

ABSTRACT

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 WORKERS IN MIAMI, 1914-1941

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“Laboring in the Magic City” examines the development of class relations in the tourist Sunbelt city of Miami, Florida, from the World War I-era until the eve of WWII. It contributes to the historical scholarship of class relations in the United States by demonstrating how employers and workers continually negotiated economic and political power in the development of the twentieth century city. Specifically, the dissertation explores why Miami’s labor history was marked by apparent peaceful class relations—that is, despite successful union activism and other forms of persistent class struggle, the

city has not been remembered or imagined as a place where continual or virulent class conflict occurred.

Central to my analysis is the concept of harmony discourse -- a worldview that assumed the existence of harmony rather than continual conflict among the classes in matters of economic development and social order. The importance of this perspective is that it challenges historical interpretations that too often assume employer hegemony and worker complicity in the existing political economy. My study thus seeks to infuse new life into the study of class by demonstrating an active and vibrant citizenry existed in Miami, one shaped by both individualistic values of self-interest and by communalism. Harmony discourse represented an engagement with capitalism that remained critical of its results, of the ordering of power, and of the organization of society. At the same time -- given the vital role that black workers and middle-class professionals played in the local political economy -- race relations are central in my dissertation. Harmony discourse shaped relations between the white and black communities, and thus reinforced capitalistic relationships while also allowing for internal challenges of existing social structures.

“Laboring in the Magic City” is a study of how workers and business interests defined opportunity. It is a story of workers involved in real though at times subtle struggle across a variety of fronts: the workplace, the political arena, community affairs, and in leisure. The dissertation seeks to return to a study of class with a fresh perspective that transcends triumphant deference to and righteous condemnation of capitalism.

LABORING IN THE MAGIC CITY: WORKERS IN MIAMI, 1914-1941

By

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation is premised on one principle: the dignity of the human body and spirit should never be compromised. Along the way in researching and writing it, I have benefitted immeasurably from family, friends, intellectual discussions with authors dead and alive, peers and colleagues, mentors, and institutions. Each has given me more than I could ever repay. I remain humbled and in awe of the luck that has allowed me to engage this project. Thanks for the opportunity.

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Several other historians have been very helpful in the shaping and completion of this dissertation. Gary Gerstle's help guide my thinking, sometimes unknowingly, to higher levels, not just in the importance and relevance of his own work in labor history, but also in his advice of how to reframe the dissertation proposal and subsequent writings. Ira Berlin, as well, offered timely advice and his working-class habits of work (usually in his office from 9 to 5, five days a week) set the tone for this serious profession. As I have been fond in reminding him, he is my concrete link to the great Herbert Gutman. Julie Green joined my committee late, and this work is the better for it. Thank you for reminding me about the integrity of the radical tradition. Like Berlin and Gutman, Julie linked me to the important working-class history record of David Montgomery and his many students. I enjoyed very much your own Gutman story. Augusta Lynne Bolles was gracious enough to serve as the Dean's representative. Thank

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for me to follow. Ricardo Lopez's work on the middle class and our many conversations about the importance of class and class identity kept me focused. Thanks for your academic and emotional support over the years. Jeff Coster stands out as a sharp thinker, widely read, and a devoted friend. Thanks for helping me get through this; for serving as an example of absolute academic integrity and great citizenry; and for all your good cheer, wit, and brilliance. Simply put, the best parts of this dissertation are certainly a result of your insight in our many conversations about the working class over the years.

The listing here should not be interpreted as a hierarchy. Linda Noel was one of my first contacts when I first arrived at UMD. Her continued support and our many conversations about academics and so many other topics have been invaluable. Thanks for offering so much support over the years and for reading sections of the dissertation. Her students at Morgan State University are lucky to have such a dedicated teacher-scholar working for them. Larry Nagl, her husband, offered timely support and much good cheer. Shari Orisich's role in this dissertation has been enormous. Our many conversations over the years really kept me going. That we shared a working-class past only enriched our explorations about the nature of class in the United States and Mexico. Shari also graciously read over and listened to freshly written pages, often over the phone. Her seemingly endless enthusiasm and curiosity helped pushed this project forward. Yvonne Oslin was central to helping me attain balance and perspective about so much. Your insight guided me the entire way and will continue to do so the rest of my life.

I grew up in Hialeah, a place I liked to describe as a working-class city with a middle class complex. It was here I met fellow scholar, academic, and long-time friend and brother, Tony Lopez. We both have come a long way from junior varsity football in the hot Florida sun. While he likes to call my work a study of class, race and gender, I am fine with calling it simply labor history. Many deep and fulfilling discussions have centered on these quirky and fine distinctions. His support over the years has been immeasurable. Other long-time friends have been vital and I can go on and on about how much they helped me, and how much I value them. I do not mean to slight you by simply listing your names here but I cannot add enough pages on how much you have helped this project along: Gilbert Lleonart, Evelyn Miranda, John Clasca (my "dissertation coach"), Pablo Toral, Roberto Pacheco, and David Callejo.

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I dedicate this dissertation to the memories of my father, Oswaldo Ramon Castillo, and my older brother, Oswaldo Anthony Castillo. My father's hard work and personal struggles and Anthony's intellectualism shaped me in ways that I continue to discover each day. My father never finished high school, immigrated to the United States from Colombia in his mid-twenties, and he worked various working-class jobs throughout his life. He first worked at a factory, then at numerous other jobs, often holding more than one job at a time, but he was defined most by his ten-year experience in a New Jersey, General Motors parts factory, where he was a member of the local union, and by his lifetime work as a house painter. He took pride in calling himself a master painter. I got my first job working for my dad at the age of 12 as a "painter helper" and then rose up in my apprenticeship to become just a "painter." Tough economic times forced me to work at that early age. Indeed, my fascination with class and power began by observing him and our surroundings. Why did some work so hard and get so little is a question that has resisted easy answer. While the road may have often been rocky, my dad's love was nonetheless unquestionable. He was proudest of the one thing that proved the test of time: his family. My brother's sharp and curious mind launched me in my own quest to understand and engage the world in which I live. I will always cherish our deep conversations about life and the world. My debt to both is profound.

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INTRODUCTION

Against the Tides of Hegemony: Working-Class Community, Harmony, and a Service Economy

The development and growth of United States cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often took the appearance of a business venture, industrial in nature and progressive in tone. Each addition, from buildings and parks to infrastructure, constituted a progressive march for social betterment and a sacrifice to the god of economic growth and abundance. While the urban-rural tensions persisted, the city won out as the dominant power between the two regions. Farmland and the outskirts of the urban would serve the demands of the city—the bastion of modernity, acting as the brain to the body and revealed in the landscape of finance, financial markets, manufacturing, and the service trades.

Developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in a pristine and sparsely populated area, Miami built on this longer history of the city. Its founders and boosters pushed for growth, begged for investment by selling its potential for economic profit, and packaged South Florida's climate, natural landscape, and geographic proximity to the Caribbean and Latin America as unique competitive advantages. At the very least, the weather was better in sunny Miami than in Jack Frost's north.

Miami endured an identity crisis in the first half of the twentieth century regarding what kind of city it would become. Many were satisfied to keep the city simply a resort town with agricultural development in the hinterland. The rural outskirts would maintain the tropical resort where aristocrats basked in the pleasures of leisure. This envisioned keeping tourism the primary economic engine, particularly the aspects of

the trade that engaged the wealthy and well to do. Into the 1950s, the adjacent city of Miami Beach did its best to safeguard this vision of exclusivity by keeping out African American residents from either living on or visiting the Beach for leisure; restricting American Jewish use of clubs and hotels; and remaining cost prohibitive for low-income workers more generally. Fear of worker theft led hotels and restaurants to force the workers who commuted to work from Miami city, white and black, to submit to fingerprinting and criminal background checks.¹ The winter season witnessed an increase of local police and the migration of northern detectives to the Beach and Miami to secure the perception of safety in the *winter playground*—a term used widely by boosters and promoters of Greater Miami that often referred more specifically to Miami Beach.² Increasingly over time, the acute seasonal ebbs and flows of unemployment

¹ “Miami Beach Adopts Fingerprinting Law,” *Evening Independent* (St. Petersburg, Fl.), 5 Nov 1936, p. 1. This article cited that, “The Beach regulation applies to all employes of night clubs, any place that handles liquor or beer, amusement houses, hotels, apartment houses, delivery services, restaurants and bath houses and to special policemen, newspaper boys, golf caddies, taxi drivers, charter boat operators and domestics.” It also highlighted how Miami Beach police had been fingerprinting various seasonal employees since 1932. More will be discussed in Chapter One, Three, and Four regarding fingerprinting and control of worker movement more generally to the state and within South Florida. Nathan Connolly misreads the photo ID policy he discovered in his research—it was the same law referenced here. He interprets this practice as a sign pointing to apartheid tendencies in Miami, but he understates the significance of whites enduring the same treatment (or the fact that more whites than blacks worked on the Beach). Connolly, “Colored, Caribbean, and Condemned: Miami’s Overtown District and the Cultural Expense of Progress, 1940-1970,” *Caribbean Studies*, 34, no. 1 (Jan-June 2006): 11-14. The lack of context leads to a misreading that has race superseding class.

² Philip Wylie, “Slums in the Sun,” *Miami Daily News* (hereafter, *MDN*), 28 May 1958, p. 1A; “Six Detectives Ordered to Miami Force,” 16 Jan 1930, p. 1; “Beach Officers Work Overtime,” 14 March 1933, p. 12; “Pinkerton Men to Work Here,” *MDN*, 29 December 1937, p. 11A. This article commented that, “The private detectives will replace the former ‘foreign legion’ of Northern detectives brought here during the regime of A. J. Kavanaugh,” (who served as safety director in the mid-1930s): “Finest Police Force Planned Here in Winter,” *MDN*, 20 Sept 1936, p. 1. Miami Beach hotel owners and the Hialeah Race Track had invested in private detectives since the mid-1920s; the Miami Beach police also added police officers during the winter. This policy of increasing security was a reaction to widespread gambling, tourist theft, and the migration of “gangsters” symbolized most dramatically by Al Capone’s move to Palm Island (situated in Biscayne Bay between the Beach and the mainland). One suspects, the increase

characteristic of an economy overly reliant on the short winter tourist season (December to March) made for an unstable and insecure environment, one that could not be sustained as the area's increasing resident population struggled to make ends meet throughout the year.

Others argued logically for Miamians to engage this agricultural development but not be so dependent on tourism. They advocated growing an industrial sector and later in the century a financial sector in banking and in trade, thus arguing that south Florida become an entrepôt in relation to Latin America. As a potential economic gateway to the southern hemisphere, proponents argued Miami would enjoy a natural competitive advantage because of its geographic location. The attempts to create a manufacturing landscape ran up against physical limitations such as Miami's distance from the northern United States; lack of deep-water harbor accommodations³; flooding along the Everglades eastern boundaries (reaching as far east as Coral Gables and Hialeah, western cities adjacent to Miami) that required the "reclaiming" of the wetlands through drainage

in tourist clientele from various class backgrounds also affected security perceptions. Polly Redford, *Billion-Dollar Sandbar: A Biography of Miami Beach* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), 221-224 (on exclusion of Blacks and Jews).

³ Shallow waters mark Biscayne Bay and the surrounding waters to the South Florida coast. Early developers of Miami and Miami Beach started to dredge the bottom of the Bay to allow for larger boats and more boat traffic in general entering the area (as well as build islands within Biscayne Bay, such as Palm Island), but were often held back by limited resources. Through the first half of the twentieth century, Miami boosters lobbied investors and especially the government to deepen these waters. The problem that shallow waters, narrow shipping channels, and the lack of an adequate deep water harbor represented was best symbolized when the *Prins Valdemar* was grounded in January 1926 at the head of the channel to Miami Harbor—playing its role in hurting the real estate and building boom of mid-1920s south Florida. Chronicler Kenneth Ballinger wrote in his book, *Miami Millions: The Dance of Dollars in the Great Florida Land Boom of 1925* (Miami: The Franklin Press, 1936), that "ships grounding in the channel were regarded as ordinary hazards until new federal dredging could start," p.139. Helen Muir, *Miami U.S.A.* (1953, reprint; Gainesville, Fl.: University of Florida Press, 2000), 3-13 & 143-145; Tracy Hollingsworth, *History of Dade County Florida* (Miami, Fl.: Miami Post, 1936), 70-71 (on harbor development).

and canal construction⁴; the evolving development of airplane technology and the necessary accompanying infrastructure; and the absence of any significant extractive mineral attracting investors for quick turnaround profits. Vegetables and fruits would slowly become more important over time as flooding and transportation problems were resolved; as noted, farming in the rural regions of Dade County did not pose a threat to the tropical tourist landscape as manufacturing development would.⁵ The idea of making Miami an economic leader of Latin America was reinforced culturally by the white assumption that the United States benefited from its racial superiority to darker and foreign peoples—aided and abetted, of course, by native Latin Americans complicit in the exploitation and “development” of their homelands. These two visions of progress—Miami as tropical tourist destination/winter playground and as Latin American commercial capital—comprised tense countervailing arguments at the root of Greater Miami’s political economy.

Complicating these two visions of economic progress was the anxious business of community building, particularly for the workers of the city. The rhetoric of boosterism—as embedded in the two visions of progress—only served to silence this current in Miami’s history. The story of workers was at best a sidebar to heroic accounts of hard working entrepreneurs/pioneers or the benevolence and intelligence of wealthy

⁴ Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

⁵ *Planning Your Vacation in Florida: Miami and Dade County Including Miami Beach and Coral Gables, American Guide Series* (Northport, NY: Bacon, Percy & Daggert, 1941), 74-78, for a quick overview of agricultural in Dade County. For an excellent history and introduction to South Dade see Paul S. George’s *A Journey Through Time: A Pictorial History of South Dade* (Virginia Beach, Va.: The Donning Company, 1995). Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), chapter 5 & 6.

magnates.⁶ The winter playground ethic prioritized the need of the winter resident and tourist. Despite this apparent inertia, the workers and small business owners who built and kept Miami operating needed and demanded more stability.

House painter, one-time editor of the weekly city labor union paper, and poet, Stephen Cochran Singleton observed in December 1928 that Miamians were determined that their city “become a home and not a road-house.” He continued: “We are beginning to realize that the components of our future prosperity will be products and not tips... that one citizen who will insist on good schools and who will make something to sell is worth 100 visitors.” In typical conservative gendered terms, Singleton called for more men “who can wear overalls efficiently and men who can pay wages to these overall wearers sufficiently.” While Singleton clearly aligned with the second vision of greater economic independence, his concern for creating a stable society amid a political economy geared toward “carnival” put him in opposition to the logic of tourism economics.⁷

More significant was the tone of Singleton’s insights. His concern was with the creation of a moral economy, or as he described it, a partnership in “our municipal corporation.” Singleton demonstrated an impatience for the antics of boosterism—such as luring visitors to Miami with the city’s daughters in “nearly nude” photos. The airs of

⁶ Some early histories serve as examples of this tendency: Ethan V. Blackman, *Miami and Dade County, Florida: Its Settlement, Progress and Achievement* (Washington D.C.: Victor Rainbolt, 1921); Isidor Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami, Florida* (Miami: Privately Published, 1925); Hollingsworth, *History of Dade County Florida*; John Sewell, *Miami Memoirs: A New Pictorial Edition of John Sewell Story* by Arva Moore Parks (1933, reprint; Arva Parks & Co., 1987); Jane Fisher, *Fabulous Hoosier: A Story of American Achievement* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1947). The local booster history tradition may also be located in the work of Arva Moore Parks, such as in *Miami: The Magic City* (Miami, Fl.: Centennial Press, 1991) and Thelma Peters’ several richly detailed and sympathetic histories accounting the pioneering history of Dade County: for example, *Biscayne Country, 1870-1926* (Miami, Fl.: Banyan Books, 1981).

⁷ Stephen Cochran Singleton, “These Changing Times,” *MDN*, 9 Dec 1928, p. 6.

prudish Victorian morality and his conventional patriarchal assumptions could easily distract the reader as he also added his equal impatience and frustration with “jazz,” the dance hall, and bootlegging. However, when read beyond these obvious interpretations, Singleton’s observations offer a serious criticism of the deprecating nature of tourist economics, including its temporary nature, by demanding more substantial work, wages, and community building endeavors. Given the context of the short tourist season, such comments represented a moral compass for development. The calls for year-around tourism—that is, including the summer time—probably did not alleviate his concerns.⁸

Miami boosters were anxious about the balance between resort town and permanent abode, albeit in playful terms. The city’s oldest newspaper, the *Miami Metropolis*,⁹ argued in 1920 that the city had to draw small business entrepreneurs and workers: “Something must be done to offset the idea that Miami is a rich man’s town. It is that, and it is more—it is the town for the man who may not be rich but who can contribute as much in brain and genius and labor toward the town as does the man with only his money bags.”¹⁰ This was an honest and fair assessment of what was needed for the growth and development of South Florida.

Yet the reality that “laborers are toiling away to make a paradise for the rich man’s pleasures,” was a public testament and expectation that revealed the reproduction of social hierarchy; it also highlighted how paradise on earth needed to be humanly constructed. This quote, taken from a 1915 article discussing the building of Vizcaya,

⁸ S. C. Singleton, “These Changing Times,” *MDN*, 9 Dec 1928, p. 6. A common yearly drive occurred throughout much of Miami’s history—but starting most obsessively in the interwar period—that sought to expand tourism in the summer months.

⁹ The paper was later renamed, first to the *Miami Daily News & Metropolis*, then the *Miami Daily News*, and finally the *Miami News*.

¹⁰ “Ten Years Ago and Now,” *MDN*, 28 Sept 1920, p. 4.

John Deering's 185-acre extravagant villa on prime waterfront property in southern Miami, offers an important lens through which to view the past. Referring to what was then known as the Deering Estate, the article boasted how "one out of every twenty-five of Miami's 20,000 residents" was working daily in its construction. Its extravagance, defined by an Italian Renaissance style, can be traced in the materials being used. Here is a small sampling: stone from Miami's own scarce and precious limestone, as well as from the Florida Keys and Cuba; red Spanish roof tiles from homes in Cuba bought by Deering for the sole purpose of extracting these tiles; royal palm trees purchased fully grown from Cuba to decorate the causeway between Miami Avenue and the Estate's boathouse (Deering had a channel dredged in the Bay to facilitate the transport of these materials to the worksite).¹¹ This construction project was a literal representation of the idea of laboring for the rich man's pleasures. That reality also served as a symbol of Miami's tourist economics. Displays of social hierarchy and performances that reinforced this class relational logic defined the cultural backbone that shaped the economy.

But the view that saw deference and service as essential to economic survival conflicted with notions of equality as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and as promised by American Exceptionalism. If all humans were created equal and if what made America unique was the absence of a feudal past and messy class conflict, then how did society reconcile the apparent contradiction between the demands of social

¹¹ "800 Men Employed on Deering Estate," *MDN*, 20 Sept 1915, p. 1 & 6; "Modern Stone Plant Furnishes Supply for Deering Estate," *MDN*, 15 Sept 1915, p. 1 & 2; Metropolitan Dade County Office of Community and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division, *From Wilderness to Metropolis: The History and Architecture of Dade County, Florida* (Miami: Metropolitan Dade County, 1982), 56-57; Donald W. Curl, "The Florida Architecture of F. Burrall Hoffman Jr., 1882-1980," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 76, no. 4 (1998): 399-416.

hierarchy and the visions for greater social equality?¹² “Laboring in the Magic City” explores this class dynamic. I argue that class struggle operated along the discursive axis of class harmony.

Class harmony discourse was a language that navigated the tension between two visions of social order: one inegalitarian, the other more egalitarian. The former embraced a social order of clear class hierarchy, where laborers worked for the rich. Work was exoticized in hokey platitudes and moral caricatures and mocked in playful performances of deference, some quite undignified. In essence, the “rich” were busy directing others and living the leisured life while workers labored in happy cadence. The egalitarian vision of social order was dominated by the drive toward moral economy. While dignity in work was a given, just as important was the idea that all had the right to competency. In Miami, the right to a pleasurable life, with access to recreation and decent living conditions, also shaped this twentieth century version of moral economy. This vision of class harmony struggled with the rigid sense of social hierarchy.

¹² Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955) stressed the point of a lack of a feudal past in American history. The literature that seeks to explain the apparent scarcity of class-consciousness among American workers is wide and varied. It has often expressed some version of the liberal roots of American consciousness—that is, a firm adherence to the ideas of private property and individualism, essential components of American Exceptionalism. A recent excellent discussion of the liberal roots of equal opportunity discourse and the problems it represents to actual expressions of social equality, is Claire Goldstone’s “‘America Was Promises’: The Ideology of Equal Opportunity, 1877-1905” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Univ. of Md., 2009). The idea that workers were primarily driven by wage consciousness (John Commons/Selig Perlman) has explained why socialism did not emerge in America. Liberalism’s hegemony explains the failure of socialism to make deeper inroads politically, and by default explains the absence of a stronger and wider workers’ movement. The history of contestation and the contingent nature of power tends toward more complicated histories. For the biases found in exceptionalism discourse that has shaped strands of U.S. labor history, see Reeve Vanneman and Lynn Weber Cannon, *The American Perception of Class* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 1-52. Labor historians would support their observation that, “Americans have a collective amnesia about their history of labor conflict” (28). David Montgomery’s *The Fall of the House of Labor* (1987) offers a solid overview of working class struggle and employer social control in the 1865-1925 period.

The language of class harmony—instead of classlessness or class conflict—served to hide struggle within the tourist economy. This political economy, perhaps more than most others, necessitated a peaceful social setting to assure the promises of the winter playground; that Miamians came mostly from other places raised the stakes for creating a culture that appeared welcoming.¹³ Class harmony discourse obscured struggle in the historical memory in part because of the demands of tourism and community. The trajectory of Miami's growth and development also played its part in silencing struggle and idolizing the idea of a rich man's paradise.

Miami's early twentieth century identity crisis, for example, extended to the memory of the period as the major population shifts post-1960 affected how it would be remembered. Demographically, two Miami Floridas have existed in history.¹⁴ The Miami since 1960 became the symbolic capital of Latin America, where the upper class and middle class have gone to shop and enjoy Latin U.S.A. The seeds of these encounters were laid decades before when Cuban and other Latin American elite and upper middle class traveled to Miami to vacation, shop, live, or go to University of Miami in Coral Gables. Ousted Cuban presidents and other former politicians walked the streets of Miami, making it a potential default exile destination long before the great migrations of the post-1959 era. The Cuban consulate enlarged its staff in 1928 as a result of increased commercial ties between Miami and Havana as indicated by the

¹³ The most recent treatment of this history is Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville and other: University Press of Florida, 2009), based on her dissertation, "They All Came from Someplace Else."

¹⁴ When referring to Miami, I am also including Dade County unless otherwise noted. The histories of the other towns, cities, and unincorporated areas are distinct in varying ways. These distinctions will be commented on when relevant throughout the dissertation. However, the City of Miami remained dominant and its changes and politics affected outlying areas.

pervasive advertisements of travel rates for trips to Havana that appeared in the local newspaper, especially during the tourist season. In 1933, the *Miami Daily News* started printing a short Spanish language section called *Noticias Mundiales* (world news) that later changed its name to *Temas Tropicales* (tropical topics), then *Noticias Breves* and expanded after World War II to include an extended section entitled, *Si Ud. Habla Español, Le Interesará* (of interest to Spanish speakers). Cuban commercial interests, including natives of the country as well as former resident Americans of the island, no doubt influenced this addition, as a Cuban Chamber of Commerce attained a Miami charter on December 23, 1933—New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore had already issued charters for their own Cuban chambers. Only about 5,000 Cubans resided in the city at this time (out of a population of over 130,000), many of whom only lived in Miami on a temporary basis. As early as the late 1920s the *Miami Daily News* in its famous news tower (built in the mid-1920s) and other businesses (particularly hotels) held weekly Spanish classes, likely for potential tourists and residents interested in visiting Cuba or improving their ability to work with Spanish speaking clientele; by the mid-1930s local Burdines department store advertised *Aquí Se Habla Español* (we speak Spanish here). With first ship travel and then the onset of commercial flights between Havana and south Florida beginning in the late 1920s and increasing through the 1930s and after, middle and upper class Cubans visited the city more frequently for shopping, sometimes doing so in day trips because of the relative short duration and low cost of the flight.¹⁵

¹⁵ “Cuban Consulate Here is Enlarged,” *MDN*, 26 Oct 1928, p. 7; examples of free Spanish classes appear throughout the interwar period in the local newspapers; for example of Burdines ad, see full page ad, *MDN*, 14 June 1936, p. 3, Main Section. The Spanish section was

Later in the late 1940s and through the 1950s, a larger Latin American contingent of workers arrived: mostly Puerto Rican American citizens but also Cubans came to live and work, many from wealthy and middle class backgrounds, others who were wholly rooted in the working class. Then, of course, came the watershed year of 1959 and the Cuban Revolution, which would have such a seismic effect on South Florida. This Latino Miami became the image that was evoked when the city's name was uttered in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Tied to the Caribbean, Central America, and South America through migration and travel, South Florida has served as a border outpost to the United States mainland. Different from the Southwest and California that shared a contiguous physical border with Mexico as well as concrete historical connections, this borderland remained connected to its international neighbors through legacies of U.S. economic and political intervention into the region and Cold War refugee policy. Miami became an island different from most of Florida and the United States, even as it anticipated the diverse multicultural landscape that increasingly marked several locales throughout the country since 1965.¹⁶

The foundational component of Miami's history lasted into the 1950s and shared with the later period similar patterns of demographic change—mainly, continued movement of migrants to and from the city. Incorporated in 1896, the city grew slowly in

launched on 17 Dec 1933; "Cuban Chamber Given Charter by Court Here," *MDN*, 23 Dec 1933, p. 3. The paper listed Juan Esfakis, Dr. William Hodge Morales, and Dr. Octavio Casanoya as central to the Chamber's organization. Cuban tourism in Miami translated to millions of dollars spent in the city and the establishment of Cuban tourist offices in the city, "*Tempestad Tropical*," *MDN*, 30 May 1936, p. 2; Louis Perez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality & Culture* (New York: The Eco Press, 1999), 432-444.

¹⁶ For an early framing of Miami and other locations representing separate entities within the United States, see Joel Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 1-13 & 167-206.

its first two decades of existence, reaching a population of some 29,000 in 1920, then surged to 110,000 in 1930, 170,000 in 1940, and 249,000 in 1950. Greater Miami, constituting several smaller adjacent cities and unincorporated areas, increased the population even more each decade. One thing was for sure: then and for the remainder of the century, the city's residents virtually all came from somewhere else.¹⁷ A plurality of white and black southerners from Florida, Georgia, and other nearby states constituted the majority of the city's population; Northerners from the mid-Atlantic and mid-West represented a large portion of migrants; and early in the city's history, Bahamian blacks constituted a majority of the black population but decreased in number each decade while African Americans from northern Florida, Georgia, and other states constituted the dominate group in subsequent years; the 1920s immigration laws created barriers for continued migration.

While linked with Havana, Nassau, and some other Latin American and Caribbean nations through tourism and some limited migration, Miami was a wholly different place than its modern version. White northern and southern U.S. migrants made up the majority of the area's population. Some of these migrants arrived as second-generation immigrants (or conscious of their immigrant past) as revealed by the formation of a small Italian American club and a German Society. An increasing number of northern Jewish migrants moved to the city in its early history and formed a small but vibrant Jewish community based in Miami and Miami Beach. This grew from the mid-1920s onward but not until after World War II and after did Jewish Miami Beach emerge.

¹⁷ Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*.

Migrants of Latino origin, as noted, did not arrive in any significant numbers until after World War II.

The Miami of the early period was mainly a tourist based and local economy where the construction industry remained logically a vital part, though the area slowly added some small manufacturing and industry. The rise of air travel played a significant role in making south Florida more accessible and assisted in facilitating its exchanges with the North, Latin America and Caribbean, but this developed slowly in the late 1920s and more rapidly soon after. Train and boat travel remained the dominant means of travel to Miami in the interwar period, though travelers and migrants increasingly used automobiles for the long trip down Florida's long east coast.

Despite the vast changes that south Florida would endure in the post-World War II period, the social, economic, political, and cultural history that defined earlier Miami had an enduring influence on the later city. "Laboring in the Magic City" argues that to understand class struggle and the nature of class relations in spaces of U.S. leisure such as south Florida's tourist-based economy in the early 20th century, one has to unpack the language of class harmony—a fluid discursive terrain that contained class tension, conflict, repression, and progressive grassroots politics. Hospitality practices in tourist work and the urban boosters' push for rapid growth and development translated into the dominance of this class language. The effect of this hegemony has been a distortion of how we have remembered class struggle and its interrelationship to race in spaces outside of industrial and mineral extracting locations such as Miami. These discursive practices emerged in a context where racial segregation, industrial labor conflict, and welfare capitalism existed as social realities, solutions, and limitations to shaping class relations.

The Contours of Harmony Discourse

We cannot afford to give either race or class short shrift with the stakes in the struggle against racial capitalism being as high as they currently are... we need to fight on both fronts, which are often the same front, at all times to win the struggle for democracy.

John Munro¹⁸

“Laboring in the Magic City” analyzes the history of class and race by exploring the nature of capitalism as it developed in Miami, Florida, in the first half of the 20th century. More specifically, it focuses on how class and race relations reflected and reinforced the nature of power in that locale and how those dynamics reflected larger national patterns. Miami’s continuous growth, changing population, and economy rooted mainly in low-wage-service-oriented (and often seasonal) jobs pose a challenge to understanding class and race relations because of the constant change and persistent obstacles that workers faced both in living their lives in low wage work and in organizing collective responses to ameliorate those problems. My dissertation contributes to the vibrant and penetrating work of historians who have explored the central importance of class in shaping civil rights struggles, and who remain careful not to write about race and racism in isolation or to elevate whiteness as the key shaping force defining race relations. “Laboring in the Magic City” complicates the whiteness narrative by infusing class and the complex dynamics of capitalism into the story.

Central to my analysis of power is a theoretical framework I call class harmony. While nowhere formally articulated by any of the historical actors in this study, one may deduce its existence by analyzing an array of historical documents: newspapers, private papers, organization minutes, government records, and letters, among others. Class

¹⁸ John Munro, “Roots of Whiteness,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 54 (fall 2004): 175-192.

harmony discourse negotiated class conflict and debated competing notions of social order and power among the classes. It engaged the realities of class hierarchies by arguing for class cooperation as opposed to class conflict. Many employers tried to foster an oversupplied labor market and, consistent with this structural goal, tried to create as pliant, docile, and loyal workforce as possible. For their part, workers sought a stable labor market able to supply jobs over longer periods (as opposed to temporary and seasonal work) while also pushing to alleviate the hardships of work, the insecurity of low pay and inconsistent work, and the financial vulnerability emerging from such conditions. In Miami, class harmony discourse was a function of a culture of growth and development, the business of boosterism, and the political economy of tourism.¹⁹ Despite the apparent concession to classlessness that such a language suggests, “Laboring in the Magic City” will demonstrate how harmony discourse provides a theoretical framework that challenges notions of U.S. classlessness and broadens the boundaries of class conflict and class-consciousness.

