had begun to send out misleading statements in several of the major trade presses, which in turn begun to undermine the industry’s confidence in the stability of either the CDMP and SMPC. In regard to Kennedy, all Collins had to say was, “Neither committee is interested in fly-by-night promoters.”

Although Trenton Collins claimed neither committee was interested in working with Kennedy, Fred Blair seems to have missed the memo. In October 1932, Blair wrote a personal letter to Kennedy inviting him to survey the conditions in St. Petersburg to build a studio. In December he replied with a lengthy non-committal telegram that if the money could be raised, he would transfer his operations to St. Petersburg. Unable to get support from the chamber of commerce or local businesses, Blair instead raised money through a personal guarantee from an option he held on Weedon’s Island with the First National Bank of Tampa. In January 1933, Kennedy officially agreed to develop his self-proclaimed “Kennedy City” on the site of the abandoned San Remo nightclub on Weedon Island. That same month the Kennedy Picture Corporation (KPC) was formed and St. Petersburg City Manager W.M. Cotton pledged his “administration would back up the negotiations by pledging support of the city of St. Petersburg to securing the motion picture industry here.”

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143 Al D’Agostino to Trenton Collins, 29 October, 1932, Box 936, Folder 16, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
144 Trenton Collins to Maurice Kann, 17 April, 1933, Box 82, Folder 4, Florida State Archives.
146 “Hollywood Motion Picture Man Plans to Locate in City,” SPI, January 30, 1933, 1, 8.
resume to the extent where he claimed to be a co-founder of Universal City in Hollywood and an official organizer for MGM Studios. The excitement surrounding Kennedy’s arrival in a January 30 press release utilized the same boosterism that was common during Jacksonville’s heyday in the 1910s. “Florida, which can rival California’s locations in everything but the mountain atmosphere, is desirable as a production center because of its proximity to New York City, source of many leading stage stars who have bounded into prominence as screen favorites with box office appeal.” W.M. Cotton enthusiastically endorsed this promise in announcing, “Kennedy’s enterprise offers more hope to this city for a quick return to prosperity locally than any other industry or type of activity.”

As Kennedy successfully started to draw support for his studio and collect the funding needed to build his studio, W.M. Cotton attempted to follow up on several of Kennedy’s alleged connections within the film industry to see if they would be interested in contributing. Kennedy claimed in several interviews in the trade presses that New York-based distributor Pat Powers had agreed to a twenty-four-pictures distribution deal with the KPC. When Powers learned of the articles, he publicly announced “he did not know anything about the Kennedy company and had no plans for the distribution of its product.” After a long-distance phone conversation with Powers, Cotton ordered the Chamber of Commerce and advertising board to withhold any further funds until Kennedy could prove the project was feasible. In his conversation with Cotton, Powers revealed that Kennedy previously worked for Universal as a production manager and was not as he claimed a co-founder of Universal City. In a statement to the St. Petersburg Times, Powers denied Kennedy’s claim he would put up half of the production costs of any picture produced by KPC. However, he was willing to “distribute his pictures and might advance money on negatives, but I have no business connection with the production end of the manner.”

147 “Kennedy Buys Property on Weedon’s Isle,” SPT, January 30, 1933, 1-2.
148 Ibid, 1.
Although Powers agreed that the discord in the California motion picture industry has afforded Florida a unique opportunity to bring motion picture production to the state, he advised, “There is no reason why pictures can’t be made in Florida. It’s simply a matter of building up an organization. Not overnight proposition.” Kennedy rebounded from the negative press rather quickly and by February, Fred Blair secured a $2,000 city building permit to renovate the San Remo nightclub into a sound stage. Through the use of public funds donated from local investors, Kennedy then bought a house and established “permanent residence in St. Petersburg.” After this incident St. Petersburg’s city government withdrew all additional funding it had pledged for Kennedy City.

Just as it seemed the entire venture would stop in its tracks, an angel investor named T.C. Parker – manager of Coca-Cola’s bottling plant in Jacksonville – put up the additional funding needed to complete the studio. In May 1933, with all the necessary pieces in place, Kennedy rented a Cinephone sound truck from Pat Powers and hired Oral Cloakey, a former Universal colleague, to establish a casting office in St. Petersburg. He next wrote to former Kalem director Marshall Neilan that he found “the most perfect swamp that you could possibly ask for,” to be used as the setting for his upcoming feature Chole. Neilan immediately flew to St. Petersburg and after a short visit to Weedon Island, agreed to move his production to Kennedy City. Through sheer force of will, it appeared that Aubrey Kennedy had successfully been able to attract the support and funding necessary to establish St. Petersburg as a production center. The St. Petersburg Times heralded, “May 22, should mark a new era in the history of St. Petersburg. On that date the Sunshine City will make its debut as a motion picture production center as cameras here start grinding out the swampland story of Chloe.” Lodwick’s optimism for St.

151 Ibid, 1.
152 “Roof is Raised for Movie Studio,” SPT, February 22, 1933, 3.
153 “T.C. Parker, Chairman of Kennedy Corporation Board,” SPI, July 29, 1933, 15.
154 “150 Seeking Jobs in Movies Here,” SPT, May 17, 1933, 5; “First Movies Are Taken at Local Studio,” SPT, May 18, 1933, 5; “Weedon’s Island is Ideal Locale,” SPI, July 29, 1933, 6.
Petersburg’s future as a production center with Kennedy at the helm, was stimulated even further at the end of May when legendary silent film star Buster Keaton arrived in St. Petersburg and announced plans to film his next three feature films on location.156

“The Florida Mecca for Movie Stars and Fans”

On a late Tuesday afternoon on May 30, 1933, a large crowd assembled along the runway of St. Petersburg’s Grand Central Airport with an air of excitement that Tampa Bay had not felt since Lupe Velez’s arrival to film *Hell Harbor* in September 1929. Since that time the region’s efforts to establish a permanent production center had been filled with nothing but false starts and dead ends. Although the enthusiasm of prominent boosters such as Trenton Collins had started to waver, newspaper publications across Pinellas and Hillsborough counties remained hopeful that their community was one major step away from becoming the country’s third motion picture production center. All of their hopes now rested on the promises of Aubrey Kennedy and a famous stone-faced comedian aboard the Eastern Air Transports plane. At the airport, famed silent actor Buster Keaton was swarmed by adoring fans and greeted by Aubrey with members of St. Petersburg’s Board of Governors. The impromptu reception was cut short as Keaton plowed his way through the crowd and into a waiting car, which took him directly to the Suwanee Hotel where he immediately hung a “do not disturb” sign on his doorknob.157 The inauspicious first meeting with Keaton was excused in the press by Aubrey Kennedy where he explained that Keaton was “very tired” after his plane journey and “anxious to catch up on much needed sleep.”158 Keaton recalled he was in high spirits as he flew into St. Petersburg. “Getting 3,000 miles from the scene of my worst defeats was exhilarating. I was determined to stay off the booze, do a good job, and show everyone that I was anything but a dead duck.”159

158 Ibid, 1.
Desperate to prove himself after a disastrous string of films while under contract to MGM Studios, the newly independent Buster Keaton was drawn to Florida for the same promise of reinventing himself and reinvigorating a fledgling career. When Keaton arrived in St. Petersburg, production on *Chole* (1933) at Kennedy City was already underway. The same day as Keaton barreled through the crowd at Grand Central Airport, independent producers Adolph Pollak and Morris Shiller announced their intention to produce two more films at Kennedy City, *Playthings of Desire* and *The Hired Wife*. They instructed director Albert Hiller to stop production in Hollywood and come to St. Petersburg immediately.\(^{160}\) Several days later Keaton and his manager Lew Lipton confirmed that they had agreed to a six-picture contract with Kennedy. He next flew to Ocala to meet with Marshall Neilan who was completing a location sequence at Silver Springs. He returned to St. Petersburg the next day and perhaps to make up for his abrupt behavior when he first arrived, Keaton agreed to attend an official welcoming event at Williams Park, where Mayor Henry Adams awarded him the key to the city before the largest crowd “ever to have been gathered in the park for a single event.” Keaton still remained somewhat standoffish with the crowd and remained silent throughout the proceedings. He later made the excuse that the terms of his contract prevented him to make a speech. Despite his lukewarm response to the overtures made by St. Petersburg’s citizens, Keaton wasted no time in establishing himself in the community. That same day he closed on a house and joined a community baseball league.\(^{161}\) Notwithstanding his brisk demeanor at public functions, Petersburgians fondly remembered Keaton’s short stay in their city. Emil Latham, the manager of the Suwanee Hotel recalled, “Buster used to dive through the windows of streetcars to entertain the kids. His greatest thrill was to do something for the kids. Everybody in town loved him.”\(^{162}\) Casting director Oral Cloakey remembered, “Keaton made full use of his training as

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an acrobat to make people in town laugh.”\textsuperscript{163} On June 18, Keaton reinforced his commitment to St. Petersburg when he along with Marshall Neilan, Lew Lipton, and Aubrey Kennedy filed articles of incorporation to the governor’s office for a charter to form the Flamingo Film Company, a corporation designed for the production Keaton’s Florida films. In a refreshing change of pace from the stock schemes perpetrated by Harry Kelly during the Sun City venture, Secretary-Treasurer Lipton announced, “The Flamingo Company being a closed corporation, with all the stock owned by members of the company, no stock will be sold.” Shortly after the announcement, they broke ground on a proposed 150 by 140-foot soundstage and office building to house Flamingo’s productions.\textsuperscript{164}

At this point, Aubrey Kennedy had not only succeeded in attracting major star power to Florida’s Gulf Coast, but he also brought deep pocketed investors who intrigued producers with verifiable credentials. Over the next month Keaton and Marshall Neiland traveled across the state and also to Cuba to scout locations for their first planned Florida talking film, \textit{The Fisherman}. Marshall Neiland’s \textit{Chloe}, after being marred with interruptions finally wrapped its final set of reshoots.\textsuperscript{165} Just as production on \textit{Chloe} came to close, the cast of \textit{Playthings of Desire} came to St. Petersburg. Pollak and Shiller contracted George Melford to direct the film. By July, production commenced with several sequences filmed on location in Clearwater and at Bayou Farms in Yahala. To film the St. Petersburg sequences, crowds gathered across the city and nearly sixty locals were used for various scenes, with almost 1,400 requests sent to Oral Cloakey and his casting office. By the end of the month, production on \textit{Playthings of Desire} had wrapped without a hitch.\textsuperscript{166} Shortly after the completion of the film, California producer E.B.

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} “Buster Keaton Organizes Own Film Company,” \textit{SPT}, June 18, 1933, 3.
\textsuperscript{165} “\textit{Chloe}’ Films Burn in Plane,” \textit{SPT}, June 7, 1933, 1; “Acting Isn’t All Fun – Nerve Needed,” \textit{SPI}, July 29, 1933, 11. Retakes on \textit{Chloe} had to be completed after a plane crash which killed pilot W.L. Jamison of Eastern Air Transport, destroyed the film’s original print. The production was also halted for several weeks when the film’s leading actress Olive Borden nearly drowned during a sequence at Tarpon Springs.
With three completed soundstages, along with several more announced productions and counting, by the end of the summer of 1933 Kennedy City sprouted into a formidable independent production center. In his moment of triumph, Aubrey Kennedy traveled to New York to meet with Pat Powers and follow up on leads for other potential investors. On his way to one of these meetings Kennedy was involved in a minor car accident, but his arm became infected and he was hospitalized in New York for several weeks. In Kennedy’s absence, Fred Blair presided over the day-to-day promotional efforts and helped to orchestrate a series of newspaper spreads in the *St. Petersburg Independent* as well as assisting the Flamingo Company in securing the permits needed for production of *The Fisherman*.167 Blair personally appealed to filmmakers and actors currently active in Florida to reach out to their “many thousands of friends throughout the country to come to St. Petersburg” and “really enjoy life.”168 He added in his publicized promotion, “You will want to see Kennedy City, home of Aubrey Kennedy Productions, Eagle Productions, United Pictures, and the Buster Keaton Unit. The Buster Keaton sound stage is as large as any found in the country. Many screen stars are in St. Petersburg and others will come to take parts in the various plays that are being produced by these companies. The Sunshine City is recognized as the Florida Mecca for Movie Stars and Fans.”169

Additional research will be needed to understand exactly what brought about the rapid decline of the Kennedy City venture. The timing of Kennedy’s car accident and the rapid deterioration of his various deals could be a possible reason. It also could be that there was a lack of coordination between his proposals with the efforts of Fred Blair and the SMPC. The first significant blow to Kennedy City came in early August 1933, when Buster Keaton and Lew Lipton suddenly abandoned their plans for pre-production on *The Fisherman*, dissolved the Flamingo Film Corporation, and announced they would not return to St. Petersburg. In his

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167 “Film Finished, Players Leave City For East,” *SPT*, July 22, 1933, 8.
169 Ibid, 9.
memoir, Keaton recalled that despite the promise of Florida’s sublime weather, after watching Marshall Neiland and George Melford suffer through the oppressive summer heat and swarms of insects during their outdoor film shoots, he felt the environment was far too inhospitable for filming in the summer. Keaton recalled, “None of this discouraged our optimistic backers. But I told them the truth when I became convinced that they were only throwing their money away in trying to establish a year-round movie industry there.”

Lew Lipton was less kind and more critical of the situation in an August 14 statement to the *Tampa Times*. Lipton claimed, “Misrepresentations made by Kennedy” were “the basic reasons for the star’s sudden exit from the field here.” Lipton evaded specifics on what type of misrepresentations Kennedy made, but he did say “they were financial more than anything, but also involved working conditions.”

According to Lipton, the studios were nicely equipped for mid-range productions with a budget between $35,000 and $50,000, but did not have the facilities to sustain a project that demanded a budget of $100,000 or higher, which would be the type of production Keaton was interested in producing. In a word of advice after “their realization that the glowing promises of Kennedy had not materialized,” Lipton suggested Florida producers needed “to learn how to make small ones first. No one can hope to beat Hollywood at its own game in three months. I don’t doubt for a minute they will be successful in making productions if they don’t overstep themselves.”

Another possible reason for Keaton and Lipton’s departure could be that the quality of the soundstage built by E. B. Ring did not meet the lofty expectations Kennedy had promised. Either in response to Keaton’s sudden departure or due to the extended recuperation time needed after his hospitalization, or because of the further investigations that were being conducted by the SMPC and the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce into his multiple misrepresentations, Aubrey Kennedy abruptly sold all of his holdings on Weedon Island to

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170 Keaton and Samuels, 245.
171 “Keaton Will Not Return to City to Make Movies,” *Tampa Bay Times*, August 14, 1933, 1.
172 Ibid, 1.
173 Ibid, 1.
T.C. Parker. He then announced his plans to take a month-long vacation with his family to the Adirondacks and that he would return to St. Petersburg in two to three months.¹⁷⁴ This promise also went unfulfilled and Aubrey Kennedy never returned to St. Petersburg.

“Like a Falling Meteor:” The Sun Sets on Sun Haven Studios

After taking control of Kennedy City, T.C. Parker reassured the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce and local press that he would continue productions on Weedon Island with George Melford as his head director. The studio complex that had been funded by E.B. Ring had completed construction earlier that same week. As post-production commenced on Melford’s Playthings of Desire in a processing facility in New York, production on Melford’s next film, The Hired Wife immediately commenced in time to inaugurate the new studio. Parker next reorganized the fragments of Kennedys’ former companies under a single umbrella, which he renamed Sun Haven Studios, with himself as president and Fred Blair as secretary and treasurer. Although Parker admitted that Sun Haven was “his first venture into the film field,” he seemed eager to follow Lipton’s advice and scale down the ambition of Sun Haven’s productions. In his acquisition deal with Kennedy, Parker drew up contracts with several other filmmakers to make twelve additional films over the next six months. Parker promised, “We plan to produce feature and program pictures at reasonably moderate costs. Nothing gigantic like Gold Diggers or 42nd Street, but the best pictures possible for $50,000. Some may run as low as $20,000, with an average of $35,000.”¹⁷⁵

The next day production on The Hired Wife commenced at Sun Haven, just as Ray Friedgen, Sun Haven’s new production manager arrived in St. Petersburg.¹⁷⁶ Even without Kennedy, the enthusiasm for St. Petersburg’s production industry and community organization

¹⁷⁴ “Kennedy Sells Out to Parker,” SPI, August 11, 1933, 15.
¹⁷⁵ “Parker Reorganizes Movie Project at Weedon Island; Plans Two Pictures Monthly,” SPT, August 15, 1933, 1-2.
remained as high as ever. Fredric Chapin, the editor in-chief of Sun Haven, set out to file a petition to the SMPC to create a school of dramatic arts in St. Petersburg to help foster home-grown talent and reduce the costs of having to import talent from Hollywood. \(^{177}\) Chapin confidently declared, “Hollywood is in a rut. The same old settings and locations have been used over and over. Florida is new and fresh. Virgin territory, new settings, new talent, spontaneity! Someone is going to make a lot of money in Florida in the motion picture industry. And Mr. Parker right now has the best chance. I want to be in on the ground floor.”\(^{178}\) As production on *The Hired Wife* finished in early September, George Melford’s first film on Weedon Island, *Playthings of Desire*, held its world premiere at the Capitol Theatre in St. Petersburg. The event was promised to “be one of the most outstanding and elaborate theatrical events staged in St. Petersburg,” and “have all the glamor of a Hollywood premiere and be staged like those at Hollywood’s famous Chinese Theater.”\(^{179}\) This moment in the sun was further reinforced by a glowing report sent by Florida State Assessor Chick Owens in regards to the potential that could come from the work being done on Weedon Island. “St. Petersburg’s motion picture industry has a payroll as great or greater than any single business concern in the city and promises to dwarf all other commercial activities before it is a year old.”\(^{180}\) He also praised the tens of thousands of dollars the industry had already brought to regional “merchants, building supply houses, public utilities, real estate dealers, and hotels” which were just “a few of the lines that have benefited from the industry’s golden touch.”\(^{181}\)

In the end *The Hired Wife* garnered a less than stellar reception from audiences in St. Petersburg and nation-wide. The film’s poor reception likely further contributed to the difficulties

\(^{177}\) Ibid, 4.
\(^{178}\) “Man Who Began His Stage Career With Belasco Now Working At Studios Here,” *SPI*, September 11, 1933, 6.
\(^{179}\) “Capitol Arranges Brilliant Premiere For First Locally Made Talkie Picture Tonight,” *SPI*, September 2, 1933, 4.
\(^{180}\) Chick Owens, “Enter the Movies: St. Petersburg Takes Place Among Film Producing Centers of Nation,” *Florida Municipal Record* (September, 1933), 27-28.
\(^{181}\) Ibid, 28.
Parker experienced in establishing a relationship with a reliable distributor. In his retrospective of Sun Haven’s heyday, Fred Wright called *Playthings of Desire*, “the worst motion picture ever made.” By the time the long-delayed *Chloe* was ready for its premiere in December 1933, the decision was made to host a private event at Weedon Island instead of a gala-style premiere. However by this point, Sun Haven was already in moderate financial trouble. In an effort to consolidate the various fledgling independent production ventures across the Tampa Bay, Parker met with Chester Beecroft – who had yet to produce a single film at his complex on Davis Island – and proposed they combine Sun Haven with Beecroft’s holdings. The company was reorganized when Parker stepped back to function in an advisory position, while Beecroft became managing director, with Fred Blair as general manager. The contract for the ten films Kennedy and Parker planned to produce with George Melford were completely abandoned. To legitimize his production company, Beecroft sought to produce a big-budget feature film production that would be sponsored by the Fox Film Corporation to tell the story of Spanish explorers Ponce de Leon, Panfilo Narvaez, and Hernando de Soto, and their exploits in Florida. The project never materialized or went past the planning stages. Although as managing director, Beecroft was able to secure a contract to produce seven films for the New York-based Showman’s Pictures Inc. at Sun Haven, the particulars of the agreement were never locked down and the deal ultimately fell through.

By February 1934, Parker had entirely abandoned Sun Haven and sold the property to Walter C. Martin of the Southeastern Oil Corporation. Although Martin and his associates expressed their intentions to continue to make films at Weedon Island, they did not outline any

182 Wright, 18a. He described the film as having “a quality strangely reminiscent of today’s late, late movies on TV.” The scene that Wright found especially worthy of this description was a sequence in which the film’s lead actor James Kirkwood falls into an alligator pool and all that was recovered were his clothes. Apparently according to the film’s logic, the alligators first undressed him before devouring him.

183 “‘Chloe’ To Get Early Showing,” *SPT*, December 12, 1933, 8.


details as to what type of films they intended to make.\textsuperscript{186} No further plans for productions were announced at Sun Haven, even while other local boosters did their best to continue to bring productions to the Gulf Coast. The studio city was mostly abandoned although in the 1950s there was a brief effort to reopen the studio to accommodate Florida’s burgeoning television industry. When Empire Studios Inc., moved its production unit to the sound stage and the surrounding 600 acres in 1956, Governor LeRoy Collins praised its effort to establish Florida’s first major film production company. The goal was to use the site as the location for the filming of \textit{Osceola Story}. When production moved to Kissimmee instead, it marked the end of any effort of movie making on Weedon Island. In early 1956, Empire sold the studio to Florida infrastructure and local support had already died out.