The juxtaposition of the words harmony, struggle, and conflict may appear strange, particularly in the absence of the words consent, legitimacy, and authority. The latter words express finality or at least imply political exchanges over the nature of power. Too often liberal democracies, such as the United States, assume consent, legitimacy, and authority, which then translate into simplistic interpretations of class-consciousness or the lack thereof. In this common framing, on one end of the ideological spectrum stands individualism and on the other stands collectivism. Individualism and

¹⁹ I suspect, however, that class harmony discourse has wider applicability than just early twentieth century South Florida and beyond simply tourist economics. The discussion below will suggest this.

collectivism were not and are not mutually exclusive. Hierarchy and competition have coexisted with mutuality and sharing, sometimes in conflict and sometimes in healthy balance.

Class harmony discourse—in contrast to classlessness and American Exceptionalism—centers process, contingency, and the all too human desires for social balance, dignity, and peace. In this light, process and contingency become synonymous with struggle and conflict. The language of class harmony, instead of demonstrating hegemony, consent, or false consciousness, reveals how contestation was involved in defining and enacting competing notions of class harmony. The importance of this insight is that it allows for wider inclusion of class conflict without having to demonstrate the prevalence of socialist or communist ideas in historical actors. Likewise, no litmus test measuring the degree or extent of individualism or communalism will do. The analytical focus becomes the historical context and the nature of power, not preconceived notions predetermining political conservatism or radicalism.

As capital concentrated into larger and larger corporations—via vertical and horizontal integration—and production moved toward greater efficiencies and order in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the nature of work changed. Regardless of the economic sector, whether in manufacturing, mineral extraction, agricultural, entertainment, service, or craft labor, work withstood varying levels of increasing alienation or, at the very least, continued to remain arduous for the laborer (think here of farm truck workers, for example) and thus led to the persistent strain on the mind, body, and soul. The process was ongoing and never entirely encompassing, but the processes

of capitalism and drive for profit continued the historical project of perfecting the commodification of work and workers.²⁰

Worker resistance and even apparent accommodation to this process of commodification can be understood as a drive for class harmony—that is, whether expressed in labor conflict, union organization, passive resistance, or quiet “accommodation,” workers shared a common interest to earn a livelihood under the best possible working conditions. On another level, the dream of class harmony—social peace, economic stability, and good working conditions—was common enough for us to assume broad tacit worker solidarity even in the absence of a trail of records documenting it. Success in politics, broadly defined to include government and the workplace, were only one tenuous and contingent strand of human experience. The power of the state and of employers all too often overwhelmed worker attempts at organization—such civic lessons served as useful deterrents for a greater political movement. When the obstacles and dangers of organization were not enough, the struggle for survival and the business of living lives filled with cultural and social meaning certainly created limitations on one’s time and energy. The concern of earning a living and having job security, without a doubt, remained a persistent and dominant issue that helped make workers cautious about political activism. The effort to find individual self-fulfillment through self-

²⁰ See Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974, reprint; New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998) for a useful introduction to this theme. Harvey Swados classic essay, “Myth of the Happy Worker,” offers an excellent corrective when thinking about work and consumption and their effects on workers: *The Nation*, (August 17, 1957): 65-69. See Susan Porter Benson’s useful intervention in widening our conception of the application of scientific management to include not just the factory but even sales work. *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

expression, friendships, intimate relationships, family, work, leisure, and imagination was no easy or uncomplicated task.

Despite these commonsensical truisms, scholars have too often judged American workers harshly for their inability to organize in the workplace or in the larger political arena. E. P. Thompson was correct to write that the lower classes have been subject to the “condescension of posterity,” but he could have easily extended this powerful insight to living contemporaries.²¹ The failure to dent liberal democratic power, whether in the workplace or political arena, cannot be interpreted as a failure of class-consciousness. Doing so amounts to conceding to either acceptance of social inequality as a natural state of existence or cynicism: whether in abject condescension to the working class—disapproval of mass consumerism, political apathy, or other targeted behavioral pattern—or acceptance of the idea that humans are innately selfish and driven only by self-interest.

In an era when welfare capitalism in the United States²² and corporatism in Europe and Latin America²³ similarly proposed to achieve harmonious class relations,

²¹ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Press, 1966)

²² The literature on welfare capitalism in the U.S. is vast. Some key works include, Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); David Brody, “The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism,” *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the 20th Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 48-81; H. M. Gitelman, “Welfare Capitalism Reconsidered,” *Labor History*, v. 3, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 5-31; Walter Licht, “Fringe Benefits: A Review Essay on the American Working Place,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 53 (Spring 1998): 164-178; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 157-211; and Sanford M. Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), especially chapter 1.

²³ On corporatism in Europe, see Charles S. Maier, “Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1970): 27-61; and corporatism in one Latin American country, see Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working Class in São Paulo, 1920-1964* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); for debates about the corporatist state in the United States, see Steve Fraser, *Labor*

there existed other locations where class harmony was imagined and negotiated. Some employers, politicians, and social scientists—potential and apparent allies of workers—strove to ameliorate the worst aspects of capitalism by seriously considering the problem of how to attain class harmony beneficial to worker, employer, and society.²⁴ Even in the noxious calculations of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s scientific management and the cult of industrial engineering, the drive for efficient production (and greater profit) was at least partly encased in the argument that such advancements improved conditions for workers and the larger society. As Taylor summarized:

Science, not rule of thumb.
Harmony, not discord.
Cooperation, not individualism.
Maximum output, in place of restricted output.
The development of each man to his greatest efficiency and prosperity.²⁵

Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 10, especially 280-288; Nelson Lichtenstein, “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era,” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Steve Fraser and Gary Gestle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 122-152; Ronald W. Schatz, “From Commons to Dunlop: Rethinking the Field and Theory of Industrial Relations,” in *Industrial Democracy in America: The Ambiguous Promise*, edited by Nelson Lichtenstein and Howell John Harris (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 87-112; Colin Gordon, “Why No Corporatism in the United States? Business Disorganization and its Consequences,” *Business and Economic History*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 29-46.

²⁴ Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing the People: The Progressive Movement, The Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Howard Brick, *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). Examples of this in the business world see Kim McQuaid’s many essays including, “Corporate Liberalism in the American Business Community, 1920-1940,” *Business History Review*, Vol. 52, no. 3 (Autumn, 1978): 342-368; and his book/dissertation, *A Response to Industrialism: Liberal Businessmen and the Evolving Spectrum of Capitalist Reform, 1886-1960* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986); Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Kellogg’s Six-Hour Day* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

²⁵ Taylor’s dream of harmony, of course, occurred by way of coercion: “The knowledge obtained from accurate time study... is a powerful implement, and can be used, in one case to **promote harmony between the workmen and the management** by gradually educating, training, and leading the workmen into new and better methods of doing the work, or, in the other case, **it may be used more or less as a club to drive the workmen** into doing a larger day’s work for approximately the same pay that they received in the past” (emphasis added). Frederick

The role of technocrats and the importance of technology increasingly gained greater importance over the course of the twentieth century; the implicit promise of abundance, however, would not eliminate the political economic problem of inequality and the conflict that resulted from it. World War I witnessed the first concerted attempt to achieve industrial democracy by including workers and unions, business, and the state in the collective negotiation for the greater good. The open shop onslaught, in the postwar period, highlighted employer resistance to giving up managerial prerogative and thus power to workers.²⁶ Yet the dream of industrial democracy and greater economic and social harmony did not disappear. Liberal business reformers such as William P. Hapgood and Edward A. Filene implemented progressive labor policies in their attempts

Winslow Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911, reprint; Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, INC., 1998), 70 & 74; Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle of Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Ellis W. Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,' 1921-1928," *Journal of American History*, vol. 61, no. 1 (June, 1974): 117-119.

²⁶ Allen M. Wakstein, "Origins of the Open Shop Movement, 1919-1920," *Journal of American History*, vol. 51, no. 3 (Dec., 1964): 460-475; David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1965); Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 87-138; Of course, the open shop movement started long before this moment. See, Doris B. McLaughlin, "The Second Battle of Battle Creek: The Open Shop Movement in the Early Twentieth Century," *Labor History*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (Summer, 1973): 323-339; Sidney Fine, "*Without the Blare of Trumpets*": *Walter Drew, the National Erectors' Association, and the Open Shop Movement, 1902-1957* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Howell John Harris, *Bloodless Victories: The Rise and Fall of the Open Shop in the Philadelphia Metal Trades, 1890-1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas Klug, "Employers and the Limits of the Open Shop in Detroit, 1902-1907," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, April 7-10, 2010, Washington D.C. (in authors possession); Chad Pearson, "Making the 'City of Prosperity': Engineers, Open-Shoppers, Americanizers, and Propagandists in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1900-1925," *Labor History*, Vol. 45, no. 1 (Feb., 2004): 9-36; Howard Stranger, "From a 'Negotiatory' to a 'Belligerent' Employers' Association: Organized Master Printers of Columbus, Ohio, 1887-1987," *Advances in Industrial Labor Relations*, Vol. 17 (2010): 69-125.

to achieve labor-management peace and harmony.²⁷ The work of Herbert Hoover as Secretary of Commerce and later as President embodied the persistence of this dream of industrial and economic harmony. Associationalism, despite its failures, help lay the intellectual and policy groundwork for the New Deal order. Hoover's associationalist approach—having government play an advisory role to business to attain a smoother run economy including improving conditions for workers—was rooted in a noble voluntarist outlook and implicitly in the dream of social harmony.²⁸

The failure of Hoover's associationalism to attain greater business cooperation highlighted an inadequacy of the rising corporate capitalism as well as the problems of welfare capitalism. The idea of class harmony, for instance, too often served as a ruse that merely reflected a repackaged paternalist social order maintaining the status quo of power. Welfare capitalism had this effect as much as it might ameliorate working conditions. The current strand in management literature to recast welfare capitalism and company unions in a positivistic light as forerunners of personnel management and human resources leaves unquestioned managerial prerogative and worker disempowerment. Perhaps even more problematic is what historian Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt and other scholars of work and leisure have traced: the field of human relations management—a specialization that developed over the course of the twentieth century—sought to reaffirm work as life's center at the cost of greater individual

²⁷ Kim McQuaid, "Corporate Liberalism in the American Business Community," 342-368; McQuaid, "Industry and the Co-operative Commonwealth: William P. Hapgood and the Columbia Conserve Company, 1917-1943," *Labor History*, vol. 17, no. 4 (Fall 1976): 510-529; McQuaid, "An American Owenite: Edward A. Filene and the Parameters of Industrial Reform, 1890-1937," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, Vol. 35, no. 1 (Jan., 1976): 77-94.

²⁸ Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat," 116-140; Robert Zieger, *Republicans and Labor, 1919-1929* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), 87-108.

(worker) freedom and more expansive notions of human (worker) happiness. The underlying paternalist assumptions in the revisionist narratives of human resources are only reinforced when this positivism celebrates worker agreement to greater efficiencies, performance-based wage incentives, and strict budgetary restraints. The vital questions of (human) worker happiness and the ill effects of the drudgery of work, as highlighted by Hunnicutt, have too often been ignored.²⁹

Company towns and unions represented problematic areas of harmony with their social control goals.³⁰ It was in both institutions that worker discontent was sometimes able to gain traction and lead to independent unionization, organization, and strike actions, some of which represented the most violent episodes of United States class conflict, such as in the 1894 Pullman Strike and the 1914 Ludlow Massacre. Employee Representation Plans (ERP), or company unions, made the idea of industrial democracy and workers' control into a mockery even when employers' sincerely sought to avoid disharmony in the workplace or the outbreak of violence. John Rockefeller, Jr.'s, embrace of the ERP after Ludlow highlighted such a response. The dwindling number of company towns and the illegitimate claims of industrial democracy emanating from

²⁹ Hunnicutt, *Kellogg's Six-Hour Day*, see esp. p. 110-132 and *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). For an example of the revisionist human resource literature, see Bruce E. Kaufman, "The Case for Company Unions," *Labor History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2000): 321-359; other sympathetic accounts include, David Fairris, "From Exit to Voice in Shopfloor Governance: The Case of Company Unions," *The Business History Review*, vol. 69, no. 4 (Winter, 1995): 494-529; Jonathan Rees, "What If a Company Union Wasn't a 'Sham'? The Rockefeller Plan," *Labor History*, vol. 48, no. 4 (Nov 2007): 457-475; Daniel Nelson, "The Company Union Movement, 1900-1937: A Reexamination," *Business History Review*, vol. 56, no. 3 (1982): 335-357.

³⁰ Company unions or representation plans could spin out of the employers' control at times. A company union's inability to act effectively in the workers' interest would easily delegitimize its value and destroy any semblance of independence. In effect, the apparent drive to class harmony was undermined by the company union's conflicted interest. Some of them of the most powerful and violent strike actions occurred in company towns, despite the best hopes of paternalist employers and magnates.

company unionism highlight the problematic nature of employer control of workers even in the best conditions. And as historian H. M. Gittleman has pointed out, welfare capitalism efforts diminished precipitously by the mid-1920s, when the open shop movement, employer strong-arm tactics, and government repression through injunctions and police force helped stifle union worker actions and union organizing efforts.³¹

Some historians have mediated such efforts at worker disempowerment by arguing tenuous conceptions of working-class agency. They argue that workers embraced paternalist values and adopted consumerist expectations rooting them firmly in individualism and the politics of reciprocity. But this conception is too linear and unproblematic. A complex story of the nature of power and work is foregone to fulfill a self-fulfilling prophecy that has workers depicted as merely individualists and middle class in outlook, that is, as assumed by the absence of evidence and a liberal bias to read expansive and inclusive notions of free will even in capitalism's worst manifestations. The scarcity of evidence on one count—scattered anecdotes proving these assumptions—is strengthened by the absence of a robust record of radicalism or other prominent dissent to the existing political economy.³² The noble radical straw man, such as William Z. Foster, is the exception that proves the rule. Consumerism historiography has only reinforced this tendency of finding John Common and Selig Perlman's wage conscious worker. Unfortunately, this work has contributed to the drive to abandon the arena of

³¹ H. M. Gittleman, "Welfare Capitalism Reconsidered," 5-31; Walter Licht, "Fringe Benefits," 164-178.

³² Jacquelyn Down Hall, et al., *Like a Family: The Making of A Southern Cotton Mill World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making A New Deal; A Consumers Republic*.

production and issues of worker's control on the shop floor.³³ The quest for greater economic security and overall happiness, which often underpinned unionization drives, is ignored in the whiggish history of capitalist triumphalism and in the dubious agency rooted in the literature of the cultural turn.

“Laboring in the Magic City” seeks to recast the idea of class harmony as an arena of conflict as opposed to a sign of worker accommodation. When capitalism’s promises of growth and development and the assumptions of American Exceptionalism and the idea of classlessness are combined, the result is an amalgamation, at least theoretically, that may lead to a perception of class harmony. To avoid the pitfalls of assumed worker accommodation and perceived class harmony, a few assumptions must be discarded: 1) the worker as mainly wage-conscious; 2) the reduction of worker consciousness to popularity tests, whether in support of political candidates, unionization rates, or polling data; 3) essentialist ideas about worker conservatism or radicalism; 4) conflating classism, sexism, and racism and treating them as equivalent categories or 5) raising cultural arguments, whether race or gender based, as superseding class. This introduction will not unpack these assumptions; to do so would require lengthy essays in their own right. Suffice it to say at this point that “Laboring in the Magic City” will directly and indirectly tackle each of them throughout.

The idea of class harmony, at least as played out in welfare capitalism and company unionism, has gained attention in only certain sectors of economy, mainly in

³³ See for example Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). John Commons, et al., *History of Labour in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918); Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, *History of Labor in the United States, 1896-1932, Volume IV: Labor Movements* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935).

mass production industries and factories or extractive work as in mining. The construction industry, service work (hotels, restaurants, etc.), and other small worksites have mostly remained outside the scope of historical studies.

Historians have generally failed to isolate other manifestations of class harmony, particularly in less organized economic sectors and locales. Scholars have demonstrated how workers often argued for and acted toward attaining greater power. I argue that we need to reframe the idea of power and focus the essence of worker struggle as a drive toward greater social harmony. Sometimes these movements dissolved into violence, often as a result of employer and state action. These movements were held in check by the employers' power and state authority as defined by legal opinions, legislation, and police power. In general, workers' concerns focused primarily on greater distribution of wealth and thus fairer distribution of power; however, workers also were concerned about economic justice and fairness. This was often articulated in moral terms as expressed by social harmony. The idea of moral economy—the protection of individual competency and the right to a livelihood—defined this morality.

Because the city of Miami emerged at the height Jim Crow and in the South, how harmony negotiated class and racial hierarchies is central to “*Laboring in the Magic City*.” As a history of class relations, it focuses primarily on the working class, white and black, and how they struggled for financial security and community amid an economic climate that praised the existence of abundance but that applied an ideology of scarcity. As a history of race relations, it tells a familiar story of cultural division and racism. When the study of class and race are combined, the outlines of the causes and pernicious consequences of social hierarchy become more apparent and the differences between

these two analytical categories less blurred. Unfortunately, historians have too often given short shrift to class in their study of capitalism, elevating race, gender, ethnicity, or other identity and ideological categories as the primary agents shaping inequality and subordination. The common “class, race, and gender” focus of studies has too often neglected class to the detriment of critical structural analysis and sharp social history.

The discursive landscape of whiteness studies, for example, has explored the racial components if not roots of capitalism. Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism* (1983) used the term racial capitalism to denote the interconnectedness of racism and capitalism; several historians since have used the term but not necessarily the same social scientific methodology or style of sweeping generalizations, ahistorical conclusions, or faulty logic that characterized parts of Robinson’s book. Such terms needlessly segment the experience of the working class at the cost of understanding class commonalities among groups. As much as one may embrace the goal of eliminating the divisive ideas of race and the destructive results of racism from society, ideas such as racial capitalism risk the danger of becoming intellectual caricatures. Racial capitalism explains inequality too neatly and also risks perpetuating racist, nationalist, and other cultural essentialisms.³⁴ In the place of critical, analytical and dynamic class histories, historians have offered the

³⁴ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (2000, reprint; The University of North Carolina Press, 1983). For a critical review of the book and argument, see Gregory Meyerson, “Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and Others,” *Cultural Logic*, 3, no. 1 (fall 1999): <http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/meyerson.html>. Meyerson argues that Robinson, though appearing before the advent of whiteness studies, embraced and anticipated many of the intellectual gaps in the later studies; Munro cited above provides a nice historical overview. The literature on whiteness is too lengthy to cite here. The place to start would be: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) and *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London and Verso: Verso, 1994). In addition to Munro and Meyerson, see Eric Arnesen, “Whiteness and the Historians’ Imagination,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, No. 60 (Fall 2001): 3-32 (and the responses and Arnesen’s rejoinder in that issue) for a lively and heated discussion.

hegemonic framework of white privilege, where the wealthiest to the poorest whites embrace a racial bond with bottom line economic and social benefits.³⁵ The direct and indirect results of such hegemonic arguments are damaging to intellectual rigor and to the larger political project to attain an egalitarian democracy. Ideological assumptions of capitalism—whether they are the narratives of natural “man” or economic “man”—are seldom questioned or engaged. All too often the tenets of liberal democracy are unknowingly adopted and thus the framework of capitalism is left unquestioned.³⁶ Except, of course, its racist consequences.³⁷ As the historian John Munro reminds us, too much is at stake to not consider class and race in all their fullness.³⁸

³⁵ George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) is an emblematic example of this.

³⁶ Intelligent and fair criticisms exist of the influence on academia of the cultural turn and the ideology of liberal democracy. For an introduction, see the work of Ellen Meiksins Wood. For a good start see her, *The Retreat from Class: A New ‘True’ Socialism* (1986, reprint; New York: Verso, 1998). Another useful primer is Adolph Reed Jr., *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

³⁷ Unfortunately, a large current of the story of whiteness is that workers were the biggest culprits of racism as they benefited from their whiteness; systematic analysis of capitalism and power fall by the wayside for an obsession on whiteness, race, and racism echoing the early twentieth century calls to investigate the Negro Problem. Much of the literature has interesting insights but fail to account for such things as the virulent antiunionism that permeated the South, often being satisfied with the sweeping explanations incorporating pseudo-psychoanalysis, paternalism, or some other generalization. W. E. B. Dubois’ allusion to a psychological wage is used over and over again in these various studies. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935, reprint; New York: The Free Press, 1992).

³⁸ Munro, “Roots of Whiteness,” 192. Despite my criticism, I acknowledge that Robinson and whiteness studies have had some very positive influences in the study of race and labor. Two notable examples are: Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). However, the studies that rely on psychoanalytic approaches end up being inadequate. Others frustrate in the arbitrary nature of their cultural analysis as well as their arguments’ hegemonic pretensions. This footnote and dissertation are not the place to tackle these issues and vast literature. See Munro, Arnesen, and the Meyerson citation cited above as well as Gergory Meyerson’s essay, “Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Labor Competition,” *Cultural Logic*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1997): <http://clogic.eserver.org/1-1/meyerson.html> as good primers.

“Laboring in the Magic City” will outline the commonalities within the working class in one place and at one moment in history. A careful analysis of the commonalities will allow for a starker account of the causes for the divisions between workers and explain the struggle of power that they had with their employers. I will avoid a longer theoretical discussion here and allow the dissertation to unpack a fuller narrative of how class and race unfolded together. I draw from a vast amount of insightful historians such as E. P. Thompson, Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, Barbara J. Fields, Ira Berlin, Eric Arnesen, Alex Lichtenstein, Thomas Sugrue, and Brian Kelly, to name but a few. All emphasize the centrality of class, the need for critical, local histories, and the importance of connecting local narratives to larger processes of capitalism. Race for them is ideologically constructed whereas class, in Barbara Field’s words, refers to “the inequality of human beings from the standpoint of social power.” In perhaps her most famous (and contested) phrasing, Fields wrote: “class is a concept that we can locate both at the level of objective reality and at the level of appearances. Race is a concept that we can locate at the level of appearances only.”³⁹ This dissertation is concerned with

³⁹ Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, edited by J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177 (quotes on 150-151). The few authors I mentioned have written so much as have the many scholars not listed. Here are a few citations: E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Press, 1966); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, & Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Idem, *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, edited by Ira Berlin (New York: The New Press, 1987); Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*; Ira Berlin *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (London: Verso, 1996); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

exploring these various historical processes: class as objective reality and appearances, and race as appearances.

My profile of the objective reality will demonstrate the similar types of arduous labor, power, and powerlessness that black and white workers experienced; this entails outlining the power of the ruling class and the strategies of attaining and keeping power. The analysis of ideology will examine how narratives of race and class hierarchy divided and united groups—employers and employees, black and white, rich and poor. Barbara Fields reminded us years ago that “an understanding of how groups of people see other groups in relation to themselves must begin by analyzing the pattern of their social relations.”⁴⁰ “Laboring in the Magic City” is a study of the pattern that defined Miami’s social relations through the prism of class and political economy.

“Laboring in the Magic City” will explore through class analysis the history of the formation of community amid the flux of early city development and analyze the political economy that gave it sustenance. Chapter One unpacks the culture of the tourist political economy as it developed in Miami. The performance of social hierarchy combined the narratives of class and race into a fluid story of subordination and leisure. Narratives of servility, hospitality, and paternalism—of deference and condescension—marked the cultural landscape and helped shape the image and memory of class harmony. The project of making Miami a winter playground reinforced capitalist exploitation as much as it fueled the imagination of abundance, leisure living, and greater human happiness. Subsequent chapters move the narrative from the culture of the local political economy to more focused social histories. Chapter Two explores the labor movement, especially in

⁴⁰ Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History,” 149.

the construction industry, as it developed in the city's early history. Attempts by organized labor to create a "closed shop" town and control the labor market met with resistance from a large portion of employers. It was during WWI and subsequent years that a "home labor" ideology emerged. Unionists and resident workers urged employers to hire resident workers and, when more labor supplies were needed, to allow local unions to bring or recruit more unionists to work in union conditions—higher wages, eight-hour workday, shorter weeks (5 days and half a day on Saturdays), and other amenities. In Miami, as elsewhere, the American Plan arrived with a vengeance. Employers could not, however, gain complete domination for the open shop. In their calls for social harmony, workers would continue to push for a moral economy.

Chapter Three highlights the limits of class harmony as viewed through the prism of race and class. African American chauffeurs and black community leaders united to challenge Jim Crow and the limits to driving in the city. Mobility in the city was a practical matter; so was the necessity of safeguarding the tourist industry. African Americans took the opportunity of WWI and the fear of race riot to push white leaders to change the impractical Jim Crow custom of not letting them drive in Miami. The winter playground banked on maintaining the image of a harmonious, hospitable southern tourist abode. Chauffeuring and its servile status allowed for an adjustment of an intolerable situation. The clash between white and black drivers reminded both groups of the tenuous endeavor of creating a moral economy while also highlighting the stifling power of racial ideology, economic insecurity, and capitalist exploitation.

The problem of economic insecurity or scarcity in Miami is explored in Chapters Four through Seven. Miami's winter playground status faced a dual assault: a growing

resident population stirred for more economic security, and economic depression, starting first with the collapse of the land boom in the mid-1920s and continuing through the nationwide downturn of the 1930s, which reframed Miami's harmonious image. It was during this period that home labor ideology found support from a larger portion of the employer class who sought to attain better relations with workers—several employers had denied work to residents in favor of temporary migrant workers, including in the construction trades and larger service economy as in the seasonally opened hotels and restaurants. Home labor ideology intersected with the project of protecting the winter playground in the implementation of the “hobo express”—the Florida east coast effort to exclude the down and out from visiting the area. But this method of discriminating against the transient impoverished could not be used with unemployed residents.

After enduring the challenge of the open shop and the economic downturn caused by the mid-1920s real estate collapse, Miami's labor movement experienced a resurgence of political activism, often functioning as local boosters for economic growth including pleas for federal government funding. The formation of the Central Labor Union's Citizenship Committee in 1929 created a space for progressive and egalitarian formulations of class harmony. While the push for more and steadier jobs continued throughout the interwar period, the reality of persistent high rates of unemployment highlighted the contradictions of capitalism—mainly the existence of scarcity amid abundance. The early years of the Depression stirred workers and the unemployed to organize. In addition to increased union activity, the unemployed also organized and pressed for an expansive progressivism.

The native Floridian and activist Perrine Palmer and others helped push the conception of class harmony toward more radical interpretations challenging capitalism to deliver on its promises of economic security. The arrival of the New Deal and specifically the National Industrial Recovery Act spurred greater worker activism but it also built on this grassroots movement. Palmer, the unemployment movement, and organized labor did not turn to the Socialist or Communist parties, even though elements of their egalitarian perspectives as well as the model of participatory democracy did help shape their ideas and practices. Perrine Palmer's many letters to the local papers left an important trail of records accounting the unemployment movement's history. As important, Palmer's and the letters of others in the movement demonstrated a fluidity of progressive ideas and hopefulness in the promise of abundance. Support of the underlying assumption that defined the Technocracy craze of 1932 and 1933 inspired the left: namely, the abundance produced by the U.S. economy could be made to alleviate suffering for all when an egalitarian vision of equality was embraced.

"Laboring in the Magic City" concludes with a short analysis of how the radical conception of harmony helped broaden the local skilled workers labor movement to include unskilled workers as well as affect the end of the poll tax and inspire African Americans to fight for the right to vote. White unionists even joined hands with black workers in a cross-race alliance to undermine the power of business. While the coalition was loose and maintained the hierarchy of race and class (white skilled workers supported black laborers and longshoremen), it nonetheless represented a sharp break from immediate past practice. This national, state, and local upsurge threatened business interests, creating the fear that workers and the underclass would organize to undermine

the low-wage Florida economy. That African-Americans, albeit from the middle class, made an early Civil Rights push for the vote only charged the political context that much more. Many employers in Miami and across Florida joined hands to paralyze the grassroots upheaval from below by passing the nation's first right-to-work law in 1944—legislation rooted in the idea of safeguarding social harmony and the individual against the apparent tyranny of labor unions and cooperative political solutions. Such an outlook promised an aggressive battle, then and for the decades ahead, against unionism and other communal strategies in organizing the political economy, and thus for connotations of harmony that challenged individualism and that called for greater political and economic justice.

Analysis of the language of harmony contributes to class, labor, and working class history by demonstrating how classlessness and class conflict frameworks divide too neatly a complicated social history driven by a deep desire for dignity against the alienating forces of exploitation.

CHAPTER 1

Class and Culture in the Interwar Years

I have the most wonderful Bahama negroes you ever saw to push these gondolas around. They are all going to be stripped to the waist and wear big brass rings. And possibly necklaces of live crabs or crawfish.

Carl Fisher to John La Gorce, 1920

If your swimming pool and cabanas are to be a success, you must have some attractive women and swimmers at the pool... If it is necessary, hire one or two good looking and attractive swimmers at the pool every morning at ten o'clock until you get the place going.

Fisher to Charles Krom, manager Flamingo Hotel, 1929

Among the many things one may find in reading the papers of Carl Fisher, millionaire Indiana entrepreneur, land developer and key capitalist investor in Miami Beach, perhaps the most striking were his interventions in creating a specific tourist experience: from manipulating representation and orchestrating performance to exact a culture of leisure and safe adventure, to directing workers to shape the stage and deliver the product. From my understanding, no pictures survive that capture the dressed up Bahamian blacks described above nor are there any remaining accounts of how wealthy tourists experienced this voyeuristic excursion into the African-Caribbean exotica as objectified in the bodies of these two men. At this early point and through the next two decades, most of Miami Beach's hotels remained outside the reach of the working class except for the workers producing the product of servility propping up leisure. This was an elaborate project that included grounds keeping, cleaning and organizing spaces, washing clothes, bellboys, bootblacks, and other on-service unskilled and skilled workers

(plumbers, carpenters, painters, etc.) maintaining the winter playground landscape; such an endeavor required plenty of organization, planning, and team work. The shaping of the cultural environment with exotic African-Caribbean bodies and “attractive” women swimming and lounging by pools and cabanas highlight that the entrepreneurial strategy in producing the leisure experience relied on the combination of the brawn of working class labor, the finesse of customer service, and performance of classist, racial, ethnic, and gendered stereotypes.¹

That Fisher was writing to John Oliver La Gorce, fellow developer of Miami Beach and editor of the magazine *National Geographic*, to relate that he had “the most wonderful Bahama negroes” signified the concrete connections between the imagined and the real. Creating the illusion of tamed primitiveness perhaps appealed to this chronicler of geographic discovery—his response is not extant. Fisher clearly sought affirmation that his plans represented a smart business move: package perceived danger and sexuality with a fine hotel and romantic gondola ride on Biscayne Bay and presto leisure, unforgettable memories, and returning customers. La Gorce would soon start an exclusive country club to keep out the unwanted (i.e. the poor, Jews, African Americans) from associating with the wealthy. As demonstrated in Fisher’s explicit direction to his

¹ Carl Fisher to John La Gorce, Dec 4, 1920, *Carl Fisher Papers, 1896-1956*, Historical Museum of South Florida, Box 7, Folder 9 (hereafter *CGF Papers*); Fisher to Charles Krom, Jan 22, 1929, *CGF Papers*, Box 7, Folder 11. Mark S. Foster, *Castles in the Sand: The Life and Times of Carl Graham Fisher* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 189-190. For a rare discussion of hotel work in the local newspapers, see “Odd Jobs No Trifle in Big Hotel,” *Miami Daily News*, 23 January 1948, p. 1B, which describes the on-staff workers including carpenters, painters, housekeeping, and other work.

hotel manager Charles Krom to use “attractive” women in the public spaces of a private resort,² objectification served the specific purpose of creating demand and assuring customer patronage. The purpose of luring hotel guests to the pool and cabanas increased the potential of more dining consumption and, even more importantly, the manipulation of space and experience as positive marketing efforts to shape the leisure experience with concrete associations.