By November 1934, the abandonment of Sun Haven studios and overall collapse of film production in St. Petersburg, combined the political chaos in Hillsborough County after the contentious Senatorial primary between Claude Pepper and former Florida governor Park Trammell had created an environment unsustainable for major motion picture production. Similar to David Sholtz, Pepper was an acolyte of FDR’s New Deal initiatives, while Trammell initially opposed expanding the role of the government through state-wide and federal programs that depended on tax dollars or public funds.\textsuperscript{189} After the surprise election of David Sholtz, Florida conservatives mobilized to prevent the further election of New Deal liberals at all possible costs. In the run-off election between Pepper and Trammell, a disproportionate number of votes were counted in Tampa. Claude Pepper personally claimed to have witnessed a series of criminal acts and occurrences. He observed that the ballot boxes in these districts were hidden from the public, and when prospective voters tried to look inside the precinct, deputies

\textsuperscript{186} "Martin Leases Picture Studio," \textit{SPI}, February 16, 1934, 1; “Martin Leases Movie Studio,” \textit{SPT}, February 18, 1934, 6.

\textsuperscript{187} Yogman and Rawlins, 13.

\textsuperscript{188} Bean, 142.

\textsuperscript{189} John M. Brackett, “Wrongful Defeat: The 1934 Senatorial Democratic Primary Between Claude Pepper and Park Trammell,” \textit{Florida Historical Quarterly}, 84 no. 2 (Fall, 2005), 208.
immediately blocked off the view. Police “volunteers” were then called in to keep the peace, allegedly armed with pistols, sawed-off shotguns, and machine guns guarded each of the Ybor City and West Tampa precincts.190

The blame for the arrests and outbursts of violence that occurred was then directed against his campaign manager Peter O. Knight. Knight worked closely with Robert Chancey during the 1934 senatorial run-off in coordinating intimidation tactics needed to ensure Trammell’s election. Ironically in August 1935, Knight successfully arranged to utilize WPA funding to build a municipal airport on Davis Island, the airfield, which was then named after Peter O. Knight Airport in his honor.191 A year later, former Mayor D.B. McKay challenged Chancey in a run-off election, which Hampton Dunn describes as a “day of hot votes, fraudulent registrations, corrupt election officials, stolen ballot boxes, ballot box stuffing, dead men voting, cannon manned by guardsmen, a reckless display of machine guns, sawed off shot guns, and a while arsenal of weapons by an army of special city police and special sheriff’s deputies.”192 The city deputized 1,150 “special police,” some from out of state, while the sheriff’s office called for 500 special deputies of their own. In response to the escalation, Governor Sholtz sent in 270 federal troops and 116th Field Artillery of the Florida National Guard to “keep the peace” as a series of skirmishes broke out at the polls between police volunteers, sheriff’s deputies and National Guard members.193 The ensuing scandal surrounding the controversial election proved to be a national embarrassment for the City of Tampa and the State of Florida. Under these dubious circumstances Chancey was reelected, but his administration was admonished in local and national newspapers.194

190 Ibid, 224.
191 Grismer, 272.
192 Dunn, Yesterday’s Tampa, 24-25. Dunn incorrectly notes that T.N. Henderson ran against Chancey in 1935, when it was in fact D.B. McKay.
The timing of the political instability in Tampa along with the exodus of independent film producers from St. Petersburg in 1934 and 1935 could not have been worse. At that time the money-saving prospects that the 1933 tax exemption had captivated the attention of producers anxious over the prospect of Upton Sinclair’s election as Governor of California in 1934. The fly-by-night nature of Kennedy City and Sun Haven Studios, along with the overall lack of organized infrastructure or a cohesive business model production city on Weedon Island prevented producers from putting serious consideration toward utilizing the available facilities. A 35 percent tax bill imposed on motion picture producers by the California legislature, led to a proposal by independent film producers to raise up to ten million dollars through a popular subscription plan to build motion picture studios in Florida to be rented by the industry for an average of $250,000 a year.\textsuperscript{195} Sensing an opportunity, David Sholtz initiated a letter writing campaign to studio executives in an effort to follow through on this initiative.

Either due to outright hesitation or lack of organization, Sholtz did not get around to making concerted effort toward contacting producers until December 1935. The disagreement between the motion picture industry and the California legislature had been resolved and the bad press from Tampa’s mayoral election resulted in a slew of rejection letters from prospective producers. With the end of David Sholtz’s letter writing campaign, any direct coordinated effort between Florida’s state government and a local community to establish a film production center had ceased. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s a succession of major Hollywood productions filmed on location in Florida. These productions sought to exploit existing aspects of Florida’s natural landscape and architectural heritage. Once the location work wrapped these productions returned to complete their films on soundstages and processing laboratories in California. However the onset of the television boom in the 1960s inspired a new coordinated push to establish an independent motion picture production hub in Florida.

\textsuperscript{195} “Studios Set for Florida – Schenck,” \textit{Motion Picture Herald}, March 9, 1935, 126
CHAPTER THREE: “ASSURANCES OF FULL COOPERATION;” THE EMERGENCE OF FLORIDA’S MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY IN MIAMI AND ORLANDO, 1965-2005

Once the capital of the silent film industry in the early 1900s, Florida is again emerging as a major production area for this highly desirable industry. Many producers are rediscovering Florida’s assets including excellent weather for shooting and a wide variety of locations. As Governor, I would extend a personal invitation for you to take advantage Florida offers and assure you of the full cooperation of my office and all state agencies.

– Governor Reubin Askew, An Open Letter to the Motion Picture and Television Industry

The Great Profile for Profit

On the night of February 2, 1967, an over capacity crowd packed into the 900 seat Park West Theater in Winter Park to witness a film premiere unlike any other in Florida’s history. In attendance that night was recently inaugurated Florida Governor Claude Kirk, accompanied by four cabinet members, nearly half of the Florida legislature, along with as many of Florida’s mayors, commissioners, and civic leaders that could wrangle a ticket. This was by far one of the largest assemblages of Florida politicians at an entertainment venue in the state’s history. Press from local, state, and national media sources had also converged on the scene to watch the late Walt Disney rise from the dead before their very eyes. Seated next to Governor Kirk was Walt’s older brother and successor as President of Walt Disney Productions, Roy Disney. After a brief introduction given by General William Everett Potter, the former governor of the Panama Canal and Executive Vice President of the 1964 World’s Fair, the lights were dimmed, and a flash of light burst from the projector to light up the room. The audience was first immersed in a series of sweeping vistas accompanied by a voice over extolling the virtues and engineering achievements California’s Disneyland Park as “the greatest piece of urban design in the United States today.” As the montage of monorails and aerial views of the park concluded, the voice

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1 Ruebin Askew to The Motion Picture and Television Industry, undated, Box 935, Folder 5, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archives.
2 Richard E. Foglesong, Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 66.
over transitions by exclaiming “Yesterday, Disneyland and the New York World’s Fair. Tomorrow a project so vast it has been called a whole new Disney World.” The screen then dissolved to a map of Florida filled with the veiny intersections of its major highways, as the camera slowly zooms in on the place where all roads in the state meet in Orlando. Another dissolve and Walt Disney is then seen on screen, seemingly resurrected from his supposed cryogenic slumber. Uncle Walt beams from ear to ear as he sits casually on the edge of a conference table filled with blueprints, presentation pointer in hand. He is framed in a central position inside a conference room filled with maps and concept art for his last and greatest legacy. Filmed on October 27, 1966, weeks before his death, Disney beams as he outlines his plans for his proposed “Florida project.”3 This screening would later be remembered as “Orlando’s coming out party, heralding its transformation into a world-class travel destination.”

The front page of the Orlando Sentinel the following day celebrated the centerpiece of Disney’s concept – his projected Experimental Prototypical City of Tomorrow (EPCOT). The article repeated Governor Kirk’s promise to the Winter Park audience that Disney World would directly generate $6.6 billion in measurable economic benefits for the State of Florida as a whole and at least 50,000 new full-time jobs to support an increase in population of about 128,000 people by the end of its tenth year of operation. Perhaps nervous of the lofty and unsubstantiated numbers and figures the governor had floated to the crowd, Roy Disney quipped in a follow-up question about the estimated cost of EPCOT, “I wouldn’t go as far as those figures the governor was throwing around.”5 To restore public faith after this gaffe, Governor Kirk and Roy Disney together issued a televised “Report to the People of Florida,” which included Walt’s EPCOT film shown at the Park West Theater. The millions and billions discussed in the broadcast were

4 Foglesong, 66.
5 Don Rider, “Florida’s Disney World Unveiled: Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” Orlando Sentinel (hereafter OS), February 3, 1967, 1A.
combined with the glamor of Disney certainly won over voters and the Florida legislature. Two months later, on April 17, 1967, three separate Disney bills giving the company unprecedented autonomy and self-determination passed through the Florida’s House of Representatives and Senate with just one dissenting vote. One hour after the vote was passed, the State Road Board approved emergency funding for Disney’s road requests. When Disney World officially opened on October 1, 1971, Orlando Mayor Carl T. Langford exclaimed the coming of Disney was “the greatest thing that’s happened since the city got its charter.” Historian Gary Mormino describes the commercial vision and corporate model Disney imposed on the Orlando Metro Area as earthshattering to the extent that it has “aftershocks that are still felt today.”

The arrival of Disney in Florida was not just a transformative moment for Central Florida and the state’s tourism industry, it also led to a fundamental shift in Florida’s relationship with the film and television industry. Urban design scholars Kevin Archer and Kris Bendecny argue that in the proceeding decades after 1971, “Disney’s presence in Orlando became a very powerful agglomerative magnet for similar firms in the tourist-entertainment sectors.” Over a six-month period in 1965, rumors and speculation circulated across the state over the identity of a mysterious land buyer who had purchased nearly $5 million worth of land southwest of Orlando. Governor Haydon Burns was informed of Disney’s covert “Project Winter” long before the land purchases were officially publicized. In preparation for the announcement Burns formed the Florida Development Commission to coordinate with Disney along with several prominent Miami land companies and a group of brokers from Florida Ranchlands to assist in purchasing the forty three square mile tract that would become the Reedy Creek Improvement District.

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6 Foglesong, 70-73.
9 Kevin Archer and Kris Bezdecny, “Searching for a New Brand: Reimagining a More Diverse Orlando.” Southeastern Geographer 49 no. 2 (Summer, 2009), 190.
Governor Burns believed Disney’s presence in Orlando would not only be boon for tourism to the state, but also help to revitalize Florida’s long dormant entertainment industry.\textsuperscript{10}

In an interview with the \textit{Orlando Sentinel}, Howard Colee, the Executive Vice President of the Florida Chamber of Commerce, explains “why 1917 remained the film industry’s death year in Florida.” He then discusses an overview of \textit{Florida Brief on the Motion Picture Industry}, a pamphlet issued in 1935 during the David Sholtz administration. “Our study of the state then was detailed. Our reasoning was sound. But we weren’t as knowledgeable about the inner workings of the movie industry then as we are today.” In comparing the state of Florida’s film industry in the 1930s to the 1960s, Colee offered a confident assertion that through learning the lessons of history, the Burns administration was on the precipice of developing a “more sophisticated approach that may regain a share of this glamorous industry.”\textsuperscript{11} In collaboration with Colee, Burns formed the Florida Development Commission and appointed Charles W. Campbell as director. Campbell was charged with the task of publishing and distributing an attractive booklet to producers in California and New York to detail the benefits Florida offer for their productions.

The booklet referenced in the Colee interview, suggested to the Sholtz administration how motion picture companies located in Florida could profit directly from the state’s tourist industry. Campbell’s call for facilitating a collaboration between the state’s tourism and entertainment industries would set the tone for film and television production in Florida for the next half century. By the time that the Florida Development Commission initiated its campaign to draw out-of-state producers to Florida, a small but thriving regional production industry had already emerged in South Florida. In early 1965, brothers David and Raymond Brady completed construction on Studio City in North Miami. The $3.5 million, fifty-five acre facility was the


\textsuperscript{11} “Florida Tries Again to Regain Lost Movie Industry,” \textit{OS}, September 7, 1965, 1B.
largest motion picture complex on the East Coast and one of the largest outside of California.\textsuperscript{12} Just down the road from Studio City, plans for the expansion of the small one-soundstage Thunderbird Studio were announced by a charismatic producer Ivan Tors, who in the early 1960s “rivaled Walt Disney when it came to reaching children with fantastic and far-fetched stories.”\textsuperscript{13} Tors renamed the facility Ivan Tors Studio and built two additional soundstages that employed a 150 person staff with an estimated annual payroll of $3 million. The success of *Flipper* (1963) and the popularity of the NBC television program based on the film (1964-1967) positioned North Miami as one of the most important centers for children’s programming in the United States. Tors sought to extend his success through a line of animal films aimed at family audiences with films and television programs such as *Zebra in the Kitchen* (1965), *Gentle Giant* (1967), and *Gentle Ben* (1967-1969). Following suggestions made by the Florida Development Commission, Tors outlined his plans to build a tourist attraction on land adjacent to his studios.

The competing visions of the Walt Disney Company in Orlando and Ivan Tors Studios in Miami during the 1960s triggered a fascinating competitive rivalry between the two cities for control over Florida’s tourism and entertainment industries. However, in spite of the efforts by Governors Haydon Burns and Claude Kirk in the 1960s, producers and directors interested in filming in Florida continued to face a barrage of bureaucratic roadblocks. Florida in the early 1970s essentially faced the same crossroads decision that it had answered in the negative more than fifty years earlier – it had to decide whether it was going to become a professional major picture center or again spurn the glitter and glamor of a billion-dollar industry.\textsuperscript{14} By the 1970s, the opportunity to reinvigorate Florida’s film industry perfectly aligned with a moment in film history where


\textsuperscript{14}Richard Alan Nelson, “Florida: The Forgotten Film Capital,” *Journal of the University Film Association* 29 no. 3 (Summer, 1977), 20-21.
technological changes related to the advent of television and independent film production methods made filmmaking more mobile.  

After several lost opportunities in the early 1970s and to counteract the State of Georgia’s efforts to siphon prospective Florida productions, Governor Reubin Askew approved funding for the Florida Motion Picture and Television Bureau (FMPTB), the forerunner of the Florida Film Commission (FFC) in 1974. Overseen by Ben Harris, the FMPTB helped to streamline producers’ efforts to acquire permits, coordinate the use of state facilities, to better develop liaisons and healthy relations between film studios and administrative agencies in Tallahassee, as well as county and city governments. A new era for Florida film came in 1979 when recently elected Governor Bob Graham announced his intentions to put a top priority on the promotion and development of the motion picture industry in the state. Under the Askew and Graham administrations, Florida became the third largest film production center in the United States. This prestige was further bolstered by the nearly $43 million in feature films and $40 million in sponsored film and TV commercial productions shot in Florida. In all between 1975 and 1990, film and television productions contributed an additional $1.25 billion in the state economy. The subsequent passage of legislation in 1984 exempted the purchase, rental or lease of television, motion picture or recording equipment used for production in Florida from the state’s five percent sales tax proved a major incentive toward attracting runaway productions to Florida. By the end of the decade, Florida was positioned as the third largest film industry outside of California and New York. The state’s newfound success led to film critic James Ponti in 1992 to give Florida a new eponym, “Some industry insiders called ‘bi-coastal’ when they commuted

16 Beth Barber, “Harris Puts State Back in the Movies,” Tallahassee Democrat, January 25, 1976, 4E.
between New York and California, have become ‘tri-coastal’ as they’ve added Florida to their loop. In fact, Florida has become so confident in its role in the film industry that a new nickname has emerged: Hollywood East.”

While South Florida remained active in the film and television industry until the end of the 1960s, a slowdown in the national and regional economy during the 1970s led to a deterioration of the tourist and entertainment industries in the Greater Miami area. During the 1960s and 1970s Miami transformed from “America’s Riviera” to “God’s Waiting Room.”

Then in 1980 the triptych trauma of the escalation of the drug wars, Liberty City race riots, and Mariel Boatlift forever transformed Miami’s identity as a seasonal resort town and retirement community into a “Paradise Lost” on the brink of imminent social collapse. The disparities within Miami life in the midst of this chaotic period of the city’s history were further showcased on the front cover of a January 1982 edition of Harper’s, which described the city as “America’s Casablanca.”

This in turn led to the creation of popular television programs such as Miami Vice (1984-1989), which has been widely credited as revitalizing the region’s fledgling tourism industry and transforming Miami’s South Beach into “the hippest hangout on Earth.”

In the years following Miami Vice, film and television productions in South Florida continue to grapple with narratives that address this amalgamation of themes.

In contrast, Orlando’s affiliation with Disney caused the city to transform overnight into

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19 Barron M. Stofik, Saving South Beach (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), xii.
21 Stofik, xiv.
“a bourgeoning metropolis and a certifiable mecca for tourists.”

Orlando’s association as “a wholesome family vacationland” had far reaching implications for how the film and television industry sought to portray Central Florida.

According to T.D. Allman, “By creating Disney World, Disney conferred California’s compelling allure on Florida; he made it the other great locus of the middle-American imagination in the Television Age.”

Ironically, the efforts made by Orlando boosters to change its image relied on the completion of Disney-MGM Studios and Universal Studios amusement parks in 1989 and 1990, respectively. The accompanying soundstages that were built with the studios made Orlando seemingly overnight into one of the most important hubs for film and television production in the United States. The soundstages built at Disney-MGM and Universal can be in a sense considered fulfillment of the vision Charles Campbell and Ivan Tors’ laid out to integrate popular amusements with motion picture productions at the same facilities.

This chapter will demonstrate how over the course of four decades two very distinctive production industries emerged in Miami and Orlando, as it sets out to trace the emergence of Florida’s position as a major center for film and television production between the 1960s and the early 2000s. Although the incentive programs and initiatives used to draw motion picture productions to Florida resulted in a state-wide buildup of the film and television industry, during this period Miami and Orlando emerged as major production centers in their own right.

The rise of Florida’s regional production industry in the second half of the twentieth century presents a fascinating case of contrasts between the two cities and their efforts to develop as major film production centers. Miami and Orlando are described by Florida historian Gary Mormino as “perfect opposites,” where Miami “functions as Florida's gateway city,”

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“cannot escape Walt Disney’s shadow.” These dynamics had a significant influence on the visual style of how each city was depicted on the screen. To better understand these contrasts, a close analysis of popular newspaper publications combined with retrospective reflections by community leaders and filmmakers based in both cities will be needed. The goal of this study is to explore how the motion picture industry interacted with both communities and differences in the type of films and television programs produced in Miami and Orlando during this period. Each regional study will rotate back and forth between Miami and Orlando with a progressive narrative that weaves together the histories of both communities and where it overlaps with efforts made to establish motion picture production each city as a major motion picture production center. The purpose of such an approach is to demonstrate both the contrasts in how each community responded to various milestones in Florida’s film history between the 1960s and early 2000s. Such a comparison can offer valuable insights into how local politics, economics, and culture influence how a regional entertainment industry develops. Over the next five decades both cities would be sometimes at odds with each other, other times complimentary.

The Magic City of the South

The relationship between Miami and the motion picture industry is almost as old as filmmaking in Florida. The crux of this relationship relied on Miami’s reliance on its winter tourism industry. Miami’s dependency on tourism during the 1910s was more essential to the regional economy than in Los Angeles. This early emphasis on Miami as a resort and by proxy a potential motion picture production rival to California was based primarily on the city’s geographic position five hundred miles south of Los Angeles’ latitude, and its ability to offer a

milder climate and longer hours of sunlight during the winter.\textsuperscript{28} As late as 1896, Miami was still a small fishing village. That year, however, Henry Flagler connected Miami to the wider world with the completion of the Florida East Coast Railroad. The opening of the railroad made Miami accessible to the rest of the country. The construction work needed helped to bring in a large influx of workers and attracted a service sector to meet the needs of the construction crews.\textsuperscript{29} The newly incorporated former fishing village became an “instant city, a winter resort for rich, a depot for agricultural goods, and a home for railroad workers.”\textsuperscript{30} Historian William Cash explains that the land development policies that started with the Broward administration “helped to promote the growth of the southern end of the State as much as Flagler’s railroad.”\textsuperscript{31} In 1906, Governor Napoleon Broward commissioned a series of dredges to clear the Everglades. This policy triggered a frenzy in land speculation surrounding the Greater Miami region.\textsuperscript{32}

The extension of the rail system to Key West in 1912, opened the whole of South Florida to widespread development. The combination of rail construction, land speculation, and the explosion of winter resort communities contributed to Miami’s emerging reputation as “The Magic City.”\textsuperscript{33} Unlike Jacksonville and to a lesser extent Tampa, the identity and imagery associated with Miami remained separate from the rest of Florida and the South as a whole. By the 1920s, even the design of gasoline filling stations were transformed. The Bayshore station at the Miami end of the causeway between Miami Beach was described by visitors as “so unusual

\textsuperscript{28} Nathan Mayo, \textit{Florida, an Advancing State, 1907-1917-1927: An Industrial Survey} (Tallahassee, FL: Florida Department of Agriculture 1928), 174.
\textsuperscript{29} Frank, B. Sessa, “Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and Its Environs During the 1920s,” PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1950, 4-10. Dade County was created in 1836. Later 24 counties would be divided from the original Dade County. By 1920 the Dade County population had reached 42,753 as opposed to 11,933 in 1910. Miami’s population in 1900: 1,681; 1910: 5,471; 1920: 29,571.
\textsuperscript{30} Bush, 153.
\textsuperscript{33} Bush, 162-163.
and picturesque that if it had been intended for a private residence or a bungalow tea-room there would not have been so much to wonder at.”

In 1910 the Lubin Manufacturing Company made a pit stop to film sequences in Miami during its southward journey to the Bahamas in *A Honeymoon Through Snow to Sunshine* (1910), with the film’s closing sequence including scenes shot in Palm Beach and Miami. The city made such an impression that Lubin director Arthur Hotaling announced plans to establish a production studio in Miami. In the end Lubin decided to establish a base of operations in Jacksonville instead. The additional 350 miles by rail was likely the deciding factor. In 1914, Charles Field, President of the Prismatic Film Company decided to relocate his operation from New York to Miami. With $65,000 that was in part contributed by the Miami Board of Trade, Field produced a two-reel booster film called *The Magic City of the South* (1914). The completed film premiered on December 6, 1914 at Miami’s two operating movie houses the Fotoshow and Airdrome to sold out audiences. Prints of the film were then distributed by the Board of Trade to help promote tourism.

Suggestions were made by several Board members to enlarge the scope of the film to a melodramatic feature that could “increase the potential audience for the film” by adding a sequence “showing a Seminole Indian burning a white man, or something similar to arouse interest.” After local women’s groups in the city protested that such creative liberties would “give a wrong impression of life in and around Miami,” the plan was scrapped. This occurrence would not be the last time that local interest groups had a decisive influence on the content of films produced in Miami. Similar to many of the piker promoters active in Jacksonville and Tampa at the same time, Charles Field had the reputation as “part producer, part

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34 Sessa, 39.  
35 Richard Alan Nelson, “Palm Trees, Public Relations, and Promoters: Boosting Southeast Florida a Motion Picture Empire, 1910-1930,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61 no. 4 (April, 1983), 383-388. This article gives a far more comprehensive overview of filmmaking practices in South Florida during the silent era than the summary above.  
36 Ibid, 387-388.
con man.” According Richard Alan, Field’s tumultuous relationship with the community “failed to rise above the headlines and advertising he generated in local newspapers.” The example outlined by Charles Field’s failed promotions combined with the overzealousness of the Miami Board of Trade and Chamber of Commerce is a pattern that recurred throughout the history of film production in Florida.

The first serious attempt to establish Miami as a film production center came in March 1922 when civic leader E.G. Sewell and several prominent local businessmen sought to build a “Second Universal City in Florida.” The result of the joint venture was the completion of Miami Studios on a $300,000 140-acre facility equipped with film sets under lighted cover, a processing laboratory, and stages that could host four film companies simultaneously. Although by no means on the same level of output as production facilities in California or New York, Miami Studios produced an impressive fourteen major productions in 1922 and twenty-one in 1923. One of the most noteworthy productions to come out of South Florida during this period was D.W. Griffith’s *The White Rose* (1923). Griffith previously came to South Florida in 1919 to film *The Idol Dancer* (1920) in Fort Lauderdale, but the production was marred by tragedy and disaster. While scouting locations Griffith and his company were shipwrecked for several days on a desert island while en route to the Bahamas to scout locations for the film. Perhaps more ominously, the film’s lead actress Clarine Seymour suffered a severe fall during production and although Seymour was able to complete filming, she died several months later from complications of ‘intestinal strangulation’ at the age of twenty-one. After these setbacks, Griffith announced he did not think the city provided the backdrop he needed and moved the production.

38 Ibid, 349.
39 Sessa, 62.
to New Providence Island in the Bahamas. Griffith did return to South Florida in 1923 and expressed that he saw enormous potential the region’s landscape. He broke from his conventional aesthetic of close-ups and cropped in sequences in favor of long shots and wide frame views that showcased the location. Despite Griffith’s initial enthusiasm for the visual potential the environment surrounding Miami Studios could provide for his production, when he returned to New York to edit the footage he publicly announced he was dissatisfied with the results. Apparently the bright South Florida sun ended up over exposing much of the sequences to such an extent that it did not capture the vibrant color pallet which initially had caught Griffith’s eye. It would be decades before advances in lens technology combined with the advent of color film before a camera could truly replicate the hues and contrasts of South Florida’s landscape.

Technical and logistical difficulties were among just a few of the problems facing the productions at Miami Studios. Tense relations between visiting filmmakers and the perceived inefficiency and unprofessionalism of untrained local technicians based in South Florida, brought about a public relations disaster that led to the studio’s closure. The crisis escalated following the completion of Outlaws of the Sea (1923), when the film’s photoplay author Ernest Lebrel complained to the Miami Herald, “Those of us who had any extensive experience in this intricate and high art, were either utterly unacquainted with each other or made subordinate to the most helpless incompetents.” Lebrel’s statement was then circulated in several major trade presses. Following the industry-wide negative publicity attached to the production of Outlaws of the Sea, previous bids by companies to film their production in Miami were withdrawn. Studio manager John Brunton resigned under pressure and by the end of 1923 Miami Studios went dark.

Although E.G. Sewell and Miami Mayor B.L. Smith were successful in attracting another
production company into the facilities and drummed up a public relations campaign pitching
“Miami as a Second Hollywood,” the facilities were again left unused by 1925. By the early
1930s, the studio was “ballyhooed” for some community events, but “stood as an empty
reminder of a faded dream.” One exception came in the late 1930s, after a bitter animator strike
led brothers Max and David Fleischer of Betty Boop and Popeye fame, to relocate to South
Florida to take advantage of the tax incentive bill passed during David Sholtz’s administration.
The Fleischer brothers constructed a state-of-the-art animation studio in Miami and during their
brief stint produced two of the first full-length animated films based on an original story,
Gulliver’s Travels (1939) and Mr. Bug Goes to Town (1941). However, a series of disagreements
with their distributor at Paramount led to a buyout in December 1941. The property was taken
over and renamed Famous Studios. The facility continued to operate briefly under Paramount’s
ownership, but the studio soon sold the property and permanently relocated back to New York.44

The collapse of the Florida land boom in 1926, combined with the destruction that came
with the “Great Miami Hurricane” that Labor Day, followed by the 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane,
collectively left the region physically, financially, and psychologically devastated. Despite the
quick succession of events, Miami surprisingly did not become a ghost town since its boom time
development possessed enough solid achievements to keep the city alive.45 The region’s
dependency on tourism and position as a seasonal resort town kept the regional economy afloat.
In the years following World War II, federal programs for highway expansion were matched by
state and city efforts to draw in tourists. The advent of tin-can tourism and the proliferation of
roadside attractions allowed Florida to shed its image as exclusively a “playground of the

44 Nelson, Florida and the American Motion Picture Industry, 466-467. Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs
(1937) is widely considered the first full length cel animated feature film, however it is based on a Brother’s Grimm
fairy tale from 1854.
45 Sessa, 357.
wealthy.” The expansion in accessibility to the state through the expansion of the highway system allowed for an entirely new type of Florida tourist.\textsuperscript{46} By the 1950s, the small Art Deco hotels in South Beach were no longer acceptable to the expanding middle class, and vast new hotels in Middle Beach, many on the locations of the old vacation mansions built by industrial magnates in the 1920s, became the destination of choice for the rapidly expanding tourist sector. The largest and most famous of the new hotels was the Fontainebleau, designed by the prominent local architect Morris Lapidus and built in 1954. The hotel was built to fit the city’s tropical aesthetic in the new modernist styles of architecture, particularly a local variation that would later become known as “Miami Modernism” or “MiMo.”\textsuperscript{47} The development of new luxury hotels combined with the advent of air travel helped Miami to further repackage its reputation as an inclusive tourist haven. In a 1950 Gallup poll of where Americans wanted to visit most, Miami finished third behind California and Hawaii, but ahead of Europe.\textsuperscript{48} It did not take long before the city’s increased visibility combined with the broadening demographic of Florida’s vacationers captured the attention of filmmakers.

Miami’s emergence in the 1950s as America’s preeminent vacation destination coincided with the collapse of Hollywood Studio system and the reemergence of the independent producer. The Supreme Court’s 1948 decision to break up the vertical integration of the film industry, combined with the advent of television, pushed Hollywood film production to new locales.\textsuperscript{49} Ongoing labor unrest in Hollywood that came on the heels of the 1945 Black Friday Strike and the lockout of 1946, led to an increase in “creative runaway” projects that were dependent on

local labor. Among some of the notable creative runaways that came to Florida during this period was MGM’s adaptation of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’ *The Yearling* (1946) and *Key Largo* (1948). However at the time the institutional and environmental challenges associated with location filmmaking in Florida continued to obstruct the long anticipated exodus of production studios from California. This started to change with the development of new more mobile technologies and available light film stocks, which accompanied advances in recording methods. The late 1950s and early 1960s witnessed a succession of “blink and you missed them” television programs filmed in Miami. Gary Mormino argues, “What made 1950s Miami and Miami Beach so alluring was not the resplendent Biscayne Bay or tropical foliage but the arresting combination of sun, sand, and sea; of sex, sport, and sin.” Such an attractive and narratively engaging backdrop placed Miami’s extraordinary range of cultural tastes and reputation as a sought after tourist destination at the forefront of American popular culture in the decades after the Second World War.

Miami’s newfound position as a cultural icon resonated in a range of contemporary depictions of its famed millionaire’s row. Films such as *The Moon Over Miami* (1941) set out to illustrate the resort town’s reputation as an escape for wealthy tycoons and magnates. Over a decade later this formula started to grow stale as productions such as Frank Capra’s *A Hole in the Head* (1959) and Jerry Lewis’ *The Bellboy* (1960) were accused of portraying “the pathetic shallowness of spectacle and personal ambition surrounding Miami Beach's hotel scene.” In

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51 For more information on the behind-the-scenes drama that took place during production of *The Yearling*, see: William Stephenson, “Fawn Bites Lion Or, How MGM Tried to Film *The Yearling* in Florida,” in *The South and Film*, ed. Warren French (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1981), 229-239. Most of *Key Largo* was filmed in Los Angeles, though several exteriors were filmed on location under great peril.


54 Bush, 169.
terms of production an entirely different dynamic formed between the two films. The differences
between the strained relations between A Hole in the Head star Frank Sinatra and the free
spending professionalism of Jerry Lewis during the making of The Bellboy is indicative of the
challenges faced by filmmakers and performers to ingratiate themselves the local community.
Frank Sinatra’s troubled relations with the local Miami press led to a series of rumors circulating
around his behavior which resulted in the production’s early departure from Miami. Herb Rau,
the amusement editor for The Miami News, described Sinatra’s behavior as “a brief but frantic
fortnight” that resulted in two separate lawsuits. The first was by the Flagler Dog Track for
failing to keep a personal appearance and a second from the Carlyle Hotel in Miami for the
nuisance caused by filming at the neighboring Cardozo. Sinatra was also directly implicated in a
series of run-ins with locals across the city where he “left his mark on Miami for good.”

In contrast Jerry Lewis arrived in Miami in the midst of a heated actors strike, which
escalated with series of negotiations between the Motion Picture Producers of America (MPPA)
and Ronald Reagan, the president of the Screen Actors Guild. Without a fixed plan for the
project, Lewis called Paramount and requested eight truckloads of equipment to be sent to Miami
Beach so that production would not be interrupted in case the strike dragged on. He based
operations at the Fontainebleau Hotel and with a little more than a treatment managed to
complete the film in twenty-nine days before the actor’s strike began. The Bellboy’s two million
dollars in expenditures contributed to the local economy during February 1960. The draw of the
film production combined with Lewis’ evening performances at the Fontainebleau nightclub
lined the pockets of hoteliers, business owners and politicians across the Greater Miami area.

55 Herb Rau, “Sinatra Left His Mark in Miami,” The Miami News, November 23, 1958, 12A.
56 Ponti, 19; Ily Goyanes, “Celluloid City: Jerry Lewis is The Bellboy at the Fontainebleau Hotel,” Miami New
Times, August 26, 2010, https://www.miaminewtimes.com/arts/celluloid-city-jerry-lewis-is-the-bellboy-at-the-
fontainebleau-hotel-6491506; Wayne Federman, “What Reagan Did For Hollywood,” The Atlantic, November 14,
By the mid-1960s Miami Beach was regularly featured as a tourist haven and exotic locale. It was prominently featured in back to back James Bond films *Goldfinger* (1964) and *Thunderball* (1965), and the region soon reached international recognition as a thriving hub for television and film. Another major boon for Miami came in 1964 when comedian Jackie Gleason relocated *The Jackie Gleason Show* (1952-1970) from New York to broadcast from Miami Beach Auditorium.57 To further accommodate Gleason, who for the rest of his life rarely left Miami, CBS built a state-of-the-art television studio next to his favorite golf course.58 Filmmaker and underwater stunt performer Ricou Browning recalled that impact of Gleason’s presence “did more to popularize South Florida than a boatload of press agents working overtime could have managed.”59 With the completion of Miami Studios, Ivan Tors Studios, and the presence of CBS in South Florida, Miami was able to offer everything a production company needed without shipping in entire crews from Los Angeles and New York. Unlike the difficulties the city faced in providing trained personnel during the 1910s and 1920s, by the mid-1960s, there were enough set builders, art directors, soundmen, camera crews, and equipment in Miami to stock two feature film productions at a time. The industry-wide implications of productions hemorrhaging to Florida were felt across the national film and television industry. In 1966 New York Mayor John Lindsay issued the *Lindsay Plan*, a massive overhaul in New York’s stilted permit policies, which was closely modeled on the far more liberal policies implemented by Miami’s Chamber of Commerce.60 According to historian Gregory Bush, just as South Florida started to emerge as a preeminent production center, the region also struggled to reconcile its association “with humorous drunks and chorus girls,” the perception of the resort community came across as “more and more formulaic and passé to a younger generation.”61

57 Stofik, 107.  
58 Nelson, *Lights! Camera! Florida!*  
59 Gonzalez, 40.  
61 Bush, 169.
It was up to the enterprising efforts of Ivan Tors and Ricou Browning to introduce Florida to a younger generation and bring the Florida to primetime television. According to William Grefe, the former president of Film Artists International in North Miami, “In 1965 there was an irreversible turn for the better in Florida’s film fortunes: Ivan Tors bought the old Thunderbird Studios in North Miami and made the first *Flipper* feature. The studio was improved into the best facility outside the West Coast.”62 This turn in fortune was due to the close collaboration and working relationship between Ivan Tors and Ricou Browning. Tors was born in Budapest, Hungary, and came to the United States just months before the outbreak of World War II. Legend has it that Tors’ interest in the entertainment industry came as a result of his time as a spy for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) – the forerunner of the CIA. After he was sidelined due to an injury sustained in the field, Tors was reassigned to a squadron in the Air Force Technical Training Command that also included famed big band composer Glenn Miller. Through his friendship with Miller, Tors was able to establish the contacts he needed later on to receive a contract from MGM as a screenwriter when the war ended. 63 After working on a series of obscure low-budget projects and as a script doctor for several programs for CBS, Tors pitched to Fredrick Ziv – president of Ziv Television Productions – an idea for a program loosely based on his time in the OSS and the Airforce. The result was *Sea Hunt* (1958-1961), which starred Lloyd Bridges as a retired Navy Frogman who travels on his boat the *Argonaut* and has a series of episodic adventures running salvage and rescue missions. The program was a massive success for Ziv, and as one of the most watched syndicated programs in television history, it helped keep networks.64 The show was primarily filmed around Marineland of the Pacific in Los Angeles.

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62 Samuel Gill, foreword to *Lights! Camera! Florida!*, 5.
63 Gonzalez, 35.
but several underwater sequences and location sequences were shot at Silver and Tarpon Springs and Cypress Gardens in Florida. These location scenes were what first brought Tors to Florida. It was during one of these shoots that underwater stunt performer Ricou Browning first met Tors while working as a public relations director at Silver Springs. According to Browning, “Ivan saw me swimming and said, ‘Hey how’d you like to swim for me?”’ As a former member of the Air Force swim team, he started his career by performing underwater tricks for newsreels during World War II and upon his return to Florida, worked as a location scout for production companies that came to Florida. When director Jack Arnold came to Wakulla Springs to in search of outdoor locations for his Universal monster film, *Creature From the Black Lagoon* (1954), Browning was hired for $600 a week to play the monster during the underwater sequences. Browning later returned to the role two more times in *Revenge of the Creature* (1955) and *The Creature Walks Among Us* (1956).66

After *Sea Hunt* wrapped production in 1961, Tors expressed interest in developing another program that utilized Browning’s special approach to underwater filmmaking. He served as the executive producer for short lived series *The Everglades* (1961-1962), which became one of the first television productions to film almost entirely on location in South Florida.67 During his time overseeing production on *The Everglades*, Tors met up again with Ricou Browning, and the two men formed a joint venture called Underwater Productions and based their operation out of Nassau in The Bahamas. Browning suggested to Tors an idea that he had for a book, which he described as “*Lassie* on the water,” but instead with a boy and a dolphin. Tors was intrigued and helped to raise $500,000 from MGM to produce a feature film based from Browning’s story.

65 Gonzalez, 35.
vol-41-no-12/.
The result was *Flipper* (1963), which proved to be an enormous box office success grossing roughly $8 million in ticket receipts. Tors next made a deal for a sequel and a half-hour prime time show *Flipper* (1964-1967). To follow-up on this success they shot their second feature film *Flippers New Adventure* and pilot for the television series – a model the studio would follow with several more of their animal productions. To meet the demands of the accelerated production pace that came with the show’s thirty episodes per season order, Tors decided to have the ocean scenes filmed in The Bahamas while the Miami Seaquarium would double as the home for the Flipper dolphins and as the location set for on-land scenes. At the 1966 Academy Awards, Underwater Productions achieved even greater prestige when it received the Best Visual Effects Award for the underwater sequences Ricou Browning shot for *Thunderball* (1965). Tors’ subsequent purchase of the Thunderbird Studios property and the opening of Ivan Tors Studios combined with the opening of Studio City in North Miami in 1965, helped produce millions of dollars to the Dade County economy and introduced a new generation to the wonder and possibilities of Florida’s widely diverse environment and landscape.

To accommodate the increased attention, in April 1966 producers in Dade County, including Howard B. Chapman the president of Ivan Tors Studios, petitioned Miami’s Metropolitan Board of County Commissioners for relief from the regulations that governed the installation of electrical apparatuses. The Board responded enthusiastically and on May 17, 1966, an amendment to Section 10-32 of the Metropolitan Building Code was passed, which provided exemptions for motion picture and television producers. The political clout of filmmakers during this period now extended from South Florida all the way to Tallahassee. That same year Governor Haydon Burns and the Florida Legislature passed Florida Statue 212.08, which specifically exempted films produced for television consumption from the 4 percent sales and use tax. To help facilitate the collaboration between the state government and motion picture

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68 Ibid, 35-38.
industry, the Florida legislature chartered the creation of the Florida Motion Picture and Television Producers Association (FMPTPA) to assist in carrying out the Florida Chamber of Commerce’s revised mission to “help unite Floridians in cooperative efforts toward the state’s development.” Winter Park-based director and producer R. John Hugh was elected as the first president of the FMPTPA and Ricou Browning became the vice president. In the organization’s first brochure Hugh expressed that the purpose of the group would be to “maintain an active program of research and development in all phases of technical production, marketing and distribution of film and video tape productions. To further encourage the use of Florida facilities by out-of-state producers, a constant program of promotion is going to be directed toward the areas of greatest potential.” In following this directive, Hugh felt certain that it could be possible to ensure that “Florida would become the movie capital of the world.”

For much of the latter half of the 1960s, the motion picture and television industry in South Florida boomed with an incredible array of production opportunities. Dade County had rapidly asserted itself as the most important center for the production of motion pictures and television programming in Florida with a 60-70 percent stake of the state’s overall production industry based in South Florida. However Dade County’s share of the national market for film products remained a paltry 2 percent. Despite this unimpressive percentage, the motion picture companies that were already located in Dade County set their sights set on expansion. In an effort to capitalize on the popularity of *Flipper*, Ivan Tors and Lloyd Bridges teamed up once again to film *Around the World Under the Sea* (1966) at the Miami Seaquarium, while Browning directed the underwater sequences. Tors sought to develop a series of animal-themed adventure features and television programs including *Rhino* (1964), *Zebra in the Kitchen* (1965), *Clarence*

69 Kimball, 42, 45-46, 55.
70 Ibid, 56.
the Cross-eyed Lion (1965), and Daktari (1966-1969). As the 1967-1968 television season approached, Tors decided not to continue with a fourth season for Flipper, and the last episode of the series concluded on in April 15, 1967.\textsuperscript{73} He instead decided to develop a new animal adventure program that closely followed the Flipper formula.

The outcome was a new combination feature film-television program based off of the book Gentle Ben by Walt Morey. The novel told the story of a friendship between a boy and a brown bear in the Alaska wilderness, however Tors adjusted the setting to the Florida Everglades and changed the character of Ben to an American black bear to take advantage of his studio facilities.\textsuperscript{74} The feature film Gentle Giant (1967) and the television series Gentle Ben (1967-1969) were shot on location at Ivan Tors Studios, with outdoor sequences completed at Homosassa Springs and Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. Many of the plots of the show focused on themes related to the leading actor Dennis Weaver’s work as a wildlife officer in the Everglades Preserve. The topics of the episodes ranged from animal management, lost children, disasters such as hurricanes or fires, and poaching or other illegal activities that took place in the region. Gentle Ben finished number two in the Nielson ratings for the 1967-68 television season, while a line of creatively promoted tie-in merchandise brought in additional revenue.