It is the argument of this dissertation that the influence of tourism as a business model shaped class relations in the Miami area. That what happened on the Beach and other tourist venues in Greater Miami revealed a deeper tendency in the south Florida political economy. Anchored by real estate salesmanship and sales, the ballyhoo of boosterism in south Florida drew from two conflicting class perspectives, one hierarchal and the other more egalitarian, that led to varying social outcomes. Tourism capitalists such as Fisher or La Gorce banked on the idea that wealthy and elite society embraced social exclusion through walled spaces and accepted the inequality resulting from capitalism. Social hierarchy, as traced in Miami’s landscape, revealed itself in the construction of physical boundaries. Within these boundaries the pastiche of tropical imagery and classist, gendered, racial, and ethnic stereotypes reinforced difference and justified social hierarchy.

² I define the idea of private broadly. Whereas La Gorce’s private country club meant one had to apply for membership (which meant formal exclusion of minorities and the poor more generally), the prohibitory pricing and social exclusionary practices of many of Miami Beach hotels made them informal private resorts, at least through the 1930s.

An egalitarian outlook, weakened by equal opportunity ideology, defined a second class perspective; it was further complicated by a deep sense of moral economy embedded with a racial segregationist ethic that mirrored the exclusionary practices of the wealthy. Rooted in this class perspective was the idea that the benefits of climate belonged to all, not just some—though the Miami Beach elite prohibited black access to the ocean (more on this below). This class perspective tacitly embraced the idea of equal opportunity and its sermons about the morality of rising up the social ladder. The contradiction between the ideology of equal opportunity and the ethic of a moral economy that stressed competency and the right to a livelihood challenged egalitarianism. In other words, embedded racism plus capitalist morality undermined the push for greater democracy and equality. Classist, gendered, racist, and ethnic ideologies thus reinforced and maintained the rule of the ruling class. In the case of Miami, this included the congregation of wealthy winter residents and the local bourgeoisie who aspired to similar grand levels of financial riches.

The result of the encounter of these two class perspectives was a class discourse I call class or social harmony. Rooted in the promises of liberal democracy, harmony discourse was a class language that engaged the nature of class hierarchy by arguing for class cooperation as opposed to class conflict. Conservative manifestations of harmony discourse embraced rigid hierarchies but adopted a paternal instinct and an ethic of noblesse oblige. Some adhered to fairer forms and others were more stingy and hypocritical but no one subscribing to such a class perspective challenged the nature of

social hierarchy. “Radical” uses of the idea of class harmony discourse posed a challenge to the larger political economy. It stressed the need for moral economy and argued for access to leisure and recreation for all. The egalitarian hopes rooted in this conception of class harmony borrowed broadly from socialist and progressive ideas. On a practical level, labor unionism and other progressive grassroots movements pressed for class harmony along the axis of moral economy. The benefits of such discourse for unionists were the emphasis on community and shared experience, as opposed to revolutionary ideals calling for total social transformation. It offered unionists greater legitimacy in the struggle for power. The cost, however, was the marginalization of egalitarian political programs such as socialism and the persistence of racial hierarchies—though occasionally, over time and in only some spaces, black and white working class coalitions did occur. Class harmony discourse had particular resiliency in Miami’s tourist political economy where cultural plurality, huge disparities of wealth, and the persistent exploitation of labor from a diverse working class necessitated a means to negotiate power and class struggle.

Before exploring this class history in later chapters, I will focus in this chapter on the relationship between class and culture in interwar Miami. The chapter goes beyond an analysis of Carl Fisher or any other individual historical actor. I will provide a brief overview of Miami’s Jim Crow and social history and offer more in-depth analysis of some cultural productions used in tourist venues and in community settings. The latter consisted of private affairs and more public contexts. There is no pretense of extensive

coverage. My primary concern is to trace the production of kitsch, pastiche, and mimicry as cultural tools that reinforced the power of the ruling class as they operated through the period. Representation and performance shaped the tourist economy. I am interested in the ways these cultural tools affected class and race relations. While the idea of class harmony reflected the preference of a tourist-based economy and the landscape of leisure, the prevalence of this idea did not translate to the disappearance of class struggle.

Jim Crow Miami and the Service Economy

It is unquestionable that Jim Crow was firmly rooted in Miami, Florida and that outright racists permeated all corners. From Klu Klux Klan parades to mob rule lynching to over-zealous police imposing law and order unequally and unfairly, black Miamians faced constant reminders that their lives existed in a different paradigm than whites; that their freedom had more restricted borders. The 1921 city charter, written by local business leaders and responding to WWI racial strife, empowered Miami's government to maintain a segregated community, that is "to establish and set apart . . . separate residential limits or districts for white and negro residents" (Section 3, part ii, *Charter of the City of Miami*). This stipulation remained in the Charter through the 1940s, a surprising holdover given the 1917 Supreme Court ruling of *Buchanan vs. Warley* making it unconstitutional for states and local governments to legislate residential segregation. Not only was Miami's community to be defined in racially segregated terms (Colored Town through the early 1920s or Central Negro Section in the 1930s and 1940s

as described in the contemporary discourse), Charter writers also empowered the local government “to prevent persons with no visible means of support, paupers, and persons who may be dangerous to the peace or safety of the city from coming . . .” to Miami (Section 3, part v). In such transparent terms Miami’s ruling citizenry mandated the exclusion of the poor (and criminals) from the city while also establishing the rigid boundaries of segregation.³ Keeping Miami a safe and pleasant tourist destination meant imposing strict segregation, protection of white identity, and keeping away the poor regardless of racial identity.

This juxtaposition of race and class in the Miami City Charter reflected a cruel reality about the nature of capitalism in the Magic City. The ruling citizenry embraced race and class hierarchy as much as it preached the rhetoric of the American Dream: economic mobility, property ownership, and the freedom for family development and growth. Transient migrants, white or black, entering the city from the late 1920s through the 1930s faced systematic harsh treatment if they could not show they had financial means for housing or a job waiting for them or were visiting family.⁴ Police harassed them if they lacked these resources, often being arrested for vagrancy. This dubious “crime” could lead to unfair punishment such as being put to labor on street construction

³ 1921 Miami Charter: <http://fulltext10.fcla.edu/DLData/FI/FI00007784/file4.pdf>

⁴ City officials as early as 1924 implemented the Charter mandate by warning all who arrived in Miami without means needed to find a job: “Beggars to Find City Cold This Year,” *Miami Daily News* (hereafter, *MDN*), 10 Oct 1924, p. 12. The article pointed out that farmers also benefited from the roundup of “negro loafers.” It seems Miami was reacting to down and out migrants who may have arrived during the depression of the early 1920s—reflected both in the Charter and in the cited news article.

or other infrastructure work or expulsion from the county via paddy wagon. Local papers and observers dubbed this infamous system the Hobo Express, at work since at least 1928 and sanctioned by the City Charter. Limitations clearly existed disallowing the city from having complete control over the inflow of migrants to the city, namely, an overstretched police force and the need for labor to accommodate the local economy such as with “fruit tramps,” migrant laborers traveling the east coast in search of agricultural work.

However, in trying to safeguard tourists from unsightly and undesirable visitors, city officials and citizens insured a negative attitude toward the poor and working poor.⁵ This law and order tool will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

The system of racial segregation equally helped maintain the cultural, social, and economic predilection against the poor and working poor as well as keep in step with the deeper traditions of segregation culture. The majority of blacks lived in present day Overtown, labeled through the 1920s as Colored Town. Living primarily in Shotgun homes, crowded and congested, Miami’s black population resided in one of the poorest sections of the city. Numerous grand juries reported on its unsanitary conditions; the 1930s movement for the public housing project, Liberty Square, only made such reports even more common.⁶ As travelers to white homes and establishments, whites

⁵ Farm workers worked mainly in south Dade. Contemporary articles on farm migratory labor include: Earl Evans, “‘Fruit Tramp’ Nearly Ready to Migrate from Redlands But Romantic Figure Will Appear With Southing Birds Again Next Winter,” *MDN*, 24 April 1927, Society Section, p. 10; Evans, “Big Tomato Acreage Bringing Prosperity to Redlands Area,” *MDN*, 31 Dec 1928, p.12; “Fruit Tourists Go in Swarms Into Redlands,” *MDN*, 31 Dec 1928, p. 12.

⁶ See the Dade County Grand Jury Reports from the 1930s through the 1940s held in the Florida Collection, Dade County Public Library, Downtown Miami.

occasionally raised alarms about how black workers represented potential public health nuisances as possible carriers of diseases such as tuberculosis. Continuous discussions pervaded the interwar era about white concerns pertaining to the movement of African Americans as consumers and laborers, especially domestic and other service workers to and within the city. Blacks worked primarily for white employers, for long hours and for low wages, so large supplies of workers were readily needed and whites sometimes facilitated transportation means, but more often than not black workers relied on black taxi and jitney drivers. On occasion, direct bus lines between black and white residential areas ran only at the beginning of and end of workdays. Indeed, their role as laborers made them essential to the city's economy as their central geographic location suggested but their importance did not eliminate the racism and classism that marginalized them.⁷

City tourist brochures advertised the vital role that black male workers played in the

⁷ "Tuberculosis Danger Talked, Negro District Is Called Menace to Entire City," *MDN*, Nov 21, 1935, p. 2; "Negro Bus Lines For Miami Shores," *MDN*, 16 Dec 1928, p. 10; on the social control and limitations to transportation see, "Miami's Own Whirligig, Traffic Menace," *MDN*, 7 Dec 1939, p. 1A, on the use of negro jitney's to Miami Beach; see also Polly Redford, *Billion Dollar Sandbar: A Biography of Miami Beach* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1970), 223. Miami Chamber of Commerce, *Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings*, South Florida Historical Museum, (hereafter *CC Minutes*), April 24, 1922 (African American shopping) and May 2, 1921 where Dr. J. M. Jackson complained about how difficult it was "to obtain and keep servants on account of no transportation, to the south side of Miami" (though the race of servant is not indicated); see also letter from John Gramling (white attorney advocate for the Liberty City housing project) to Horatio Hackett of the Emergency Housing Division, September 20, 1934, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196, National Archives, Washington D.C., (hereafter PHA, RG 196), Box 298. Gramling noted that, "at the present time the negroes are dependent upon the street car line and negro hacks. In the majority of cases the street cars do not operate near where the negroes work, therefore the negroes are dependent upon negro hacks to haul them to work.... There are no colored bus lines and *negroes are not permitted to ride on many of the white bus lines*" (emphasis added).

city's history and economy in an unconscious gesture that reinforced the class-race hierarchy.

As the narrative went, city pioneers, brothers John and E. G. Sewell, arrived to Miami in the late nineteenth century as representatives of the Flagler railroad interests to help clear Miami land of trees, brush, and to build roads. According to the city's publicity pamphlet published from the 1930s through 1950s, "the Sewell brothers, from Georgia, *worked negroes as their specialty*. With hundreds of them, they accomplished wonders clearing land so that buildings could be erected" (emphasis added). While unabashed and stating a not very unusual occurrence, this history of Miami's growth and development calculated that knowledge of how the Sewell brothers "worked negroes as their specialty" was significant to highlight until city publicity agents in the 1960s removed that statement, perhaps because such allusions had become too embarrassing to mention. The heroics of pioneer history depended on bossing laborers to engage arduous work—that is, the "negroes" were not getting credit rather the pamphlet celebrated the Sewell brother's skill of working others for the benefit of Miami's growth.⁸

In a strange turn and unconscious nod toward benevolent paternalism, much of Miami's post-civil rights local history celebrated the work of African American and Bahamian Blacks in building the city and placed their effort on an equal plane with the

⁸ *Highlights of Greater Miami, Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale* (Miami: J. C. Mills, Inc., 1952), Carlton W. Tebeau Library, Historical Museum of South Florida History. John Sewell, *Miami Memoirs: A New Pictorial Edition of John Sewell Story* by Arva Moore Parks (1933, reprint; Arva Parks & Co., 1987), 17-20, 145-152 (city incorporation and use of black workers for vote—see also 168-169), and 52-59 & 159-169 (street work and clearing the brush and trees).

Sewell Brothers and other pioneers. This ahistorical corrective obliterated the significance and persistence of class hierarchy by indirectly embracing a modernization and bootstrap narrative. Jim Crow racism was the culprit in this literature because it delimited African American opportunity but little if any critical analysis was given to the structure of class hierarchy or the collective shared experience of work among the working class. The violence that defined segregation certainly merits much attention. However, the class system that allowed low pay and minor alleviation of difficult working conditions has been left unanalyzed. Someone had to do the arduous labor of clearing the land of brush and trees in order for Miami to develop, but the critical question about power—under what conditions—has been left unanswered. Accepted uncritically and indirectly are the assumptions that class hierarchy was acceptable, low pay for difficult work was justified, a managerial class must boss a working class, and the entrepreneurial spirit is what built the nation not the actual workers. As a result racism and racial violence become anomalies of a particular time and place or the result of particular ideas or attitudes: the former safely locked in a far away and distant space, and the latter stored in morality tales highlighting individual accountability or deviant profiles. Liberal democracy and the triumphant march of capitalist growth and development remain unscathed by such primitive divergences as segregationist America—did not the Civil Rights movement attain greater equality?⁹

⁹ For examples see, Arva Moore Parks, *Miami: The Magic City* (Miami: Centennial Press, 1991); Paul George's "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 57, no. 4 (1979): 434-450; and Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth*

Occupation distribution among white and black workers revealed a clear racial-class hierarchy existed in Miami. White workers held jobs in more diverse areas than black workers. Taking 1940 as an example, over sixty-nine percent of employed white men worked in the following occupational categories: clerical, sales, and kindred work (9,614/25% overall), craftsmen, foremen, and kindred work (7,607/19%), proprietors, managers, officials (6,639/17%), professional and semiprofessional work (3,248/8%). In at least the construction trades, white skilled crafts workers enjoyed a virtual monopoly over jobs. Of the 3,915 employed skilled workers, 3,701 were white and 214 were black. Seventy-nine percent of construction laborers, however, were Black (1,696 versus 443). The pattern held true as well in other trades and for women, such as for waitresses where ninety-two percent were white, and for stenographers, typists, and secretaries where less than one-percent were black.¹⁰ Table 1 highlights this job distribution pattern for the years 1930 and 1940. White workers held more diverse jobs, in part because they and their employers relegated blacks to the bottom of the economic totem pole. This practice, of course, was not unusual in the United States and so helped to make Miami more like the rest of the country, not just the South.

Century (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997). The recent studies by Nathan Connolly and Melanie Shell-Weiss have focused less on class and more on race; both also are stronger on post-1940s Miami. Nathan Connolly, "Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008); Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Commerce, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume III, The Labor Force: Occupation, Industry, Employment, and Income, Part 2: Alabama* (Washington Printing Press, 1943), 660-665

Table 1. Service Economy Profile, 1930 and 1940

<i>Occupational Categories</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>
<i>Year</i>	1930	1940	1930	1940
Male Total¹¹	7,416	10,881	27,454	39,043
Laborers ¹²	3,526	4,330	1,090	1,554
Service Workers ¹³	1,951	3,762	1,699	3,413
Operatives & Kindred Workers ¹⁴	1,075	1,529	4,476	5,566
Skilled Construction ¹⁵	276	214	4,208	3,604
Sales, Retail, & Restaurant ¹⁶	244	324	5,504	8,932
Total	7,072	10,159	16,977	23,069¹⁷
Female Total	7,416	9,566	8,148	15,746
Domestic & Personal Service ¹⁸	6,253	8,267	1,690	4,360
Seamstress, other operatives	179	971	707	1,286
Telegraph, telephone, other	38 ¹⁹	0	212	342
Sales	79	113	1,617	2,509
Clerical	21	61	2,080	3,995
Professional (teachers, etc) ²⁰	173	239	1,399	2,252
Total	6,686	9,651	7,258	14,744

¹¹ Numbers include only gainfully employed. The 1940 numbers exclude workers in emergency programs like the WPA. White category includes native and foreign whites for 1930; the distinction between foreign and native was not made in 1940. Citations for all numbers are below, note 22.

¹² This included laborers in construction, public service, farm, and other “unskilled” work.

¹³ This included porters, bootblacks (1930 Census only listed blacks as holding this position), janitors, waiters, servants, barbers, and cooks. I have excluded dye workers and hotel owners & managers from the 1930 numbers; the compilers included them in their general category of “domestic & personal service.” Dye workers are included in operative category here.

¹⁴ This included all types of operatives, including locomotive engineers, mechanics, chauffeurs, drivers, deliverymen, sailors, laundry workers, etc. The 1940s census compilation was much more precise and diverse in its categories than the 1930 compilation. Whites had a monopoly of foremen and manager positions. This is true as well with the construction trades.

¹⁵ This includes only the skilled crafts in construction such as carpenters, plumbers, brick masons, and painters; it excludes other skilled crafts such as machinists, bakers, tailors, and shoemakers.

¹⁶ In addition to the inconsistent groupings between the 1930 and 1940 compilations, this is the least precise category given the diversity and fluidity of the occupational categories. I list the category simply to highlight the service-oriented nature of overall occupations. I have included proprietors of retail and “drinking and eating places” in the 1940 numbers—many small mom & pop places existed. Not included are cashiers, bookkeepers, ticket agents, and other types of office workers (these categories were listed for 1940 not 1930): this equated to over thousand.

¹⁷ The general 1940 categories divided the numbers for white workers this way: craftsmen & kindred workers = 7,607; clerical, sales, and alike = 9,614; operatives and alike = 5,566; service workers = 3,283; laborers = 1,554. The total of this = 24,341. If one includes retail and eating establishments, the numbers rises to 26,933. The remaining employed were scattered in professional and semiprofessional, protective services (policemen, firemen, etc), and other proprietors (excluding retail/eating establishments).

¹⁸ Includes laundresses for 1930 (1,954 of blacks); but the occupation was included in operatives for 1940 (679 for black, 365 for white) reflecting both changes in technology and competition with laundry mats and dry cleaners. Also includes boarding and lodging housekeepers.

¹⁹ This only includes other communication operatives, not telephone or telegraph operators.

²⁰ The vast majority in this category were teachers and nurses for both black and white women.

This pattern was rigid and consistent over time. For example, well over seventy-six percent of employed African-American men held jobs as laborers in 1930, 1940 and 1950 in various capacities such as janitors, laborers, and servants in both domestic and non-domestic work. Most longshoremen and stevedores were black during this same period: 1930 = 217 of 221; 1940 = 348 of 359; and 1950 = 268 of 293.²¹ At least ninety-percent of employed African-American women worked during these same years primarily as domestic and non-domestic servants, laundresses, and an array of other service work. One could go further into the century, say to 1970, and the pattern of low-income labor would remain consistent for Miami blacks, even in the midst of a vibrant civil rights environment.²² The predominance of low-income occupations would remain true for many whites as well, especially given that retail, restaurant, hotel, and other similar service work remained numerous and often represented the only job options for many Miamians.

On the surface, this pattern of employment distribution would suggest that white workers benefited from the privileges of whiteness. However, this insight would fail to

²¹ The drop reflected the rise of the airline industry, where African American laborers continued to work lifting and moving shipments: the Census listed 162 of the 430 workers in transportation other than railroad (no category yet listed airline labor) were black.

²² U. S. Department of Commerce, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930; Occupations, Volume IV* (Washington Printing Press, 1932), 358-361; Idem., *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume III, The Labor Force: Occupation, Industry, Employment, and Income, Part 2: Alabama* (Washington Printing Press, 1943), 660-665; *Census of the Population: 1950, Volume II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 10, Florida* (Washington Printing Press, 1952), 238-240; *Census of the Population: 1960, Volume I, Characteristics of the Population, Part 11, Florida* (Washington Printing Press, 1963), 478-480; for the 1970 Census, please refer to the following web link, http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/42189395v7_TOC.pdf

account for the particular class texture of work in Miami. As Table 1 demonstrates, Miami was defined by a service economy. Most people worked in working class jobs and had relatively little power especially in relation to their employers. As the economist Michael Zweig has noted for recent America, the working class resided “in a place of relative vulnerability—on the job, in the market, in politics and culture.”²³ Many in Miami were service workers and often were participants in constructing particular experiences. Whether the work entailed skill crafts work in the building trades constructing hotels or other structures, music entertainment, service behind a counter, waiting tables, driving people places or cleaning tourists’ clothes, many workers in Miami were involved in constructing a place and often shaping the experiences of others, local customers or tourists. How workers, black or white, experienced their relative vulnerability and shared the endeavor of producing the Miami tourist and consumer experience are questions that have not been studied. A culture of low wage work and economic vulnerability defined Miami’s service economy.

From its earliest days, white capitalists, such as Henry Flagler, profited from bringing black laborers into the region and paying them low wages. Whether from the Bahamas or other parts of the South, black workers were drawn to south Florida because of bad economic conditions at home and job opportunities abroad.²⁴ City developers

²³ Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 13.

²⁴ Raymond Mohl, “Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1987): 271-297; Howard Johnson, “Late Migration and Early Twentieth Century Labour Migration to Florida,” Howard Johnson, “*Bahamians in Slavery*

maintained a low wage labor market as a function of existing values placed on “unskilled” work by employers. Racist discourses only legitimized and rationalized such labor relationships. Such classist and racist assumptions justified forcing black vagrants (“negro loafers”) to work on nearby farms or other jobs. In the aftermath of the 1926 hurricane, blacks faced forced conscription to help pick up debris resulting from the devastating storm.²⁵ The segregated status of Colored Town reinforced practices then common in the Jim Crow South, but this too only highlighted the marginal value employers’ attributed “unskilled” work whatever the skin color or ethnicity of the worker.

Complicating the narrative was the struggle of defining service jobs as high-wage labor. Chapter three will show how white chauffeurs attempted to institute a monopoly on driving in the city. Their endeavor was partly an attempt to define the work as skilled and to eliminate its servile profile. Much of labor history has been defined by workers arguing for higher wages for devalued work—often determined by arbitrary measurements of skill. Of course, employers had a say in defining the nature and quality of the skills they wanted their workers to implement or demonstrate. As early as 1931

and Freedom (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1991); Jerrel Shofner, “Florida and the Black Migration,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (1979): 267-288; Idem., “The Legacy of Racial Slavery: Free Enterprise and Forced Labor in Florida in the 1940s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 3 (1981): 411-426; Melanie Shell-Weiss, “Coming North to the South: Migration, Labor and City-Building in Twentieth-Century Miami,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2005): 79-99; Idem., “‘They All Came from Someplace Else’: Miami, Florida’s Immigrant Communities, 1890-1970” (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 2002).

²⁵ “Beggars to Find City Cold This Year,” *MDN*, 10 Oct 1924, p. 12; see the *NAACP Paper.s. Part 10: Peonage, labor, and the New Deal, 1913-1939*, reels 10, 16 and 20 for coverage of the 1926 hurricane and conscription.

organized labor accommodated this expectation when they helped push the Dade County School Board to sponsor vocational training in hotel work so as to help relieve local unemployment.²⁶ Even employers like Burdines department store implemented since 1926 their own training programs for resident workers. The former trained workers to be housekeepers, maids, waitresses, food checkers, linen room workers, and front office workers. Burdines hired graduates of Boston's "Prince School for Store Service Education" to supervise the teaching of a 15-part course "each taught under a specialist in each division of the store." By the 1940s and afterward, Dade County Schools operated a vocational education program that trained residents in various skilled jobs as well as hotel work and even retail jobs.²⁷

This service economy—much of it local in nature and catering to the resident population—built on selling Miami as a semi-tropical vacation destination, where fun, leisure, and pleasure were the fundamental production. While much of this

²⁶ "Pluck and Job Idea Achieve Results," *MDN*, 9 Oct 1931, p. 8 & "Hotel Training School Success," *MDN*, 29 Nov 1931, p. 7; "Hotel Training School to Open," *Miami [Labor] News*, 19 July 1935. The latter article wrote, "The school had its beginning at the suggestion of Labor's Citizenship Committee to relieve unemployment in Dade County and put local people to work in jobs that previously had largely gone to outsiders attracted during the winter season."

²⁷ "Miamians to Get Miami Jobs" *MDN*, 13 Sept 1931, p. 2 (Burdines). For background on Prince School in the United States and its influence, see Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 150-153. Jack Kassewitz, "Adults Also Suffer in Space Pinch," *Miami News (MDN, The Blue Streak Edition)*, 19 Sept 1968, p. 1A. The vocational school eventually became the main office of the Dade County School Board. It was named after Coke bottle magnate, Lindsey Hopkins, who had purchased the unfinished building, formerly named the Roosevelt Hotel. The original owner of it, Frederick Rand, had envisioned making this hotel a featured place of 2nd avenue, which he hoped would become the Fifth Avenue of Miami. This historical account was given in the *Miami News (MDN)*: Agnes Ashe, "History: Mr. Rand's Hotel That Never Was," *Miami News (MDN)*, 29 August 1965, p. 9, Miami Magazine Section.

representation was the product of boosterism and concerted advertising drives throughout Miami's early history, the question of how this was translated in the day to day is less clear. Or put another way, how was Miami as tourist experience created and recreated and how did this affect the working class and class relations more generally?²⁸

Workers, of course, were drawn to the city for work opportunities but they also had positive reactions to the Florida setting. In the case of construction workers, the pull factors were directly linked to the number and size of building projects. The boom years of the early and mid-1920s witnessed a huge influx of construction workers to accommodate the labor demands of employers. White and black resort workers, from retail to restaurant to hotel, migrated to the city for job opportunities particularly during the tourist season, December to March. So movement to and from South Florida defined the nature of many workers experiences especially those struggling to find steady jobs. In addition to the hope for jobs, temporary visitors and old and new residents also embraced the recreational opportunities Miami offered. The warm weather, lush vegetation, and access to Biscayne Bay and Atlantic Ocean proffered the possibility of a good life. As Stephen Cochran Singleton, the house painter, labor newspaper editor, environmentalist, and poet, wrote in 1930,

My Florida! When from thy low-swung stars,
Thy murm'rous inlets and thy tide-swept bars,
I take reluctant leave, and in the fading light,
My spirit journeys forth upon an unknown flight,

²⁸ Gregory Bush, "'Playground of the USA': Miami and the Promotion of Spectacle," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 68, no. 2, Orange Empires (May, 1999): 153-172.

Think ye I shall not seek here to return?
Yea. I will strive in humbleness some way to earn
A detail on some duty that will bear me nigh
Thy well remembered shores, thy glorious, cloud-flecked sky.

“Lord,” I may reverently say, “this golden street
Is beautiful; the songs the angels sing are sweet
But, is there not some work that I can do
Down where the gulls cry over waters blue?

“I would not seem ungrateful; yet, I pray,
Let me go on some errand where the spray
Of salt waves leaps and falls around some key.
If there be work like that, I pray Thee, Lord, send me.”

Singleton tapped into an interesting desire to work in the specific environment of Florida. Each stanza evokes familiar images of the state’s idyllic landscape, the “low-swung stars, the “tide-swept bars.” Yet the traveling worker can only enjoy this landscape if they can find “some way to earn,” “some work,” “some errand.” While most workers may not have shared Singleton’s poetic sensibility, his poem “My Florida!” does highlight both the practical pull factors that brought workers to Miami and Florida as well as the significance of the place and the pleasures one could gain from the natural landscape.

Much of the landscape, however, was shaped through human intervention and for certain effects. The remaining portion of this chapter explores the representation and performance of Miami as a tourist destination. This entails unpacking how Miami was Southern, a place for the rich to visit and live, how work and its workers were degraded, and how the degraded manipulated representation and performance for their own benefit. The cumulative effect of these interventions was the formation of a peculiar Miami culture that built on the practice of shaping and reshaping representation and performance

for greater consumption and particular tropical style of leisure. Such a setting, where hospitality and the pleasure of others were dominant ethics, necessitated a language of class harmony relations. The reality of class conflict, though, merely meant that class struggle would be translated to harmony discourse.

Tropical Landscapes

Constructing a winter resort and leisure playground required plenty of work, much of which entailed the manipulation of social prejudice. These practices of representation and performance reflected and reinforced social hierarchies while also serving conflicting purposes of both fueling cultural division and creating spaces of potential social unity. Kitsch, mimicry, and the creation of imaginary landscapes have functioned as the essential paradigms in the tourism business-operating manual. As hotels, restaurants, retail stores, and other public venues attempted to represent particular worlds through racial, ethnic, class, and gendered stereotypes, everyday life was also affected: to what degree and exactly what way is unclear. What is clear was that economic survival for much of the working class, white or black, entailed scripted performance of social hierarchy.

The building and development of South Florida translated into a marketing-and-product packaging scheme meant to lure the wealthy and the free spending middling sorts. Gregory Bush and Paul George, among others, have written on the packaging of Miami. Bush argued that this process was part of a larger phenomenon of promoting spectacle in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This marketing tool, Bush

wrote, “reflected a growing consciousness about the need to engineer people’s attention to the large-scale market and ‘magic’ of the modern technological world.”

Unfortunately, both Bush and George say little about the nature of class and how workers contributed to or reacted to such spectacle. The working classes, black and white, came to Miami as well and not necessarily as tourists.²⁹ They did the necessary work of building and maintaining the city. The marketing of Miami entailed creating exclusive spaces and, more importantly, setting cultural norms of what was in and what was out; when they cared, workers imitated as best they could or simply made enough adaptations to stamp their own creativity. It is difficult to trace these patterns but one can locate the cultural grist that fueled them.