In order to capitalize on the show’s popularity CBS moved Gentle Ben to the same timeslot as Walt Disney’s Wonderful World of Color on NBC for the 1968-1969 season. Even without Disney’s charismatic presence as host, the show drew from the same young adult demographic that Tors’ Gentle Ben sought and as a result, the show was not renewed for a

\textsuperscript{74} Bob Foster, “Screenings,” San Mateo County Times, May 5, 1966, 32; Kenneth White Munden, ed., American Film Institute Catalog: Feature Films 1961-1970 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 392. The feature Gentle Giant (1967) was initially scheduled for release before the show was set to air, but the film’s release date was changed by Paramount’s executives be closer to Thanksgiving 1967, two months after the companion show Gentle Ben (1967-1969) premiered on CBS. Instead Gentle Giant instead served as additional promotion for the Gentle Ben series.
third season. In a direct toss-up between Ivan Tors and Walt Disney, family audiences decisively chose Disney. Although the popular media of the 1960s regularly attempted to position Ivan Tors as the inheritor of Disney’s legacy, Tors never wished for such a direct comparison with the Disney brand. When asked in an interview following the conclusion of Gentle Ben, Tors remarked, “I don’t want to be the second Walt Disney. I want to be the first Ivan Tors.” After the simultaneous cancellation of Gentle Ben and his California-produced Daktari, Tors returned to feature films with Treasure Isle (1969). The film proved to be an enormous box office and critical flop. These successive setbacks combined with the death of his wife Constance in October 1969, caused Tors to take a hiatus from producing. He returned two years later with the undersea adventure series Primus (1971-1972), but it was cancelled after one season and left North Miami once and for all soon after. Although he remained active in the industry until his death in 1983, Tors never seemed to capture the same lightning in a bottle that he had with his underwater and animal adventure programs of the late 1950s and 1960s.

As production on Gentle Ben wound down and as his personal life deteriorated, Tors started to lease his studio space for other productions. Ricou Browning took over for Howard Chapman as president of Ivan Tors Studios to help oversee the new leases and also coordinate with the Dade County and Florida state government to develop new ways to attract major feature film and television productions to the state. On November 13-14, 1968 the Florida Council of 100 sponsored a conference that would address ways to further stimulate film and television activity in Miami. In attendance were individuals active in motion picture and television production, representatives of labor and talent, sets and facilities, sound services, laboratory services, government agencies, and the news media, and all phases of finance including banking.

76 Gonzalez, 42.
77 Gonzalez, 42-44.
small business investment companies, corporate underwriting, factoring, and risk capital. The
main outcome of the gathering was the call for the formation of a Florida Film Council. At a
January 10, 1969 meeting of the FMPTPA and Florida Council of 100, Browning outlined a plan
for a state-wide motion picture advisory group that was reminiscent of Trenton Collins’ vision
for the Commission for the Development of the Motion Picture.

In an unpublished manuscript from March 1969, which documented the proceedings of the
meeting, Browning details his plan for all sixty-seven of Florida’s counties to form their own
film council and unite under the banner of the Florida Film Council. Each county council would
then individually select the personal best qualified to understand the possibility – to learn what
movies and television can do for them – and what they can do to promote and to welcome the
industry. Each office in the council would deal with their own local problems and promotion for
the industry, but only working toward goals which they mutually agree upon to be effective in
building an industry for the county and the state and dealing with the county and city
governments to further their industry. 78 Although Browning’s ambitious proposal for a state-
wide film organization did not immediately take hold, it would later lay the groundwork for
organizations such as the FMPTPA, the Florida Motion Picture and Television Bureau (FMPTB),
and Film Florida. In the meantime, the state government’s interests appeared to have shifted
almost exclusively toward the tourism sector. Frustrated by the uptick in red tape raised by local
politicians, Ricou Browning stepped down as president of Ivan Tors Studios. That year Detroit
Red Wings owner Bruce Norris purchased the properties. William Grefe took over as president
and eventually came to hold the mortgage on the property after which the studio became
secondary to Norris’ other business concerns. In 1980, Martin Marguiles bought the studio from
Bruce Norris’ company. Under Marguiles the property, which comprised of the studio and a

78 Kimball, 57-58.
condominium community, came to be called Greenwich Studio City.\textsuperscript{79}

Meanwhile several hundred miles to the north in Orlando, the opening of Disney World in October 1971 heralded as “a seminal event in the history formed American tourism and turned Orlando into one of America's most intriguing cities of the late twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{80} This drew the state’s attention away from its burgeoning motion picture industry and instead reentered political attention on the tourist sector. In the process the Florida Legislature and Governor’s office effectively granted a wholly private political structure to be controlled by one corporation and allowed it to exercise unaccountable authority over a significant amount of Central Florida and ten times more powerful than any other local government in the whole of Florida.\textsuperscript{81}

The Action Center of Florida

On November 22, 1963, as the nation collectively ground to halt with the sudden announcement of the attempt on the life of President John F. Kennedy, Walt Disney and an entourage of his top executives were unknowingly untethered to the tragic news. Instead they were thousands of feet above a seemingly endless expanse of citrus orchards, cow pastures, and swampland in Central Florida. The night before they had checked into a Tampa hotel under assumed names in order to avoid drawing unwanted attention from the press. “Project X,” as it was known at this stage, was a nation-wide search Disney initiated to find the site to build a second theme park 150 times larger than Disneyland in Anaheim. His intention was to essentially reinvent popular attractions and the American vacation by creating a “total destination resort,” that would have “enough hotels, restaurants and amenities to serve the many tourists traveling down from the Northeast or across the Gulf states to visit.”\textsuperscript{82} An essential component of his proposed East Coast Shangri-La were linkages to a good highway system and a temperate climate

\textsuperscript{79} Gonzalez, 42-44.
\textsuperscript{80} Mormino, “Sunbelt Dreams and Altered States,” 13.
\textsuperscript{81} Archer, 325-6.
\textsuperscript{82} Foglesong, \textit{Married to the Mouse}, 14-15.
to allow the park to remain open year round. On that auspicious day, he surveyed an expanse of land along near Ocala National Forest but felt discouraged by the area’s lack of a good road network. As Disney prepared to leave for Houston, the company Gulf Stream took a detour over Orlando where the Florida Turnpike intersected with the recently completed Interstate 4 Highway. “This is it!” He announced as he looked out the window to a tract of land just south of the City of Orlando. Below them was an intersection between two major roads which would eventually bring the seventeen million tourists who already vacationed in Florida each year to a tourist mecca unlike any that had been designed before or since.83

By the time Disney landed in Houston and learned of the news of President Kennedy’s death he had already made the fateful decision that would transform the destiny of Central Florida to such an extent that Gary Mormino divided Orlando’s history into two periods: “B.D.” (Before Disney) and “A.D.” (After Disney).84 There is an overall consensus among historians in regard to the totality of the transformative effects Disney’s presence had on Orlando in the twentieth century. Both Gary Mormino and Richard Foglesong focus on how the region before 1970s had more cows than people. Mormino described Disney-adjacent town of Kissimmee as “The Cow Capital of Florida” during the 1960s, while Foglesong places an emphasis on how the bovine population of Osceola prior to 1970 exceeded its human population by 40,000.85 Kevin Archer and Kris Bezdeceny take the notion of pre-Disney Orlando as a bucolic backwater to the extent that the city after 1970 “can be considered a thoroughly post-industrial metropolitan area arising, as it has, on a virtually featureless pre-industrial plain.”86 While there is little doubt that the arrival of Disney “was the single largest factor that accelerated the city’s economic

85 Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse*, 146.
86 Kevin Archer and Kris Bezdeceny, “Searching for a New Brand: Reimagining a More Diverse Orlando,” *Southeastern Geographer* 49 no. 2 (Summer, 2009), 185.
development beyond Florida’s own rapid pace,” the notion that pre-Disney Orlando languished in a pre- industrial stupor needs to be reevaluated. The opening of Disney World in 1971 did without question forever change the political, economic, and demographic composition of the Orlando Metro Area. However, Disney World’s opening simply amplified existing trends of industrial growth and development that taken place across Central Florida since the end of the Second World War. Before that time the regional economy was indeed tied closely to citrus, cattle, and its position as a regional crossroads. This dynamic was initially disrupted when three major military bases – Pinecastle, Orlando Air Base, and Sanford Naval Air Station – brought new settlement and infrastructure to the region. The slew of newly constructed regional highway system completed in the 1950s further help amplify Orlando’s emerging position as a burgeoning trade and transportation hub.

Historians have possibly been too reliant on the apocryphal story of Walt Disney’s fated flight above the Florida Turnpike and Interstate 4 as the starting point for Orlando’s modern history. While the secret land purchases made through Disney’s “Project Winter” in January 1964 is widely considered as the beginning of Orlando’s physical transformation, the region had already experienced a massive period of growth and development in a relatively short period of time. A topic that needs further study is the role road building played in Orlando’s expansion during the second half of the twentieth century. It is perhaps fitting then that the impetus to bring Disney to Orlando came from his regard for the proximity of the intersection between two major

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87 Bacon, 277. The Orlando area had an influx of new residents at nearly 8 percent annual rate in 1970 to 1974, compared with the state’s 5.4 percent average. This growth triggered a tremendous demand for tourist-related facilities such as all types of accommodations, services, and retail trade. The following statistics in terms of the demographic transition of Central Florida between 1950 and 1990 can be found in: Foglesong, Married to the Mouse, 5.

1950 – Orange County: 114,950; Orlando: 52,367; Four County Region:189,579
1960 – Orange County: 263,540; Orlando: 88,135; Four County Region:394,899
1970 – Orange County: 344,311; Orlando: 99,066; Four County Region:522,575
1980 – Orange County: 470,865; Orlando: 128,291; Four County Region: 804,774
1990 – Orange County: 846,328; Orlando: 184,639; Four County Region: 1,561,715

88 Kevin Archer, “Limits of the Imagineered City: Sociospatial Polarization in Orlando,” Economic Geography 73 no. 3 (July, 1997), 323.
The lobby efforts of newspaper publisher Martin Andersen proved to be one of the key catalysts for Orlando’s urban development during this period. Remembered as “the man who built Orlando,” Andersen was the owner of both the Orlando Sentinel and Orlando Evening Star from 1931 to 1967. During his time as Orlando’s newspaperman, Andersen seamlessly moved between promoting new construction through editorials to directly lobbying for major public works. He unabashedly supported local politicians who promised to build roads and provide other services that would encourage and sustain central Florida's development. In the mid-1950s Andersen personally intervened when he discovered the Florida State Road Board outline for state highways initially would bypass Orlando entirely. Andersen’s political clout in the gubernatorial ambitions of Charley Johns and LeRoy Collins had a substantial impact on the construction of several major road building projects across Central Florida. In 1953, the Florida Legislature approved funds for the completion of the Florida Turnpike. Two years later Andersen teamed with Orange County attorney and State Road Board member Billy sought to bend the turnpike inland toward Orlando. After endorsing Collins in a special run-off election against acting governor Charley Johns (with whom Andersen had previously negotiated a road building project with), Collins pushed the legislature to approve the inland route in June 1955.

As soon as the inland route for the Florida Turnpike was approved, the State Road Department outlined plans for Interstate 4 to run 154 miles across Florida from St. Petersburg on the west coast to Daytona Beach on the east. The significance of the project on bringing tourism to Central Florida was not lost at the time. After the announcement of Orlando’s “Pike Route” was made public, Mayor Rolfe Davis predicted that Orlando “will reach 250,000 in population in ten years.” Billy Dial, considered Orlando’s power broker during the 1950s and 1960s, called the interchange between the Florida Turnpike and Interstate 4 “one of the greatest things to help develop this county that has happened in recent years. With two interchanges adjacent to

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89 Thompson, 494.
90 Ibid, 499-504.
Orlando, it’ll be conducive to industry to settle in this area.”

With the announcement of the I-4 interchange in the mid-1950s, Orlando was situated to become a major economic player in Florida in the decades to come. In anticipation of the build-up of Cape Canaveral Space Center, The Martin Company built a plant in Orlando in 1957 and became a major contractor for the U.S. Army. The production of booster rockets to service the space program added thousands of jobs and provided a major boost to the local economy. The economic and demographic development of Central Florida had reached such an extent that by the 1960 U.S. Census, metropolitan Orlando led the nation in population growth, with a 65.9 percent increase in the region’s industrial development credited as the cause for much of the expansion. With these extending factors in mind, Bailey Thompson makes a strong case that “Orlando already was enjoying boom times before the new theme park arrived.”

It also should be acknowledged that Orlando had a long-standing relationship with Florida’s motion picture and entertainment industry long before the arrival of Disney. As early as 1922, plans were made by the Authors Production Company to build a $250,000 studio facility near downtown Orlando. The effort to bring motion pictures to Orlando during the 1920s was led by Boston-based film promoter, John O’Loughlin. Inspired by the output of productions streaming from Miami Studios, O’Loughlin and Liebe sought to develop a local studio that utilized a pool of funding from twenty-five Orlando based business leaders. A June 1922 press release issued by the Authors Production Company outlined “visions of palaces being erected one day and torn down the next almost within the city limits and of Orlando’s fame spreading far and wide.” Within a month O’Loughlin had raised nearly $85,000 from local investors, under the promise

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93 Thompson, 505. Thompson goes on to state that by 1963 Orlando had 342 industries that employed 83,000 workers. In a single year, 1964, eighty new firms moved to Orlando, creating 1,184 additional jobs. The city also was by then Florida’s third largest retail sales market.
that he had already secured a six-picture distribution deal with Pathe Freres. The first production filmed by Authors was a feature titled *Broad Road* (1922), written by local author Habsburg Liebe. To help support the production, the company proposed that Orlando Chamber of Commerce spend $60,000 to build a studio that would be “equal to the finest estate in the country.” After a series of delays, production on *Broad Road* finally started in October 1922. Plans for the promised studio were held off until after the film’s completion. The exteriors for the film were shot in Forest City, with interiors shot in and around the downtown. As production for *Broad Road* kicked off, it seems the Authors Production Company had failed to secure funding for the other five promised productions.

To secure the funding for the five additional films Liebe had written, Authors’ executive committee penned “A Letter of Importance to the People of Orlando,” published in the *Orlando Sentinel* and *Orlando Evening Star* on October 6, 1922. The letter outlines the plans for the five additional films and emphasized that the executive committee of the company had invested their own personal capital into the production of *The Broad Road*. In their appeal to local investors they emphasized the box office receipts attached to and net profits of other Florida-filmed productions. They naively listed the total net profit as if the amount was then directly funneled into the investor’s pockets. The appeal also extended to civic boosters and local politicians in the attempt to increase the city’s visibility and draw tourism. They contended, “Orlando is ideally situated as the home of motion picture production. We have the mountains of Georgia not far to our North; the sea and its sands but forty miles or so to the East, tropics and their picture lure are at our door, the lake region is all about us and Orlando itself presents every opportunity for city pictures, either north, east, west, or south.” Skeptical would-be producers kept their distance.

96 “Stock in Local Motion Picture Co. Selling Fast,” *OS*, July 30, 1922, 1.
97 “Company to Begin Work on Its First Movie This Morning,” *OS*, October 4, 1922, 1.
and refused put up the needed $250,000 to finance the additional five films promised by Authors. By November 1922, after production on *The Broad Road* wrapped O’Loughlin left Orlando. He sold his shares to R.E. Grable, a prominent member of the Orlando Chamber of Commerce and previously a member of Authors’ executive committee.

In a situation quite similar to the shady dealings perpetrated by Harry Kelly or Aubrey Kennedy in Tampa and Charles Field in Miami, the person most responsible for drumming up community interest in bringing motion pictures to the community was able to flee the city with a tidy profit and left local community organizers to deal with the wreckage. For the most part Grabel’s sentiments reflected many of the same talking points that promoters had issued to would-be investors across the state during this period. He optimistically predicted the industry would soon shift from California to Florida. Grabel’s lack of industry experience did not seem to deter him. Grabel described his ascendance to company president as very hurried. Even though he “had not attended a single board meeting and was only given the company as an evidence of my faith in its success by taking the bulk share of stocks, and almost immediately I was told I had been made president.”

O’Loughlin’s name does not appear again in local news sources or trade presses from the 1920s, and he more or less disappears from the record after Grabel bought out his stock shares. The finished cut for *The Broad Road* opened on January 17, 1923, to an over capacity crowd at the Beacham Theater in downtown Orlando. Billed as a home made production, the film had a successful local run and was distributed nationally by First National (the forerunner of Warner Brothers). Following the film’s premiere Grabel held on to his optimism that the positive word-of-mouth for *The Broad Road* could result in a massive box-office receipt to help supplement the costs for the company’s next film. After they paid off the editing firm that processed the film stock, and the film’s distribution fees were deducted by First

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National, the net profits for the film failed to come anywhere close to O’Loughlin’s promises. Several months later Grabel sold off his shares of Authors Productions to state Senator Moses Overstreet, who outlined his own plan to produce several additional comedy films that utilized local funding. He also promised to re-edit footage from several loose-ended comedy films that were shot earlier in the year. Neither proposal ever fully materialized, nor did John O’Loughlin’s proposed studio. Yet even with the unfulfilled promises that came with the Authors Production Company, film production did not disappear completely from the Orlando metro area.100

The first major studio in Central Florida was constructed at about the same time as the first film and television productions were establish production units in South Florida. Miami-based father and son production team W.J. and Thomas Casey sought to capitalize on Florida’s recent success in bringing motion picture and television productions to the state. They were previously affiliated with Avalon Pictures Incorporated, which produced several television shorts, commercials and serial dramas in Miami. After buying a majority stake in the studio they liquidated the company’s holdings and used the left-over funds to purchase Avalon’s thirteen-acre studio along Miami’s Bayfront. The newly incorporated Shamrock Studios in Miami was intended to operate both as a tourist attraction and studio center.101 Even though the Caseys planned to keep their studio in Miami, they believed that the Orlando-Winter Park area could offer a greater variety of exterior scenic locations than anywhere else in the state. The geographic diversity available in Central Florida, combined with the low cost of labor in Florida, could reduce their production costs by nearly 40 percent compared with California’s overhead. They also wanted a studio that could provide easy access to the rest of the state from a relatively central location. The decision was made to purchase a twenty-acre studio complex near Lake Killarney at 707 Nicolet Avenue in Winter Park.

100 “Beacham Unable to Hold Crowds for ‘Broad Road,’” OS, January 18, 1923, 7.
To capitalize on the recent uptick in the number of runaway film and television productions that located to Florida, the twenty-three-room facility included three soundstages that were fully air-conditioned and acoustically treated, along with the latest in professional camera, sound, lighting, and recording equipment. The site’s two processing laboratories included three printing machines that could help meet the demands for major feature film and television productions. They also bought a nearby apartment building to accommodate studio personnel as well as additional outdoor sets that could utilize the adjacent lakefront.\(^\text{102}\) In comparison to the unrealistic promises John O’Loughlin made to the Orlando community in the 1920s, the Caseys announced plans to produce three films a year and also put to rest concerns in the community and “hastened to point out that the corporation is privately funded and we have no desire to raise funds locally.”\(^\text{103}\) The one request they asked from \textit{Orlando Sentinel} readers was for a donation of a period horse and carriages and a triangular dinner bell.\(^\text{104}\) In March 1956, as the studio facilities expanded beyond local independent productions, Thomas Casey hired former Walt Disney and Warner Brothers production manager Glen Lambert to oversee day-to-day activities at the studio. That summer Lambert invited Sam Spiegel of Columbia Pictures to Winter Park to film his grindhouse production \textit{The Strange One} (1957) at Shamrock Studios.\(^\text{105}\)

When asked by Jean Yothers of the \textit{Orlando Sentinel} what he thought of Central Florida’s future as a motion picture center, Spiegel’s response was resonant of the assessments made by major producers during the heyday of filmmaking in Jacksonville and Tampa. “There’s no basic reason why Florida can’t make movies the same as California,” however he made sure to add, “but first it must have larger studios, more equipment to attract picture-making companies here.”\(^\text{106}\) For the time being the ambitions of the Caseys and Shamrock Studios

\(^{102}\) “Casey to Make Feature Films,” \textit{OS}, April 1, 1955, 3.


\(^{104}\) Ibid, 14.


seemed resigned to establish a firm foundation to slowly build up a stronger industry presence. During the late 1950s, Shamrock produced a number of local commercials and industrial films, which provided much needed experience and capital for further film ventures. In 1957, Shamrock followed Spiegel’s suggestions and set out to expand its facilities further. The project included the construction of a new wing of production offices to accommodate independent producers as well as two brand new soundstages, equipped “with enough cable to bring electric power to every home in Winter Park.”

With a grant from the Martin Company – which had recently built its Orlando plant – Shamrock had access to the only professional 35mm film processing laboratory in the American Southeast. Casey detailed his plans for Shamrock to become the sole provider of film stock and trained technicians for productions filmed in the Bahamas or Cuba. Producer Harold K. Carrington, who purchased a space at the one of the new offices, described the facilities as “better than anything this side of New York or Los Angeles.” The studio was utilized for major and minor productions alike during this time such as Warner Brother’s *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958) starring Christopher Plummer and directed by Nicholas Ray. The production was filmed primarily on location at Everglades National Park, but Shamrock’s soundstages were used for indoor scenes. The low-budget science fiction film *Terror from the Year 5000* (1958) was independently funded by Robert J. Gurney Jr. The outdoor scenes were shot at Shamrock’s Miami facility, but the indoor soundstages were used for much of the production. The established balance between prestigious productions and B-side of drive-in double features kept Shamrock busy with steady work.

This work was supplemented further by the Martin Company’s use of the studio’s development lab, as well as commissions for commercials and producing non-theatrical industrial films for General Motors. In an effort to build on the steady stream of business, in June 1958 the Caseys announced their plans to expand the studio facilities to “accommodate New York and Hollywood producers who will trek to Shamrock as a motion picture mecca.”\textsuperscript{111} That same month industry insiders went as far as to predict, “Shamrock Studios may be [the] forerunner of other picture units as industry begins to see the advantages of utilizing Florida climate,” and that the Caseys “are becoming a vital force in attracting important segments of both the movie and television industries toward Florida, which they find ideal in many ways.”\textsuperscript{112} Yet, just as Shamrock Studios started to emerge as an influential regional production center, political developments across the Straits of Florida politics would interrupt the studio’s ambitions.

On December 31, 1958, Fulgencio Batista fled Havana for the Dominican Republic, while many of his inner circle fled for Jacksonville. Initially the revolution was little cause for consternation by the American public and especially the ranks of the pro-Castro-supporters in the Hollywood Left. The night before Castro’s triumphant entrance into Havana on January 8, 1959, he gave an interview to Ed Sullivan in an improvised television studio at two o’clock in the morning in the town hall of his outpost in the town of Matanzas. The jarringly chummy interview led Sullivan to proclaim to nearly 50 million Americans on his broadcast that Castro and los bardudos– Spanish for the bearded ones – were “in the real tradition of George Washington.” Ten days later Life magazine placed Castro on the cover of its January 18, 1960, edition, with endorsements that ranged from describing him as “the bearded scholar,” a “dynamic boss,” and “the liberator.”\textsuperscript{113} As Castro set out on his P.R. campaign to charm the United States, he and his

\textsuperscript{110}“Shamrock Studio to Make Feature,” OES, January 4, 1958, 11.
\textsuperscript{111}“Shamrock Studios’ Activities Reflect Latest Industry Bid,” OES, June 14, 1958, 3.
\textsuperscript{112}“Florida Gets in the Movies,” (Clipping, Box 942, Folder 44, Richard Alan Nelson Collection, FSU Library Archive).
brother Raul formed the Ministry for the Recovery of Misappropriated Assets (MRMA), which sought to expropriate land and private property for the government, while land, businesses, and companies that were owned by foreign entities would be nationalized and seized by the government.\textsuperscript{114} In the midst of America’s “Fidelmania,” the Caseys saw a prime opportunity to establish a working relationship with the new government and become its primary provider of film equipment and serve as an intermediary for any would-be Hollywood production that intended to film in Cuba.

Instead of expanding Shamrock’s Winter Park facility as originally intended, Thomas Casey redirected the majority share of the company’s funds to produce Edmund V. Cole’s \textit{Barbudos}, a dramatization of the Cuban revolutionary movement which was set to feature boy-next door heartthrob Van Johnson and jazz legend Nat King Cole in starring roles. The lion’s share of the studio’s equipment was then shipped to Havana as the first step in their intended Cuban operation. Although the film was described as having “a sympathetic feeling toward the revolution,” halfway through production Raul Castro ordered the production to be shut down and insisted the Shamrock crew return to the United States. Edmund Cole and his crew instead reached out to the constabulary on the Isle of Pines (today Isle de Juventud), which had a large American expatriate community and close ties to American businesses. The studio received permission to film on the island, but after several weeks of filming, production of \textit{Barbudos} was interrupted a second time and nearly $500,000 worth of equipment was seized by the MRMA. Several crew members were arrested and imprisoned on the island, while Edmund Cole fled arresters at Havana airport and arrived safely in South Carolina. Casey and Cole confidently stated to the \textit{Orlando Sentinel} that the seizure of equipment was simply a misunderstanding and


that they planned to fly to Havana to meet with Fidel Castro at a pre-arranged cocktail party in an effort to straighten things out.\textsuperscript{115} Additional research is needed to determine whether this meeting took place or if Shamrock received any reimbursement from the Cuban government for the seized equipment, but it appears highly unlikely. What can be gathered is that the studio never fully recovered from the financial strain that came with the financial hit that came from their ill-fated production of \textit{Barbudos}.

In January 1960, the Caseys leased their Winter Park facilities to Robert W. Stabler of Filmaster Productions Inc., for a five-year contract. Stabler appointed Colonel Robert E. Kearney the head of aerial photographic and charting services at Orlando Air Force Base as the company’s vice president and to oversee day-to-day operations of the facility. After clarifying that the studio had not been sold “lock, stock, and barrel,” as previously reported, Thomas Casey attempted to reassure \textit{Orlando Sentinel} readers that “this entry by a major Hollywood studio into the Central Florida area marks the first big step in making a movie capital here.”\textsuperscript{116} Filmaster made several attempts to reinvigorate production at the old Shamrock facilities. The most significant attempt came by utilizing its soundstages for Stabler’s production of the ITC television series \textit{The Beachcomber} (1962), starring Cameron Mitchell. The program’s one season and thirty-nine episode run came to an end after Mitchell was arrested for falling behind on his alimony payment and held on a $60,000 bond that he was unable to pay. The four days Mitchell spent in at the Orange County Jail apparently took its toll on the actor and the incarceration according to his attorney “has done immeasurable damage to his career.”\textsuperscript{117} Plans for a second season for the series were scrapped shortly after the arrest and following his court hearing in March 1961 Mitchell left Central Florida, never to return.

Film production in Winter Park did not entirely cease after production on \textit{The...
Beachcomber wrapped. The old Shamrock Studio went on to produce a string of low-budget features directed by English-born independent filmmaker R. John Hugh. In January 1955, Hugh formed Empire Studios of Orlando and leased the old Kennedy City facility on Weedon Island to film *The Osceola Story*. Hugh had trouble attracting backers for the film, and after his plan failed, activities the studio on Weedon’s Island fell silent forever.\textsuperscript{118} Later that year he contracted with the Caseys to use the Shamrock facilities for his projects. He retitled his production entity R. John Hugh Productions and between 1955 and 1959 he produced a series films at Shamrock Studios in Winter Park.\textsuperscript{119} In November 1959, before the facilities transferred over to Filmaster, Hugh began preproduction on *A Crowd for Lisette* (1961) and also brought in B-list talents from California while also building a roster of local talent from to form his own personal acting troupe.\textsuperscript{120} Hugh carried on several further attempts to revitalize production in Central Florida with limited success. In 1966 he became president of the FMPTPA and also produced *Johnny Tiger* (1966), which starred Robert Taylor. The movie was filmed on location in Longwood, Florida and did its part to bring back a certain degree of industry interest in Central Florida. Although *Johnny Tiger* would go to be one of the greatest critical and box-office successes of Hugh’s career, as president of the FMPTPA he developed a more cynical view on the state of Florida’s film industry. In a three-part career retrospective Hugh penned for the *Orlando Evening Star*, he recalled a meeting he had with Paramount founder Adolph Zukor in 1952.

At the time as an aspiring filmmaker, he told Zukor his plans to produce his own films and make them in Florida. Zukor’s response upon hearing Hugh’s mention of Florida was dismissive, “We made pictures there once. A studio on Weedon’s Island, St. Petersburg. We

\textsuperscript{118} Pinellas County Department of Environmental Education, *The Weedon Island Story* (Tarpon Springs, FL: Department of Environmental Lands Division, 2005), 35.
\textsuperscript{119} While at Shamrock, Hugh produced: *Yellowneck* (1955), *Naked in the Sun* (1957), and *Of Sex and Violence* (1959).
\textsuperscript{120} “Film Star Arrives To Make Movies,” *OS*, November 16, 1959, 1B; “Thespian to Appear in Play,” *OS*, February 4, 1960, 15.
made pictures in Florida, they don’t want ‘em. They don’t know what they’re talking about in Florida. We tried it.” Zukor went on to advise Hugh to remain in California. “In Florida they got has-beens and never-make-its. They’ve got the con-boys and operators. There’s no producers in Florida. Don’t get involved where you’re not wanted…the business can kill you anyway.”

Although the factual correctness of Hugh’s account has some glaring holes – he writes that Adolph Zukor died in 1960, when he was still alive in 1966 – Hugh uses his conversation with Zukor as a way of coming to terms with his career as a Florida filmmaker. “[Zukor] died in a time of radical change and was lucky enough to live into a new post-television era for motion pictures. If he lived a few years longer he would have seen Florida become part of it; in spite of everything that Mr. Zukor said about film production in Florida turned out to be true.”

At the end of 1966 film production in Central Florida had come to a grinding halt. By this time however, Disney’s “Operation Winter” was in full effect. A February 18, 1966 Time article proclaimed Orlando with its Disney-related construction as “The Action Center of Florida.”

According to Gary Mormino, the far-reaching impact of Disney World on Central Florida “was the equivalent of a ten-point earthquake.” T.D. Allman claims, “The Disney conquest was the most important economic, social, cultural and psychological event in the history of Florida since the Flagler conquest.” Although Disney’s vision of a self-sustaining urban utopia never fully came to fruition, the transformative effects Disney World would have on Orlando – and Florida as a whole – reverberated across the state’s tourism and entertainment industry. The next year the Walt Disney Company successfully convinced the Florida legislature in an unprecedented session to do its part for Walt’s memory by creating the Reedy Creek Improvement District for Disney’s 28,000 acres. The subsequent passage of three bills with near-unanimous support and without

121 R. John Hugh, “How Do You Reach a Movie Goal?,” OES, December 8, 1966, 17B.
122 Ibid, 17B.
123 Bacon, 267.
124 Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams, 105.
125 Allman, 241.
debate in either chamber forever aligned the state with the tourist economy.\footnote{Joe Flower, \textit{Prince of the Magic Kingdom: Michael Eisner and the Re-Making of Disney} (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1991), 253.} Reedy Creek was initially intended as the first step toward fulfilling Walt’s vision for EPCOT as he had posthumously detailed to a capacity crowd at Park West Theater in Winter Park. When Roy Disney died in 1971 shortly after the opening of Magic Kingdom, both Florida and Disney’s interests entirely reentered around its tourism potential.

The eleven million visitors to Disney World and $139 million in gross profits that came in the park’s first year of operation, sealed Orlando’s fate as amusement park capital of the world. The tremendous boost the entertainment complex gave the metropolitan area probably was the single largest factor that accelerated the Orlando’s economic development beyond Florida’s own rapid pace. The Orlando area experienced an influx of new residents at nearly 8 percent annual rate in 1970 to 1974, compared with the state’s 5.4 percent average. Such rapid growth triggered a tremendous demand for tourist-related facilities such as all types of accommodations, services, and retail trade across Central Florida.\footnote{Foglesong, \textit{Married to the Mouse}, 73.} Orlando’s ascendency as a tourist mecca also caused a precipitous decline in the resort culture Miami Beach had thrived on since the end of the Second World War. Moreover, the economic stagnation that followed the onset of the 1970s recession, combined with the various social and political upheavals in South Florida, brought Miami to its breaking point. When film and television productions started to proliferate in South Florida once again during the 1980s, local film promoters had to learn to find ways to utilize potential that motion picture and television productions could provide for the local tourism industry. In doing so, both industries would find ways to rebrand South Florida in the midst of a period of unprecedented turmoil. From these combined trials and traumas, the filmmakers and television producers alike seized on a opportunity to exploit Miami’s moment of crisis and forever redefine South Florida’s identity and help to revitalize a city on the brink.
Paradise Lost and “The ‘Miami Vice’ Effect”

On the cover of *Time* published on November 23, 1981, illustrator Nicholas Gaetano provided magazine readers a striking image that became the posterchild of the 1980-81 recession. On the top right corner, almost as an afterthought, was a picture of David Stockman, Ronald Reagan’s controversial Director of the Office of Management and Budget and later remembered as “the father of Reganomics.” The text underneath the photo included a dog ear with the caption “Economic Woes: Confession and Recession.” Instead of focusing on the bespectacled agent of economic woes, the reader’s eye is drawn toward a green and red map of the Florida coast. The words “Paradise Lost?” blaze across a map divided in two, with a vibrant green Central Florida at the top and a blood red South Florida. Below is a cartoon of the sun wearing sunglasses with a simpering frown. In the boundary between the peaceful green and violent red are the words “South Florida,” with each letter filled with apocalyptic imagery of desolated beaches, internment camps, armed officers, drug lords, piles of cash, refugees, and assault. The corresponding article titled “Trouble in Paradise,” describes the cover’s selection of photographs as unlike anything found in a travel brochure produced by the Miami Chamber of Commerce. “Here is a picture of a policeman leaning over the body of a Miamian whose throat has been slit and wallet emptied. There is a sleek V-planed speedboat, stripped of galleys and bunks and loaded with a half-ton of marijuana, skimming across the waters of Biscayne Bay. Here are a handful of ragged Cuban refugees, living in a tent pitched beneath a highway overpass.” The article goes on to address how Miami’s idyllic image as “America’s Favorite Winter Playground,” filled with sunburned senior citizens had been decisively overrun by an “epidemic of violent crime, a plague of illicit drugs and a tidal wave of refugees” that had

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“slammed into South Florida with the destructive power of a hurricane. Those three forces, and a number of lesser ills, threaten to turn one of the nation’s most prosperous, congenial and naturally gorgeous regions into a paradise lost.”

The landmark article was a capstone to a tumultuous period in the history of South Florida as Miami emerged as the “new murder and drug capital of America, a city that had been ravaged by race riots, gun killings and the sudden arrival of 125,000 Cuban refugees, many of them sprung from Fidel Castro’s jails.” Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick have argued in City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami, that the consequences of the 1980 Mariel boatlift was seen by city officials as a double threat. First, as an economic cataclysm, given the depressed state of local industry and the negative impact of the inflow on Miami’s status as a tourist destination. Second, as a direct threat to the establishment power structure, given the addition of many thousands to an already uncomfortably large Cuban population. Such doomsday headlines as Time’s “Paradise Lost” portrayed Dade County as “becoming numb with the stress of dealing with overwhelming numbers of refugees, dismayed at the violence in the black community and the rising crime rates,” in other words, “a county under siege.” By the summer of 1981, crime had become the number one political issue in South Florida. Francisco Alvarado of the Miami New Times recalled how a $800-a-month rental refrigerator truck that was used by the city for storing the city’s exorbitant number of murder victims had become “a symbol of Miami's ignominious distinction as the nation's murder capital, largely as a result of shootouts among cocaine cowboys and violent crime committed by Marielitos.”

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131 Ibid, 24.
134 Stofik, 68.
The rise in drug trafficking and violent crime escalated to such an extent that Tom Gallagher, the State Representative for Florida’s 111th District, told local and national newspapers in August 1981, “There is no other issue in Dade County at this point.” Jim Dingfelder, the public affairs officer for United States Customs Service, described the situation in Miami to *The New York Times* as “Dodge City South.”136 A month later in an attempt to counter the flow of drugs into South Florida, Vice President George H. W. Bush created a special South Florida Drug Task Force charged with bringing together officials from Customs, DEA, the Coast Guard and the Treasury Department.137 As the economic, social, and political crisis in South Florida bubbled over into a full-blown emergency, the region suffered from an image problem as much as anything else. As David Rieff argues in *Exiles, Tourists and Refugees in the New America*, the media frenzy proved to be self-actualizing. “Reporting on a bunch of Colombian dealers peppering each other with Uzis and Mac-10s at every stoplight and across every shopping mall in Dade County was a lot more fun than a story about the SALT talks.”138 *Time* was guaranteed to sell more magazines through pedaling images of refugees floating ashore, drug running, and murder on the streets than David Stockman could.

In response to the *Time* cover story, Miami city officials immediately sought ways to counteract the negative publicity.139 These images were juxtaposed against an understanding of Miami’s position as the “capital of Latin America” and as a “the world’s most national crossroads of travel, finance, Florida's most influential city.”140 Newspapers and magazines were able to utilize this colorful imagery in a way that certainly helped to boost sales, but it also did not take long for film and television producers to see the narrative possibilities such a setting could offer. When screenwriter Oliver Stone set out to remake the 1930s gangland classic

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139 Meek, 289.
Scarface: Shame of a Nation (1932), it was suggested that to update the film’s relevance the script relocate the film’s setting from prohibition-era Chicago to 1980s Miami. Concerned that Scarface (1983) would tarnish the city’s image even more than the Time article, Miami Commissioner Demetrio Perez initiated a one-man campaign against the production. He introduced a resolution to the city council that would have prohibited the production from getting a permit to shot on any piece of city property. Even if Universal rented out private houses and restaurants, this too would have been blocked due to the need to use city streets to park their equipment trucks. In the press Perez also accused Al Pacino’s portrayal of a Cuban Marelito drug lord as “the propagation of pernicious racism,” so that by September of 1982, with a minimal amount of footage shot, Universal executives decided the Perez’s campaign was not worth the grief and relocated to Los Angeles.141

Even as local politicians scrambled to accommodate director Brian DePalma and producer Martin Bregman and get them to reconsider, the public relations campaign against the production had effectively driven Scarface out of town. Marylee Lander, Miami-Dade’s Film and Television Coordinator in 1983, estimated that Scarface’s departure cost “at least $10 million to Dade’s economy,” while Commissioner Perez proclaimed the “a victory for the people of Miami.”142

In the end Miami still got the bad publicity while Los Angeles kept the money. This experience proved to be an important learning experience for South Florida film boosters and politicians alike. Later that same year when television producers Anthony Yerkovich and Michael Mann pitched their idea for “MTV Cops” set in the seedy underbelly of 1980s Miami, reluctant local leaders were at the very least more willing to hear the pitch out.143 The proposed show would package the two major pillars of Reaganomics: law and order and conspicuous consumption into a meta-narrative that incorporated Miami’s tumultuous recent history and its

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141 Ken Tucker, Scarface Nation: The Ultimate Gangster Movie and How it Changed America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 53, 55-56.
142 Ibid, 56.
present-day role “as sort of an American Casablanca.”

Before *Miami Vice* arrived on the scene in the mid-1980s, the Florida film industry was in the midst of its own period of growing pains and uncertainty. With the onset of the 1970s recession, the State of Florida experienced a significant downturn in the overall number of film and television productions across the state. South Florida’s tourism industry was equally hard hit during this period. This development could be a result of a re-centering of the tourist sector from South Florida toward Disney World in Orlando. While the new attractions in Central Florida directed tourists away from Miami, the development of new Caribbean resorts accessible by affordable cruise lines or air travel precipitated the decline in the regional economy even further. Meanwhile the bureaucratic barricades raised by the Florida legislature once again brought on a slowdown in productions across the state, while competition from film liaison offices in other states drew many runaway productions away from Florida during the early 1970s.

Although Claude Kirk’s administration had been quite friendly to filmmakers, with the election of Reubin Askew in 1970 it seemed as if those efforts would be dimmed. Askew personally had direct real interest in the motion picture industry. Phil Ashler, a personal friend and advisor to the governor stated in an interview to the *Tampa Tribune* that he “could not recall the last time Askew had seen a movie.” By 1973 the Florida legislature also had become equally as dismissive of film and television productions in the state. That year they rejected a request from the Florida Industrial Commission for additional funding to help strengthen their bid for attracting motion picture productions to the state. Even though the legislature rejected the plans, by this time Governor Askew had been convinced by film lobbyists of the economic potential the industry could provide. The bid was in part influenced by the efforts of Georgia

145 Drolet and Listokin, 92.
Governor Jimmy Carter, who was inspired by the financial success of *Deliverance* (1972), coordinated with his state legislature to turn the state into “Hollywood South,” and set out to “pursue the feature film industry with the same vigor used in bringing Japanese zipper making, northeastern bed making, and other industries to the state.”\(^{148}\)

Carter’s Hollywood South campaign combined with the ambivalence of Florida’s legislature had devastating consequences for the state’s production industry. The Georgia Film Office claimed its first major victory against Florida when the state’s native son Burt Reynolds, himself an active booster for Florida’s film industry, attempted to have his prison football comedy *The Longest Yard* (1974) filmed in Florida. When excessive bureaucratic red tape caused a significant delay and mark-up on the prices of state-issued permits, the Georgia Film Office swooped in and offered producer Albert Ruddy the use of Georgia State Prison. Without any other viable option, Reynolds had the production relocate across the border. Richard Alan Nelson lauded the Georgia Film Office for its quick maneuvering and lamented the disorganization of Florida film promoters on the state and local level. “This practical, no-nonsense cooperation led Florida to lose yet another Reynolds picture written specifically for the State of Georgia later that year. The Burt Reynolds snafu wasn’t the only one to vividly bring home the need for change.”\(^ {149}\)

Similar losses to Florida’s film industry came when American International Pictures tried to arrange for a production package to shoot five motion pictures in Miami. When the city commissioners hesitated, the producers publicly announced they needed to locate somewhere with a clear line of authority and packed up for Texas instead.\(^ {150}\) After these very public losses to Georgia and Texas, film lobbyists once again reached out to Governor Askew to attempt to organize the state industry in an effort to prevent further losses. In a letter to Askew, B.J.


\(^{149}\) Nelson, *Lights! Camera! Florida!*, 95.

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 95.
Johnson, the Locations Coordinator for Ricou Browning’s directorial debut *Salty* (1973), chastised the government for its recent lack of support. “Realizing that the state spends a great deal of money to attract tourists to visit here, it is extremely difficult to understand how this same state arbitrary ignores the free publicity offered.” In an echo of J.E.T. Bowden’s desperate appeals to the people of Jacksonville in the 1910s and Trenton Collins’ pleas to Doyle Carlton in the 1930s, Johnson also reminded Askew, “The only thing a film company takes out of Florida is that which is on film and its endeavor to boost tourism.”

By 1974, with increased pressure from South Florida filmmakers and businesses, the Florida Legislature reconsidered Governor Askew’s proposal and finally approved a paltry $24,000 in funding for a Florida Motion Picture and Television Bureau to operate within the state’s Department of Commerce. The cost went directly toward the salaries for FMPTB director Ben Harris, a secretary, and limited promotions to Hollywood filmmakers. Despite its limited funding the FMPTB successfully coordinated a network of twenty-two film liaison offices across the state to provide local contacts and follow-up for productions. With careful budgeting and monitoring, the bureau sought to prevent another situation like *The Longest Yard* from happening to the state again.