On the level of how spaces were organized and given meaning, we know that certain cultural motifs emphasized the Spanish colonial past of Florida or simply the exotic and extraordinary: architects used Mediterranean styles, from Spanish to Arabic, to denote the wealth and leisure possible when living in Miami; the legend of Black Caesar taught tourists of south Florida’s ties to the infamous pirate Caribbean and encouraged yachting in south Biscayne Bay for sports fishing and voyeuristic adventure; the Musa Isle Indian Village (Miami River and 27th avenue) packaged Seminole Indian culture and south Florida fruit and vegetables reminding its visitors of yet another tamed frontier land

²⁹ Bush, “‘Playground of the USA,’” p. 155; Paul George, “Passage to a New Eden: Tourism in Miami through Everest G. Sewell,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 4 (April 1981): 440-463.

ready for agricultural exploitation.³⁰ As a result of early attempts and continued efforts at developing Dade County agriculture, coconut palm trees spread throughout the south Florida landscape, as did other tropical fruit trees such as papaya, avocado, grapefruit, and mango trees. Into the twenty-first century many homes across the class structure continued to have these trees in their yards, especially mangoes and avocados. The many varieties of palm trees became a staple feature of south Florida, planted near resort spaces (hotels, beaches, golf links, shopping districts, etc.), residential districts, and roads; their images permeated the iconography that defined Miami as tourist destination. In the context of Miami U.S.A., palm trees associated a tropical landscape with tourism within a safe, tamed and apparently exotic place.³¹

³⁰ *Highlights of Greater Miami, Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale*; "This Week in Greater Miami: What to See; What to Do," vol. 2, no. 2, (11 Dec 1937), Pamphlets Collection, Carlton W. Tebeau Library, Historical Museum of South Florida History (guide book distributed free from leading hotels). Alligator wrestling, along with staged Indian weddings, "cooking, sewing patchwork garments, or carving canoes and the like," created a safe, anthropological tourist experience of the exotic. Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *The Florida Seminoles and the New Deal, 1933-1942* (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University Press, 1989), 38-41 (quote on 38). For a short contemporary account see: "Musa Isle Village Interesting Place," *MDN*, 27 June 1934, p. 6 ("Indians living as they did in their native haunts many years ago") and "Gator Wrestling is Daily Feature," *MDN*, 7 Dec 1929, p. 9, which wrote: "Nowhere, perhaps, is Florida life so characteristic of the primitive that obtained before the coming of the white man..." For images of the themed village, see <http://www.pbse.com/image/81114049> and the pictures in the Everglades Digital Library.

³¹ Harold Dorn, "Mango Growing Around Early Miami," *Tequesta*, 16 (1956): 37-53. See the many postcards for Miami and Miami Beach in two excellent collections: Patricia Kennedy, *Postcard History Series: Miami in Vintage Postcards* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2000) and Idem, *Postcards History Series: Miami Beach in Vintage Postcards* (Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2000). In addition to the many images of sport, fun, and recreation, the marketing of the palm tree as a signifier of leisure is quite evident. See for example, Anne O'Hare McCormick, "Adventuring in Our Tropical Empire," *NY Times*, 15 March 1925.

Mediterranean style barrel roofs pervaded the architectural landscape, from the wealthiest corners such as the John Deering estate discussed in the Introduction to working class neighborhoods, though over time. Apparently, the practice of extracting barrel roof tiles from Cuban homes was a common practice among the wealthy in Miami at least through the mid-1920s. But other exotic pieces also made it onto or into homes of the wealthy: huge jars that had allegedly once been used to transport olive oil from the Canary Islands to Cuba, marble floor blocks, iron hasps, “marble and bronze pieces from the old city hall at Santiago,” marble doorknockers, and iron window grills. As architecture critic Beth Dunlop has written about Mediterranean revival as developed in south Florida between 1917 and World War II, the purpose of such styles was to “evoke antiquity, generally of a romantic Spanish nature” though often drawing from Italy, so as to “express ideas about a place with no long history to draw on, no common culture, [and] no unique aesthetic.” This concern “to make the new look old” revealed how the anxiety of new wealth to not be viewed as nouveau riche spread as a general aesthetic defining south Florida architecture. Added to this aesthetic project, of course, was the leisure motif of open spaces, swimming pools, cabanas, and tropical landscaping, including fruit and palm trees. While the Mediterranean revival style became less common over the 1930s as the efficient aesthetic of Art Deco emerged and later mass produced houses came to dominate the south Florida landscape, the practice of marking

class distinctions through architectural style and location of residence continued as well-rooted south Florida traditions.³²

Workers, white or black, built their homes based on past practice and convenience or they more usually bought or rented ready built homes throughout interwar Miami. Some Bahamian blacks built homes in Coconut Grove and Overtown based on the Conch style common in Key West and the Bahamas, though some variation existed among both American and Bahamian blacks adapting preferences from their home towns to their new abode. As noted earlier, most blacks, African American or Bahamian, bought or rented homes in the Shotgun style. It is less clear where white workers lived. According to a Dade County history on architecture commissioned by the local government in the early 1980s, whiteness apparently equated to “middle class” or “lower middle class,” terms that appear instead of *working class* and not in association with American or Bahamian Blacks. We learned that “mission styled houses, along with the bungalows, became the most popular building types for the moderate income subdivisions that spread throughout the metropolitan Miami area.” The small, compact sizes of both bungalows and mission style homes translated to cheaper construction cost and thus more affordability to workers. Most homes were indeed small given that the majority of housing in the interwar period were for single families. Interestingly absent from the book as well was

³² “Antique Roofing Tiles Imported Here From Cuba,” *MDN*, 26 July 1936, p. 11, 40th Anniversary Section; “Inventing Antiquity: The Art and Craft of Mediterranean Revival Architecture,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts: Florida Theme Issue*, 23 (1998): 195-196. I am in no way arguing that the organizing of space according to class distinctions is unique to Miami. However, with few exceptions, class as an analytical category is missing in studies of south Florida especially for this pre-World War II period.

any discussion of apartments in which workers also likely lived. In 1925 over 50% of families were housed in apartment houses, the percentage decreased to 27% the following year but that was still up from the 14.1% in 1921. The omission of the term working class from this history, *From Wilderness to Metropolis*, revealed more a general inability to discuss class outside the American Dream and classless framework than any racist tendency. Many of its contributors were (are) outstanding local historians quite sensitive to the diverse history of the region.³³

Despite the best efforts of local historians, lacking in the historical record is a clearer picture of how class was organized by neighborhoods. Much more is known of the wealthy areas than about where the working class lived, in part because no systematic analysis exists for the 1930 and 1940 census manuscripts. Workers lived across the city but seemed to have congregated further from downtown Miami, and over time, spread across the county. They lived in neighborhoods like Riverside, Little River, and Allapattah. These neighborhoods racial and ethnic profiles changed after the 1950s as the population grew to include more diverse groups. While the colors and sounds of the areas may have changed, they remained primarily working class. In general, less is

³³ Metropolitan Dade County Office of Community and Economic Development, Historic Preservation Division, *From Wilderness to Metropolis: The History and Architecture of Dade County, Florida, 1825-1940* (Miami: Metropolitan Dade County, 1982), 41-43, 70-73, and 86-87; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Building Permits in the Principal Cities of the United States," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, No. 449 (GPO, 1927), 29-30 & 36. The vast majority of homes in these years and after were for single-family dwellings. Statistics are not available for subsequent years, though the number of new housing units built dropped drastically between 1927 and 1935 even while the population continued to increase. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Housing Construction Statistics: 1889 to 1964* (GPO, 1966), 156.

known about how working class neighborhoods changed over time: how they started and developed over time is less clear, what kind of work its inhabitants did, and possible class divisions within them.

The biggest differences between working class neighborhoods and exclusive ones were on the level of scale and proximity to waterfronts. The wealthiest, from winter residents to Miami's own elite, resided in Miami Beach, on the land filled islands in Biscayne Bay, Miami's waterfront (such as Millionaire's Row on Brickell Avenue), Miami Shores, Coral Gables, and Coconut Grove. Coral Gables, adjacent to southwest Miami, had some working class neighborhoods but was built for better off residents. George Merrick, its visionary promoter, sold Coral Gables as a center of civilized living amid "native tropical and sub-tropical trees and shrubs" with ingenious landscape architecture and an ideal paradise setting accommodated with abundant parks, golf courses, and playgrounds. As "heart of the American tropics" and with "40 Miles of Water Front," it used Spanish names to mark its streets (Ponce de León and Granada Boulevard, for example), general Mediterranean architectural revival style in the construction of its homes and buildings, and beautiful gateway entrances to residential neighborhoods to highlight its exclusive standing. Over time excessive development in South Florida led to the proliferation of human made lakes and a sometimes dingy canal water drainage system. More homes were around some watering hole and thus a reminder to their owners about the advantages (and disadvantages) of living in tropical

Miami.³⁴

In typical advertising bravado, most real estate developments and tourist boosterism sold Miami's tropical landscape and the paradise that south Florida could represent for recreation and leisure living. So it is not surprising that the stories of workers and where they lived is missing for the most part from the literature and iconography of the interwar period. What is clear is that over the course of the twentieth century the initial exclusive nature of some of Miami's real estate developments often could not be sustained. Miami Beach, for instance, witnessed enormous growth in the 1930s in part because the area south of Lincoln Road, today's South Beach, opened to a broader array of classes and ethnicities, including Jewish residents (who continued to be excluded from most hotels). Favorable U.S. housing policy beginning during the New Deal, and to a lesser degree Florida's 1934 homestead tax exemption law, certainly had its effect in drawing people to the state and helping more classes in their efforts to acquire houses.³⁵

³⁴ George Merrick, *Coral Gables Homes* (circa 1920); Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *Coral Gables, Miami Rivera an Interpretation by Marjory Stoneman Douglas* (N.P., 1925). Later in the century, towns like Miami Lakes sold themselves in part on their exclusive natures and this included waterfront property. Gated communities became more prevalent throughout south Florida by the end of the century and, because of the pressures on the environment and the watersheds from accumulated runoff, human-made lakes sprouted in each

³⁵A jump in residential house construction occurred between 1936 and 1941 after a decade of little development (1935 witnessed a jump to 919 issued permits from the 1934 total of 282). *Housing Construction Statistics*, 156. Raleigh Barlowe, "Homestead Tax Exemption: A Tenure Improvement Measure?" *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics*, vol. 23, no. 4 (Nov. 1947): 360-370. For the further institutionalization of segregation via redlining, see Raymond Mohl, "Trouble in Paradise: Race and Housing in Miami During the New Deal Era," *Prologue* (Spring 1987): 6-21; John A. Stuart, "Constructing Identity: Building and Place in New Deal South Florida," in *The New Deal in South Florida: Design, Policy, and Community Building*,

Reports on how workers came and how they were living are few and far between. Wealthy tourists often brought their own servants with them during their winter stays in Miami Beach and Miami. Carl Fisher planned for servant quarters in winter bungalows he constructed on the Beach during the twenties—accommodations were also made within hotels. In the mid-1920s he built a set of cottages for “a little village of workmen” who worked for the City of Miami Beach, the Fisher Properties, the Miami Beach Improvement Co. and Beach Construction Company. Outside of this one 1925 newspaper report, no other record exists discussing who made up this “little village.” It is likely that this was the origin of what became known as the Smith Cottages in South Beach, where white tourist workers lived for low rates in poor housing. It was razed in 1951 and replaced with a housing project. Fisher also had a hand in building a small black village consisting of about 15 houses “suitable for negro laborers” near Forty First Street and Pine Tree Drive on Miami Beach. Later destroyed in 1927 when the area was developed, Fisher ordered to “surround the entire plantation with a fence ... so that the place will not be an eyesore to the rest of the property.” The use of the word “plantation” evoked both the undeveloped conditions of the Beach as well as the memory of slavery and the absolute power over labor. Wealthy owners of winter residences, such as J.C.

1933-1940 edited by John A. Stuart and John F. Stack, Jr. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 40 & 64 (South Florida tourism becoming accessible to middle and working classes). See also Mary Wood’s essay, “Migrants, Millionaires, and Tourists” in the same collection.

Penney and Harvey Firestone, made accommodations for servants, but it is unclear if they were Miami residents or part of the owners' entourage.³⁶

Floods of tourists and workers arrived during the short tourist season (December to March), some deciding to make South Florida a home. Hotels, retail stores, and restaurants, opened only during the winter season, often brought northern workers to run these businesses. From the mid-teens through the early 1930s this seasonal pattern held true for many establishments especially in Miami Beach, when boarded up windows and closed-for-the-season signs announced the economy's dependence on tourism.

Construction sites hiring northern and non-union labor were struck or faced other types of labor action. This practice of hiring non-resident workers was strongly criticized by residents as detrimental to community life and for being a contributor to local unemployment. These criticisms only increased as the year-round population grew and when the economic downturn of the late 1920s and 1930s hit Miami. Migrating hotel workers likely took up quarters in their places of work, especially those who worked in the owners' northern establishments.

³⁶ "Cottages Built for Fisher Aids," *MDN*, 14 Sept 1925, p. 28; "Large Estate of Firestone is Little Known," *MDN*, 9 Dec 1928, p. 12; "Penney's Island Estate Among Beautiful Beach Residences," 16 Dec 1928, p. 10. (On black colony) "Begin for New Houses in Mid-Golf Addition," *MDN*, 26 Oct 1920, p. 1; Fisher to Pancoast and Schilling, August 25, 1919, *CGF Papers*, Box 13, Folder 10; Redford, *Billion-Dollar Sandbar*, p. 223; Memory of Stella Stuberman remembering Smith Cottages, Joann Biondi, editor, *Miami Beach Memories: A Nostalgic Chronicle of Days Gone By* (Guilford, Connecticut: Globe Pequot Press, 2007), p. 23; "War on Beach Slums Renewed, Raze Shacks Says Klein," *MDN*, 27, Oct 1950, p. 1B; "Workmen Raze Beach Slums," *MDN*, 5 July 1951, 9C.

Where other temporary northern workers ended up residing while in Miami is not clear. Housing shortages were chronic throughout the interwar period as population growth created increased housing needs. The housing problem was particularly acute in the height of the mid-1920s real estate boom. On occasion, employers built living quarters for their employees as the Fisher examples above suggest. In the summer of 1925, Miami's Chamber of Commerce (CC) arranged to build wooden barracks in the "colored part of town" (NW 1st Ave and 17th St.) for the recruitment of "negro common laborers" from outside of Miami to relieve the labor shortage problem. Chief of Police Leslie Quigg promised to arrest black vagrants in an attempt to assist the Chamber in its efforts to acquire cheap labor. The City Commission and CC highlighted the need to find accommodations for workers, including urging employers to build temporary small homes and even "portable houses." The call to build and buy "homes and apartment houses for their employees" revealed the dependent and vulnerable position workers often found themselves in when employed in Miami. One recorded instance of this occurred when the Coral Gables Corporation built the San Sebastian Apartment Hotel—a three-story building that contained seventy-two apartments.³⁷

The tropical landscape of south Florida had different meanings for workers, tourists, and the wealthy largely because the material conditions of their experiences differed. Despite these differences in conditions some things remained common besides

³⁷ See body of the dissertation below for examples on worker criticism of outside labor. *CC Minutes*, June 15, July 7, 13, and Sept 18, 1925 (on black workers); Sept 1, Oct 1, Oct 12, Nov 9, 1925 and Dec 27, 1926 (dealing with worker accommodations). Nicholas N. Patricios, "Phineas Paist and the Architecture of Coral Gables, Florida," *Tequesta*, 64 (2004): 17.

the climate. Some degree of exposure to the aesthetic of the imagined tropical style was likely for tourists and residents even in a highly segregated society. From the flora to the architecture to the thousands of lines of advertising print and photography and art (in postcards, brochures, and local newspapers, for example), residents and tourists alike were inundated with the ideas of recreation, leisure, and good living. The many options for entertainment allowed for all classes to escape reality. Some of them required active engagement: fishing (angling), golf, tennis, sailing (yachting), swimming in pools or ocean, shuffleboard, “bowling on the green,” horseshoes, cards, checkers, chess, bridge, dominoes, tennis, basketball, football, and baseball. Residents formed local sports leagues, particularly for baseball and bowling and usually associated with particular jobs or occupations that ran at various points of the year but especially in the spring, summer, and fall. Spectator sports, which often integrated gambling, included: polo, horse and dog racing, jai alai, baseball, boxing, and even “professional wrestling.”³⁸ Nightlife entertainment included live music (performed by union and non-union musicians), dancing, dining, vaudeville, film, and simply lounging around during the mild and usually good winter weather. Other frequent forms of entertainment included picnics, parades, and outings to beaches or pools, though whites and general poverty (in the case of pools) prevented blacks from engaging in water recreations.

³⁸ See Kennedy *Post Card History Series* for Miami and Miami Beach for tourist imagery. “Lummus Park Miami Center for Recreation,” *MDN*, 26 July 1936, p. 9, Second Section. The sports pages of the *Miami Daily News* and *Miami Herald* abound in the descriptions of all kinds of local sports activity; likewise, the social pages as well as the amusement sections offered abundant details of leisure activities.

The final portion of this chapter will explore patterns of social entertainment that pervaded Miami's tropical landscape. The acting out of social hierarchies—racist, gendered, ethnic, and classist—occurred and reoccurred in these spaces. While the fun and humor that defined the experience of those witnessing or actively engaging in such performances may have contributed temporarily to social solidarity or monetary benefits, the effect of such a cultural landscape was to commodify servility and devalue and degrade work. Founded in the era of segregation and the consolidation of capitalist power, tourist Miami depended on low wages and narratives of servility to maintain its economy. The next section analyzes a set of typical vignettes in an attempt to offer a brief ethnographic profile of tourism and residential life in interwar Miami.

Class, Race, and Spectacle

When theorizing how Miami's tourist tropical landscape came to be, one should not forget that the enthusiastic and sometimes aggressive intervention by businessmen and boosters—with the undeniable and ostensible support of many workers—shaped how class and race translated into the spectacle of frictionless social hierarchy. The social outcomes of these interventions were often conservative and the expectations quite rigid. Take for example how Blacks were only allowed to visit Miami Beach as employees. One abbreviated letter in the Carl Fisher papers reveals how white business leaders instituted the policy of preventing Blacks to swim in the beaches of Miami Beach. For a short moment between 1918 and 1920, Miami Blacks regularly drove to Miami Beach in

their own cars and swam in what is now South Beach. Thomas J. Pancoast, Miami Beach developer and hotel owner, complained to Fisher in the fall of 1920 about how their cars arrived “loaded to full capacity,” how they used them “as dressing rooms and bath houses,” and often they traveled “all the way from home in bathing suits.” He observed how it was important to handle this situation sooner than later because it would become more difficult to stop the practice the more time passed. He suggested that their real estate company, the Miami Beach Improvement Company, hire a man by the name of Johnson to confront the problem.

The sight of Blacks engaging in recreational and leisure activities, and not in subordinate roles, was apparently too much to handle for white tourists, at least in Pancoast’s mind. This Johnson character “stated he had lived in the South a number of years and that he knew pretty well about how to handle the negroes ... [and he could likely] get an appointment as Deputy Sheriff from [the Dade County Sheriff D. W.] Moran.” The Miami Beach Improvement Company would have to pay for Johnson’s services but that was to be expected in this corrupt use of police power for private interests. Unfortunately, the letter is missing the next page and no other record exists within Fisher’s papers to offer more details of how the practice of segregated beaches started and unfolded. Much of the record of segregation suffered the same fate of public silence; the recollections of the victims and the witnesses of such indignities have served to record this nasty history. Pancoast’s letter demonstrates how the process of constructing spaces for white leisure entailed careful planning and imaginative creativity

if not outright violence or at least the apparent legitimate intervention of the state. No one doubted the need for Black labor but controlling their movement and limiting their access to leisure and recreation became necessary strategies in building tourist Miami and safeguarding the wealthy elite's and tourists' imagination from discordant reality.³⁹

Photos of Blacks rarely appeared in the pages of the two white newspapers, the *Miami Daily News* or the *Miami Herald*. In the thousands of pages I have reviewed in the interwar period, I have just come across a few. The most startling of these includes a January 1931 photo of a Black "waiters' derby" on the sands of a beach in Miami Beach. Apparently this "annual steeplechase" had Black waiters racing in their work clothes, carrying trays filled with dish and glass china, around beach umbrellas toward a finish line. In a small inset, a waiter named "Admiral Robley Evans Peruna Johnson" was shown diving forward in an apparent attempt to save the contents of the tray from falling off "at the risk of several inches of skin." No other information accompanied the photograph besides a short caption giving few details about this "hot contest" including silence on how long this had been a tradition.⁴⁰ The difference between these two moments in time, of independent Blacks enjoying leisure on South Florida's beaches and dependent Black workers acting out perverse, undignified performances for white pleasure, revealed concretely the class expectations defining Miami's tourist landscape. The appearance of harmonious race and class relations was merely a front for

³⁹ Pancoast to Carl Fisher, 23 Sept 1920, *CGF Papers*, Box 13, folder 10. Redford, *Billon-Dollar Sandbar*; Vaughn Davis Bornet, "How Race Relations Touched Me During a Long Lifetime," (3 Sept 2007): <http://hnn.us/articles/42042.html>

⁴⁰ "Waiters Derby Has Thrills and Spills," *MDN*, 11 Jan 1931, p. 1, Second Section.

mechanisms of social control. Likewise, the lessons of harmony demonstrated how employers and employees could survive or profit in the business of serving or entertaining others.

One should not, however, view the segregation policy of keeping Blacks from using the beaches of Miami Beach as simply the practice of protecting white privilege. The segregation that defined leisure and recreation reflected the general tendencies to include and exclude by class. The exclusion of Blacks from the Beach was more than just a racist expectation especially in light of their relative impoverished economic status. Inclusion and exclusion were part of the same process in tourist economics: as much as leisure and recreation spaces included certain classes and groups and excluded others, the significant dynamic remained the various ways narratives of servility and hierarchy manifested in workplaces and social contexts. Navigating through Miami's social landscape entailed, to some degree, donning masks signifying clear and distinct class and racial hierarchies. The business of a resort town in segregationist America reflected the cultural expectations and predilections of a predominately white clientele in a capitalist nation. The leisure and recreation culture that arose in Miami—embracing and adopting the new developing mass forms of entertainment as well as older ones—spun tales of justified social hierarchy. Often framed in narratives of the nostalgic Old South or U.S. Empire, from Manifest Destiny to rising world force, these stories were acted out in numerous social settings and events. These narratives worked in tandem with the resilient ideology of the work ethic and persistent faith in the quick riches of speculative

ventures, such as in the real estate market, to silence class conflict with the appearance of class harmony. The collective result of these cultural moments was to normalize class hierarchy.

Miamians and tourists enjoyed throughout the interwar era an array of public and private and formal and informal entertainment that reconciled with the reality of class hierarchy. Humor was a common element that united these events but if that was lacking, then romantic sentimentalism for the Old South or Uncle Sam paternalism toward Latin America defined the moment. In addition to how mass culture perpetuated this pattern, local traditions and experimentation, undoubtedly common throughout the rest of the country, instituted recurrent practices such as: black minstrelsy and vaudeville, “negro spirituals,” costume parties, cultural themed dances and parties, Pan-American parades celebrating “Spanish” culture and promoting economic relations with the southern hemisphere, elegant dinners with blackface waiters (white waiters painted in blackface), semi-public demeaning events like the waiters steeplechase race described above, Black boxing promoter Willie “Duke” Slater’s winter shows, and likely several other undocumented examples. Encoded in the racial stereotypes used in these cultural events was a sensibility that class hierarchy was normal and thus natural. Clearly, the situational context was important but the use of racial stereotypes in effect translated to justification of the status quo. The symbolic masking of the black body and the masquerade of the exotic or of bygone days of the Old South world represented powerful narratives involving dreams not just of distorted visions of simpler times but also

affirmations of class hierarchy. The black body represented the “sacrificial” figure (to borrow Ralph Ellison’s phrase) of a failed economic and social system that had long accepted that some would labor for others and that defined inequality as natural despite equal opportunity rhetoric.⁴¹

I want to approach blackface minstrels, Black spirituals, and other forms of cultural mimicry from a different angle than scholars have done. Too much of the work has used psychoanalysis to read significance in such productions. My interest is not narratives of whiteness or stories of anxious workers reacting to the trials and tribulations of modern industrialization and its increasing complexity (i.e., urbanization, mass culture, immigration, world wars). Nor am I interested in the artistic meaning or significance of the self-expression that the art forms of such performances as blackface minstrelsy represented—for white or black performers. These histories tend to reduce meaning too simply to stories of uplift or agency, of beating the odds in a segregated society or succeeding within the confines of the status quo, of becoming white/American, or even as counter upper class rituals where workers ridiculed the rich. My focus is on how the cultural stereotypes reinforced the denigration of the lower classes, regardless of color or culture.⁴²

⁴¹ Ralph Ellison, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke,” in his *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964). Ellison’s essay had first been published in spring 1958 in the *Partisan Review* as a response to Stanley Edgar Hyman’s essay, “The Negro Writer in America: An Exchange,” 25, no. 2 (Spring 1958): 197-211.

⁴² Examples of identity and whiteness studies that focus on blackface minstrels include: David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1991); Eric Lott, *Blackface Minstrelsy and the American*

The humorous use of stereotypes, like the nostalgic remembrances of the Old South, represented a class harmonizing project where ridicule, admiration, and curiousness merged. Through the scope of voyeuristic condescension, audiences and customers could unite in their appreciation of the musical, dramatic, or servile job performance while maintaining the class and race status quo. A mythology of class hierarchy unfolded on the formal stage and in the daily experiences of leisure-tourist work: contempt for and the fear of abject poverty and loss of social status helped foster hope and appreciation for the leisure life. The performance of servility as in the singing of “plantation melodies,” “negro spirituals,” the comedy and varied musical acts of blackface minstrelsy and vaudeville, and the execution of service work represented expressions of class hierarchy that naturalized the reality of such a state of conditions. Similarly, costume balls and themed parties of the wealthy flaunted their ability to play and act out their fantasies of the exotic and historical. These leisure expressions of the status quo highlight a dynamic that is similar to the way humor dialogued with society. Film scholar Gilberto Perez offered important insight into these connections.

Humor, as Perez has argued in his analysis of John Ford’s 1934 film, *Judge Priest*, served to identify the problems of a racist society, it did not resolve them. The playing of “Dixie” by Stepin Fetchit and his African American band parading in the middle of the town at the climax of *Judge Priest* “humorously declare[d] the injustice of their situation” and highlighted how the ability of humor to disturb hierarchy—to “bring

Working Class (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The vast majority of the work remains focused on the nineteenth century.

down the high and give play to the low”—ultimately has limits.⁴³ Namely, “comedy says that society admits improvement only up to a point, and that beyond that its wrongs are to be lived with. The endings of comedy may be happy, but part of the reconciliation they bring about is reconciliation to injustice.” What Perez uncovers in the larger historical patterns of comedy, and specifically defining *Judge Priest* as a “comedy of rhetoric,” has relevance in real world places like Miami. The judge in the film, played by Will Rogers, and Stepin Fetchit’s character Jeff are easygoing Southern types who manipulate others by using “the rhetoric of a trickster”: the former by representing and resisting the law and the latter by using dumbness as a mask. And here Ralph Ellison’s often quoted essay, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke,” offers insights into blackface minstrelsy and the trickster character that remind us about the significance of class hierarchy. While some might find intelligence in the parodying of the grotesque and the trickery of “playing dumb,” both acts are articulations of “self-humiliation of the ‘sacrificial’ figure,” that is, “malignant images of black men.” Slavery and later the designation of African Americans for the toughest and least secure and remunerated jobs revealed the profit

⁴³ It also imitated the long-time practice of the minstrel troupe advertising practice when they entered a new town: a minstrel parade, in the spirit of the carnival and showmanship, would go down the main thoroughfares announcing in costume that they had arrived and were going to perform. Carl Wittke, *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage* (reprint, 1930; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1968), 103-104, 145-147, & 158. Wittke, a historian of immigration, had himself participated in blackface minstrelsy, as he related in his preface: “Happy memories of the burnt cork semi-circle, gathered during [my] barnstorming [college] days, are responsible for an abiding interest and a real love for the old-time minstrel show” (vii). Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, the actors and creators of the *Amos ‘n’ Andy* radio show, had participated in such parades. Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos ‘n’ Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 37.

motive at work. Blacks became the scapegoat of a failed social system and nation; the mask of blackface served “to veil the humanity of Negroes thus reduced to a sign.” Ellison commented: “It is not at all odd that this black-faced figure of white fun is for Negroes a symbol of everything they rejected in the white man’s thinking about race, in themselves and in their own group.”⁴⁴ It is not difficult, viewed from the scope of the early twentieth-first century, to sympathize and agree with the outrage of such images as blackface and to understand why anyone would despise such cultural caricatures of themselves. But this is only the tip of the significance of Ellison’s insights.