“Florida Climbs to Third National Film and TV Capital”

The efforts of the FMPTB led to the creation of a state wide film bureau since the David Sholtz administration in the 1930s. Combined with the promotional efforts of producers and local politicians across Florida, the bureau helped bring on a massive upsurge in film and television productions in the mid-1970s. In the year 1976 alone, the estimated value of major film and

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152 Ruth, 3.

153 Nelson, *Lights! Camera! Florida!* 95-96. The organization acts put through by the legislature in 1973 included an eleven-step initiative to help encourage film and television producers to come to Florida. 1) Gathering factual data. 2) Publishing directories and other guides. 3) Providing information on personnel, facilities and equipment. 4) Scouting locations. 5) Offering a videotape and slide location library. 6) Cataloging weather information. 7) Simplifying required permits. 8) Holding down fees. 9) Hosting conferences. 10) Conducting the Governor’s Screenwriting conference. 11) Coordinating movie and TV productions with civic authorities.
television productions in Florida ranged between $50 and $60 million, while local independent productions were estimated at $30 million. That year the FMPTB assisted thirty-three companies, while fifteen ultimately filmed in Florida and spent $7,277,000 during their time in the state. Among that number several major feature films were produced in the state including, *Airport ’77, The Greatest, Empire of the Ants, Joe Panther,* and *Thunder and Lightning.* By 1977 the Florida film industry was back from the brink. Burt Reynolds was even able to return to Florida to film another football comedy, *Semi-Tough* (1977). He was able to do so through coordinating with United Artists and Miami Dolphins owner Joe Robbie. For the price of $40,000 a day they rented out the Miami Orange Bowl to simulate a winter game at Denver’s Mile High Stadium.

In a little over three years, the promotional campaign initiated by the FMPTB managed to not only draw major productions back to Florida, but also helped the state’s industry ascend to become the most important regional production center outside of California and New York. The front-page headline for the November 17, 1978 edition of *Backstage* heralded that, “Fla. Climbs to 3rd As Nat’l Film & TV Capital.” The article’s author Carol Pearce added, “The predictably balmy weather and great variety of locations became Florida’s most saleable assets, as it offered a lower-cost alternative to Hollywood. Motion picture and commercial companies recognized these values and gravitated to the fun-in-the-sun flatlands of Florida.”

The election of Bob Graham in November 1978 also brought on a new period of increased growth and development for the state’s entertainment and motion picture industry. In June 1979, several months after taking office, he traveled to California to hold a succession of meetings at the Walt Disney Studios and with 20th Century Fox president Alan Ladd, Jr., Lew-

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155 Ponti, 97-98.
Wasserman, the president of the Music Corporation of America (MCA), Ned Tannen, president of Universal Pictures, Burt Reynolds, and various other major motion picture producers. An outcome of these meetings was the first major in-road toward the creation of the Disney-MGM and Universal Studios soundstages in Orlando a decade later.

According to Nelson, the Graham administration was an effective game changer for Florida’s film and television industry. “Unlike previous administrations, they backed up talk with action, and their timing was also good.” Unlike his predecessor who pursued the entertainment industry strictly for its economic prospects, Graham had a deep passion for motion pictures. He would later fondly recall the eight mile drive he and his parents would take from the family farm to a Hialeah theater to watch serials, Roy Roger westerns, and adventure films. During his Governorship, Graham returned to that very same theater about six times each year, while describing himself as an enthusiastic subscriber to the latest cable-network phenomenon, HBO. In an interview Graham described the ritual-like experience that moviegoing meant to him. “Going to the movies is a very special thing. It’s an event and I look forward to it.” One way Graham demonstrated his ongoing commitment to the motion picture industry was through his Workdays campaign. Workdays was an initiative Graham began as a state senator in 1974 to learn more about the lives and jobs of his constituents by working anywhere between eight hours and eighteen weeks on various jobs across the state. In November 1983, Governor Graham worked as a grip during the first set of shoots for the Burt Reynolds’ directed Stick (1985).

Graham’s personal interest in and efforts toward facilitating Florida’s film industry culminated on February 23, 1984, when he again traveled to Los Angeles to attend dozens of

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157 Daniel Ruth, “Gov. Graham Hypes Florida to Film Industry Leaders,” Tampa Tribune, June 19, 1979, 3D.
159 Tom Sabulis, “The Governor Goes to Hollywood,” St. Petersburg Times, March 18, 1984, 1E, 4E.
meetings with studio executives at Universal, Columbia, Paramount, and Twentieth Century Fox – each studio a long-standing contributor to Florida productions. The trip was coordinated by Ben Harris and Charles Porretto through the FMPTB with the intention of attracting interest in the studios to build a major production studio in Florida. Described as “The Raider of the Lost Art,” in an interview with the *St. Petersburg Times*, Graham drew on the state’s long history with the motion picture industry as an important reason for his efforts to encourage film studios to establish in Florida. “The movie industry had a very heavy commitment in Jacksonville in the early 1900s before it moved to California. We’re trying to put the best product on the shelf in terms of what Florida has to offer and then let independent producers trying to make quality movies – profitably, within budget, on-time – make the decisions where they best can do that.”

Graham’s words were subsequently followed up with the passage of legislation that exempted the purchase, rental or lease of television, motion picture or recording equipment used for production in Florida from the state’s 5% sales tax. The incentive deal that Bob Graham was incredibly well timed as producers started to eye both Orlando and Miami as possible homes for a third coast operation.

The ‘Miami Vice’ Effect”

Two producers who took on Governor Graham’s call to utilize Florida’s unique visual landscape and favorable conditions were Anthony Yerkovich and Michael Mann, as they deliberated over where to locate their MTV-generation take on procedural cop dramas. When scouting out locations for the show, Michael Mann’s motto was said to be “no earth tones,” sienna, ochre, red and brown were eliminated in favor of rose, lime, neon, aquamarine, turquoise and peach, the sensuous feel of pastel and fluorescent colors. The vibrant color scheme of Miami’s Art Deco architecture combined with the emerald waterscapes and bright sun helped to flesh out Mann’s preferred color scheme. Anthony Yerkovich was especially drawn to the

162 Sabulis, E1.
164 Buxton, 141.
seedy underbelly of Miami, which he described “as sort of an American Casablanca’ with its Cuban refugees and reputation as a drug capital in the U.S.” Miami of the 1980s certainly had the endemic crime and economic crisis to depict a city in desperate need for law and order, while also providing a fertile environment to extol the virtues of the pursuit of private wealth and conspicuous consumption. Yerkovich and Mann sought to “recast a hyper-Miami as a principal character in their cops-versus-drug-lords melodrama – even locals had trouble recognizing.” After the pilot premiered The Christian Science Monitor described Miami “as the capital of cool,” a place that “oozed glitz and glamor.” In their assessment of efforts to preserve South Beach’s historic architecture, Jedediah Drolet and David Listokin credit the juxtaposition established of Miami’s depiction on the television screen as one of the most important turning points for the regional economy and tourism industry. “This massively successful national and international hit featured the Art Deco buildings of South Beach as a backdrop for much of the show,” while “the plot glamorized the very real crime problems the area was suffering, and city officials were concerned about the image it was giving of their community.” When plans for the show were announced, city officials in Miami such as Demetrio Perez into a near panic.

The negative publicity attributed to events such as the 1979 Dadeland Massacre, combined with the 1980 McDuffie Riots and Mariel Boatlifts led to a nosedive in Miami tourism. Between 1980 and 1984, domestic tourists to the Greater Miami area declined from 6.7 million visitors to 5.3 million. Of even greater concern for the Miami’s Chamber of Commerce was the overall drop in international tourists, whose numbers plummeted by 13

165 Meek, 291.
166 Vigucci, “The Vice Effect: 30 Years After the Show That Changed Miami.”
168 Drolet and Listokin, 96.
169 Meek, 291.
percent and 15 percent over the same years. This downturn was perhaps no better recorded than
in the massive demographic and shift in popular perception that Miami Beach’s South Beach
experienced during this period. Going into the 1970s, South Beach had been labeled as a
“Jewish Resort” for elderly northeastern retirees. The impression of the area as retirement home
had already turned away young vacation goers. Miami Beach Mayor Norman Ciment was
sodetermined to rid his city of its “nursing home” image that he said that “board and care homes
should be built with interior courtyards so the elderly residents wouldn’t be visible to passing
tourists.”¹⁷⁰ When Miami Vice premiered in September 1984 the city government expressed a
multitude of concerns. According to Barron Stofik, “The chamber of commerce, tourism
officials, and civic leaders wrung their collective hands in dismay at the area’s crime problems
being glamorized on national television. They decried the show as a bullet in the heart of what
was left of the Beach’s tourism industry.”¹⁷¹ T.D. Allman observed that many of the show’s
local critics expressed concern that the real Miami was not accurately depicted on screen, but
instead “a series set in some suburb would have given a more accurate view of their city, and
perhaps they were right.”¹⁷² In an ideological sense, “Miami Vice got the colors and the rhythms
right, but it missed the main point: Miami wasn’t just a cauldron of conflicting firepower. It was
a cauldron of human possibility.”¹⁷³ The concerns over how Miami would be portrayed went as
far as city officials suggesting to producers that the word Vice be removed from the program’s
title.¹⁷⁴ Rather than promoting an image of Miami that went along the lines of the Wonderful
World of Disney, there were fears Miami’s negative image would only be validated by a prime-
time chronicle of drug wars, serial murders, shopping mall drug wars and assorted mayhem.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Stofik, 19, 100.
¹⁷² Allman, 86.
¹⁷³ Ibid, 93.
¹⁷⁴ Dave Hogerty, “‘Miami Vice’ (Documentary),” YouTube Video, 6:20, September 6, 2014,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC2gF5c9lr8&frags=pl%2Cw.
¹⁷⁵ Meek, 293.
Unlike the furor raised during the production of Scarface, community organizers and industry promoters such as Marylee Lander launched a public relations campaign to ensure Miami Vice was flaunted as the show that could save Miami. With Greenwich Studios as its base of operations, the show brought millions to the local economy. Jeff Beal, a producer active at Greenwich during the 1980s, described South Beach before Miami Vice as “boarded up storefronts, abandoned buildings. Thank you, Miami Vice. Saved the studio.”

According to Alison Meek, “The television version of the city was a sanitized version of Miami, a Hollywood version of Miami. It truly became a case of life imitating art as city officials and tourism officials tried to take the new image of Miami Vice and run with it.”

James Ponti credits the show with helping to establish Miami as a dominant center for film and television productions. “After Miami Vice became the most popular show on television, Florida production grew by leaps and bounds. The show reinvented South Florida in the minds of America, suggesting fresh, new possibilities for filming.” When the producers needed a crowd, they usually had little trouble in finding one. Local drama majors, models and musicians could regularly be found milling around in the background of a shoot, according to Fabio Arber, a production assistant and location manager for the show. Most significantly, Mann and his location scouts had a keen eye for buildings, places and details that even native Miamians immediately picked up on. They depicted those details with an obsessive care unusual for the typically fast-paced production of television show.

At the height of the show’s popularity, tourists streamed to the South Beach to see the buildings, the parks, the streets where much of the show was filmed. They congregated wherever the crew was filming that day. They were drawn by the cameras, the lights, and the excitement, and strained to catch a glimpse of the stars. Visitors on tour buses were no longer asked

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176 Gonzalez, 44.
177 Meek, 305.
178 Ponti, 7.
179 Vigucci, “The Vice Effect.”
about the area’s murder rate, but instead were asked where Don Johnson lived. They also wanted to know the locations of popular programs such as *Golden Girls* (1985-1992) and *Empty Nest* (1988-1995), both of which were set in Miami but filmed on soundstages in California. In the end, *Miami Vice* poured millions of dollars into South Beach and the South Florida economy. Locations were rented, local actors got work, caterers were hired, hotel rooms booked, and equipment rented. Producers also paid hotel and storefront owners to repaint their buildings in the Caribbean hues to match Michael Mann’s pastel vision for Miami.¹⁸⁰

Miami’s revised public perception had far reaching implications for the city’s tourism and entertainment sector. In their 2013 assessment of Florida’s film industry, Mary Pergola-Parent and Kevin Govern reflected on the impact Miami’s reformed image had on the South Florida community. “As tourists came to visit the exotic splendor of the series’ locations and other Miami area movies and television shows, businesses invested more in renovating South Beach and city leaders increased law enforcement vigilance.”¹⁸¹ The combined community element that contributed to South Florida’s film and television boom extended beyond law enforcement, shopkeepers, and hotel owners. Even the city’s criminal element became swept up in the fervor over *Miami Vice*. Drug Kingpin Juan Jonny Hernandez was approached by one of the show’s top producers to serve as the official cocaine supplier for cast and crew members.

According to Hernandez the producer, “didn’t want them out in the mean streets of Miami, dealing with tabloid bound dealers and middlemen to score blow of questionable quality.”¹⁸² In return Hernandez was given a two-episode arc on the show, where he depicted a stolen merchandise runner in “Made for Each Other,” (1985) and Marco, a goon, in “The Fix” (1986).¹⁸³ On the other side of the law, G. Gordon Liddy of Watergate fame, played “a retired right-wing renegade General illegally recruiting American mercenaries to fight

¹⁸⁰ Stofik, 107-108.
¹⁸¹ Pergola-Parent and Govern, 67.
¹⁸² Farzad, 193-194.
¹⁸³ Ibid, 194.
alongside the Contras in Nicaragua.” Vice President George H.W. Bush was also at one point approached by producers to play himself in an effort the program to showcase its solidarity with President Ronald Reagan’s war on drugs.  

As primetime entertainment, Miami Vice managed to create an effectual juxtaposition between criminality and order, combined with grit and glamor. According to Gary Mormino, Miami of the second half of the 1980s “appeared to be a “city of contrasts,” where “Third World poverty” met “First Class luxury.” This would be a common thread found in the films and television programs that followed Miami Vice revolved around how the community interacted with the multitude of publics that coexisted alongside one another. After the final season of Miami Vice concluded in 1989, South Florida’s reputation in the tourism and entertainment sectors was drastically transformed. Although short-lived programs such as The 100 Lives of Black Jack Savage (1991), Grapevine (1992), and South Beach (1993) failed to repeat the success of Miami Vice, the television industry’s role in the resurrection of South Beach was so instrumental that in October 1995 Travel and Leisure dubbed the Art Deco District “the hippest hangout on Earth.” In the fourteen year period from 1995 to 2009, visitors to Miami Beach spent a total of $15 billion on food, drinks and lodging, while South Beach accounted for nearly 75 percent of tourism dollars spent in the city. Meanwhile in North Miami, after the successive cancellation of programs shot at Greenwich in the early 1990s, the various regional production companies scattered across the Greater Miami area just as the center of gravity of Florida’s film industry started to shift north toward Orlando. The completion of soundstages at Disney-MGM and Universal Studios in 1989 and 1990 triggered a push to bring major film and television productions to the Orlando Metro area. With the advertised statement, “Hollywood weather

184 Meek, 292.
186 Stofik, xiv, 195, 240.
187 Pergola-Parent and Govern, 67
without the Hollywood overhead,” civic organizers sought to take advantage of the further fracturing of the American motion picture industry and Miami’s moment of weakness, to create a “Hollywood East” in Central Florida.

The Eisner-Era Expansion and Disney-MGM Studios

In the early 1960s Ivan Tors toyed with the idea of purchasing the lots adjacent to his studio and develop rides and carnival-style popular amusements. A key component of his plan that along with the price of admission visitors “will have the opportunity to see how television programs are made and how animals are trained to act with humans.” While Tors’ idea of combining film and television production with popular amusements went unfulfilled in his lifetime, Walt Disney’s utopian vision for EPCOT was distorted in the decades after his death. Indecision between Disney Imagineers on how to proceed with Walt Disney’s vision for a self-sustaining showcase of urban design, become a platform to displays cutting edge technology in the vein of the World’s Expositions, or a showcase of international cultures and customs. Eventually the latter two concepts were combined together as the new park became at the time the largest construction project on earth. In the end, EPCOT did not become the residential community envisaged by Walt Disney. It was another theme park that featured sponsored attractions from companies such as General Motors and AT&T in one section, and pavilions offering a taste of different cultures, underwritten by foreign governments in another. When EPCOT opened on October 1, 1982, it was a carefully groomed landscape of spindly eucalyptus trees, acedia rubber, and immaculate lawns, among truncated geodesic glass pyramids and domes and strange dancing fountains with single arcs of water leaping from place to place. Altogether the effort to build EPCOT had significantly weakened the company.

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189 Kimball, 73. 
The original budget of $400 million tripled to $1.2 billion, but the $350 million of corporate sponsorships that catapulted the design overhaul did not increase at all. Company vice chairman and senior executive director Roy E. Disney, was so shocked at the cost of EPCOT that he refused to come to the opening ceremonies. In 1983 attendance at Disney World swelled from 12.6 million to 22.7 million in the new attraction’s first year of operation. Despite the initial excitement next year overall attendance at Disney parks dropped by 10 percent. This overall decline brought on a company-wide shakeup that caused Roy E. Disney to force Ron Miller to step down and appoint Michael Eisner as CEO and Chairman of the Board and former Warner Brothers executive Frank Wells as president. Several months before he was ousted by Eisner and Wells, Miller orchestrated a $200 million buyout of the Boca-Raton- based Arvida Corporation. By the end of 1984, the newly formed Arvida-Disney merger announced plans to develop a section of the Orlando pine woods to build an array of houses, high-rise condos, shops and hotels. It was called the ‘Core’ concept. Set near EPCOT, it would include not only permanent housing – reaching back to the original EPCOT idea of a prototype city – but also manufacturing facilities that would include tours.

This announcement was combined with a decided re-centering of company toward its entertainment outlets such as The Disney Channel and the recently acquired Touchstone Films. Initially, the television and motion picture production components of the Walt Disney Corporation hemorrhaged money. Going into January 1985, The Disney Chanel acquired two million subscribers as it broke into the black, while the Touchstone label begun to break through

192 Flower, 93-94. Roy E. Disney (1930-2009) was the son of Roy O. Disney, the company co-founder and organizer of Walt Disney World and also the last member of the Disney family to be actively involved in the company.
193 Foglesong, Magic Town, 22.
196 Flowers, 155.
the wide-spread prejudice against Disney in Hollywood circles. To further facilitate both companies’ increased prestige and inspire a higher quality output of film and television programs, Eisner assured his producers that they would not be fired for one mistake, and that they could afford to stand on the strength of their convictions. He also merged into a single entity the television, cable, video, and theatrical film divisions into a single “filmed entertainment unit,” a move previous studio had never before attempted. This move was followed up in April 1985 with Disney’s announcement to build on the newly purchased Arvida property a new $300 million Hollywood-style theme park.197

This plan also involved a licensing agreement made with MGM Studios that allowed Disney the permission to utilize characters and scenes from iconic MGM and United Artist films. It called for a rendered environmental homage to the art deco/art modern architecture of Hollywood in the 1930s, the park presents a mixture of performances, rides, tours, films, and demonstrations of movie technology and its by-products. In what could be considered the first fully attempted merger between popular amusement and motion picture production, Disney-MGM was divided into two sections. The first was a conventional ride-centered amusement that occupied 40 percent of the park space, while the working studio made up the other 60 percent. Although it operated as a working film and television production facility, with huge soundstages, backlots, and postproduction spaces, the studios were set up to allow for a constant flow of tourists, who could view both prearranged events and actual film and television scenes as they were recorded.198 The studio park was part of the overall $1.3 billion new construction initiative, which also resulted in the completion of the Typhoon Lagoon waterpark, the Downtown Disney a nighttime and restaurant complex, and four new hotels with a total of 4,300 rooms.199

The advent of the Eisner-era expansion of the mid-1980s set off a series of public

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197 Ibid, 184, 189.
199 Foglesong, Magic Town, 22.
critiques in the Orlando government over who should finance the public facilities needed to support Disney’s growth. Disney was accused by of adopting a strategy to dominate and control visitors’ time at the expense of the area’s non-Disney hotels, attractions and businesses. The dissent was led by Orange County Commissioners Lou Treadway and Vera Carter. In the end Disney refused to support a proposed bill in the Florida legislature that would have funded light rail system that would have connected Orlando International Airport to the downtown and Disney resorts. When this proposal was struck down the county commission sought to press Disney to pay transportation impact fees, as well as to permit the county an advance look at the company’s development plans.\(^{207}\) Although community leaders in Central Florida initiated the first truly public dissent against Disney, Richard Foglesong makes it clear that this protest was more so in regards to the massive overreach the company had been initially given with the Reedy Creek Improvement District. According to Foglesong, “[T]readway and Carter were not rebelling against growth in general or Disney World in particular. They were rebelling, rather, against the terms of the Disney charter, against the pre-nuptial agreement signed with the Disney Co. in 1967, the agreement that protected their immunities in the future.”\(^{208}\)

To help counteract these concerns, in 1985 Governor Bob Graham sought to secure passage of a new growth management legislation. The Growth Management Act provided a statewide framework for managing growth. It required that public facilities be provided “concurrent with the impact of new private development.”\(^{209}\) The result was that for the first time since construction began on Disney World, the company would reimburse the Orlando community for the traffic problems created by its perpetual growth. By this time the traffic situation in Orlando had become so severe by this time that former mayor Carl Langford who had once enthusiastically endorsed Disney’s arrival had retreated to North Carolina “to escape

\(^{200}\) Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse*, 26, 110-111.  
\(^{201}\) Ibid, 112.  
\(^{202}\) Ibid, 151-152.
from all the traffic.\textsuperscript{203} The ensuing Orange County-Reedy Creek interlocal agreement resulted in Disney agreeing to pay $13.4 million over five years for road improvements, while the county agreed not to legally challenge either Reedy Creek’s governmental autonomy or the land use or rezoning on the Arvida properties over the next seven years.\textsuperscript{204} The agreement was signed off on in July 1989, just two months after Disney-MGM officially opened its doors.