Scholars William Mahar and Michael Rogin misread Ellison’s significance. Mahar grouped Ellison historiographically in the Civil Rights era and thus a race-conscious writer in such a moment would logically be appalled by racial caricature. Mahar argued, however, that Ellison’s importance lay mostly in that he recognized that “minstrelsy’s real significance as an exemplar of popular culture lay in the realm of symbolic communication.” This reading limits the value of Ellison’s essay even while it gives Mahar license to offer his own analysis of the symbolic value of nineteenth century minstrelsy. Rogin, in his book *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*, located a “process of identity change that transformed poor into rich, daughters into wives and mothers, and immigrants into Americans.” Taking his cues from whiteness studies’ emphasis on blackface minstrelsy as a platform where

⁴⁴ Gilberto Perez, “Saying ‘Ain’t’ and Playing ‘Dixie’: Rhetoric and Comedy in *Judge Priest*,” *Raritan*, 23, no. 4 (2004): 34-54; Ralph Ellison, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke,” p. 45-59.

ethnic groups became white, he told a story of Americanization for Jewish immigrants, but he side stepped the class implications. Paralleling a similar narrative arc as Constance Rourke's concern with American character, Rogin found in minstrelsy a struggle over becoming a white American, of attaining national identity, and revealing a central characteristic of American nationality: "the power of subjects to make themselves over." Both authors complicate Ellison unnecessarily. The joke at the center of American identity—the trickster, the "smart man playing dumb"—is best summarized in an anecdote Ellison relates in "Change the Joke." He writes, "Said a dark Southern friend of mine in laughing reply to a white businessman who complained of his recalcitrance in a bargaining situation, '*I know, you thought I was colored, didn't you.*'" It is across this joke that Negro and white Americans regard one another" (emphasis added). Essential here is Ellison's emphasis on the importance of a people to have a past, a tradition, something denied Blacks in the white mind. With an identity rooted in community an individual is less likely to be taken advantage of, to be cheated, or denied dignity. An offense to one is an offense to all.⁴⁵

The act of masking, which Ellison powerfully connected to the advertising industry, defines an important cultural dynamic in American culture: "America is a land

⁴⁵ William J. Mahar, "Ethiopian Skits and Sketches: Contents and Contexts of Blackface Minstrelsy, 1840-1890," in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, edited by Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover & London: University Press of New England, 1996), 179-186; Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 49-50; Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of National Character* (reprint, 1931; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1953), 70-90; Ellison, "Change the Joke, Slip the Yoke," p. 54.

of masking jokers.” And even while this describes an interesting trait, one must not forget that Ellison sought to highlight the complexity of American culture as traced by the variance of its multi-people past and present and as expressed in the various cultural products from music to literature. The Black rejection of the blackface or “darky” act mask did not preclude their use of such signification given the value such performance could render, whether in the personal “joy of the joke” or for monetary value. The agency that the wearing of such masks may represent only highlighted the particular degrading elements of such images. It revealed the “reconciliation to injustice” that Gilberto Perez points out occurs in humor. What Mahar and Rogin take for granted, Ellison takes time to demonstrate and emphasize. “The continuous debasement” of the Black image in the period of segregation was worse than what had occurred during slavery, according to Ellison. This reminder is historical and has class significance. While the trickster trope and Black folk tradition offered Blacks cultural tools to survive and endure “the insecurity and blues-like absurdity” of the real world, the debased images were signifiers of the reality of existing in a lower, degraded class position to be exploited and used for profit by others—hence, the joke “you thought I was colored, didn’t you.” All those who resided in a lower class position symbolically rescinded a right to their humanity but in reality the struggle for meaning was continuous and relentless. In other words, apparent acceptance of the status quo, of the inequity of class hierarchy, did not concede one’s oppositional position to that power structure.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ellison, “Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke,” 54 & 58-59;

This cultural dynamic of playing around the status quo but eventually not challenging it in significant ways or simply embracing it was part of what defined class harmony. Often performances on the stage were mirrored in reality, as in the burlesque comedy common in blackface minstrelsy and Black waiters racing on a beach. It is probably impossible to trace how often this kind of mirroring occurred. However, blackface minstrelsy and vaudeville shows were performed throughout the interwar period, both on a professional and amateur level. While African Americans also engaged in minstrelsy and likely performed in front of Black audiences (perhaps in the Lyric Theater in Colored Town) given the strict segregation laws, all the newspaper reports I uncovered were of whites in blackface. It continued a tradition that had occurred regularly in Miami and elsewhere prior to the period. Despite the national dwindling popularity and diminishing economic returns resulting from various factors, 1920s Miami and other tourist venues like Atlantic City continued to host various traveling blackface minstrel and vaudeville shows. John F. Murphy's Minstrels, "Lasses" White Minstrels, J. A. Coburn Minstrels, Al G. Fields Minstrels, and Christie's Minstrels, the few I have identified, were regular features during the tourist season in 1920s Miami. The newspaper records often did not write much about these shows. We know that they contained dancing routines, the use of "Negro dialect," comedy that varied with stand-up and skits that likely contained jokes about Black stereotypes (laziness, gambling, chicken and watermelon eating, relationship issues, ignorance, etc.) and singing performances. The Lasses White Minstrels in November 1927 was divided into seven scenes and provided

“a good two hours of amusement for those who liked the burnt cork type of entertainment, and who doesn’t?” While this seemed like a more traditional show, other performances included modern music. Emmett Miller, the influential blues singer, sang his hit “Any Time” in January 1927 and was recalled to the stage four times. Before the song started, the blackfaced Miller began with dialogue in dialect, and then transitioned into “Any Time” which had a common blues theme about loneliness and a broken heart.⁴⁷

The 1920s, and especially the 1930s when fewer and fewer minstrel shows circulated through the country, witnessed a flourishing of amateur productions. Organized by the city government, churches, schools, girl and boy scouts, the Mickey Mouse club, the Elks Club, American Legion, the wealthy elite Committee of One Hundred, Improvement Associations, a few unions such as the Typographical Workers Union, and other groups, these events often set out to raise funds for some cause usually for charity purposes. I suspect that this was not necessarily unique to Miami. Historians have neglected the extent of this form of entertainment in the twentieth century, noting of course the prevalence of racial stereotypes in film, radio, and other cultural products such as cartoons, postcards and various collectibles. The most popular American radio show

⁴⁷ Competition with new forms of mass entertainment such as films, the large size of the minstrel companies and small profit margins, and then the Great Depression helped to kill or at least limit the number of regionally circulating shows. *MDN*, 18 Jan 1922, p. 3, 2nd section (J. A. Colburn); *MDN*, 14 Dec 1922, p. 2 & 3 Jan 1923, p. 2 (Murphy); *MDN*, 11 Nov 1927, p. 7 (Lasses White); *Miami Tribune* 7 Jan 1927, p. 14 and *MDN* 6 July 1928, p. 14 (Al G. Fields); *MDN*, 23 April 1929, p. 13 (Christie). In July 1926, January 1927 and March 1928, Emmett Miller appeared in Miami. Writer Nick Tosche devoted an entire book searching for this elusive but important blues and country singer. *Where Dead Voices Gather* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001), 67-70 (for the July 1926 date).

of the interwar period, *Amos 'n' Andy*, had two white men speaking in stereotyped “Negro Dialect.” The show started in 1929 and ran through the 1950s. Its white creators, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, drew from their blackface minstrel show experience. Nonetheless, much of the local entertainment resorting to blackface minstrelsy has remained outside the radar of scholars of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

The local production of minstrels represented a mainstay in the entertainment culture of Miami’s citizens. At times the shows were advertised through the traditional minstrel parade. In 1922 the Elks club conducted a for-charity amateur show coached by New York professional Harry Miller and it advertised the event with the “niftiest minstrel parade ever on the streets of Miami.” Borrowing from this well-worn strategy, Miami High promoted its 1924 school carnival with “a colored clown minstrel” going “all around town on a truck” for several days before the scheduled event. A minstrel parade was to march down Flagler Street before the start of the carnival, with all the members of the high school band participating. The carnival was to include “minstrels, plays, Hawaiian dances, acrobatic stunts, and any number of things.” Minstrel parades

⁴⁸ Wittke, *Tambo and Bones*, 123-134; Frank Costellow Davidson, “The Rise, Development, Decline, and Influence of the American Minstrel Show” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1952). Perhaps working on Wittke’s own insights as well as Robert Toll’s still widely cited book, historians too readily ignore the twentieth century, especially after the WWI period, because of these scholars’ assertions that blackface minstrelsy had essentially died out by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). Even Grace Hale’s excellent book, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998) ignored the prevalence of Blackface minstrelsy but offered thorough coverage of the widespread dissemination of racist and paternalistic paraphernalia. On collectibles, see Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

continued to appear throughout the interwar period; though it is unclear the frequency of such events given no index exists for Miami's newspapers and the likely countless private unreported affairs. As late as 1939, Coral Way's Daddies Association organized a minstrel parade to march down Flagler Street to Bayfront Park. Advertised as a playful walk down nostalgic memory lane, the news story reporting it wrote that "Miamians will remember the days of darkies in the old deep South when they watch an old-time minstrel parade" and witness in Bayfront Park "buck and wing dancing, minstrel jokes and a male chorus of 75 voices accompanied by Caesar La Monaca's band."⁴⁹

Minstrelsy had cross class support and represented a legitimate mainstream form of entertainment. The wealthy elite club, Committee of One Hundred, had its hand in various amateur minstrel shows held in February 1936 and 1938 in the exclusive Coco Lobo Club located on Adams Key, an island south of Key Biscayne. The Typographical Union held annual minstrel shows through at least 1938. The Florida, Power and Light Company sponsored the Sunshine Minstrels, an annual all employee production, casting as many as 120 workers. Its 1939 show held in the Miami Edison high school auditorium turned away more than 1,000 leading to a second show being added. H. H. Hyman, the southern division manager of the company, invited "1,500 officials and employees of other businesses as "special guests." They included the Chamber of Commerce, City Hall, Burdines, Marks department store, Sears Roebuck, Walgreens, Red Cross Drugs,

⁴⁹ "Elks' Big Fun Frolic and Minstrels Begin," *MDN*, 27 Jan 1922, p. 2; "Pupils Ready for Carnival," *MDN*, 25 April 1924, p. 11); "Minstrel Parade Set for Tonight," *MDN*, 24 April 1939, p. 2A.

Miami Laundry, Eastern Air Lines, and Pan American Airways. Residential organizations followed the practice of using the minstrel show for fun and humor. The North Miami Beach Improvement Association, for example, held an annual minstrel show from the 1930s through at least 1941.⁵⁰

More notable was the practice of organizing minstrel shows to deal with the unemployment and poverty problems during the Great Depression and the efforts to promote year round tourism. From 1930 to 1933, the Empty Stocking fund, a welfare charity effort that included many of Miami's civic clubs including churches, held a year end heavily promoted minstrel show in Bayfront Park. The newspaper promotion of 1931 and 1932 shows included a cartoon depiction of a blackface minstrel. Some "old timers" played the role of end men in the 1931 minstrel line, including the firefighter known as "Miami's Own Minstrel Man" Steve Brodie. He had traveled with Coburn's Minstrels and the Eddie Leonard's troupe before he settled in Miami and became a regular participant in local shows. With the goal of "feeding Miami's poor at Christmas time," an advertisement highlighted how Steve Brodie and Harry Allen planned on performing the comedy skit "The Two Black Recruits." The 1931 show also included the

⁵⁰ *MDN*, 28 Feb 1936 and *MDN*, 20 Feb 1938, p. 1B (Committee of 100). The Committee planned in December 1933 on organizing their own minstrel show in 1934 with its millionaire members donning blackface but it is unclear if they ever did have that show, "Millionaires to Go Blackface," *MDN*, 13 Dec 1933, p. 9; *MDN*, 12 June 1938, p. 4B (Typographical union); "Power Firm Cast Repeats Minstrel," *MDN*, 6 May 1939, p. 6; Cecil Warren, "Numerous Distinctions Boasted by Young City," *MDN*, 20 June 1941, p. 1D. For employer support of employee attendance of minstrel shows in another city and state, see Jerome P. Bjelopera, "White Collars and Blackface: Race and Leisure among Clerical and Sales Workers in Early Twentieth-Century Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 126, no. 3 (July 2002): 471-490.

Dixie Mammoth Minstrels (a southern traveling troupe) as the featured act, but nightclubs, such as the Club Alcazar and Club Bagdad, also participated by donating the services of their regular performers. Club Bagdad offered a “bevy of [“Miami’s Anti-Depression”] beautiful girls in special minstrel costumes to close the show.” Ceasar LaMonaca’s band gave the overture to the program and an all-male chorus followed with the singing of “Happy Days.” A reported 6,000 attended this 1931 performance. Beginning in 1934, the Empty Stocking Fund yearly program dropped the minstrel show but kept a vaudeville format and expanded the contribution of local nightclubs and hotel performers. This move likely reflected the variety of local entertainment, the dwindling popularity of the minstrel form, and, perhaps most importantly, awareness by local economic interests of both the public relations benefits and advertising opportunity such charity events represented.⁵¹

In an effort to expand tourism in the summer months, the booster Sun-Sea-Air-A association organized a “mammoth” minstrel parade and show in the June 1934. The “father of minstrelsy,” Michael B. Leavitt, at the age of over 90 years old, told stories of his long career reaching back to the 1870s (he would die the next year). Danny Sheenan

⁵¹ The Empty Stocking Fund started in 1928 as a toy collection drive and welfare relief effort during Christmas; at first to literally gather sugar for candy production and toy donations to give to “Miami’s firemen” [to distribute to] “needy children,” *MDN*, 21 Dec 1928, p. 1. *MDN*, 29 Nov 1931, p. 7, 3 Dec 1931, p. 1, 4 Dec 1931, p. 4; *MDN*, 15 Dec 1932, p. 1 (when an audience of 10,000 was expected); *MDN*, 7 Dec 1933, p. 1 (a repeat performance was added); *MDN*, 25 Nov 1934, p. 14, Society Section (vaudeville and dance held instead of minstrel show) and 18 Dec 1934, p. 1. The 1934 program was titled the “Night Club Vaudeville Extravaganza.” County and city employees were urged to attend and “R. B. Burdine pledged his employees would have tickets to the show.” The program included an “American Indian presentation” and a blues singer (subsequent shows included the latter *MDN*, 13 Dec 1936, p. 8).

sang Stephen Foster's classic plantation melody, "Old Black Joe," and Adolph Seerth and the Sun-Sea-Air-A chorus sang "That's Why Darkies Were Born," the Kate Smith 1931 hit that told listeners: "someone had to pick the cotton, someone had to pick the corn, someone had to slave, that's why darkies were born; someone had to laugh at trouble though he was tired and worn, had to be contented with any old thing, that's why darkies were born..." The crowd was also treated with Steve Brodie's blackface monologue, "Darktown Politics," which one can only imagine offered a stereotype of African American corruption, gambling, drinking, laziness, and licentiousness.⁵²

Class hierarchy appeared in other performances of the quaint and exotica. Held throughout the 1930s in the beginning of spring, the yearly Pan American parade featured the city's school children participating in costume of historical figures such as Simon de Bolivar or school contingents representing different Latin American countries dressed in the imagined cultural attire of their assigned country. After being treated to a visit to the Seminole Village (likely Musa Isle) in 1941, Riverside elementary school children learned the history of the Old South through "an old plantation minstrel." Quite common occurrences during the winter season were the elaborate themed parties held by wealthy winter residents and tourists. The exclusive Surf Club on Miami Beach, in its 1931 Gala series, had parties arranged with a Spanish-Andalusia theme and another featuring a "Samarkand fete on the Persian-Chinese border." Three years later, party planners for

⁵² On Sun-Sea-Air-A, see *MDN*, 30 May 1934, p. 5; *MDN*, 19 June 1934, p. 6, Society Section; *MDN*, 20 June 1934, p. 1; *MDN*, 21 June 1934, p. 13; *MDN*, 24 June 1934, p. 5 (for a rare photo of the very large cast in costume and blackfaced); *MDN*, 27 June 1934, p. 6 (a repeat performance was given).

the Club designed “an elaborate spectacle of the exotic architecture of Indo-China with its pagan temples, fantastic gods and goddesses, gilded pagodas and temple dancers” that allegedly surpassed any past endeavor. Orchestras were placed at various points of the elaborate space of the Club. Situated in a large garden, the night’s coordinator, Mrs. Weller, had the party start at “twilight so the guests can wander in the jungle” surrounding the Club. The invitations were written in blue and gold paper so as to further express “the oriental influence.”⁵³

Even more ostentatious were the common winter costume parties. In the February 1929 inaugural Committee of One Hundred costume party, some of the world’s wealthiest individuals attired in 18th century French, Spanish, English, and American colonial wear and as particular historical characters. “No expense was spared... by the hosts in elevating this affair to the highest pinnacle in social excellence,” wrote the news article reporting the event. It continued,

The luster given the brocade velvets, laces and silks of the men’s and women’s costumes was accentuated by the setting of palm garden and ball room. Illuminated yachts, at anchor in a semicircle in front of the Nautilus hotel [owned by Carl Fisher] extended the scene far beyond the boundary of the bayshore. By their positions they afforded passage for five or six gondolas gliding in and out of their shadows. On board, gondoliers were singing Venetian boat songs.

⁵³ *MDN*, 15 March 1931, p. 1; “Colorful Park Pageant Marks Pan-Am Events,” 18 Nov 1933, p. 14; Barbara Ann Thomas, “Riverside Visits Seminole Village,” *MDN*, 23 Nov 1941, p. 2B; “Surf Club Plans Gala Series of Winter Events,” *MDN*, 11 Jan 1931, p. 2, Section 2; “Surf Club Presents Exotic Setting for Cambodia Evening,” *MDN*, 4 March 1934, p. 1, Society Section; “Surf Club Fete Attended by Atlantans,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 March 1934.

One gondola carried musicians who provided music for the guests from the boat; two other bands were located in the ball room and two others in the tea garden. Music was seldom far away in most tourist and leisure events, so as to set the mood and enhance the experience. Carl Fisher's elephant, Rosie, led women dressed as "Marie Antoinette, Mme. Pompadour and other court ladies of a previous day" down from the home of Mrs. Elliot F. Shepard, the chairman of the patronesses. Guests at the party included: personal representatives of President-elect Hoover, Florida Governor Doyle E. Carlton, President Machado of Cuba, Governor Orr of Nassau; Frank Seiberling and Harvey Firestone, rubber manufacturers; J. C. Penney; Mrs. E. G. Sewell; Hewett Brown, vice president of Standard Oil Company; the architect Addison Mizner; Gar Wood and Webb Jay; George Harrison Phelps; C. F. Kettering, A. J. Trumball, and De Witt Page, vice presidents of General Motors and their wives; and Philo Gelatt of Northern Engraving Company, to name just a few.⁵⁴ This became an annual event but the theme of each year's party changed. The Surf Club as well as other social clubs held similar yearly costume parties.

The exotic, minstrel and servile job could easily mesh together in a smooth transition from formal performances on the stage to the platform of leisure social exchange. After the Kanoe Klub held its minstrel in 1921, five blackface minstrels served refreshments during the reception after the show. The entire membership of the Junior League (made up of women) received the guests to their January 1928 Gypsy Ball in gypsy costumes: "these charming young women will be here and there about the

⁵⁴ "Costume Party is Brilliant Beach Affair," *MDN*, 16 Feb 1929, p. 16.

arched balconies and rooms of the club and on the terrace.” Held in the exclusive Coral Gables Biltmore Hotel, guests were also treated to Mrs. Ralph Buss and the Junior League chorus’ singing of the prelude to “Habanera” and “Carmen.” The quest for legitimacy, authority, and status that accompanied these classical songs may have been undermined by the humor of the gypsy costumes and the “strolling minstrels and cigarette girls”—“expected to add charm to the evening’s entertainment.” A who’s who of Miami high society were guests to this kitschy event: Mr. and Mrs. Sedgwick Cooper (president of the Committee of 100), E. G. Sewell and his wife (founder of the Miami Chamber of Commerce and multi-term mayor), the Pancoasts, the Firestones, the Coxes (1920 Democratic presidential candidate and owner of the *Miami Daily News*), the Shutts (owner of the *Miami Herald*), and several others. From the real world to the imagined, the movement was apparently seamless in the Winter Playground. A *Miami Daily News* 1934 cartoon depicted Mayor Frank Kazentine being served by a blackfaced waiter saying, “A mint julep, Kunnel, Suh?” The opening of the Miami Beach restaurant, the Roadside Rest, in January 1937 included singing minstrels strolling from table to table. If it was good for high society it was also good for the rest.⁵⁵

The more demeaning uses of stereotypes may very well have occurred in the many unrecorded day-to-day experiences, though some revealing examples are extant. In addition to the racing waiters described above, other leisure settings ridiculed the black body. The Committee of One Hundred, in their yearly outing to the Cocolobo Cay Club,

⁵⁵ “Kanoë Club Minstrels,” *MDN*, 5 Aug 1921, p. 7; *MDN*, 29 Jan 1928, p. 1, Society Section; *MDN*, 18 Jan 1934, p. 10; “New Restaurant Opens at Beach,” *MDN*, 20 Jan 1937, p. 9.

assembled in 1934 a group of African American adolescents for the entertainment of its white wealthy members. Half of the 60-acre island that the Club was located consisted of grassy lawn and its exclusive nature is best described by this contemporary account: “facing Biscayne Bay to the west, Caesar’s creek to the south, and the ocean to the east. The only means of access to the island is by boat or airplane. Every member owns one to four boats; some make the trip by air.” A *Miami Herald* article reminded its readers that the location of the Club had historical and exotic significance: “Caesar’s creek was the headquarters more than 100 years ago for Black Caesar, the last of the pirates who operated in Florida waters.” The chairman of the entertainment committee, C. W. Chase Jr., had the Black boys fight off a raft, walk and wrestle on a grease pole, box each other, and finish the deprecating day with a battle royal. Chase had programs made for the day for the 350 male guests. Cartoons showed a blackface music band performing on a dock, the grease pole climb, blackface waiters serving members of the Committee, and two blackface individuals boxing on a small platform on the water with one receiving a blow and about to fall in the water. There was also a flour diving contest. Even in cartoons the black body could only be depicted in the humorous blackface minstrel form. To make matters even more perverse, the day’s events were filmed (over two hours of footage) and later shown to the wives of the Committee members in their newly constructed clubhouse on Michigan Avenue, Miami Beach. It represented an amazing production in which the degradation of human dignity was neatly packaged for voyeuristic adventure. A short one-minute clip of a similar 1931 event emerged on the internet in 2011 and was entitled

“Dusky Entertainers, A Feature of Annual Millionaires’ Outing.” The clip showed Black boys pushing each other off a small raft and into the water as male spectators donned in white suites and hats watched. The *Miami Daily News* reported that “a water tournament in which dusky participants tumbled each other from rafts, boats, and greasy poles for prizes and chased ducks around the improvised pools entertained the guests until luncheon.” Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*’s protagonist’s harrowing, demeaning, and alienating experience fighting in a battle royal in front of the “the most important men of the town...the bankers, lawyers, judges, doctors, fire chiefs, teachers, merchants” was certainly no exaggeration. The Committee’s millionaires treated these African American youth as animals to be exploited and used for their enjoyment through sporty burlesque. The connection between work and leisure, tourist economics and hierarchy, and class and race could not have been more direct. No records have been uncovered to indicate if this kind of event occurred every year, but it is not unlikely given the parallels of the 1931 and 1934 outings.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Newspaper clipping from the *Miami Herald* entitled “Cocolobo Cay Outing Features Yacht Race, Black Boys Not So Gently Treated in Royal Battle Wind Up,” undated (likely Feb 11, 1934), “Committee of One Hundred Records, South Florida Historical Museum, Box 7; *Miami Herald* (hereafter *MH*), 10 Feb 1934; *MDN*, 11 Feb 1934, p. 4; “Masses Lead Prosperity,” *MDN*, 28 Feb 1934, p. 11; “Pictures of Cocolobo Cay Picnic Shown Feminine Admirers,” *MDN*, 8 March 1934; “25 Yachts, With 100 Committee Go to Cocolobo,” *MDN*, 29 Jan 1931, p. 1; “Cocolobo Cay Outing Routs Business Care: Captains of Industry Play Like Kids at Their Annual Picnic,” *MDN*, 31 Jan 1931, p. 2. (Newsreel cameramen joined the party in this outing. In addition to the use of yachts, “several prominent guests were taken down in Gar Wood’s plane, the Kinjockity, which made two trips to the key...”); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (reprint, 1947; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 17-33. The Critical Past website clip described the Black youth as “natives of the island”: http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675055150_wrestling_eating-hotdogs_natives-of-island-wrestling_yachts-and-boats (last viewed on 3/12/2011).

Other forms of class and racial hierarchy were more paternalistic and benevolent and thus apparently less demeaning. In contrast to the Cocolobo Cay outings, the Committee of One Hundred in January 1931 witnessed the singing from a group of “10 negro singers” from Howard C. Coffin’s “Sapelo Island plantation.” Born in Ohio, an engineer, and the president of the car company, Hudson-Essex, Coffin had bought the Georgia sea island in 1910 and built his home in the refurbished antebellum house of the planter and slave owner, Thomas Spalding. Coffin took time before introducing the singers to urge the gathering’s businessmen to advertise the south Atlantic coast’s colonial past and thereby help develop the region’s economy. According to the newspaper story reporting the event, “he then recounted a short history of slavery and told of [the] origin of [the] songs sang. The negroes serenaded amid the flickering light and smoke of campfires, forming a picturesque scene with the palms of Mr. [Gar] Wood’s estate in the background.” A photo that accompanied the story suggests that the “negro harmonizers” likely sang folk, blues, and possibly gospel songs. The picture showed nine singers sitting on chairs in a rowing motion—indicating a folk work song—with a guitarist off to the side and all wearing long sleeve shirts and large handkerchiefs, suggesting the formal quality of the entertainment. These singers were only the opening act of the night’s festivities: Harvey Firestone gave a short pep talk about the imminent economic recovery and the benefits of that on tourist Miami; Cyrus Curtis of Curtis Publishing provided jokes for the evening; Clayton Sedgwick Cooper offered general comments and introduced the host of the evening Gar Wood who then displayed his new

racing boat, Miss America IX; opera singers Miss Irma Debaun and V. Y. Kallini individually sang several songs; and the main speaker of the night, Charles Kettering of General Motors, spoke on the need to produce new things to essentially create demand and thereby end the economic depression. Any subversive politics inherent in the African American performances, in their expressions of stories of perseverance amid hardship, were subsumed in this context of wealthy white men leisurely tackling the problems of the day. The memory of slavery and the persistent prevalent rate of African American poverty stood in stark contrast to the enormous riches of their audience. Such casual juxtapositions of the tamed, civilized laborer and the self-important stock holders of society justified the moral rightness and intelligence of class hierarchy.⁵⁷

The singing of spirituals, folksongs, blues, or other popular music was an acceptable practice especially when whites performed. Thirty African American singers, known as the Southern Cotton Pickers, sang spirituals and gave exhibitions of “the blackbottom and Charleston dances” at the Opa Locka swimming pool (Northwest of Miami) in February 1927; later that year 100 singers of the “negro community” sang at the Anglers club in north east Miami. In the winter season of 1931, African American singers sang at the Biscayne Fronton. It is not clear how often this occurred. One

⁵⁷ “New Ideas Said Business Need by Kettering,” *MDN*, 28 January 1931, p. 14. Maxwell Taylor Courson, “Howard Earl Coffin, King of the Georgia Coast,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 83, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 322-341; William S. McFeely, *Sapelo’s People: A Long Walk into Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 146-148. It is likely that these singers were a forerunner to the Georgia Sea Island singers of later years led by Bessie Jones and others and recorded by Alan Lomax. See the indispensable book by Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (reprint, 1977; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

member of the audience thought it would be a good idea “to send those negroes, who are so typical of the south, with their melodious voices, on a tour of . . . northern cities as publicity for Miami.”⁵⁸ In a March 1934 gathering on Phillip Lord’s schooner in Miami’s municipal pier, hundreds of the *Miami Daily News* Homemakers club and their president, Mrs. Sedgwick Cooper, enjoyed the singing of “Dixie” by soprano Ruth Showers Baker, “Old Man River” by John Weber (“Miami’s singing policemen”), and “Old Black Joe” and the “Laughing Song” (African American singer George W. Johnson’s 1890s hit) by “a quartet of negro teachers” who also sang other “tunes of the Old South.” Glee Clubs from the University of Miami, Emory University, and Yale University also performed “negro spirituals.”⁵⁹ The White Temple Choir in downtown Miami regularly sang “negro spirituals” during the winter season in their church and around south Florida including in Hollywood (December 1926) and Flamingo Park in Miami Beach (December 1928). The *Miami Daily News* reported that the most popular part of Driskell Wolfe’s 1940 performance at the White Temple “was the four negro spirituals and folk songs which so capably demonstrated his ability to capture the feeling of the negro in his songs.” He sang “Mah Lindy Lou,” “Sweet Little Jesus Boy,” “Steal Away,” and “Didn’t It Rain.” “Mah Lindy Lou,” a 1920 composition by white South

⁵⁸ “Annual River Swim Will be Held March 16,” *MDN*, 26 Feb 1927; *MDN*, 23 Dec 1927, p. 8; *MDN*, 10 March 1931, p. 11; “Negro Spirituals,” *MDN*, 26 March 1931, p. 6.

⁵⁹ “Party of ‘Seth Parker’ Attracts Many Homemakers,” *MDN*, 29 March 1934, p. 10; *MDN*, 8 April 1928, p. 2 and *MDN*, 11 Feb 1934, p. 7, Society Section (for University of Miami); “Emory Glee Club Will Appear Here,” *MDN*, 8 Jan 1935, p. 12 (also in *MDN*, 13 Sept 1922, p. 2); “Yale Glee Club to Sing Here [at the Biltmore Country Club in Coral Gables],” *MDN*, 25 March 1934, p. 12, Society Section.

Carolina native, Lily Strickland, and “Sweet Little Jesus Boy” (1934) by white song writer Robert MacGimsey (La.), actually represented interpretations of African American music. Both writers stated they had been influenced by their exposure during childhood to African American culture: Strickland had listened to the cotton pickers in the fields of South Carolina and MacGimsey had spent much time in the company of African Americans.⁶⁰ How the audiences experienced the “authenticity” of the performances between white and black singers of spirituals was not recorded. Will Rogers did make a funny quip about the difference after witnessing singers from Tuskegee University: “oh, boy, after hearing 1, 500 of these colored pupils sing negro spirituals, I feel sure I will shoot the next white person I hear try to sing one.”⁶¹

African Americans at times attempted to profit from the stereotypes that justified class hierarchy. In addition to musical and vaudeville groups like the Southern Cotton Pickers, others sought to cash in for the benefit of the larger community. The Tropical Jubilee Singers of Miami sang spirituals, folk songs, and did some comic acts in December 1928 to raise funds for the Christian Endeavor Society and day care services. That same month St. Peter’s A. O. Church (1729 N.W. Third Court), St. James African Episcopal Church (N.W. 65th St. and 18th Ave), and Warner’s Memorial Church (N.W.

⁶⁰ *MDN*, 28 Dec 1926, p. 2; *MDN*, 3 Dec 1927, p. 6 (White Temple concert “has been an annual affair”); and “Wolfe Thrills Audience Here with Recital,” *MDN*, 3 April 1940, p. 1B. Lee David Perry, *More than Petticoats: Remarkable South Carolina Women* (Guilford, CT: Morris Book Publishing, 2009), 101; William J. Peterson and Ardythe Peterson, *The Complete Book of Hymns: Inspiring Stories about 600 Hymns and Praise Songs* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006).

⁶¹ “A Line from Will,” *MDN*, 5 March 1928, p. 1.

13th St. and First Place) performed “negro spirituals” and dialect readings for white and black audiences. The churches reserved special seating for “white persons” and while no admission was charged, “offerings” were gladly accepted. Again, it is difficult to trace how often these kinds of events occurred. The Trinity Colored Methodist Church sponsored on July 4, 1936 a special performance of “plantation melodies” and “real old-fashioned Southern barbecue” in Miami City’s “colored park” announcing that, “A special section of the park will be set aside for white Southerners who are familiar with the pleasure to be derived from hearing a chorus of negroes sing, and who are aware of the gastronomical delights of real Southern barbecue.” A chorus of 100 singers representing the B. Solomon Burial society, the Afro-American Life Insurance Company, Liberty City, Coconut Grove and other clubs from “Colored” Town were to perform.⁶²

These irregular and mostly amateur attempts at profiting from stereotypes pale in comparison to the successes of black entertainment-boxing promoter Willie “Lavender Duke” Slater. While other entertainment promoters appear occasionally in the local newspapers—namely, Bill Mears—Slater remained a persistent and consistent presence in the white newspapers. Not much is known about Slater.⁶³ In fact, no historian has

⁶² *MDN*, 4 Feb 1928, p. 6; “Quartets to Give Negro Spirituals,” *MDN*, 2 Dec 1928, p. 11; “Negro Churches Inviting Whites,” *MDN*, 27 Dec 1928, p. 8; “Plantation Melodies Planned for Fourth,” *MH*, 2 July 1936; “Negroes to Hold Park Song Fest,” *MDN*, 2 July 1936, p. 14.

⁶³ According to WWI Registration Records, a Willie Slater was born in 1897 in Boston, Georgia and lived in Miami. Slater listed himself as a “mulatto.” The 1920 Federal Census records list a Willie Slater who fit this profile. He listed himself as a grocery store merchant. I have yet to locate him in the 1930 census but he does appear in the 1945 Florida State Census (from Georgia, age 47). “Florida Preps for Ring Bouts,” *Chicago Defender*, 2 Oct 1932, p. 8

ever written anything about him. Each year starting as early as 1928 and continuing through World War II and after, Slater promoted weekly boxing fights in Miami during the winter season, drawing talent from the African American boxing circuit. These boxers traveled throughout the country including the South. The fights occurred in various places over the years, apparently changing as a result of the lack of good enough spaces in “Colored” Town. The locations revealed a desperate search for a good spot: Skydome Theater (N.W. 14th St & 3rd Ave, 1928), “the negro ball park back of the gas works” (1929 & 1930), Buffalo Arena (N.W. 10 St. & 2nd Ave, 1934), and the “negro city park” which was later named Dorsey Park (N.W. 17th St. & 1st Ave, 1934 and after). Slater was well-known among sports enthusiasts including *Miami Daily News* sports writer Jack Bell who called him “my old friend” and who also organized one event with him in the 1936-1937 tourist season. Bell’s respect for Slater’s promotion of good boxing cards and his general love of boxing likely landed him space in the sports page as did the general popularity of the sport among white fans. Seats were reserved for white fans who seem to have consistently appeared at the weekly fights.⁶⁴ Local newspaper coverage did not indicate who exactly made up the white audience—that is, if it consisted

announced to traveling boxers “contemplating spending the winter months in Florida” to contact Slater, “matchmaker,” at the “World War Veterans Association,” 122 N.W. 14th St., Miami.”

⁶⁴ “Negro Fighters in Bout Tonight,” *MDN*, 9 Oct 1928, p. 9; *MH*, 11 Oct 1928, p. 8; *MDN*, 19 Dec 1928, p. 13; *MDN*, 18 Dec 1929, p. 14; *MDN*, 10 Dec 1930, p. 14; *MDN*, 17 Jan 1934, p. 13; *MDN*, 15 Feb 1934, p. 14; Jack Bell, O’er the Sports Desk,” *MDN*, 4 Aug 1936, p. 10 (Bell commenting on Slater and winter boxing promotion); *MDN*, 18 Jan 1940, p. 1C. African American boxing later extended to the Liberty City Park Arena (N.W. 17th Ave and 70th St.) in 1939: “Negro Boxers Meet Tonight,” *MDN*, 30 Nov 1939 but it is unclear if Slater promoted this or subsequent fights there.

of tourists or local residents but it is more than likely that both appeared at the shows. Except for one instance when police officers forced a few white patrons to leave a highly anticipated March 1934 fight, with most not budging from their seats, the fights went on without incident. However, it does seem that city officials went back and forth on allowing whites to attend the fights, though they never succeeded in keeping white fans away from the shows. The segregated seating and that the event occurred in “Colored” Town safeguarded racial customs. The steady announcements of the fights in the sports page indicate that white fans wanted to know when and where the boxing matches were occurring. Even Leslie Quigg, the notorious Miami police chief who lost his post in 1928 because of the excessive departmental brutality (but who regained it in 1937), attended a show in March 1939. Later in 1947, Slater succeeded in booking an “all negro card” in the Orange Bowl, the first time African Americans were allowed to enter the acclaimed sports stadium as customers.⁶⁵

The success of Willie Slater’s weekly boxing fights highlight an important point about how class and race worked together. The Committee of One Hundred’s degradation of the black body and condescending and romantic nods to the Old South revealed a larger class dynamic of mocking the lower classes which here was signified as dark skin. Captured in minstrel performances, comedy, dance, and sentimental popular

⁶⁵ “Police Hit Boxing in Miami,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 6 April 1934, p. 5; “Winston Fights Bush Tonight in Headliner at Negro Park,” *MDN*, 28 March 1934, p. 13; *MDN*, 29 March 1934, p. 13; *MDN*, 2 March 1939, 1C (on Quigg attending a show); “Slater Posts \$30,000 More for Fighters,” *MDN*, 1 March 1947, p. 6; “Open Doors to Race Fight Fans in Miami,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 21 Feb 1948, p. 17 (a mixed-race audience in the Orange Bowl to witness a Cuban boxer—many Cuban fans attend fight). Dunn, *Black Miami in the Twentieth Century*, 133-138.

music, the cultural currents helped reinforce the status quo. Slater's boxing events had a similar class dynamic. His boxing cards seldom only had boxing matches. He continued a tradition likely started by Bill "Doc" Mears in 1930 of holding a yearly "beauty contest" during a given boxing fight night. By the mid-1930s Slater expanded on this idea by holding an annual Black "bathing beauty contest." Besides holding several fights including a main event during any one boxing card, Slater often also included a battle royal, "buck dancing," and singing groups to help entertain the audience. Newspaper accounts do not comment on how these events unfolded; they usually only listed the winner of bouts. A "born showman," according to Jack Bell, Slater clearly attempted to profit from the sports entertainment business, adding his own twists of showmanship by tacking on music and sporty burlesque. This tendency was not unlike the performance of Miami's famous Black baseball team, the Ethiopian Clowns. According to historian Raymond Mohl, their show consisted of "on-field clowning antics, which included at various times wearing grass skirts, wigs, or clown suits; slapstick comedy, flashy practice routines and baseball trickery; and even wearing "whiteface" make-up, the team came to be known as the Harlem Globetrotters of baseball." These practices built from the minstrel and vaudeville tradition. While the performances of the African American and African Cuban boxers were certainly testaments to their humanity and expert skill, as was the beauty of the women contestants, the promotion nonetheless did contribute to a potentially degrading affair. The brutal nature of the boxing events, at the very least,

could justify white spectators since the bashing of the black body, whether by blacks or whites, was an unfortunate but acceptable practice in segregated America.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The Willie Slater story and the mythology of the rising boxer highlighted another connection: the feel good film of 2005, *Cinderella Man*, the story of Irish-American Depression Era boxer who rose from the gutter to win the world heavyweight championship. Like *Rocky* (1976) before it, the narrative condensed the American Dream into a nutshell. The ethic of hard work met the speculative fantasies of the gold rush or real estate deal. Ron Howard's film told a dramatic story of the down-and-out, hard-on-his-luck, Jimmie Braddock and the lucky break that led to his instant rise to stardom and economic well-being, the world heavyweight championship. *Cinderella Man* treated audiences with a powerful moral story, where the good hard-working guy helped feed his family in glorious and dramatic fashion: the threat of starvation and abject poverty paced the movie's plot line. In the margins of the film's narrative was the tragic story of a dreamy alcoholic, Mike Wilson, who ends up dying when he joins an unemployment communist uprising. Whereas Braddock played by the rules, didn't envy his social betters (even begs them for money which he promises to pay back), Wilson's

⁶⁶ "Negro Fighters Share Card with 'Beauties,' Singers," *MDN*, 29 Jan 1930, p. 15 (Mears show); "Negro Boxers Clash Tonight," *MDN*, 15 Feb 1934, p. 14 (Slater has beauty contest); "Buck Dancing, Boxing Bouts on Negro Card," *MDN*, 20 March 1935, p. 17; *MDN*, 3 March 1937, p. 1B; *MDN*, 2 March 1939, 1C (showman); Raymond Mohl, "Clowning Around: The Miami Ethiopian Clowns and Cultural Conflict in Black Baseball," *Tequesta*, 62 (2002): 40-67 (quote on 41).

death can be partly blamed to his inability to accept his conditions and just keep working harder. He chose to break the social class harmony and he paid dearly for it. Braddock, on the other hand, was rewarded with the jackpot of the American Dream.

Jack Bell's stories about Willie Slater and the boxers he booked evoked a similar narrative. Bell admired Slater because he was an optimist and a showman. The boxing promoter embodied the American Dream, a person rising up despite the odds against him. While he seemed to mock Slater at times for the stutter he had, Bell wrote about it in an affectionate and respectful way saying in effect that this guy was a success despite his various flaws. Bell wrote that African American heavyweight Bearcat Obie was a "black giant" from the cotton fields who he had seen "in the best fight your correspondent ever saw between heavyweights." Many other Black boxers also embodied for Bell the American Dream, of small town individuals working hard to make it in the world. Perhaps that was why white and black fans showed up to these fights, even if the brutality of the fighting suggested insanity and the burlesque equally dehumanized its participants. Much of the economic system seemed similarly insane or at least justified the class hierarchy that defined the great disparity between the haves and have-nots.⁶⁷

Miami's cultural landscape embraced class hierarchy and thus helped reinforce existing power relations. Despite this cultural hegemony, workers confronted the hardship of getting by occasionally bursting through these narratives of harmony. They too sought class harmony along moral economy lines: each person had a right to a

⁶⁷ *MDN*, 28 March 1934, p. 13; *MDN*, 3 Feb 1937, p. 21; *MDN*, 2 March 1939, p. 1C.

competency. But the lure of instant riches, of the easy life promised in fun and leisure, often helped to blur the similarities between white and black workers. Reverend Robert Newton Ward's June 1923 sermon in Miami's First Congregational Church suggested the absurdity of class hierarchy. Ward pointed out that the Christian call to love thy neighbor rested on the fact that all were children of God. However, he argued that "so long as God has made human-kind as he has, there will always naturally be what is called classes." Educated men naturally seek the companionship of other educated men, Ward pointed out, as do mechanics other mechanics and Blacks other Blacks. His logic derived from his divine insight: "Christ does not expect me to make a companion of an animal or to carry myself to the level of one." Ward highlighted how a community was held together through faith, that all should remember to keep their place, and that "the poor stand no more chance of getting into Heaven than do the rich." Ward's amazing defense of paternalism and hierarchy speaks volumes about the resonance of class harmony as an idea with conservative tendencies as well as a potential rallying point for progressive change.⁶⁸

Ward's sermon stood in stark contrast to the various calls for social equality. Reverend Philip Irwin, a white Episcopalian preacher giving a sermon in a black church, was tarred and feathered by a "band of ruffians" in 1921 for preaching social equality between the races, for even advocating intermarriage. Irwin denied these charges though he admitted to teaching a more hopeful message from the New Testament than Ward had

⁶⁸ "Impossible to Get Away from Caste," *MDN (Miami Metropolis)*, 16 June 1923, p. 4.

and he highlighted the powerful potential of the Declaration of Independence. The juxtaposition of the social equality advocated in both texts and the alleged preaching of racial equality has important significance. Whenever African Americans challenged the status quo, they represented such a threat to capitalist power relations as to disrupt the social order even if they adopted the egalitarian mythology of the American nation-state. The social control that segregation represented affected both white and black citizens, silently binding both to the class hierarchy apparently endemic to capitalism. Three years later, an ominous marble monument was placed near where Irwin had been attacked. One side told how a person teaching racial equality had been tarred and feathered; the other side wrote, "If you are a reckless negro or a white man who believes in social equality, be advised that Dade County don't need you." Even just the appearance of racial equality could lead to major grandstanding as when the Florida state legislature passed in 1929 a resolution condemning Herbert Hoover's wife's tea date with African American Illinois representative, Oscar De Priest's wife.⁶⁹ Segregation seemed to enable the most perverse contortions of the human spirit. How workers were limited and broke free from such restraints is the subject of the subsequent pages.

⁶⁹ "Irwin to Leave this Afternoon on F.E.C. Train," *MDN*, 19 July 1921, p. 1; *St. Petersburg Times*, 30 July 1924, p. 11 (marble inscription); *MDN*, 17 June 1929, p. 1.

CHAPTER 2

Workers and Organized Labor in Early Miami, 1914-1925

Workers were central to the efforts of building, developing, and maintaining South Florida. From construction to landscaping, lifting and digging, from hotel work to retail, serving and shelving, most South Floridians labored for others. This often entailed enduring long hours of standing and in often-unbearable heat. In addition, employers expected workers to perform hospitality work and other forms of servility as demanded by the many tourist jobs. The Miami Chamber Commerce, in an effort to combat anti-Florida propaganda, initiated in 1926 a courtesy campaign that included retail employers teaching employees “courtesy.” Sometimes the performance of servility meant adopting the worst aspects of racism and sexism in order to enhance the effect of the commercial exchange.¹ Many workers came to terms with the hierarchies of power despite the frustration they may have felt. Even with the occasional successful resistance, some form of reconciliation, bitter or otherwise, was embraced; or if possible, one escaped the existing conditions through upward mobility, migration or death. Modernity at the turn of the century promised growth and rapid development, and, as important, basic economic survival depended on it.

Miami was sparsely inhabited during the nineteenth century with a few settler frontiersmen and few Native Americans. The number of American and Bahamian settlers increased a bit later in the century so that by 1896 when Henry Flagler’s railroad

¹ Miami Chamber of Commerce, *Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings*, South Florida Historical Museum (hereafter *CC Minutes*), March 18, 19, 22, & 29, 1926.

extended to south Florida, a couple hundred voted to incorporate Miami city. Soon skilled workers sought to protect their place in the labor market by organizing unions for the sake of mutual protection against employers' interests in keeping costs, and thus wages, as low as possible. Miami, as a New South city at the turn of the century, adopted the American and Southern tradition of limiting economic opportunity to particular groups. Business interests also pursued another New South benefit: a low wage economy. Workers, whether white or black, skilled or unskilled, faced a larger political economy adverse to unionization. The cultural determinants of racism and sexism only assured greater divisions and fewer opportunities of solidarity among workers.

Few have evaluated how ordinary workers were involved in constructing and maintaining this newly formed resort town situated in the New South. The studies by Raymond Mohl and Paul George are excellent social histories, as is Melanie Shell-Weiss's *Coming to America*. Shell-Weiss's book includes useful information on pre-1945 Miami especially data on the ethnic and racial makeup of the population, although the book is chiefly concerned with the post-war period. Other historians have focused on social and political events but not on the story of workers, on the issue of class relations, or on the role of unionization in building the city and creating a sense of community. When historians have explored Florida's growing labor history, they typically focused on agriculture, the phosphate industry, Tampa's cigar workers, or the post-1945 period. Few have examined the story of workers and the role of unionization in building the city and in creating a sense of community life.²

² Arva Moore Parks, *Miami: The Magic City* (Miami: Centennial Press, 1991); Thelma Peters, *Biscayne Country, 1870-1926* (Miami: Banyan Books, 1981); Paul George's several

This chapter adds a new dimension to our understanding of Miami's early twentieth history by exploring the rise of unionism in the backbone work of the young and developing city: the building trades. The growth of the city depended on the construction of buildings and other structures. Behind the city-building rhetoric of boosterism lay the actual hard labor workers, white and black workers, male and female. Unions capitalized on the vital role skilled workers played in construction and they used this position to gain a strong foothold in the labor market. Miami's fast growth, combined with effective union organizing, established the city's unions as uneasy partners in the New South city building project.³

Business and organized labor divided not just in their conceptions of power in the workplace. A line had been drawn in the sand over the deeper struggle between individualism and communalism. Both employer and employee had stakes in individualism and communalism, for different reasons but for the same general goal: each

articles published in the late seventies and eighties, including "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 57, no. 4 (1979): 434-450; and Raymond Mohl's several articles on Miami, including "Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 65, no. 4 (1987): 271-297; Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009). For examples of the historiographic emphasis on social and political history of Florida: Wayne Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political 'Radicalism,' 1919-1920," *Labor History*, 9 (1968): 73-90; Gary R. Mormino and George Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Margaret G. Wilson, editor, *Florida's Labor History: A Symposium* (Miami: Florida International University, 1991).

³ Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5; Grace Palladino, *Skilled Hands, Strong Spirits: A Century of Building Trades History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); William Haber's, *Industrial Relations in the Building Industry* (1930 Reprint; New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1971. Bias toward industrial unions (and scant attention to the building trades) characterizes Joseph A. McCartin's *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

wanted to attain social harmony and abandon the precarious state of conflict. How to get there, of course, was the key fundamental issue at stake. Employers wanted their businesses to run smoothly, efficiently, and at the lowest possible cost. The formula of harmony often could be reduced to the absence of conflict irrespective of the nature of the work process or the distribution of wealth within the business. The concerns and grievances of the employees only became relevant if they became destructive to the goals of the business: firing was the easiest solution, that is, if other workers stood in line to replace the outgoing employee. More systemic problems needed more effective resolution whether in labor shortage conditions or if the employer failed to convince or coerce at least some workers to engage the tasks at hand. The more skills the workers possessed usually the more power they had in the workplace especially when fewer of them existed. Unions, such as in the building trades, attempted to maintain markets in which labor was in short supply in order to maintain a high value for their labor and thus lessen their own commodification. Their primary concern was to create a moral economy. The more capital reduced workers to commodities, the greater the disharmony. Hence, workers at the lowest point of the political-economic totem pole felt the greatest social disharmony, and those at the top felt the greatest harmony. Regardless where one fell on this axis, the deeper hope for social harmony remained.

Yet, to frame the relationship between workers and capitalists in social harmony terms reframes the dilemma of production and power in a different light. The nexus and dependence between worker and capitalist becomes more human, grounded, and complex. Shared interests as in economic growth and development, defy easy categorization: was the employer just a former worker lucky to have risen to such a level?

Was the worker a liberal and capitalist driven by individual desires and greed, fitting John Common's caricature of the job-conscious working class stiff devoid of class consciousness? Harmony suggests life-affirmation and the positive goal of attaining happiness outside of the limitations that conflict promises. Class consciousness, understanding of one's social status in relation to power and identity, did not need conflict to exist. Disharmony, however, in the context of the dreams for harmony and quest for moral economy—as defined in the political rhetoric of equal opportunity, democracy, individualism, communalism—necessitated resolution. Hence, whether in the workplace or the political arena employers' and employees' search for harmony translated into a politics that emphasized compromise for the sake of national, state, or local peace that safeguarded family and individual happiness. It represented a discourse of class harmony. Business argued in either technocratic or paternalistic terms and organized labor argued moral economy terms.

This chapter will focus on how unions developed their argument of moral economy within the terms of capitalist America. Unionism helped create a sense of community among workers and offered workers a better bargaining position with employers in Miami's early history. Particular emphasis in this chapter will be placed on Local 993 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA), for the historical record is most complete for this union than any other in Miami—at least, between 1900 and 1925. In so doing, this chapter fills a gap in the historiography of southern labor history. Historians of southern labor have made great strides in studying agricultural labor, domestic workers, and manufacturing industries, such as tobacco, textiles, mining, shipping, and railroads over various moments and places in the South.

The conclusion, nonetheless, remains that unions in the South were relatively weak. The collusion between state and business to suppress unionization efforts, as well as division among workers resulting from race, gender, and disputes over unionization, help explain the inability of unions to make deep and lasting inroads into the South. Despite similar forms of suppression and division among workers, Miami's union history highlights a new dimension of greater workers' success organizing for their own interest.⁴

The Culture of Unionization

The Historical Context

Like many of Florida's cities, Miami experienced enormous economic growth during the early twentieth century. Incorporated in 1896, Miami's population grew from a few thousand in the beginning of the century to 5,471 in 1910, 29,571 in 1920 and 110,540 in 1930. A plurality of the migrants were whites from elsewhere in the white

⁴ Some general overviews of southern labor history are found in the following edited books: Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, editors, *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1994); Robert Zieger, editor, *Southern Labor History in Transition, 1940-1995* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997); Glenn T. Eskew, editor, *Labor in the Modern South* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001). The literature on the various industries and occupations is vast. For a good sample, see Tera Hunter, *To ' Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labor After the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like A Family: The Making of Southern Cotton Mill World* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

South, but a significant minority originated in the Northeast and Midwest. Through the 1920s, a majority of black Miamians were from the Bahamas. The city leveraged its geographic location. Lacking a natural mineral resource to exploit, city builders capitalized on the local's special resources of sunshine, seashore, and subtropical climate. Boosterism was led by local organizations such as the city's Chamber of Commerce, led by the enterprising and ambitious Everest G. Sewell, which helped increase building investment and tourism in Miami between 1915 and 1925, years that coincided with Sewell's tenure. Historian Paul George found that the annual influx of tourists neared 1 million during these years. However, tourist accommodations were sometimes inadequate, as when the city turned away an estimated 10,000 visitors in 1917. Since Miami's economy centered on the tourist industry, city leaders and workers pushed hard for development of the necessary infrastructure. According to newspaper and local government reports, building permits increased steadily between 1914 and 1925, dropping a bit during World War I because of decreased investment resulting from the war economy, but then rose rapidly after the war (see Table 2). Skilled workers in the building trades constructed the city's houses, hotels, apartments, and other structures. This dependency on skilled workers was reflected in the job distribution within the city. Of the 3,935 male workers in the manufacturing and mechanical industries in 1920, 2,389 (or more than 60 percent) engaged in construction. As a result of economic growth and new jobs in other industries, the number dropped to 53 percent in 1930 but still remained a large proportion of the male workforce (25 percent in 1920 and 17 percent in 1930).⁵

⁵ *Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920 Volume III* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 195; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 Volume I* (Washington:

The city's youth and consequent lack of physical development meant that the construction industry would play a vital role in Miami's growth as a city.

Table 2. Total Value of Building Permits, 1914-1926

Years	Valuation
Nov. 1, 1914 to Nov. 1, 1915*	\$821,250
Nov. 1, 1915 to Nov. 1, 1916	\$1,650,378
Nov. 1, 1916 to Nov. 1, 1917	\$2,095,378
Nov. 1, 1917 to Nov. 1, 1918	\$1,305,675
Nov. 1, 1918 to Nov. 1, 1919	\$2,575,700
Nov. 1, 1919 to Oct. 15, 1920	\$3,637,995
July 1, 1921 to June 30, 1922**	\$4,553,044
July 1, 1922 to June 1923	\$5,782,400
July 1, 1923 to June 30, 1924	\$11,176,981
July 1, 1924 to June 30, 1925	\$31,835,981
July 1, 1925 to June 30, 1926	\$59,050,901

*Statistics for the years between 1914 and 1920 are based on Greater Miami Employer's Association reports. See the *Miami Metropolis*, 20 Oct 1920, p. 8 and the "The Story of the Open Shop," p. 4.

**Statistics for the years after 1920, see Frank B. Sessa, "The Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and its Environs during the 1920's," (Ph.D., diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1950), p. 223. Sessa reproduced the *City's Manager's Report's* statistics issued in 1926.

Since the building industry employed the most workers, significant unionization in this sector of the labor market reveals a strong union culture in Miami's early history. Craft unions perhaps benefitted from their long history of successful organizing. The carpenters, painters, steam and operating engineers, plumbers and bricklayers, sheet

Government Printing Office, 1931), 23. Paul George, "Passage to the New Eden: Tourism in Miami From Flagler Through Everest G. Sewell," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 59, no. 4 (1981): 450-451; "Brokers, Binders, and Builders: Greater Miami's Boom of the Mid-1920s," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 65, no. 1 (1986): 27-51. Raymond Mohl, "Miami: Ethnic Cauldron," in *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II*, edited by Richard M. Bernard and Bradley Rice (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983): 59; on city development in Florida see his article, "City Building in the Sunshine State: The Urbanization of Florida," *Locus*, no. 1 (1995): 1-24. *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. Volume IV. Population 1920: Occupations*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 288, 290, & 292; *Fifteenth Census of United States, 1930: Occupations by States. Volume IV. Population*. (Washington D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1933), 358-360.

metal workers, and lather workers had all organized national unions affiliated with the AFL in the late nineteenth century, and locals of these unions formed early in Miami's history. The carpenters and painters organized before 1905, and others soon followed. By 1915, cement workers, bricklayers, masons, and plasterers, electricians, plumbers, operating engineers, and sheet metal workers had established union locals in Miami. The carpenters of south Florida organized the East Coast District Council in January 1914, expanding the UBCJA's influence over the area from Fort Lauderdale to Homestead. After 1920, with the increase in building construction amid the great land boom, carpenters and painters formed multiple locals. Evidence indicates that there was a high rate of unionization.⁶ Though acquiring firm numbers is difficult because of Miami's constant changing population, combining the 1920 census figures with union records suggests that ninety percent (892 of 993) of the city's carpenters were unionized in 1920.⁷

The extent of unionization of unskilled construction labor is unknown. About 100 black hod carriers established a local of the International Brotherhood of Hod Carriers and Laborers' Union of America affiliated to the American Federation of Labor in the fall

⁶ *The Carpenter*, January 1914, p. 44 & *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Florida State Federation of Labor held in Miami, Florida January 1915*, 5 (establishment of East Coast District Council and its coverage). *Ibid.*, October 1931, p. 19 (date of founding of Local 993). A 1925 letter from the East Coast District Council indicated that the region was 85% organized (*Ibid.*, December 1925, p. 52). Listing of labor organizations in *City Directory*, 1904-1925.

⁷ The number of unionized carpenters taken from Local 993 trustees report on 1 January 1920 and overall number from the Census number for carpenters in 1920. The Census compilations did not list Miami's occupations by racial groups because it fell below the required population minimum of 50,000 or more. Blacks, however, made up a small number of carpenters in 1930 and evidence of union racial policies indicate similar low numbers for 1920. Trustees' Report of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 993. *U.B.C.J.A. Local 125 Records*, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library Archives and Special Collections, Box 3 (hereinafter, *UBCJA Trustees Report*); *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. Volume IV. Population 1920: Occupations*, 288.

of 1919. In general, hod carriers carried supplies to masons or bricklayers, though on occasion they also mixed mortar. While it is not known how successful they were in attracting black laborers, it is clear that the hod carriers received no support from white unionists. They did not enjoy representation in the Central Labor Union (CLU) or the Building Trades Council, and their communication with these important city organizations was limited to letters. In addition, soon after their organizing effort, a white local of the International Hod Carriers Union sprung up in the city. These two examples suggest the difficulty in organizing unskilled labor in the period; since blacks remained the majority of unskilled labor in construction, they were greatly underrepresented in the ranks of organized labor.⁸

⁸ The *Miami Metropolis* (MM; the paper appeared also as the *Miami Daily Metropolis* and, later, as the *Miami Daily News* and eventually as the *Miami News*), 3 September 1919, p. 1; The *Miami Herald* (MH), 4 September 1919, p. 1. *Fifteenth Census of United States, 1930: Occupations by States*, 358-360; the *Miami City Directory* 1920, p. 70-71. The directory added an asterisk to black organizations. The International Hod Carriers Union No. 402 listed did not have one. Though no black unions were listed (true for the entire period under study), fragmentary evidence indicates otherwise. Charles Garofalo, "Black-White Occupational Distribution in Miami During World War I," *Prologue* (1973): 98-101.

Table 3. Miami's Occupational Categories 1920

Occupation	Male	Female
Manufacturing and Mechanical Industries	3,935 (60.7% in construction)	279 (68% dressmakers and seamstresses not in factories)
Transportation	1,512 (spread over several occupations)	64 (78% either telephone or telegraph operators)
Trade	1,946 (49% retail dealers or salesmen; 17% real estate agents and officials)	294 (64% retail dealers or saleswomen; 12% real estate agents or officials)
Public Service	232 (spread over several occupations)	8 (2 laborers, 2 marshals, 2 inspectors)
Professional Service	563 (spread over several occupations)	338 (46% teachers; 19% trained nurses)
Domestic and Personal Services	851 (spread over several occupations)	2,572 (41% restaurant, café, and lunch room keepers; 35% launderers and laundresses, not in laundry)
Clerical Occupations	464 (73% bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants, or clerks, not including stores)	448 (56% same category as male; 41% stenographers and typists)
Agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry	670 (spread over several occupations)	61 (90% dairy farm, farm, and stock farm laborers)
Extraction of minerals	56 (82% quarry operatives)	0
Totals	10,229	4,064

*Source: *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, volume IV, p. 288-292. The Census did not divide by race for cities under 50,000 in 1920. One would have to do a random sample of the census manuscript to get numbers by race.

Miami's economy can be defined as a local market economy since it lacked a mass production sector. Historian Dana Frank, in her study of Seattle after World War I, defines a local market economy as one that produced goods and services for local consumption, such as "building construction, transportation, commercial laundries, sales, clerical work, domestic service, bakeries, restaurants, and others"; the city's occupational division for 1920 points to this reality (see Table 3). Outside of the construction trades, other skilled occupations also organized in Miami. They included musicians, locomotive engineers, railway trainmen, machinists, typographical workers, jitney drivers, chauffeurs, barbers, butchers, telephone operators, blacksmiths, cigar makers, and

moving pictures operators. If the rate of unionization in Miami as indicated by bits and pieces of available data are accurate, then Frank's suggestion that unions in the local market sector thrived after the war and the 1920s seems to be true for Miami. In part, this stemmed from not having to endure the economic crises experienced by the national coal, garment, brewing and textile industries during this period. Reliable numbers for unionized workers exist only for the carpenters union; however, contemporary newspaper reports provide estimates for the others. During the fall of 1919, the *Miami Metropolis* listed over twenty-seven unions with approximately 3,600 members. With the possible exception of a few barbers and musicians, and an apparent monopoly with telephone operators (the 1920 Census listed only 36, 34 of them women), women made up only a small number of union members. Black unionization cannot be determined by the *Metropolis* estimation since the paper listed only white unions. The 3,600 unionists represented nearly 35 percent of the 10,229 in the male workforce, a proportion that increased to 55 percent when black male workers are subtracted from the total. The percentage would be even more if only craft workers from the building industry are considered, as the carpenters' membership numbers suggest. Apparently, the white migrants settling in Miami during this period brought with them a union organizing culture.⁹

Business Unionism, the Urban Ethos, and Harmony

Familiar themes characterizing American labor history appear in the unions in

⁹ Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (Cambridge and other cities: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16 and 169. *MM* 28 October 1919, p. 1; *Fourteenth Census, Volume IV*, 288-292.

early Miami. Racism weakened unionism; unions of skilled workers were often uncooperative with unskilled labor; jurisdictional disputes existed among the crafts; and labor mobility and the influx of migrants into the city challenged social solidarity. Despite these problems, unions added to the community's sense of identity. The relative homogeneity of the white population in early Miami bolstered its cohesiveness, though at the expense of blacks. According to the state census of 1925, whites from the North and South, with a few European immigrants resided in the city.¹⁰ The plurality of whites, though, arrived from other parts of the South. Union workers' participation in public celebrations, particularly Labor Day, helped define public space as white. They also rallied to help each other in times of need. Unions, on occasion, built community service buildings free of charge. Especially in the building trades, well-organized unions helped to maintain comparatively good wages. The history of the carpenters Local 993 illustrates the pattern of union life in early Miami.

Established in March 1902, Local 993 enabled carpenters to bargain for high wages and offered protection of the forty-four hour week. Throughout the late-1910s and 1920s, Miami carpenters earned high wages that compared well with those in other cities in the country. In 1916, they earned four dollars for an eight-hour day, increasing by fifty-cents in 1917, and two more dollars in 1919. By 1925, carpenters were getting nine dollars a day. These wages compared well with those in other cities in Florida. In 1918 Miami's rate of five dollars fell under only Tampa's (\$5.20) and was even with wage levels in Key West. All other cities that reported wages fell below Miami, including

¹⁰ Nathan Mayo, *The Fifth Census of the State of Florida, 1925*. (Tallahassee, 1925), 105.