**Universal Studios and Orlando’s “Hollywood East” Movement**

Another significant by-product of the ceasefire between the Orange County government and Walt Disney Corporation was that Disney’s production facilities were allowed to expand without any direct legal challenge from the local government. A consequence of the showdown between Disney and the Orange County Commissioners office was that the Music Corporation of America (MCA) coordinated with the Florida government to develop a rival movie theme park on a 423-acre, $600 million facility along the I-4 corridor. Universal Studios Florida was dubbed by its detractors at Disney as “an elaborate spin-off of the Hollywood tour Universal offers at its California studios.”\textsuperscript{205} The proposal for Universal Studios Florida were announced as early 1980, difficulties with financing prevented the plans from being finalized until 1987. Ironically, it could be argued that had it not been for Disney’s plans to move forward with Disney-MGM, the push for Universal Studios never would have been completed. A survey conducted by MCA in the early 1980s had concluded that although tourists wouldn’t visit Orlando only to take in a new movie studio tour, parkgoers probably would only spend less time at Disney’s Magic Kingdom and EPCOT and would not bypass either in favor of another park.\textsuperscript{206}

While the plans for Disney-MGM required no direct state investment in the interest of autonomy, Universal/MCA was heavily reliant on state funding. In the early 1980s MCA had asked Florida for a guarantee of $175 million for film projects form Florida’s $8 billion in

\textsuperscript{203}Ibid, 3.
\textsuperscript{204}Foglesong, *Magic Town*, 27.
\textsuperscript{205}Nelson, “Reel Life Performance,” 77.
\textsuperscript{206}Nelson, *Lights! Camera! Florida!*, 90-91; Flowers, 190.
employee pension holdings, but a Florida legislative committee axed a bill that might have permitted such investments through a change of state rules. It was not until after MCA threatened to pull the plug on its project unless it received approval for a complex financing plan that required state participation through a $150 million loan. The delays in funding placed Universal Studios Florida roughly one year behind schedule from their crosstown rival. Universal opened in June 1990 to a rough start; the initial decision not to provide ambient sound and music created an eerie almost otherworldly atmosphere, while for much of that summer the park’s most advertised rides such as Jaws and King Kong were prone to frequent breakdowns and park services were forced to offer free refunds and vouchers for return visits.

Despite this bumpy beginning, the park eventually found its footing and developed into a respectable competitor and eventually a serious rival for visitors along Orlando’s tourist corridor. At the same time as the soundstages that were developed at both complexes helped to drum up community support and inspire Orlando’s aspirations toward becoming “Hollywood East.” By the late 1980s, Orlando’s boosters in the local media continued to speculate wildly on the potential prestige such an association could bring to the region. Perhaps not since the unveiling of Disney’s Project Winter had Orlando and the State of Florida been swept up in such a frenzy. Jim Hill of the Orlando Sentinel was the first to coin Orlando’s potential as a “Hollywood East” in 1987 after Disney-MGM announced their plans to build three soundstages and Universal/MCA would build four on their respective properties. The plans were published in the press exactly thirty-four years from the day that Disney flew over the bypass between the Florida Turnpike and Interstate 4. In an effort to mobilize support and draw on the state’s prestigious film history the article featured the headline “Hollywood East” was accompanied with a photograph of Ivan Tors

207 Ibid, 91.
wearing a closed mouth grin and standing in front of his studio property. Hill outlined the overall expenditures made by film and video production active in Florida and detailed the state wide governmental support that industry had received since 1981. “Ever since Walt Disney Co. and MCA revealed their plans for rival studios, however, politicians and other industry boosters have been plotting the rise of Hollywood East. U.S. Senator Bob Graham has even predicted that the state could equal Hollywood by the year 2000.” Overstated proclamations such as the one Senator Graham made, caused organizers throughout the industry to wince.

Robert Allen, the head of television and film production for Walt Disney World and former FMPTPA president, countered these statements in an interview with Jim Hill. “I usually spend a lot of my time debunking that myth. Florida and Orlando are not going to become a new Hollywood and we don’t want them too. Before anything remotely resembling the California or New York industries could emerge in Orlando, Disney and Universal will have to build up their production and Florida’s motion picture workforce will have to earn a good reputation among producers.” Industry insiders such as Allen saw an opportunity in Orlando to create a less-expensive alternative to the already overcrowded California and New York production facilities. By 1989, Central Florida achieved many of Allen’s recommendations along with an estimated $22 million dollars in film business in the first quarter of 1989 alone. As production in South Florida experienced a slowdown followed by a slew of cancellations for on-location television, the buildup of new studio facilities in Central Florida caused the center of gravity of Florida’s

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210 Ibid, 3F.
film industry to migrate toward Orlando instead. As much as state politicians and local boosters sought the prestige and glamor of major motion picture productions, it was the money attached to the making of industrial films, commercials, and music videos comprised the most important share of visual media produced in Orlando during this period. The push to develop Orlando’s commercial film industry was led by the Industrial Development Commission (IDC). With the stated goal of recruiting a variety of “targeted industries,” the IDC helped set forth the conditions that would allow for the influx of film and television professionals during the 1980s and 1990s.

Through the efforts of the IDC, by 1986 Central Florida was home to nearly 2,400 television commercials, thirty-four major film projects with an estimated combined budget of $95.6 million dollars, and eighteen smaller projects and corporate films. In an Orlando Sentinel interview Les Haskew, the Vice-President of Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce, spoke optimistically of Orlando’s future as a center for commercial productions “Coca-Cola Co. recently shot one of its commercials in the Orlando area, and an automaker also shot a truck ad there. Even though there are no studios here, there’s still a lot of production going on.”

The increase in production activity combined with arrival of new theme parks brought Orlando going into the 1990s to an existential crossroads. In April 1987 Orlando managed to win a surprise bid for an NBA franchise and hosted the first game for the Orlando Magic at the Orlando Arena in February 1989. The city’s ability to secure a major league sports franchise helped to establish the Orlando’s aspirations toward becoming as a first-tier American city. The team name “Orlando Magic” further helped to facilitate the meaning behind its new-found identity. As Magic vice president Pat Williams explained, “This Magic was not black magic, not magician magic, not rabbit-out-of-a-hat-magic. We were sensitive to that. It was. The ‘magic’ of

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Central Florida – the sunshine, the orange juice, the golf, the spring baseball. The good life. The magic life.”

By the late 1989, with new theme parks and production facilities in place, a reformed road system and an NBA franchise, Orlando was able to elevate its reputation as “a great amusement park near a town,” into “a major town with a great amusement park.” A 1991 Time Magazine cover observed Orlando had essentially become “the boomtown of the South.” A year later in 1992 James Ponti proclaimed, “Slowly but deliberately, the city of Orlando is developing its image as Movieland South.”

Going into the early 1990s, organizations such as the IDC and the FMPTPA subsidiary Metro Orlando Film and Television Office (MOFTO) worked to attract an ever-increasing number of productions to Central Florida. MOFTO further established itself as an agent for the City of Orlando by processing all production applications and issuing permits after review and approval by the city. The efforts of MOFTO and various Orlando film boosters helped to ensure that the entire city was at the disposal of producers. The efforts made by local producers helped to shine a much-needed spotlight on a variety of the area’s possibilities. In 1991 such a chance came when Orlando-based producer Ross Testagrossa saw an opportunity to incorporate the pending demolition of the old Orlando City Hall for the opening sequence of Lethal Weapon 3 (1993). After fielding nearly one hundred calls, Testagrossa was able to get in touch with producer Joel Silver and negotiated a $50,000 deal to ensure that the demolition experts rigged the explosion for maximum visual effect. After a week of preparations and location shooting the old Orlando City Hall was imploded on October 24, 1991. As a show of support Mayor Bill Fredrick made a cameo as the head of the bomb squad. The demolition sequence went off

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213 Pat Williams and Larry Guest, Making Magic: How Orlando Won an NBA Team (Orlando, FL: Sentinel Communications Company, 1989), 25.
216 Ponti, 123.
without a hitch, and it became apparent that if other big-budget projects were to come to 
Orlando the city needed liaison office to communicate between producers civic leaders. Cathy 
Savino, the director of the Film Commission and a former location manager for Paramount 
Pictures, expressed immense confidence that the agency could help establish Orlando’s 
reputation among industry professionals. MOFTO helped to coordinate requests “for the use of 
city equipment and personnel and identify streets, sidewalks, or other areas of the city that 
might need to be closed off for filming,” and to “require production companies to repay the city 
for all direct costs for extraordinary services, such as the use of city personnel and services.”

It also served as a “one-stop permit” provider for visiting producers. A 1992 meeting of the 
FMPTA helped to initiate a campaign promoting Orlando’s burgeoning film community 
through the use of promotions with captions such as: “Film Orlando” and “The East Coast 
Alternative.” This initiative culminated in 1993 when MOFTO produced the Orlando 
Filmbook, which outlined to producers the local offerings Orange, Seminole, Lake, and Osceola 
Counties could provide them. As liaison for city and county services, MOFTO’s services 
extended to also include “police assistance for traffic or crowd control,” and “the fire 
department for supervision of pyrotechnic effects.”

Despite local rumblings of Orlando’s emergence as “Hollywood East,” industry insiders 
predicted Orlando’s local production industry would fail if it tried to go head to head with major 
Hollywood productions. Nina Easton of the Los Angeles Times observed during the late 1980s 
that Orlando’s future lay as a major regional production center. Similar to the push made in 
Miami and Orlando during the 1960s, the best source of opportunity for establishing an industry

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220 Economic Development Commission of Mid-Florida, Orlando Filmbook (Orlando, FL: Metro Orlando Film and Television Office, 1993), 27.
with regular work would come from commercials and television productions. Easton suggested that Orlando instead should “lure away some of New York’s lucrative TV commercial business; and it will become a warm-weather alternative to Canada, where producers have flocked in recent years to take advantage of cheaper labor costs and a weak Canadian dollar.” This suggestion to draw away productions from Toronto and Vancouver’s emerging regional market seemed to be a sound strategy. Ted Kaye, Vice-President of Disney’s Orlando studio operations, went as far as to add, “For the foreseeable future, Orlando will develop into a regional production center. It’s not Hollywood East, it’s Toronto South.”

Why Orlando Failed to Become “Hollywood East” or “Toronto South?”

In the end it was the lack of coordination between industry leaders and local organizers that brought about a drastic downfall in production activity across Central Florida. A variety of factors can be attributed to why Orlando never successfully became “Hollywood East,” a “Toronto” South,” or simply a minor regional production hub in its own right. Jim Hill offered several suggestions on what brought about Hollywood East’s downfall. Hill suggests that one of the most important shortcomings came with the fusion of theme parks and production. Many filmmakers who were interested in producing their films at Disney or Universal’s production facilities were turned off by the notion of having tourists look in on them as they worked. According to Hill, “It didn’t matter that the Imagineers and/or Universal Creative had made these glassed-in viewing areas sound-proof. Just the idea that there were people up there, potentially looking down (figuratively as well as literally) at them working was enough to make some directors and actors deliberately take a pass on working at Disney-MGM and/or USF.”

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222 Ibid.

Suzy Allen, Vice President of Film and Digital Media development for MOFTO felt that the lofty ambitions of Orlando’s film boosters may have contributed to its overall downfall, in particular Orlando’s emphasis to retake the name Hollywood. She explains, “I think the term ‘Hollywood East’ was kind of a detriment, because it set an expectation by people and organizations that had nothing to do with the industry. The industry never planted a flag and said, ‘We want to be Hollywood East.’ That was kind of put upon them as an expectation that was really unfair. It’s like taking Simi Valley ‘near Hollywood, California’ out of Simi Valley and saying, ‘We’re Simi Detroit.’ It just doesn’t happen.”

Terri Hartman, publicity director for the production group of Universal Orlando’s film and television division agreed that Orlando was not alone in its efforts to shake off the “Hollywood East” stigma. “Houston was supposed to be the third coast. We’re not L.A. We’re not New York – never were gonna be. That was never the intention.”

In his assessment on the collapse of Nickelodeon’s Silver Age programming at the Universal Orlando facilities, James Greene Jr., suggests, that another reason for the snuffing out of Orlando’s incipient motion picture industry was an overall lack of community engagement on the part of the studios. “Nick Studio productions rarely if ever wandered out of their Soundstages or the Universal lot; as such, there are no entries where the Gullah Gullah tadpole runs afoul of Shaquille O’Neal at Lake Eola, or Shelby Woo investigating the case of the missing anything in Longwood or Sanford.” Another factor that contributed to Orlando’s downfall as a production center were that the cost saving measures Florida’s tax incentives initially offered did not entirely offset the costs attributed to flying big name talent and creative functionaries from Los Angeles to Florida. Since Orlando was never intended to function entirely independent of Hollywood, much of

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225 Ibid.
226 Greene Jr., “Location Matters: The Unmarked Tomb of Nickelodeon Studios.”
the talent that came to Central Florida in the late 1980s and 1990s continued to reside in Los Angeles during their off time. The costs for temporary housing and support proved a significant drain on a number of production budgets. Central Florida was also beset by increased competition between local producers and against studios active in South Florida during the same period.

When a change in administration in the Canadian government allowed for an increase in financial incentives and attracted productions that were initially slated to take place in Florida to Canada instead. At the height of Orlando’s Hollywood East movement, seventeen production companies oversaw a range of subcontracting arrangements with local firms that provided a full range of production services. Marginally stronger contract commitments and Limits to price competition enforced by state governmental policies further hindered Central Florida’s position as a center for production. The failure of Orlando to establish a permanent production industry is indicative of the wider difficulties that arose in many across American regional centers toward promoting an alternative location for low-cost generic production. As Susan Christopherson argues in her assessment of this shift in regional production practices, what doomed Orlando was that it could not “compete with Los Angeles for production know-how and [could not] compete with Vancouver for cost.”

While film offices elsewhere in the South in states such as Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and North Carolina, were able to reorganize and address these new industry dynamics, Florida has routinely struggled to find its place in the American motion picture industry. By 1999 systemic changes in the motion picture industry would further accelerate the downfall of the “ride the movies” strategy employed by Disney-MGM and Universal Studios. In Convergence Culture Henry Jenkins describes the year 1999 as the “year that changed movies,” with the premiere of advent of new multiplatform moviegoing experiences through films such as The

\[227\] Christopherson, 33.
This new tactic was perhaps most apparent in Florida after Universal Studios announced its plans to create a second theme park that sought to accommodate this new multimodal form of consumer experience. The opening of Islands of Adventure and City Walk in 1999, drastically changed the Universal experience. “Suddenly watching some anonymous lunatic mixing up a new batch of Gak had to compete with an Incredible Hulk roller coaster, Popeye-themed river rapids, and a goddamn Starbucks.”

Billy Maines acerbically described Orlando’s dreams for Hollywood East after the year 2000 as reduced to “suffer the humiliation of straight-to-DVD sequel infamy, reality television, and commercials.”

“We Don’t Do That Anymore:” The Decline of Production in Central Florida

On April 30, 2005, Howard Smith, the Senior Vice President for Nickelodeon Studios announced that the landmark Soundstages 18 and 19 located at Universal Studios Orlando would permanently close its doors. By the time of Smith’s announcement less than ten full time staffers from Nickelodeon’s Orlando production unit were employed at the studio. Production at the soundstages experienced a gradual decline as Universal Studios crossed over into the 21st Century. With the addition of a second theme park, the thrill-oriented Islands of Adventure and the opening of the CityWalk nightlife promenade in 1999, Universal Studio’s founding mission of creating an attraction that allowed visitors to “ride the movies” and watch live productions as they were recorded and performed in real-time had shifted toward a more conventional amusement park model established by their cross-town rival Disney World. In a final act of damnatio memoriae, the enormous orange Nickelodeon sign was removed from the front of the building and the studio’s iconic slime geyser was removed. However, the bizarre color schemes and various murals of Nickelodeon cartoons were left as an engraved tribute in the office.

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229 Greene Jr., “Location Matters: The Unmarked Tomb of Nickelodeon Studios.”
230 Maines, “Back From the Dead.”
interiors. In 2007 later the front end of the studio grounds was then painted over and converted into the Sharp Aquos Theatre to become the permanent home of the Blue Man Group, while the soundstages were adopted by Fox Sun Sports for local sports casting coverage.\textsuperscript{232}

According to Smith, the erasure of Nickelodeon Studios was solely due to the fact, “The studio was designed to accommodate programming that we don’t do anymore. We just found that we weren’t using the facility.”\textsuperscript{233} Orlando Sentinel columnist Susan Strother Clarke challenged Smith’s claims that Nickelodeon’s departure was strictly an issue of the practicality of the studio grounds. “Let’s face it: A soundstage is nothing more than a big long-term box. If the company wanted to, it could refit its big box in Orlando to look like a big box in that while Orlando will get the occasional TV series or movie, we will never be a New York or a big box in California.” Instead the studio’s official closing “shows again, that while Orlando will get the occasional TV series or movie, we will never be a long-term hub for big, high end productions.”\textsuperscript{234}

Nickelodeon’s withdrawal from Soundstages 18 and 19 at Universal Studios Orlando signaled the end of a long period of decline for Orlando’s ambitious decades-long effort to position Central Florida as a major hub for motion picture and television productions. The loss of Nickelodeon was all the more devastating to Orlando following the departure of Disney animation the year before. In January 2004, Disney management under the direction of then-CEO Michael Eisner and David Stainton, President of Walt Disney Feature Animation, announced the layoff or relocation of 258 animators from their facilities at Disney-MGM Studios in Orlando.\textsuperscript{235} In a statement later repeated by Howard Smith, David Stainton explained the consolidation of animation team at Disney’s Burbank facilities

\textsuperscript{233} Schneider, 4.
as a “difficult decision based on what is best strategically for our business both in the short term and the long term.” The departure of major studio operations at both Disney-MGM and Universal Studios in Orlando marked a decided end of Orlando’s bid to establish a so-called “Hollywood East” in Central Florida. More broadly the decline of Hollywood East ended an experiment carried by both amusement parks to develop a “living movie set” that could create a disambiguation for parkgoers between “the ‘real world’ commercial activity of the film and television studios and the ongoing ‘fantasy world’ activity of the theme park.”

In 2006, as film production started to wind down in Central Florida, the center of gravity for the state’s production industry once again oscillated back to South Florida. That year at the pilot for the USA Network spy series *Burn Notice* (2007-2013) was filmed at Greenwich Studios in North Miami. The City of Miami had a permanent set built at the former Coconut Grove Convention Center, where the first six seasons of the show were shot. During the early 2000s, Miami also propped up agreements with networks such as CBS, Showtime, and AMC for programs that ranged from *CSI: Miami* (2002-2012), *Dexter* (2006-13), and *The Glades* (2010-13). As the South Florida television industry experienced a resurgence after a series of tax incentives were initiated during the Jeb Bush and Charlie Crist administrations, Florida established an open policy of cooperation with the Florida Office of Film and Entertainment. In 2010 the Crist administration approved a $242 million tax incentive bill that passed through the Florida legislature. Such efforts toward cooperation came to a grinding halt when the Florida legislature denied requests to extend the incentives legislation after the funds were spent in 2014. This shift in disposition would once again spark a heated debate between politicians and lobbyists over Florida’s destiny as a motion picture production center.

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239 Pergola-Parent and Govern, 59-60.
CONCLUSION: “THE FLIP OF A SWITCH:” THE SUN SETS ON FLORIDA’S MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY (CAN IT RISE AGAIN?), 2006-2019

In February 2019 Florida State Senator and long-time film industry ally Linda Stewart issued before the Florida Legislature Senate Bill (SB) 726. The act proposed to authorize Florida’s counties “to use their tax revenues to promote or incentivize film or television productions,” under the condition that the county “require that the production include in its credits the statement ‘Created in Florida’ or ‘Filmed in Florida.’”¹ The purpose of the bill was announced “to help prioritize or incentivize film or television productions in this state.” According to Senator Stewart, the impetus for SB 726 was due to the fact that filmmaking in Florida had consistently “gone to Georgia or Louisiana, and they’re making a fortune.”² In 2006, Florida was home to the third largest motion picture industry in the United States in terms of the number of productions produced in-state.³ However by that time the dimensions of the industry had drastically changed. During the early 2000s as the motion picture industry experienced further corporate consolidation, the major studios were themselves bought up by a handful of international media conglomerates. This in turn brought on another period of greater fragmentation across the motion picture industry. In Los Angeles on-location filming fell a record 19 percent in 2009 and the permitted production days for feature films dropped to their lowest level since 1993. To try to recoup its place as the primary production center in the United States, California passed a five-year tax incentive program in 2009 and in 2012. Governor Jerry Brown signed the legislation. However unlike competing states, the program had an annual cap

of $100 million and feature film projects with budgets over $75 million were ineligible. During the same period between 1993 and 2009, Vancouver emerged as “Hollywood North,” siphoning away the aspirations from Orlando’s “Hollywood East movement.” The combination of the low Canadian dollar and a fully refundable tax credit in exchange for a percentage of production services helped to prop up Canada’s industry. Louisiana also emerged as a “Hollywood South” by offering runaway productions subsidies for their entire production budget from the first location scout survey on through to the catered wrap party. Meanwhile Georgia’s “Y’allywood” production industry implemented a 30 percent tax credit plan and a four-billion-dollar expenditure program. The tradeoff has resulted in an additional 79,000 jobs across the state and seven billion dollars added to the state economy. Because of these enticements nearly 250 television and film productions were shot in Georgia in 2016 alone. The stunning success of Georgia’s incentive program caused the state to climb to rank third in the country in the production of film and television programming, behind only California and New York.