Jacksonville which had a rate of four dollars and forty-cents. Miami fared well in 1919, when their wages of six dollars and fifty-cents was more than carpenters in Chicago (three locals reporting \$6.40), Philadelphia (\$6.40), and New York (\$5.75 to 6.25) but less than those in Dallas (\$7.00), Cleveland (\$6.80), and San Francisco (\$7.00). Miami carpenters also enjoyed an eight-hour day, five days a week, and half-a-day on Saturday, but this seems to have been the national standard. The push for higher wages, of course, depended on market conditions, both from consumers and producers—that is, the amount of construction underway, the availability and cost of building materials, and the supply of workers on hand. Therefore, wages varied from place to place and from time to time. Just to cite one example whose comparison goes beyond the scope of this essay, though Tampa's wages were higher than Miami's in 1918, they were a dollar less in 1925.¹¹

Negotiating for wages with building contractors was a slow process that sought change through peaceful agreement. Though the extant union minutes end by 1919, evidence prior to this date and the nature of the building industry both indicate the carpenters' concern to work within the possibilities offered by the local labor market. Carpenters, usually in several meetings, discussed raises in wages prior to a public announcement of their demands. Before pushing for a raise in the spring of 1916, for example, Local 993 tabled the motion until October and over the next three months

¹¹ *The Carpenter*, August 1916, August 1917, August 1919, and August 1925; *MM*, 25 September 1919, p. 8 & 26 September 1926, p. 2. See the following books on the carpenters: Walter Galenson, *The United Brotherhood of Carpenters: The First Hundred Years* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Robert A. Christie *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters' Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956) and Thomas R. Brooks, *The Road to Dignity: A Century of Conflict, A History of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, AFL-CIO, 1881-1981* (New York: Atheneum, 1981).

explored the feasibility of a wage hike. Seven hundred and twenty-two members voted for the increase and only twenty-two against. Finally, a committee of three members, including the business agent, approached the contractors to see if they would support their demand. The threat of a potential strike if a reasonable resolution was not reached existed in the very nature of collective bargaining. The union did gain the increase, however, which was perhaps not surprising during this period of frantic construction in Miami.¹²

The business unionism that characterized the UBCJA and AFL also defined Local 993's approach to bargaining. That is, labor leaders preferred to avoid striking so as to lose less time off the job and thus less lost income. They adhered to the belief of labor's negotiating power derived from collective action. The national position of the UBCJA, nonetheless, dictated resolution rather than striking for increases in wages. "The strike is labor's last resort and should be used only when every other means of redressing wrongs and grievances have failed and, even then, with due deliberation," wrote *The Carpenter*, the union's national journal, in 1916.¹³ Carpenters' status as skilled craftsmen in an under-industrialized industry, in any case, placed them at an advantage. Their collective consciousness as skilled laborers strengthened their position against contractors. While records of Local 993 agreements are not extant (and it is not clear if any were ever kept),

¹² Minutes of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 993. *U.B.C. Local 125 Records*, University of Miami Otto G. Richter Library Archives and Special Collections, Box 4 (hereinafter, Minutes of *UBCJA*) 17 March 1916, 6 October 1916, 3 November 1916, 22 December 1916, and 29 December 1916. *UBCJA* Trustees Report. Greater Miami Employer's Association, *The Story of the Open Shop in Miami*, 4. For rising investment in 1920s, see Frank B. Sessa, "The Real Estate Expansion and Boom in Miami and its Environs During the 1920s" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1950), 223.

¹³ *The Carpenter*, January 1916. Walter Galenson, *The United Brotherhood*, 175-176 & 181-182.

union carpenters' did gain periodic wage increases (as noted in their minutes and the national published listings in *The Carpenter*), they worked 44-hour workweeks, and employers seem to have accepted work jurisdictional rules.

The absence of any extant formal agreements may be explained by the unique nature of the building industry. Much of construction work was done by hand and thus employers depended on the specialized labor of skilled craftsmen.¹⁴ This strengthened the carpenters' perception that their craft was vital to human civilization. This image was manifest in the pictures found in the pages of *The Carpenter* of burly men with tools on hand ready for work. William J. Dobson, the national secretary-treasurer of the Bricklayers union, gave a more revealing comment on the idea of the independent worker. He described how unionists in the building crafts interacted on a personal level with their employers, imitating small businessmen: "Our employers are not capitalists in the sense that these large organizations [steel and cotton] are. We meet our employers every day, call them Tom, Dick, and Harry; we meet them from time to time when we have troubles and we understand theirs." The construction industry and its dependency on subcontracting offered many opportunities for close contact with employers.¹⁵

¹⁴ Haber, *Industrial Relations*, chapter II. He writes: "The industrial revolution in the building industry is still in progress. American manufacturing establishments began the mechanization of their processes soon after the Civil War. The building industry, however, was unaffected by any substantial changes until after 1900. Even today [1930] much of the work is done in the same manner as fifty years ago; many of the trades are still primarily hand operations, and others have changed in only minor respects" (15).

¹⁵ *The Carpenter*, October 1918 & November 1916; Haber, *Industrial Relations*, 51-62. On living standards, see Lawrence Glickman, "Inventing the 'American Standard of Living': Gender, Race and Working-Class Identity," *Labor History*, 34, no. 2-3 (1993): 221-235; idem., *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997). The burly images in *The Carpenter* suggest an interesting connection to manliness as linked to living standards and family life, the meaning of work, and the meaning of unionization. For work on manliness, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and*

Nonetheless, Dobson was perhaps too generous in his reading of the employer-employee conditions defining much of the industry. With such a perception of the potential of harmonious class relations, it is not surprising that carpenters expected respect and equal treatment as they sought to complete work in good faith.

The close contact between employer and employee was heightened by the intensely local nature of the building trades. Each city in the country confronted different market conditions.¹⁶ As a young city that was heavily dependent on tourism, Miami business interests urged peace and harmony and quick resolution of labor dispute. The success of the tourist season, which lasted from the end of December to March, depended on the completion of construction jobs and maintaining a peaceful city. This worked toward the strength of the building trades' philosophy of using the strike as a last resort. The civic duty for Miami citizens, as preached by the boosterism prevalent in the era, was to contribute to making a "big city." Because construction filled the city's landscape, both workers and contractors faced public pressure to reach a timely agreement and avoid conflict. A controlled and developed landscape was the commodity that both business and labor produced. Though skilled workers supplied only the needed labor— that is, they were not involved in the architectural designs of the constructed buildings— their role in building the city was nonetheless vital to the success of the tourist industry. This was a

Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Stephen Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Kazin, *Barons' of Labor*, 5-6 and passim; Haber, *Industrial Relations in the Building Industry*, 309-310.

detail recognized by both parties.¹⁷

Miami's boosterism represented what historian Blain Brownell has called an urban ethos of the South. I would add however to Brownell's idea the conception of class harmony discourses. Contained within the bombastic language and descriptions characteristic of this boosterism existed an urgency, particularly from small businessmen and workers, for moral economy insuring competencies for the city's citizens. Of course, urban boosterism followed a similar pattern in other New South cities and it is likely that drives for moral economy also occurred in these same locales. In fact, the label "Magic City" used by Miami boosters also applied to late-nineteenth century Birmingham, Alabama. The fluff of booster rhetoric and advertising images fit neatly into the New South practice of selling the region's economic potential.¹⁸ The booster language prevalent throughout in newspapers and tourist literature often highlighted the city's sub-tropical weather and how this gave it an edge in its competition with other southern cities for tourists and other economic ventures. In their embrace of southern racial customs as justification for segregation; in their hyperbole of southern hospitality as a characteristic of city residents (labeled as the Miami Way and Miami Spirit); and in their constant arguments that Miami was a better tourist destination than other southern cities (and

¹⁷ Kazin, *Baron's Labor*, passim; George, "Passage to the New Eden," and "Brokers, Binders, and Builders." The idea of the city as a factory derived from Kazin's comment that building trades workers were "producers of 'goods' that could not be exported" (5).

¹⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); George Tindal, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1977); and Blain Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975).

sometimes Los Angeles, an interesting anticipation of sunbelt development), city boosters tapped into the idea of Miami as the New South.

One ideological strand, though, that did tie Miami to the south as imagined was the urban ethos of the South. The urban ethos defined the nature of social relations and expectations of citizens of southern cities. According to Brownell, it represented “a general overarching conception of the city which stressed the desirability—indeed, the necessity— of both urban growth and social order in such a way that they would be mutually reinforcing.” City leaders and boosters, Brownell explains, viewed the city as “corporate and interdependent.” They envisioned a city built “not by basic changes in institutions of the urban class structure, but by an emphasis on ‘responsible’ citizenship, social control, and regulation of the physical city through urban planning.” Atlanta, Birmingham, Memphis, Nashville, New Orleans, Knoxville, and Charleston, all exhibited this philosophy.¹⁹ I would add to Brownell’s argument that the urban ethos could be extended to the nature of class relations. That viewed from the workers’ eyes or union leader, the “corporate and interdependent” conception of the city translated to a vision of moral economy. So the push for greater social-class harmony and moral economy in effect combined with the boosterism of urban growth and development. Labor and business in Miami evoked the urban ethos and class harmony (in terms of moral economy) in their battles over wages, benefits, and working conditions in order to get an upper hand against each other.

¹⁹ Brownell, *The Urban Ethos*, chapter 7, 210-216, and xix-xx. Charles Garofalo, “The Atlanta Spirit: A Study in Urban Ideology,” *The Southern Quarterly*, 74, no. 1 (1974): 34-44.

Local newspapers and other booster voices perpetuated this urban ethos through published reports celebrating the growth of the city while also preaching peace and harmony. Throughout the first several decades of the century, the *Miami City Directory*, *Miami Metropolis* and *Miami Herald* pointed to the city's population growth, building construction, development of infrastructure, and other pertinent information illustrating Miami's drive to become a "big city." Other boosters selling Miami include the several improvement associations in the city (Southside, North Miami, etc.), the Chamber of Commerce, and individuals such as E. G. Sewell, William Jennings Bryan, Carl Fisher, and George Merrick. Shaping boosting efforts were the ubiquitous slogans, the "Magic City" and "Miami Spirit." The former identified Miami as a heroic city experiencing enormous growth in a short time in a sub-tropical area, while the latter term referred to the social bond that kept Miami moving forward despite adversity. Both phrases pointed to an optimistic faith in the future while preaching conformity to the greater good. This often would also mean conformity to the culture of segregation, as will be discussed later.²⁰ In any case, labor and business sought to highlight how either disrupted the city's social equilibrium as they struggled over the fair distribution of power in the workplace. The urban ethos and class harmony thus defined the nature of public discourse between these two groups. Workers celebrated their contribution to building the city but were sure

²⁰ See Sessa, "'The Real Estate Expansion,'" and George (sources listed above) for a general introduction to boosterism in Miami. The contemporary references are too numerous to list. Here are some representative pieces: entire issue *MM* 16 October 1915; "That 'Miami Spirit,'" *MM*, 27 January 1917, p. 4; "Miami, the Magic City," *MM*, 1 July 1920, p. 7; "Impressed with Wonderful Growth of Magic City and Business Men," *MH*, 18 August 1915, p. 8. Also noteworthy are the following booster histories of Miami: Ethan V. Blackman, *Miami and Dade County, Florida: Its Settlement, Progress, Achievement* (Washington, D.C.: Victor Rainbolt, 1921) & Isidor Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami, Florida* (Miami: Privately Published, 1925). Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

to remind business interests—particularly contractors in the construction trades—about their commitment to creating a moral economy and their aversion to submitting to anything less.

Union Culture and Moral Economy

Of first concern to skilled workers, however, was strengthening their position within the labor market. The skilled handicraft nature of construction work provided building trade workers with more control at the work site. Skilled workers maintained control over the production process by setting work standards. Technological advances both in structural changes such as the use of steel and steel frames, elevators, and reinforced concrete, and tools such as the hydraulic or pneumatic riveter, rock drills, electrical welding, and power saw changed the nature of work but still required mastery from craftsmen. Technology affected large labor operations (such as mixing concrete or lifting heavy loads) and facilitated some smaller tasks, but much still depended on hand operations. The economist William Haber noted with frustration how the building industry remained under-industrialized because “a number of important building operations” continued to lag “behind in mechanization.” Guided by his faith in efficiency and scientific management, Haber seemed to have a difficult time understanding the persistence of handwork. Carpenters, in any case, pointed to how the product of their labor represented superior work and skill, despite Haber’s evaluations. Their magazine seemed always to contain some article regarding the high quality and longevity of union construction. On one occasion *The Carpenter* published a photograph showing a collapsed roof in Memphis, Tennessee, blaming “scab labor” for the house’s poor

construction.²¹

In addition to maintaining control over the production process, carpenters protected their work from both changes in technology and the growth of smaller adaptive crafts. Part of the reason for the rise of national building craft unions was to protect workers' interests in jurisdictional issues. The UBCJA's success in jurisdiction battles with the wood workers and sheet metal workers owed largely to their enormous membership and aggressive actions. Smaller unions such as the Shinglers, who were deemed by carpenters to be a "contiguous crafts," succumbed to the pressure of the UBCJA's opposition. In Miami, Local 993 reached an agreement with the sheet metal workers in 1916, and members were fined for interfering with the work of sheet metal workers. Sometimes the jurisdiction lines were flexible. Local 993 sought the permission from the Lathers union to put up a plasterboard because of the inability of the latter to supply workers at a job site. At other times the lines were rigid, as with the work rule that disallowed carpenters from pouring concrete. Though difficult to evaluate because of the day-to-day nature of construction and incomplete record, carpenters appeared largely successful in controlling the boundaries of their craft.²²

The Carpenters Union also bolstered its strength against employers by serving as an employment center. Business agents, as well as other officers, kept an eye out for

²¹ Haber, *Industrial Relations*, 29-34; *The Carpenter* Dec 1920.

²² Galenson, *The United Brotherhood*, 112-122 (Shinglers on 119), 173-181 & 206-215; Christie, *Empire in Wood*, chapters VIII & XII; Haber, *Industrial Relations*, 36-40. On Miami sheet metal workers, Minutes of the UBCJA, 3 September 1915, 25 February 1916, 10 March 1916, 1 June 1917; on lathers union, *Ibid.*, 11 October 1918; on concrete, 5 June 1914 and 27 February 1917. On workers control, see David Montgomery's books *Workers Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge and other cities: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge and other cities: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

building contractors' demands for labor. Their successful existence depended on the delivery of workers at job sites. Local 993, for example, furnished carpenters to the Cornwall Construction Company in May 1917. A billboard announced a call for workers and the union conducted a concerted search for carpenters. The union also adjusted its standards according to the need of building contractors. On several occasions union carpenters worked on Saturday afternoons (though at times the request was denied) and agreed to double shifts when needed, as occurred in February 1918 during an apparent labor shortage.²³

Workers benefited from the union's function as an employment agency and thus as a distributor of the right to a competency. The carpenters used this function as a tool in their drive to unionize. In a growing city with rapid development, the union facilitated the search for work. Union carpenters would deposit their clearance card at Carpenters Hall and proceed to obtain employment. In early September 1919, carpenters entering Miami during a period of labor tensions were, according to the local papers, "reporting to headquarters" and "none of them" were working "on any unfair building operation." Making sure to enlighten all newcomers, the business agent traveled through the city making it known to incoming unionists that Miami was a union town—that is, a community where workers were paid living wages and worked in reasonable working conditions (at least in the building trades). Local 993, for example, called a special meeting in early 1917 to expedite the initiation of six carpenters found at a small construction job. Union minutes reveal a steady weekly flow of workers either being initiated into the union or depositing their traveling cards at Carpenters Hall. However,

²³ Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 11 May 1917 & 28 February 1918.

Carpenters Hall not only functioned as a center for carpenters. Several of the other city unions used its premises for their meetings. In the late 1920s and 1930s, it served as the meeting place for the Central Labor Union and its political-civic arm, Labor's Citizenship Committee. One can only imagine the extent of the hustle and bustle that surrounded this building during Miami's early history.²⁴

Carpenters, in any case, attempted to keep a favorable balance of union workers in cities and towns through notices published in the *Carpenter*, letters between union locals, and by word of mouth. The carpenters union suggests how the building trades in general operated as national employment networks that may help explain migratory patterns of workers. This system offered union strength against employers and their attempts to undermine union organization. But as importantly, it worked to safeguard the right to a competency for hometown/resident workers or home labor as it also sought to protect the living wage and good working conditions. Carpenters worked to preempt the importation of non-union labor by meeting local demands for labor. Craft unionists traveled to locales where work could be found. For example, northern workers traveled South during the winter months when the building season ended. The rate of inflow and outflow of workers is difficult to determine, however. Workers probably moved when jobs were scarce and when other social factors, such as home ownership and family size, did not hold them to a particular place. Miami's real estate and construction boom between 1919 and 1926 thus contributed to this phenomenon. Workers, nonetheless,

²⁴ *Miami Herald*, 4 September 1919, p. 1; Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 12 January, 29 January, and 2 February 1917. Each union meeting opened with the initiation and clearance of new members to the local. I recorded the number of each meeting between 8 May 1914 and 6 September 1918. The local papers and the Minutes of the *UBCJA* highlight examples of the wide use of Carpenters Hall.

eventually settled and made homes where employment was fairly consistent. Allegedly, nearly 80 percent of Miami's skilled construction workers owned or mortgaged their own homes in 1925.²⁵

Though Local 993 facilitated the unionization of both the permanent and transitory workforce, the enormous growth in population threatened solidarity. *The Carpenter* had frequent discussions about "card carrying members" hiding their union identity in order to obtain employment. Also undermining trust in the union was the dubiousness of the "stay away notices" published by union locals in *The Carpenter*. Stay away notices, and after 1916, "reports on local labor conditions," functioned to keep carpenters from flooding labor markets. Miami seems to have stayed clear of subterfuge from UBCJA members at least early on but conditions worsened in the open shop drive after World War I. In August 1915, Local 993 reluctantly published an apparent genuine stay away notice. The order to issue the notice appeared in the union's minutes and was followed with an order to publish the number of unemployed in the local papers. According to union records, few union carpenters who applied were rejected, suggesting a pragmatic strategy to keep incoming workers affiliated with the local. Miami Local 993 avoided the pitfalls of carpenters hiding their union membership and working as

²⁵ Jules Tygiel, "Tramping Artisans: The Case of the Carpenters in Industrial America," *Labor History*, 81, no. 3 (1981): 348-376; Walter Galenson, *The United Brotherhood*; Haber, *Industrial Relations*, 96-126. The growth of working class suburbs in Dade County and its connection to working class life and culture has not been studied. The federal government reported a steady growth of one-family dwelling homes in Miami in the early 1920s. See, "Building Permits in the Principal Cities of the United States in 1926," *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, No. 449 (GPO, 1927), 29-30 & 36; "Workmen are Buying Homes," *MDN*, 3 Jan 1925, p. 14, East Coast Development Section. For a comparative framework and the potential of such a study, see Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

nonunion workers as a result of not being cleared to work in their jurisdiction, a problem faced by other locals around the country.²⁶

Local 993 promoted solidarity and union identity by engaging in social activities in the city, particularly in Labor Day events. With the exception of labor troubles damping the day in 1919 and ominous weather preventing celebration in 1920, Miami unionists paraded on Labor Day through the 1930s. Unionists viewed the event as an opportunity to advertise the benefits of organized labor and bolster their community standing as builders of the city, and thus as partners of the New South city-building project and followers of the urban ethos. Indeed, the local papers announced how Miami was “one of the most completely unionized cities in the south,” and that “its building progress has been the marvel of the country.” The booster advertising of union power signified a high standard of living—thus an attractive community to live in—and a nod of respect to the productivity and efficiency of local unionized workers. Local 993 of the carpenters required attendance and fined absent members. Union minutes also reveal wide acceptance of the tradition of parading on Labor Day. The CLU, for instance, played an active role in organizing and coordinating the city’s unions. And though for the most part slim in description, the local papers reported consistent participation on Labor Day from organized labor.²⁷

Floats, banners, and attire announced to onlookers the union consciousness of

²⁶ *The Carpenter*, August 1915; Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 2 July 1915; Galenson, *The United Brotherhood*, (on stay away notices) 135-136 & (on clearance cards) 162-163.

²⁷ The paper carried reports of the Labor Day activities for these years; the Minutes of the *UBCJA* listed the issuing of fines as policy: 10 September 1915 and 25 August 1916. Michael Kazin and Steven J. Ross, “America’s Labor Day: The Dilemma of a Workers’ Celebration,” *Journal of American History*, 78, no. 1 (1992): 1294-1323. For quote, *MM*, 2 Sept 1919, p. 1.

members and their craft pride. Leading the parade in 1915 was the Ladies CLU Auxiliary followed by the building trades “in line according to the order in which they begin work on a building.” Carpenters marched first followed by plumbers, wire men, plasterers, lathers and painters, followed by the rest of the city’s unions. Though the carpenters’ appearance was not described, the *Miami Metropolis* noted how the engineers paraded with their overalls “signifying their trade” and which made “a striking impression.” Carpenters, along with members of the other craft unions, must have also donned their attire and union badges. The largest parade occurred in 1925, at the height of the building boom. Ten thousand unionists marched, with carpenters representing the largest contingent, over 3,500 from four locals.²⁸

Ready to advertise their presence and demonstrate their values, unions also participated in the citywide, weeklong boosting festival held January eleventh through the sixteenth, 1915. The Magic Knights of Dade, a booster club formed in 1913, coordinated the affair. By participating in this parade and Labor Day celebrations, unionists symbolically etched their place in the New South project of city building. Yet, it must be emphasized that such boosting contributions from organized labor occurred in the context that unionization represented protection of skilled workers standard of living and thus their livelihood. The harmony of interests between business and labor intersected in their mutual concern for economic growth and development. Opening day of the January 1915 festivities saw the coronation of a Miami king and queen honored on a yacht; the second

²⁸ *MM*, 3 September 1915, p. 1 & 4 & 7 September 1915, p. 1 & 12; on evidence of wearing of badges, see Minutes of *UBCJA*, 11 August 1916, which recorded the purchase of 100 badges from union headquarters (Indianapolis, Indiana) prior to Labor Day; *MH*, 7 September 1925, p. 1A & *MM*, 8 September 1925, p. 25

day celebrated south Florida's history with a parade; the following day included a visit from the governor and an automobile parade; January fourteenth was labeled "Industrial Day" in which the city and surrounding towns in south Florida advertised through parades their economic growth and potential. The parades included floats from organized labor, again representing another public moment in which to demonstrate labor's adherence to the urban ethos, hopes for class harmony, and demand for a moral economy. The final two days of the festival week featured a speedboat race. Local 993 of the carpenters won first prize for "best Industrial prize float for organized labor" in the industrial parade. Their float demonstrated their demands for high living standards in support of family life. Carpenters worked on a little home atop the float "while Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Maxwell stood on the little porch with their suitcases in the front ready to move in the moment the carpenters were through." The union existed, the demonstration suggested, as an organization working in behalf of workers concerned with family life—that is, carpenters contributed to the wellbeing of society by doing the essential task of building homes for families. Speaking to the centrality and value of organized labor in society, M. E. Fiddler of the CLU commented that, "raw material is worthless until labor takes hold of it and gives it its value. You cannot ignore labor and must give it a living wage." Unions used public spaces such as these parades to strengthen their position in the labor market and their standing within the larger community. Such actions demonstrated a progressive vision of class harmony and thus highlighted how they were potential insurers of a moral economy.²⁹

²⁹ On Magic Knights of Dade, see Arva Moore Parks, *Miami: The Magic City* (Miami, FL: Centennial Press, 1991), 95. For the itinerary of the week, see *MM*, 7 January 1915, p. 7;

The carpenters union offered a sense of fraternity and community to its members through voluntary work and donations to various social causes. In 1915, they helped build a home for the Boy Scouts and a shelter for the Knights of Dade, and in 1927, they built nine cabins, which led to “much favorable comment by the citizens of Miami.” Local 993 donated money to several community services including the YMCA, the Dade Fair Association (which boosted farming in south Florida), and, on one occasion, for the entertainment of soldiers and sailors.³⁰ Carpenters and their families also received help when needed. In addition to death benefits and sick pay, the union offered financial help and voluntary work when tragedy hit, as when money was donated to aid the reconstruction of a home damaged by fire.³¹ Finally, the union revealed a deep sense of community when it announced the deaths of members and given proper respects. Local 993 announced the death of members usually in the minutes and in publication, either in the local papers or *The Carpenter*, and they would put the union hall’s flag at half-mast. The extant minutes reveal a consistent pattern of benevolence and support over the years. Such acts of compassion contributed to tighter bonds and a keener sense of solidarity.³²

On a lighter note, the Ladies Auxiliary organized dances and the carpenters themselves revealed a merry side when they organized a chorus performed in Carpenters Hall. Other social activities helped build bonds and solidarity among workers despite the

describing the parade and announcement of prize, see Ibid., 15 January 1915, p. 1 & 3, *MH* 15 January 1915, p. 1 & 3, and Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 22 January 1915. On Fiddler’s comment, see *MH*, 29 August, p. 1. On the living wage, see Glickman, *A Living Wage*. For an interesting discussion of the role of community in shaping labor relations for an earlier period, see David Grimsted, “Antebellum Labor: Violence, Strike, and Communal Arbitration,” *Journal of Social History*, 19, no. 1 (1985): 5-28.

³⁰ Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 23 April 1915, 20 August 1915, 12 January 1916, 25 February 1916, 5 May 1916, 15 January 1917, and 16 April 1917; *The Carpenter*, May 1927.

³¹ Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 21 January 1916 and 3 August 1917.

³² Minutes of *UBCJA*, 15 June 1917; *The Carpenter* September 1917.

fluidity of Miami's population. The Ladies Auxiliary appointed sick and flower committees, extending hospitality to old and new members. Mrs. John Klaus, member of Auxiliary 94, reported in *The Carpenter* of a social organized by them in 1927: "Recently we gave a social to the members of L. U. No. 993. About 500 guests were present and a varied musical and speaking program was enjoyed. The Auxiliary presented the Local with a flag, which is the largest flag in Miami." Unionists also showed at times a concern for the history of carpenters in South Florida. In 1926 George Wright of Local 993 gave a history of carpenter locals in the area to members of Local 1149 of Coconut Grove during "social night for carpenters and their families." This sense of tradition manifested itself again when Local 993 celebrated the UBCJA's fifty-year anniversary in 1931. Members were treated to a recounting of the Local's history and a guest appearance from J. A. Robbins, first president of Local 993, L. A. Osborne, first recording secretary, and W. G. Coats, first financial secretary.³³

Miami's unions also attempted to build solidarity for each other in the "union label movement." In 1918, the Carpenters pushed for the union label when it donated a one-cent union assessment to the Women's Union Label League. They also supported the engineers in the fight with a city ice company that apparently was not using union operating engineers. Some businesses were interested in luring union consumers by advertising that they sold union label goods and/or hired union labor. The Hippodrome Theatre extended an invitation with free admission for card-carrying members in October 1917. For the most part, however, the evidence is thin and the minutes and newspapers

³³ Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 12 May 1916, 21 July 1916, 22 December 1916, and 29 December 1916. *The Carpenter*, April 26, p. 49, March 1927, p. 47, February 1926, p. 52, and October 1931, p. 19.

provide little mention of the consumer label movement. Local 993 supported the label movement more aggressively when it applied to building materials. In the summer of 1917, the union voted that all stewards were to make sure “all material shipped in must be union label.” Businesses purchasing nonunion materials were placed on an “unfair” list and risked a skilled workers strike.³⁴ The extent of the union’s success in consistently preventing unfair materials from reaching job sites requires a much fuller historical record than now exists. Striking, or the threat of a strike, for the use of nonunion materials, nonetheless, carried much symbolic meaning. Union labor sought to defend the family and the living wage. When employers used unfair material they in effect challenged the decent standard of living that organized labor purportedly existed to ensure and protect.

Despite the various elements contributing to solidarity, skilled union labor suffered from centrifugal forces greater than what brought them together. Members of the working class in the United States, male or female, Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, or other group, in every occupation confronted the problem of fragmentation. Ultimately, conceptions of identity (of one’s occupation, race, gender, etc.) had as great a power to divide as they had to unite groups. Skilled unionists in the building trades attained a sense of identity that differentiated them from each other and from unskilled construction workers. A carpenter, plumber, painter, stonemason, bricklayer, or other craftsman was

³⁴ *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention*, 33 and *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Florida State Federation of Labor held at Pensacola, Florida 1919*, 17. These were some stores that catered to union labor: W. L. Douglas Shoes (*MM*, 16 September 1915, p. 8), the Miami Cycle Co. (*Ibid.*, 4 August 1915, p. 8) La Salle Printing Co. (*Ibid.*, 5 September 1919, p. 3), and Billy’s Mens Shoe Shop (*MH*, 11 April 1920, p. 11). Minutes of the *UBCJA*, July 19 1918 (Women’s Label League), 26 May 1916 (Crosslands [?] Ice Factory problem), 12 October 1917 (Hippodrome Theatre), 15 June 1917 (order for stewards).

defined by his skill to engage in the craft. Built on the tradition of the craft guilds, building trade workers believed in hierarchy. One became a carpenter through learning the craft as an apprentice. Each national union stipulated minimum standards and rules regulating advancement from apprentice to journeyman; however local variations seem common. That combined with different levels of skills and talents between craftsmen, complicated relations among workers. Nonetheless, the high rate of carpenter mobility through the country helped to establish more nearly national norms. Skilled workers in the building crafts aided solidarity by relying heavily on sympathetic strikes for power in the labor market. The UBCJA supported such action and the extant records of the Carpenters in Miami concur. Local 993 gave its support to various striking unions. Divisions between the crafts, however, continued to be a problem, particularly when jurisdictional issues arose. Solidarity among building craft workers remained tenuous, exacerbated by self-interest and self-preservation.³⁵

Racial antagonisms also divided white workers from black. Segregation of minorities was an important value in Miami as it was in most of the nation in the early twentieth century. Government, city landscape, churches, clubs, and public forums were all segregated to some degree. The craft unionism of American workers perpetuated segregation, which ultimately weakened the possibility of a stronger class movement. In Miami, unions functioned to keep blacks out of skilled construction jobs. Unfortunately, this too could take on the progressive framing of protecting the livelihood for workers—

³⁵ Galenson, *United Brotherhood*; Haber, *Industrial Relations*; Christie, *Empire in Wood*; Brooks, *The Road to Dignity*. Several examples are mentioned of Local 993's support of striking unions either in the minutes or newspapers. See for instance their support of striking musicians and moving picture operators in 1915 (Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 3 September 1915), musicians in 1917 (*Ibid.*, 24 August 1917), or linemen in 1918 (*Ibid.*, 29 November 1918).

that is, white workers. Local 993 rejected in 1904 the black carpenters' attempt to organize a separate local. As reported in their minutes, the white local in 1914 explained "matters" to the black carpenters and established what became the segregation practice for the entire building trades for the next forty years: blacks would only be allowed to work in black sections of Miami and thus safeguard the moral economies within separate segregated societies. This policy, however, seems also to have influenced other skilled construction workers. In December 1914, the CLU called a general strike at the Collin's pavilion, a casino on developing Miami Beach, when union leaders learned that employers hired black musicians instead of white union musicians. "Organized labor" announced Miami's CLU, "must maintain the barrier between white and black in Miami." Local 993's minutes demonstrate a commitment to this objective.³⁶

In other areas of the country, white labor unions would occasionally cross the color line in the interest of building the local labor movement. Miners in Alabama, for example, demonstrated much collusion despite maintaining elements of segregation in biracial unions. Economic self-interest shaped the actions of white unionists, but the bonds made during the hardship in strikes and the examples of heroic unionism of black unionists such as Richard L. Davis, were significant. But in Miami, economic self-interest guided white workers into maintaining the racial status quo with even a greater sharpness. Workers trickling into the city met a well-organized union base that decided to remain conservative. Since the majority of people arriving in Miami were white, skilled

³⁶ On segregation of locals, see Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 31 July 1914, 7 August 1914, and 4 Sept 1914; "Union Integration" 1954 (?), Part 13: NAACP and Labor, 1940-1955, Subject Files on Labor Conditions and Employment Discrimination; Eric Tscheschlok, "'So Goes the Negro'" Race and Labor in Miami, 1940-1963," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 76, no. 1 (1997): 59-62. *MM*, 22 December 1915, p. 1 (musicians union).

workers pushed for and maintained a rigid color line in the job market. Unlike the miners in Alabama, who faced competition from increasing numbers of black miners, white skilled workers in Miami never dealt with such a challenge.³⁷ In the minds of white skilled workers, keeping “the barrier between white and black” bolstered the moral position of unions and, consequently, placed them in a favorable light with the white public.