By 2010 over forty states had developed their own specific tax incentives programs in an effort to attract film and television productions, while competition with the reduced production costs available in Canada and Eastern Europe offered new location possibilities for runaway productions. In an effort to preserve Florida’s position as the third largest production industry in the U.S., Governor Jeb Bush and the Florida Legislature approved $25 million in funding for the 2007-2008 fiscal year to sponsor the Florida Entertainment Industry Incentive Program. The

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program was overseen by the Office of Film and Entertainment (OFE) and went into full effect in July 2007. The purpose of the program was to “encourage the use of this state a site for filming and to develop and sustain the workforce and infrastructure for film and entertainment production.” In a move modeled after Jerry Brown’s efforts keep productions in California, Charlie Crist, Bush’s successor in Tallahassee, implemented the incentives issued through the OFE and in 2010 signed off on a six-year program that allocated $242 million in tax credits for film and television productions active in the state of Florida. Upon the program’s ratification Governor Crist acknowledged the importance of state-wide support of its entertainment industry. “As we continue to seek growth opportunities for Florida’s economy, it is important to remember the significant role film and entertainment plays in our state, directly employing more than 100,000 Floridians.” The program under Rick Scott added an additional $12 million in 2011, and another $42 million in 2012, for a total of $296 million, which still amounts to less than California spends in one year on film incentives.

Between 2010 and 2014 a string of major studio and television network productions streamed to Florida to take advantage of the tax credits offered. Popular television productions such as Burn Notice (2007-13), The Glades (2010-13), and later Bloodline (2015-17) and Ballers (2015-present) offered steady work and a regular stream of spending in South Florida. The incentives brought in big budget blockbusters such as Magic Mike (2012) and Pain and Gain (2013). These films left a large economic imprint in terms of production expenditures. While smaller-budget independent projects like Dolphin Tale (2011) and Spring Breakers (2012) proved to be a boon for tourism. The impact from Dolphin Tale alone was so far reaching that a

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9 Mary Pergola-Parent and Kevin H. Govern, “Florida and the Film Industry: An Epic Tale of Talent, Landscape, and the Law,” Nova Law Review 38, no. 43 (2013), 68-69. This program was initiated through invoking Section 181 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. Section 181 allows for certain expenses associated with films and television productions costing less than $15 million to be immediately deducted in the year incurred.


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2012 USF St. Petersburg College of Business study estimated that 73 percent of all visitors to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium visited specifically because of the movie. While a 2013 survey conducted by Visit Florida indicated the film industry helped to induce 22.7 percent of domestic visitors to Florida.\(^\text{12}\)

When *Dolphin Tale 2* (2014) returned to Clearwater in 2013, Rick Scott expressed his enthusiasm for the production to further stimulate the local economy on Florida’s West Coast. “It’s exciting that *Dolphin Tale 2* will be filmed here in Florida. Today’s announcement will create more economic activity and opportunities for families living in Pinellas County. This exciting news builds on the economic momentum that Florida is currently experiencing.”\(^\text{13}\) Pinellas County Senator Jack Latvala and Representatives Ed Hooper and Kathleen Peters each expressly thanked Governor Scott for his support of the production.\(^\text{14}\) In their 2013 assessment of the Florida film industry and its collaboration with the state government, Mary Pergola-Parent and Kevin Govern optimistically expressed that the spirit of cooperation was, “A match made in heaven, or rather paradise. Florida’s ineradical dedication to the needs and desires of the film industry proves her unwavering commitment to this treasured relationship.”\(^\text{15}\) That same year the Office of Film and Entertainment (OFE) issued a five-year strategic plan for economic development through the use of film incentives. The plan was reminiscent of the early promotions for Jacksonville’s film industry during the 1910s and the efforts to initiate a state-wide support for the motion picture industry during the 1930s and 1970s. “Florida’s film and entertainment industry is

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\(^\text{14}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{15}\) Pergola-Parent and Govern, 79.
truly unique. It is important to the Florida economy as a major driver of employment and personal income.” The primary outcome of this initiative was “attracting revenue from other states and countries to be spent locally on wages and film production services. Florida’s year-round sunshine, moderate climate, diverse scenery and business-friendly incentive program give the state an advantage over competitors.”16

By 2013 it appeared as if Florida had finally managed to strike an effective balance between governmental cooperation and economic encouragement. According to Pergola-Parent and Govern, “As this multi-billion-dollar relationship continues into its second century, with over 120 films and television shows and counting, filmmakers and Floridians can look forward to many more success stories – especially if they focus on diligent collaboration, economic incentives, and absolutely any tale about a bottlenose dolphin.”17 Little did Pergola-Parent and Govern realize, within a year the tide would once again turn against the motion picture and television industry. Despite the additional $56 million contributed to the incentive program during the first two years of Rick Scott’s administration, by 2014 the allocated funds had been entirely spent. The final two productions that were able to take advantage of the funds sets aside were the Netflix original series Bloodline (2015-2017) and the HBO premium program Ballers (2015-present). Although the expenditures were intended until 2016, the first-come first serve nature of the incentives program allowed productions of all sizes, scopes, and potential economic impact to take advantage of the allotted funds. Detractors of the tax incentive program expressed concern that projects would only receive incentives based on when they applied as opposed to their perceived economic impact. An Office of Economic and Demographic Research report published in 2014 also claimed Florida only received a 43-cent return on each dollar spent on tax credits. With these concerns in mind, the Florida Legislature

17 Ibid, 80.
opted not to replenish the incentive program and in 2016 decided to end the initiative entirely.\textsuperscript{18} A string of highly publicized lawsuits against the modern-day flivver filmmakers raised additional suspicion among legislatures. Perhaps most notorious was a $350,000 lawsuit between Sarasota County and the defunct Sanborn Studios company. This was in response to an unprecedented deal established between Ken Sanborn and the county government for $650,000 to establish a studio at Lakewood Ranch, Florida. The company promised to deliver a series about television helicopters called \textit{Miami 24/7}, however the project never fully materialized and the only result was a two-minute trailer.\textsuperscript{19} The decision to withhold further funds for incentives had an immediate effect on film and television production in Florida, as even projects that were set in Florida relocated to states with more lucrative incentives. \textit{Magic Mike XXL} (2015) which was partially set in Tampa and had many principal scenes in the original filmed along Florida’s Gulf Coast, relocated to Savannah, Georgia and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Another casualty of the loss of incentives was Ben Affleck’s prohibition-era crime drama \textit{Live By Night} (2016). Although the film was set in Tampa’s Ybor City, Affleck and his production team found it more cost effective to film in Georgia instead. John Lux, executive director for the trade association Film Florida, described the situation for production in Florida as “the flip of a switch.” He added, “The minute we didn’t have any tax credits available, the phones rang a lot less. The interest in coming to Florida waned almost immediately.”\textsuperscript{20}

One of the primary opponents to the policy was then-Florida Speaker of the House Richard Corcoran. In a 2016 interview with \textit{PoliticoFlorida}, Corcoran explained his reasoning behind rejecting a $250 million economic incentive program outlined by Governor Scott. Corcoran explains, “The House’s position on the issue has been clear. The government


\textsuperscript{20} Geurts, “Florida Film Struggles and Successes Post-Tax Incentives.”
engaging in social engineering to pick winners and losers that benefit the 1 percent is a bad deal for Florida taxpayers. There will not be any corporate welfare in the House budget.”

According to Film Florida, this decision by the Florida Legislature cost the state nearly $650 million in projects, 110,000 hotel room purchases, and $1.8 billion in economic impact between 2013 to 2016 alone. A study conducted by Miami-Dade County’s Regulatory and Economic Resources Department indicated that upwards of 4,900 jobs, $249 million in personal income, and $20 million in tax revenues would be at risk between 2017 and 2022. The decision to forsake the incentives program by the Florida Legislature was in blatant disregard to the tourism impact film and television productions had on the state. For example, Bloodline accounted for a total of $95 million, 1,738 jobs and $9.4 million in state and local taxes in 2015 alone.

At the time Film Florida’s then-president Michelle Hillery expressed her irritation at lawmakers’ lack of understanding in regards to economic benefits such an incentive program could provide. “The legislature’s ultimate decision to officially abandon our film, television and digital media professionals has our entire industry and supporters outraged. This is not the message our state wants to send to its longtime industry workers, and the rest of the world after building a reputation for over one hundred successful years in this business.”

The collapse of incentives led to the early cancellation of Bloodline, which had initially planned at

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least six-seasons worth of storylines. According series co-creator Todd Kessler, the pivotal role the Florida Keys played in the storyline and the collapse of incentives were the primary reason for the show’s early exit. “We decided to set the show there because it’s crucial to what the show is, not because of the tax incentive, but it does affect things financially for us and the show will be challenged because of that. It makes things more difficult.”26 In November 2016, several months after Bloodline’s cancellation announcement, HBO revealed its intention to relocate Ballers to California. In a statement issued to The Hollywood Reporter, the network explained how Florida’s lack of incentives informed the decision. “We have a long history of shooting projects in Florida and were obviously disappointed in the recent vote to not renew the incentive program. We will be assessing its impact on any future productions like Ballers, who have established Florida as their home.”27

Just as the last remaining big-budget film and television studio productions packed up to leave the state, several prestigious independent productions helped to keep Florida on the map. Barry Jenkins’ Moonlight (2016) won three Academy Awards including Best Picture. Moonlight was filmed on a $1.5 million budget and has the distinction of being the lowest budget (adjusted for inflation) film to win the Best Picture Oscar. The film was shot in and around Jenkin’s former home within Miami’s Liberty City, the same neighborhood that was decimated during the 1980 McDuffie Riots. Jenkins publicly stated that Miami truly was the only place he could have imagined making his film.28 Miami Beach film commissioner Graham Winick went as far as to call Moonlight “a cultural high-water mark for Miami and Florida, comparable to hosting an

28 Geurts, “Florida Film Struggles and Successes Post-Tax Incentives.”
international art fair like Art Basel Miami Beach or preserving the area’s signature Art Deco architecture.”

Meanwhile Sean Baker’s Academy Award nominated The Florida Project (2017) was set in the shadow of Walt Disney World. Baker expressed that his film depended on demonstrating “the juxtaposition of having kids growing up in motels right outside ‘the happiest place on earth.’”

While the advent of social problem films such as Moonlight and The Florida Project have helped provide a voice to marginalized communities in the State of Florida, the concerns raised by these films narratives have yet to inspire any real changes in state policy decisions.

The prestige attached to these films has been something of a mixed blessing for the State of Florida. In a situation akin to the controversies attached to films such as A Florida Feud (1909) and The Cracker’s Bride (1909) during the early twentieth century and the backlash against Scarface (1983) in the 1980s, state promoters and tourism boosters have expressed concerns over the potential negative economic impact such subjects can have on the state. In an interesting reckoning of its earlier assessment of the drug wars, race riots, and refugee crisis in South Florida during the 1980s, Time lauded Moonlight’s depiction of this alternative side of Miami. “For decades, audiences have had a fairly myopic and often cartoonish view of life in the city, exemplified by crime-focused stories like 1983’s Scarface, the television show Miami Vice, the Bad Boys film series and the video game series Grand Theft Auto (particularly ‘Vice City’). Other stories, such as TV’s Nip/Tuck, highlighted the city’s glitz and glamor to the detriment, if not entire erasure, of the multidimensional worlds of those living in the city’s margins.”

The implied inclusivity that Moonlight has to offer audiences helps to not only revise Miami’s public

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persona but also raise important questions about the nature of the city’s social structure. In a statement resonant of *Time*’s infamous “Paradise Lost?” article from November 1981, Julio Capo of the University of Massachusetts Amherst acknowledges the film’s portrayal of Miami’s Liberty City as a “a powder keg for such a turmoil following nearly a century of urban violence, displacement and exploitation.” In response to Sean Baker’s depiction of Kissimmee’s hotel families in *The Florida Project*, county commissioners and local business owners expressed concerns that the film could “make Kissimmee look bad.” In an interview with the *Tampa Bay Times*, Osceola County Commissioner Peggy Choudhury expressed her hopes that the film does not label her district unfairly. “I understand that maybe this is why people are more interested because they’re going to say, ‘Oh, wow. It’s right next to Disney. Oh my god, how could that happen?’ Well, it happens everywhere, in the best cities and the best towns.”

In a possible retaliation for the negative publicity attributed to recent negative cinematic portrayals of the state, the Florida Legislature stepped up on its campaign against the Florida film industry. In March 2017 a bill that would have closed the Film Florida and OFE offices entirely was proposed in the Florida House of Representatives. If the bill had passed, it would have effectively ended a forty-year affiliation between Florida’s government and the motion picture industry and would have left Florida alone with Vermont as the only two states without a film office. State Representative Paul Renner put forth a proposal to cease the funding for twenty-four economic development programs including Rick Scott’s Enterprise Florida jobs initiative and the OFE. According to Representative Renner, these programs were “a misuse of taxpayer

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32 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
dollars or are not effective.”\textsuperscript{36} Florida Speaker Richard Corcoran expressed his support of the legislation, calling the effort “right on policy, right on principle.”\textsuperscript{37}

All the while Governor Rick Scott remained silent on the issue. Several days after the announcement of the proposed bill, Scott suffered enormous pushback from Florida’s film boosters. One of the most outspoken supporters of the OFE was Burt Reynolds, who criticized Rick Scott for not doing enough to help Florida’s struggling film industry, calling him “dumber than a peach orchard sow for squandering the state’s film industry.”\textsuperscript{38} In an interview with South Florida’s Local 10 news station, Reynolds compared the situation under Scott to his difficulties in getting Governor Reubin Askew to support bringing The Longest Yard (1974) to Florida. According to Reynolds, “You can’t do it unless the governor’s behind you.”\textsuperscript{39} As indicated earlier in this section, it does appear that despite moments of hesitation, Scott did in fact express his support for incentive policies that had a provable job creation record. Less than a week after Reynold’s public statement, Rick Scott came out against Corcoran’s proposed incentive cutbacks and suggested that he might veto the bill entirely. After the bill was approved by the Florida House, Scott reiterated his support for job creating incentives, “A vote for these bills was a vote to kill tourism and jobs in Florida.”\textsuperscript{40} In the end, Scott’s veto was not necessary, since the Florida Senate did not have a similar bill, the OFE managed to live to incentivize another day. However even as the situation for Florida’s production industry continued to grow increasingly bleak going into the year 2018, several promising opportunities also appeared on the horizon.

\textsuperscript{37} Luscombe, “Moonlight’s Oscars Shine May Not Be Enough to Save Florida Film Industry.”
\textsuperscript{40} Luscombe, “Moonlight’s Oscars Shine May Not Be Enough to Save Florida Film Industry.”
In January 2018 State Senator Annette Taddeo (D-Miami) proposed Senate Bill 1606 to provide funding to create a “Florida Movie Capital Corporation” that would subsidize an promote film and television productions in the state. The bipartisan bill was also co-sponsored by State Representative Joe Grunters (R-Sarasota).\(^{41}\) Although the use of the word “capital” in this specific bill implies the allotment of cash capital to supplement motion picture production activity, the name also harkens an association to Florida’s past as “The World’s Winter Film Capital,” aspirations toward becoming “The Film Capital of the Nation,” and legacy as a “Forgotten Film Capital.”\(^{42}\) Although Corcoran and company staunchly opposed the proposal, Taddeo did find an ally in Democratic gubernatorial candidate Philip Levine. At a Seminole County Democratic Party meeting held on February 8, 2018, Levine pledged to work toward ensuring that big budget motion picture and television productions returned to Florida. In a set of policy claims reminiscent of Governor Bob Graham (his daughter Gwen was one of Levine’s primary opponents), Levine claimed to have “a lot of contacts in California, I know a lot of studio heads. They’re dying to come back. It doesn’t take much to get them to come back.”\(^{43}\) As mayor of Miami Beach between 2013 and 2017, Levine witnessed firsthand the economic consequences of the industry’s departure. Throughout his candidacy, Levine expressed his frustrations toward the previous administration and Florida’s state government’s support of regressive economic policies. At a campaign rally on July 24, he said the situation was “incredible to me. How do you attract a 21st-century economy when you have a 20th-century government? We’re living with a mentality, unfortunately, where they just don’t get it.”\(^{44}\)

\(^{41}\) Geurts, “Florida Film Struggles and Successes Post-Tax Incentives.”


At the meeting, several of the film officials in attendance made it an issue to counter Levine’s criticisms by stating that other Republican-led states such as Texas and Georgia have consistently offered incentives. Instead the film officers expressed “that experience has convinced them that Florida appears to be lost in a philosophical position of not offering incentives, and what they called a flawed return-on-investment equation for the film industry.”

Levine finished a distant third behind Gwen Graham and Andrew Gillum in the August 2018 Democratic Primary. Although not nearly as outspoken in his support of the industry as Levine, Gillum did express his support for SB 1606. An insight into Gillum’s position on fostering a film production industry came in February 2018 when as a primary candidate he re-tweeted a *Deadline Hollywood* article that highlighted how the Marvel blockbuster *Black Panther* (2018) contributed an additional $89.3 million to Georgia’s state economy and $26.5 million in wages. In his tweet he added, “This could have been us, Florida. When I’m Governor we’re going to bring film tax credits back.” *Deadline Hollywood* went as far as to venture that the fate of Florida’s film industry hinged on the outcome of the 2018 election. Although Republican candidate Ron DeSantis had not expressed a position one way or the other on the tax incentive debate, Gillum’s enthusiasm for incentive policies won him the endorsement of the Congress of Motion Picture Associations of Florida (COMPASS), a trade organization that represents film and television workers. In a recorded statement for Film Florida, Gillum expressed his support of Senator Taddeo’s ongoing efforts to “bring back the contract economy

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45 Ibid.
where people can make good wages, do good work, produce great products and showcase the beauty and the attractiveness of the state of Florida all across the globe.”

In one of the most contentious gubernatorial elections in Florida’s history, Gillum lost the general election to DeSantis by a margin of .05 percent or 32,463 votes. Since his inauguration in January 2019, Governor DeSantis has yet to make any decisive statement toward his position on efforts to foster film and television production in Florida. The late Burt Reynolds argued that the support of the governor was essential to the success or failure of Florida’s production industry. However, that is just one part of the equation. According to John Lux, “In order to change the current state of the industry in Florida, we look to the new legislative leadership in Tallahassee to have an open mind, and be willing to consider options that first and foremost helps the entire state, and second, sends a signal to the industry in Florida, the United States, and the world, that Florida is open for business and competing for high wage jobs in the film, television and digital media industry.” As a non-partisan trade association, Film Florida does not expressly endorse candidates for elected office, but instead attempts to work with already elected officials. This suggested change in legislative leadership can take a variety of forms from the backing of pro-industry candidates to the continual lobbying for incentivizing producers to come to Florida, along with inspiring content creation within the state.

The bleakly titled report *Is The Sun Setting on Film in Florida?* was sponsored by Florida TaxWatch and published in November 2018. The report details the decline of Florida’s production industry during the 2010s. The report also discussed the economic impact potential that film-induced tourism can provide for the state, acknowledging a that there is a clear correlation between the decline in motion picture productions and overall tourism to the state.

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51 Robb, “Fate of Florida’s Decimated Film Industry Might Hang on Governor’s Race.”
Florida TaxWatch outlined four possible options for rebuilding Florida’s film industry. The first option, “is to retool and relaunch the tax credit incentives program.” The second possibility, “is for local governments to take up the slack and develop and make available their own incentive and subsidy programs.” A third opportunity would be, “for the private sector to take up the slack and develop and make available their own incentive and subsidy programs.” The fourth and final option suggested is to develop a new legislative program to reenergize film and television production in Florida.  

Although Senator Taddeo’s proposed SB 1606 died in the Approbations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism and Economic Development at the end of the 2018 legislative session, Linda Stewart’s proposed SB 726 has the potential to initiate the recommendations summarized in the Florida TaxWatch report. In a statement made to Film Florida, Dominic M. Calabro, the President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, draws on the state’s long history of economic development efforts. While he acknowledges, “Florida’s business-friendly tax climate, good weather, and beaches have their advantages,” Calabro advises “state policymakers should strongly consider a sound, fiscally-responsible incentive program to help grow targeted industries such as film and television production.”

Ninety-four years ago, Governor John Wellborn Martin outlined one of the most sweeping economic development and infrastructure building initiatives in Florida’s history. His road building program and subsequent efforts to attract out of state business interests and migrants to the state forever changed Florida’s destiny laid the path for its future prosperity. On the other hand, as Mayor of Jacksonville his hostile antagonism toward the motion picture industry brought about the collapse of North Florida’s position as “The World’s Winter Film

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52 Florida TaxWatch, Is The Sun Setting on Film in Florida? (Tallahassee, FL: Florida TaxWatch Research Institute, 2018), 13-14.
Capital.” Martin’s stance against providing support or subsidies for filmmakers ultimately deterred producers from further establishing their operations across the state. Martin’s actions took place during an incredibly a delicate moment in motion picture history, when the geographic destiny of the American motion picture industry had yet to be determined. The selective nature of Martin and his supporters’ economic policies established a near century-old dynamic within Florida politics and its relationship with the entertainment industry. At the dawn of the twentieth century Florida’s destiny was rooted in real estate, tourism, industry, military bases, and industrial development. Today as the state moves further into the twenty-first century, perhaps the time has come for Florida’s sometimes celebrated, but often neglected motion picture industry to come to the forefront and help drive the state into the future.
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