White workers, in any case, endured little economic or emotional strain in keeping black workers out of skilled jobs. The quantity and quality of interaction between whites and blacks is unquantifiable, but appears to have been infrequent and superficial. Workers in the building industry worked at different jobs sites and for varying duration, making it difficult for strong bonds to emerge. Added to this was the inherent hierarchical nature of the building trades. Acquiring the skill required close contact and interaction. Social norms instilled ambivalence about racial interaction and thus discouraged entrance into the craft. White workers were skeptical of black workers’ skills. The relative negative attribution assigned unskilled, menial labor hurt black workers and their aspirations of climbing the socioeconomic ladder through the building trades. A.C. Proudfoot, owner of a construction company, complained that white

³⁷ Alex Lichtenstein, “Racial Conflict and Racial Solidarity in the Alabama Coal Strike of 1894: New Evidence for the Gutman-Hill Debate,” *Labor History* 36, no. 1 (1995): 63-76; Herbert Gutman, “The Negro and United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of their Meaning: 1890-1900,” in Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, & Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1976); Herbert Hill, “Myth Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2 (1988):132-200; Henry M. McKiven Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

workers refused to do menial labor. According to Proudfoot, even when he gave the “easiest” menial assignments to white labor, such as transporting sand on a wheelbarrow, they would quit after three hours. He commented, “that kind of work is for negroes, negroes are employed on those jobs in the north even [when] the sun is too hot.” Blacks had to surmount the double challenge of learning skills in the various building crafts and the racist tendency to deem black workers’ skills inferior. Racial segregation in the city’s landscape insured white and black alienation and fueled white criticism of black labor even further.³⁸

Racial homogeneity in the white population facilitated conformity to segregation. Miami’s population, at least in the first several decades of the century, remained homogenous. White southerners enjoyed a plurality, while the rest of the population consisted of northeasterners and midwesterners. Few foreigners resided in the city. Combined, native and foreign-born whites constituted in 1920 over sixty-eight percent of the total population of 29,571; blacks made up a little over 31 percent, 52 percent of whom comprised of Bahamians. This distribution paled in comparison with Jacksonville’s population of 91,588, where over 54 percent were white and over 45 percent were African-American.³⁹ While a comparison between Jacksonville and Miami’s labor movement and race relations is outside the scope of this dissertation, a

³⁸ On Proudfoot, see *MM*, 27 May 1915, p. 1; On the back image as laborer, see Hale *Making Whiteness*, 151-168. For a discussion of racial segregation in the southern economy, see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1986), 177-197, especially 187 & 196; William A. Sundstrom, “The Color Line: Racial Norms and Discrimination in Urban Labor Markets, 1910-1950,” *The Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2 (1994): 382-396.

³⁹ Mayo, *The Fifth Census of the State of Florida, 1925*, 74 & 115; *Fourteenth Census of the Population, 1920 Volume III*, p. 195; Mohl, “Black Immigrants,” 271-272.

short discussion of the 1920 State Federation of Labor Convention offers insight into these numbers. At the convention in St. Augustine, all of Miami's union delegates (24) and some from West Palm Beach, Lake Worth, St. Augustine, and St Petersburg, threatened to leave when two black Jacksonville delegates (one from a Carpenters union and the other a delegate from the Building Trades Council) took their seats. Calling for respect of the color line while nodding to "our colored Brothers" need for "an industrial security as firm as we desire ourselves," they succeeded in ousting the black delegates. As they signed in a statement, the color line "has been found vital to the welfare of the Southern country."⁴⁰

Interestingly, no Jacksonville delegates joined this insurgency. F. J. Dye of the Jacksonville's District Carpenters Council argued for the essential need to organize "colored workers in order to protect organized labor against them." He added that to not seat these union-taxed black delegates would violate the American principle of no "taxation without representation." G. P. Hall of Jacksonville's painters union concurred with this principle. Both Hall and Dye argued that their solidarity with the black delegates did not translate in acceptance of the equality of the races. Rather, they pointed to the pragmatic nature of the union movement. The unseating of the black delegates, Dye warned, "would disrupt organized labor in the city of Jacksonville." The delegates' reactions point to the different political economic conditions confronted by organized labor in Miami and Jacksonville. The 1920 population numbers given above suggests

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Florida State Federation of Labor held at St. Augustine, Florida, April 1920*, 16-24, 29-30 (statement on these pages); see also press reports: *MM*, 8 Apr, 1920, p. 1 & 10 Apr, 1920, p.1; *MH*, 8 Apr, 1920, p. 1. The *MM* incorrectly reported that Miami sent 36 delegates instead of the actual 24 stated in the convention record.

that Jacksonville workers faced a larger pool of skilled black labor than did their Miami counterparts. The lack of cooperation between black hod carriers and white skilled construction workers, for instance, highlight the overall antipathy of Miami's white unionists toward black labor. White unions consistently ignored black unionists and used the race card to turn public opinion against business when they used black labor against the interest of white labor. White carpenters thus maintained white dominance in Miami with their segregation policy. In 1930, for instance, out of 2,105 total carpenters, only 147 were black, representing only 7 percent. This was below the proportions existing in Jacksonville (33%; 399 of 1,191) and Tampa (13%; 106 of 816). White unionization succeeded in keeping Miami a white man's town.⁴¹

The Fight Over the Open Shop

White skilled labor power over the workplace and the power of urban ethos discourse intersected in 1919. Tensions between building crafts unionists and business increased during the course of 1918 and 1919, particularly over wages and workers'

⁴¹ *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention*, 16-24, 29-30; *MM*, 26 September 1904, p. 6, 6 October 1904, p. 6, 7 October 1904, p. 6, 6 December 1904, p. 5; Minutes of the *UBCJA*, 31 July 1914; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Occupations by States*, 356, 359, & 361. The number of union carpenters in 1930 is not known. The last Trustees Report for Local 993 provided an estimate of 821 union carpenters for the first six months of 1929 (*UBCJA* Trustees Report). A rigid color line in the building trades was not unusual to Miami or the South. Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C.: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930), 178-185 & 316-327; F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 45-49; Herbert Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (1944. Reprint. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1971), 17-47 (on carpenters, see 26-34). Herbert Hill, "The Racial Practices of Organized Labor— the Age of Gompers and After," in Arthur M. Ross and Herbert Hill, editors, *Employment, Race, and Poverty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967). For an excellent general overview on white and black labor, see Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), especially ch. 10.

control issues. The high cost of living, stemming from the war economy, increasingly concerned workers.⁴² Anxiety over labor problems emerged in early May 1919 with rumors that construction workers might push for wage hikes. C.D. Mackey, president of the Building Trades Council (BTC), claimed no wage demands would be made in “the near future.” Architects, contractors, and builders expressed their disappointment with Mackey’s vague prognosis and had hoped for a definite date regarding any push for higher wages. In addition, J. T. Blackman, president of the City Council and member of the UBCJA, addressed the architects’ and builders’ concern over labor shortages. “We want to avoid the bad business, especially for the skilled workmen, of having men come here with their families, probably without the prospect of a job, only the prospect of the big volume of work going on in Miami, and have to bear the heavy expense of waiting for a job to turn up,” stated Blackman. He also was a champion of the workers’ need for steady work and protection of the union standard that kept the half-day on Saturdays. According to the local papers, the housewives in Miami, organized in the Women’s Club, took a leading role in the late summer appointing committees investigating the city’s cost of living as compared to others. They also organized meetings with city officials, business interests, and unionists to resolve the problem of rising prices. The issue would remain a concern for several months to come. Employers realized early the increasing frustration about the high cost of living and thus were correct to anticipate agitation from

⁴² Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, ch. 8; See also “Retail Prices, 1913 to December, 1923,” *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, No. 366 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), 7.

workers over wages.⁴³

The labor conflicts in 1919 stemmed from white skilled workers strength and business desire to disempower them. In mid-August, first painters and then chauffeurs and teamsters demanded higher wages, triggering labor troubles in the fall of 1919. Employers particularly protested the immediate demand made by painters for wage increases. Painters went on a short strike before builders bitterly made the wage adjustments. Soon the city would twice escape a wider scale strike. The hiring of black teamsters in the end of August precipitated the first conflict. White chauffeurs refused to unload materials from their trucks on both grounds of the union shop and color line. Business interests responded with an effort to institutionalize the open shop in the city, and thus hoped to capitalize from the national trend at the time. Businessmen declared that labor's practice of using only union label materials and advocacy of the closed shop represented a threat to their freedom. They attacked unions as being inefficient and expecting unfair labor conditions. Business particularly wanted to institute the open shop described by them as the principle of "equal rights for all." This would lead to the formation of the Greater Miami Employer Association and the eventual publication of the pamphlet, *The Story of the Open Shop*, in 1920.

Organized labor countered with declarations of their Americanness ("no trace of bolshevik tactics," as reported in the *Miami Metropolis*), solidarity for the union shop, and support of segregation at the workplace. The union attempted to preempt possible

⁴³ *MM*, 1 May 1919, p. 1 & 3 May 1919, p. 1; *MH* 1 June 1919, p. 12 (Blackman quote and comments. *MM*, 14 August 1919, p. 14, 18 August 1919, p. 1, 26 August 1919, p. 2 (on painters) & 25 August 1919, p. 1 (on chauffeur wage hike). For high cost of living, see local papers in late summer and in the fall. *MM*, 22 August 1919, p.1 (formation of women's movement).

criticism of communist connections when they declared their Americanness. However, the historical record does not indicate that communism or socialism ever became issues in Miami during WWI or after as in other parts of the country. The business unionist style of Miami's craft unions suggests the hyperbolic nature of business' claim. The maneuver, in any case, demonstrated the local union's awareness of national concerns and thus they acted first to squash any hint of association. More specifically, business (with collusion of the local papers) attempted to associate violence and intimidation tactics to union activism and recalcitrance to the nonunion shop. The Red Scare, thus, did shape in a minor way the analysis of unionism in the city. With the exception of a few instances of minor alleged union intimidation, however, charges of radicalism linked to the work of "unthinking agitators" (a clear reference to the power of business agents or walking delegates) never did stick despite the efforts of business.

In addition to their business unionist style and little or questionable use of violence, the BTC and CLU used of the race card and adhered to the urban ethos to shield them further from charges of radicalism. The BTC, representing the building trade unions of the city, turned the rhetoric of business against them by stating that "equal rights for all" meant a desire to place white skilled labor on the same plane as blacks and, therefore, threatened Miami's status as a white man's town. In the first strike, business folded and gave in to the union workers demands for better wages and the removal of the black chauffeur replacements. They, however, created the Greater Employers Association. From 1919 onward, unions would struggle to keep Miami a union town, at

least in the building trades.⁴⁴ The BTC backed down from a citywide strike in early November in the interests of protecting the success of the upcoming tourist season. Clearly, unionists were not impervious to the economic realities of the city. Though they acquiesced to business, the BTC realized that keeping the best interests of Miami first would serve their interests more in the short term (keep workers earning a living) and the long term (maintain positive public relations).

Despite union labor's apparent acquiescence, organized labor bunkered down in the following years to what appeared a permanent struggle over power in construction work and for the workers' right to unionization in the city. The modernist emphasis on economic progress, growth, and development encapsulated by the booster rhetoric that shaped Miami's history, however, helped obscure the story of workers and their struggle for power. *The Story of the Open Shop in Miami*, a pamphlet published by the Greater Miami Employers' Association (GMEA) at the end of 1920, was emblematic of the process of historical obliteration, presenting a linear, progressive history of the city's development and growth, providing a short historical account filled with newspaper clippings, and ending with testimonials from local businesses concerning the success of the open shop. It depicted a city, once stunted by closed shop conditions, advancing under open shop terms achieved by heroic businessmen. In order to attract investors, the GMEA sought to dispel notions that the city had a strong labor movement, reflecting the national mood toward unions after World War I. "The city had been for a long time

⁴⁴ See the last week of August and first two weeks of September in the *MM* and *MH* for coverage of the labor strife; the second string of labor conflict appears in mid-October till the first 10 days in November but only the *MM* is extant for this period. See also, *The Story of the Open Shop*.

under the complete domination of the Labor Unions,” the pamphlet pronounced; “All building operations were conducted on the Closed Shop basis. Every employer of labor was absolutely subject to the rules and regulations of the Labor Unions and was compelled to yield every point to the whims and arrogance of the Walking Delegate.”

The GMEA portrayed itself as the rightful protectors of class harmony—that is, along technocratic and paternalistic lines. Union labor could work in the city, *The Story of the Open Shop* argued, as long as it accepted the free enterprise principle that business had the right to choose its workforce regardless of union affiliation (a position anticipating the right to work law that passed in 1944). These employers sought to depict unions as dictatorial, undemocratic, and inefficient. It is important to remember here that the GMEA wanted to attack unions as an institution but they were keen not to target individual workers. From accusations of soldiering to corruption, anti-union politics across the country stressed the threat that organized labor represented to the American Dream. Unions were anathema to efficiency (particularly in regards to wages), from the perspective of many employers. The employers’ entrepreneurial instincts would be stifled if unions were allowed to have “complete domination” of the workplace. *The Story of the Open Shop in Miami* thus argued that in defeating the closed shop the GMEA had protected the opportunity to work and attain riches in a legal and honorable manner. The GMEA patriotically and heroically protected the harmony of interests against the worst collective instincts threatening individualism.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Greater Miami Employers’ Association, *The Story of Open Shop in Miami* (Miami:1920), 3; on the issue of union corruption, see David Witwer, *Corruption and Reform in the Teamsters Union* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Idem., *Shadow of*

Unions resisted this portrayal of their role in Miami and in workers' lives and they contested conservative notions of class harmony. They too argued that they were protectors of class harmony but along moral economy lines: in the advocacy of the union label, of fair wages, and other working condition issues. Unions sought to protect the livelihoods of its members. Businesses that gave fair wages, followed the arranged work rules and conditions, and purchased when possible union label materials were embracing organized labor's conception of class harmony. In addition, Miami's unions argued that business needed to hire home labor (that is, residents) and to work through the union to get workers. Implicit in these demands was the idea that through collective action—a formal expression of community interests—workers could keep at bay the worst aspects of individualism and greed gone mad. Union carpenters responded to the GMEA's pamphlet with their own notice in their national journal, *The Carpenter*, announcing that Miami was still a closed shop city. W. R. Robbins, a member of the Composition Roofers, Local 57 and, in 1921, first vice-president of the Florida State Federation of Labor, commented on the propagandistic nature of the term "open shop." He urged unionists at the 1921 State Federation of Labor Convention to desist from using the term since, in his opinion, it only strengthened the cause against organized labor. "There is no such term," Robbins argued, because what business was fighting for was actually the "closed shop to every man who wants to stand for the protection of his fellow worker."⁴⁶

the Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor (Urbana and Chicago: University Illinois Press, 2009).

⁴⁶ Ibid; *The Carpenter*, December 1920, p. 39; *Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the Florida State Federation of Labor held at West Palm Beach, Florida, 1921*, p. 25-26; On the open shop, see Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960); Doris B. McLaughlin, "The Second

Robbins's concern with language reflected both his astuteness to the role of presentation and memory in creating a positive, public image and the uphill battle faced by unions against a relatively organized and better-financed business community. In reality between 1914 and 1925 Miami was never entirely closed or open shop; organized labor maintained a prominent presence throughout the period under review, but the fast growing city challenged the success of unionization with a continual influx of new workers and business leaders' anti-union attitude. At the very least, the efforts of unionists to gain a stronger presence demonstrated a significant level of worker agency and faith in unionization.

The story of the open shop was not linear nor as neat as the Greater Miami Employer's association wanted to maintain. The historical record is not clear on what developed in the 1920s regarding the open shop. Carpenters maintained high union numbers, and one would suspect that the same remained true for the other building trades. Miami's local market economy empowered workers to some extent, but unionization would not have fostered if a longer tradition had not existed. The establishment of Local 993 early in the city's history seems to have played an important part. However, the specific leadership styles and the union decisions during the period under study are not as clear. From the rate of unionization and labor activities such as Labor Day parades, one can deduce, nonetheless, that workers continued to organize into unions. It is unlikely that businesses were able to win against unionization. Some work sites remained union

Battle of Battle Creek— The Open Shop Movement in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Labor History*, 14, no. 3 (Summer 1973): 323-339; Thomas Klug, “Employers’ Strategies in the Detroit Labor Market, 1900-1929,” in *On the Line: Essays in the History of Auto Work*, edited by Nelson Lichtenstein and Stephen Meyer (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 42-72.

shop while others experimented with open shop conditions— hiring union and non-union labor.

Conclusion

Workers (and their unions) embraced growth and development just as business did. On the level of values within capitalist society, workers and business were on an apparent equal plane. Both *ostensibly* supported the capitalist values of individualism, industrialism, and entrepreneurship. Miami's organized labor also accepted the idea of harmony of interests, a central element in the business unionism then characterizing mainstream AFL strategy. This conception of harmony reframed individualism by stressing a cooperative ethic comfortable with collectivist notions of civic activism and a commitment to moral economy. Business interests, though, gained an advantage on the front of media and public relations with the casual association that business represented the symbolic embodiment of capitalism. More specifically, owning one's own business and being one's own boss represented the capitalist promise or the "American Dream." The fight for better working conditions and wages thus became potential impediments to growth and, theoretically, threatened the capitalist promise with the tyranny of the business delegate and the inharmonious beat of collective solutions in a liberal political economy.

The common discursive ground that business and labor met on was the urban ethos and class harmony. While union and nonunion workers valued the products of their labor, unions as institutions representing the will of workers fought on a public front to be included in the narrative of growth. However, the local media's relative collusion with business interests hurt labor's call for greater power in the workplace. Union labor, more

often than not, became an impediment to growth according to the storyline found in such places as *The Story of the Open Shop in Miami*. In embracing the urban ethos, labor unions thus found themselves stuck in a hard place. This is not to suggest that they were necessarily aware of this at the time. Rather, unions adopted a position they believed to be true. The urban ethos discourse did not account for class conflict and contestation for power in the urban center. Its emphasis on harmony and rational solutions to urban problems thus revealed an enduring legacy of the Progressive era. Unions struggled to remain symbolic contributors to the city building project while they continued to be real, concrete builders of Miami AND protectors of a moral economy. The evidence of this reality existed across the urban landscape, in the buildings, houses, and structures constructed by them. At least for these labor unions, a discourse inflected with class conflict and more radical symbolism along Debsian lines, for instance, would have run counter to their ideals and would have fallen flat in the context of post-World War I United States.

As demonstrated by the fall of 1919, Miami's labor and social history had been shaped by a well-developed ethos of civic boosterism. It dictated the nature of discourse between labor and capital in Miami. The absence of a more radical labor movement in the city aided labor's position, as evident with Miami boosters' emphasis on the city's industrious and hard working residents. Union workers capitalized on this strand of the urban ethos in their negotiations. The city's dependency on tourism pressured citizens to resolve social conflict quickly in fear of disrupting the image of the city and the success of the tourist season. A localist demand for conformity to business development emerged in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Of course, for workers in the building

trades and other service industries, it made financial and career sense to support and push for the city to grow. As a “Magic City” and guided by the “Miami spirit,” Miami was a New South city with a strong labor presence. This in turn affected class and race conflict. Resolutions were quickly reached, and boosters celebrated how the Magic City and Miami’s spirit won the day.

The tourist industry pushed city leaders to emphasize the maintenance of peace and social order. Organized labor—particularly skilled workers in the building industry—benefited from this situation at times. They exploited the city’s demand for labor by keeping tight control of the labor supply into Miami. Skilled workers exerted their power by demanding and getting relatively high wages, understanding the economic realities faced by business interests: the tourist season was always near and thus construction jobs raced against the clock for completion. Unions also maintained severe Jim Crow conditions by both preventing skilled black workers from working in most jobs in the city and by ignoring their pleas for support and solidarity. Though business attempted to change labor market conditions in the fall of 1919 and after, organized labor remained a dominant force in the city. In April of 1919, they started publication of a weekly city labor newspaper, *The Miami News*. The paper would change its name over the years, but it remained in publication until at least 1965.⁴⁷ Labor was empowered by the urban ethos discourse and the idea of class harmony; however, both conceptions also help weakened

⁴⁷ J. R Livingston, “Twenty-Five Years of Service to Labor and our Community,” *Miami Citizen*, 15 April 1943. The paper changed its name from the *Miami News* in 1937 to the *Miami Citizen* then later in the 1940s to the *Miami Labor Citizen*, until finally to the *South Florida Labor Tribune* by the 1960s. Extant sources for the period 1919-1926 are missing as result of the 1926 hurricane that devastated Miami. I have not found any evidence of continued publication post-1965.

their collective cause. How these ideas shaped relations between labor and business in Miami's history will be explored in subsequent chapters.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ For a good beginning on Miami's labor history in the mid-20th century, see Eric Tscheschlok, "'So Goes the Negro'"; Melanie Rebecca Shell-Weiss, "'They all came from someplace else': Miami, Florida's immigrant communities, 1896-1970"; Alex Lichtenstein, "'Scientific Unionism' and the 'Negro Question': Communists and the Transport Workers Union," in *Southern Labor in Transition*, 58-85; idem., "Putting Labor's House in Order: the Transport Workers' Union and labor anti-Communism in Miami during the 1940s," *Labor History*, vol. 39, no. 1 (1998): 7-23; idem., "Exclusion, Fair Employment, or Interracial Unionism: Race Relations in Florida's Shipyards during World War II," in *Labor in the Modern South*, 135-157; Maria Jurkovic, "Picketing in Paradise: The Garment, Laundry, and Hotel Workers' Unions in 1950s Miami, Florida," (Masters thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

Black Working-Class Agency: Uplift, Economic Survival, and the Jim Crow Politics of Harmony, 1914-1930

In the early 20th century, Miami was divided into two cities, one white and one “colored.” Blacks lived in several settlements throughout Dade County labeled by Whites as colored towns. The largest, found in present-day Overtown, has been understood in the historical memory as Colored Town. Divided by residential segregation, Miami was also divided by rigid boundaries in the job market and spatial mobility.¹ Between 1915 and 1919, Miami's white union chauffeurs, seeing the opportunity to use their racial privilege in Miami's growing tourist economy, attempted to monopolize the chauffeur business and prevent Blacks from driving in the city. Black protest, combined with tourist complaints against the city's anti-black driving custom, led to a negotiation to extend the color line during this period. Black agency, the economic context, and the political discourse of class and race harmony helped African Americans gain the right to drive albeit within the confines of a continuing segregated city.

Exploring how the color line applied to driving, particularly the occupation of chauffeuring, highlights the perverse nature of segregation while also demonstrating its limitations. A rereading of newspaper accounts, discovery of untapped newspaper

¹ Paul S. George, “Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (April 1978): 435-436, 442; Raymond Mohl, “Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early 20th Century Miami,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (January 1987): 281; Marvin Dunn, *Black Miami in the 20th Century* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1997).

sources such as letters to the editor, reference to national discussions about the chauffeur occupation, and use of city directories and the 1920 and 1930 census manuscripts, yield a more complete picture of race conflict in chauffeuring. Black drivers, and community leaders of all ethnic backgrounds, turned the chauffeur issue into a moral problem challenging the city's racial etiquette. Blacks used segregation as a progressive policy to achieve race harmony. In not challenging the idea of separateness, Blacks in particular forced flexibility of the color line in chauffeuring because of their community's needs to move about the city in order to get to jobs and shop in the city's white stores. Pushing for a stopgap to racist tendencies to limit their movement melded well with white employers' needs to have Blacks working for them. In addition, the ideas of black servility and racial uplift merged neatly as Miami's white, business elite sought to protect the viability of the city's tourist economy. As shown in Chapter One, Miami's Winter Playground image built on nostalgic notions of the Old South and happy race and class relations. The Jim Crow resolution to give Blacks the right to drive and chauffeur in Miami became the segregation rule until after World War II. In this way the chauffeur debates in Miami serve as another example of how modernizing forces, such as automobile technology, became new focal points for the application of segregation culture.²

Few scholars, however, have devoted attention to driving and its place in the

² Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University, 1992): 132-159, 426-437; Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998): 85-197; August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906," *Journal of American History* 55, no. 4 (March 1969): 756-775.

history of segregation and African American civil rights. Historian Paul George's recounting of the 1915, 1917, and 1919 conflicts in his dissertation and subsequent articles on Colored Town, brought to light this historical moment. Most recently, Marvin Dunn has restated George's earlier findings with more detail. Neither, however, explored the context from which the struggle between white chauffeurs and Miami's black community emerged, except for general commentary regarding U.S. racial custom. Both highlight the ineffectiveness of the police department to protect black drivers and the racism endemic to the era. But in all these accounts, the story of the chauffeur conflict remains static, devoid of contingency and agency. The city's "leaders," black and white, gain the credit for change, while the workers remain shadowy actors with stereotyped roles and the class context remains blurred.³

Rooting the historical analysis in the economic and political context helps clarify the complicated issues of race and class. Outlining the power wielded by white, union chauffeurs points to the role of unionism in keeping the color line in the job market. It also highlights how the scarcity of work opportunities, resulting in part from seasonal unemployment and oversupplied labor markets, allowed for the worst discriminatory instincts to flourish. This context led to many of the scarce jobs to be devalued. The racist stereotypes of the era enabled employers to further this process by allowing easy

³ *Miami Metropolis* (hereafter *MM*), Oct. 4, 1915: 6. See P. George, "Colored Town"; Paul S. George, "Criminal Justice in Miami: 1896-1930," Ph.D. Dissertation, Dept. of History, Florida State University, 1975; Paul S. George, "Policing Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (April 1979): 434-450; M. Dunn, *Black Miami*: 94-95.

condescending and paternalistic associations to be made regarding certain types of work such as chauffeuring. In addition, the politics of growth in Miami's tourist economy, as expressed in harmony discourse, set the terms of the debate. A conservative context was undermined by the demands of the everyday dynamics of a tourist economy: Black workers needed to get around and white tourists needed to be accommodated to enhance their leisure experience. Black workers' persistent challenge to white chauffeurs' rules and to hard-line segregationists, suggests an active and ongoing tension among workers and between employer and employee over control of the job market despite the political context of class harmony. White chauffeurs were eventually unsuccessful in their moral economic appeals for a rigid color line not because they were unable to convince other Whites about their racial superiority; rather, unlike skilled craftsmen, their work fit a culturally hegemonic, servile profile. Tourists could ultimately bring their own driver to the city or choose a local driver based on their particular biases and prerogatives and remain consistent with the racism of the day. The relative easy entry into the chauffeur business and the persistent need to drive Black workers around town also further undermined the white drivers' goals.

Defining the Chauffeur

Miami's incorporation in 1896 coincided with the period characterized by historian Rayford Logan as the nadir of American race relations. Despite the general treatment of African Americans as second-class citizens, 162 Blacks voted in the city's

incorporation election because their numbers were needed to meet the minimum number of required voters to attain a city charter. Whites depended on black laborers, many of who worked on construction projects and helped to clear land. In this case, this dependency also extended to the ballot. As the city of Miami grew, institutional forms of segregation and racial custom merged. The subsequent and continuous violations of black civil rights would define the political, economic, and social context of the first half of the next century.⁴

In spite of the limitations of living in a Jim Crow city, Blacks continued to migrate to Miami and worked mostly in service occupations. Bahamians made up a large percentage of these migrants. Southern African Americans also moved to Miami, arriving mostly from other parts of Florida and the Deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, North and South Carolina. In 1920, Bahamian immigrants made up 52 percent (4,815) of Miami's black population of 9,270. But by 1925, the number decreased to about 35 percent (7,595 of 22,037), falling to 22 percent (5,152 of 25,166) in 1930. Though Miami's black population overall increased, it fell in proportion to the city's white population. From a high of 31 percent in 1920, Blacks slipped to about 23 percent in 1930 (of 110,637), then to about 18 percent in 1940 (44,240 of 250,537).⁵

⁴ P. George, "Colored Town": 433; Rayford W. Logan *Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier, 1965). For a more recent treatment, see Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

⁵ R. Mohl, "Black Immigrants": 271-272, 289-290; Nathan Mayo, *The Fifth Census of the State of Florida, 1925* (Tallahassee: State of Florida, 1925): 74, 115; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negroes in the United States, 1920-1932* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office

Blacks also found their job opportunities limited in Miami, as they did in the rest of the country. According to the 1930 census, black women worked mostly as laundresses or as domestics, and black men as laborers, domestic workers, servants, janitors, and in other types of service occupations. Many Blacks moved to Miami in pursuit of job opportunities in the tourist industry and service work in general. While this led to an increase in the permanent population, temporary seasonal growth occurred as well. According to the Works Progress Administration's research on 1930s black Florida, Miami's black population doubled during the winter months, a time when tourism also peaked.⁶

Throughout this time, the exclusion of Blacks from jobs that were considered “skilled” is particularly notable. As I have shown in another essay, white, male workers actively sought to exclude black men from skilled jobs in Miami. This practice was most effective in the building trades. The success of such a strategy depended on the degree of control over the occupation that union workers could foster without causing too much of an imbalance in the city's economy. Defining chauffeuring as a skilled job, however,

(GPO), 1935): 33; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *15th Census of the United States: 1930* 3, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1932): 410; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *16th Census of the United States: 1940* 2, Part 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1943): 166.

⁶ U.S. Bureau of the United States, *15th Census of the United States, 1930, Population* 4 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1932): 358-361. The winter season lasted between November and April. See also Gary W. McDonough, *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers' Project Legacy* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1993): 39-40; Raymond A. Mohl, “Miami: The Ethnic Cauldron,” *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II*, edited by Richard M. Bernard and Bradley Rice (Austin: University of Texas, 1983): 72-75; Raymond A. Mohl, “The Patterns of Race Relations in Miami since the 1920s,” *The African American Heritage of Florida*, edited by David R. Colburn and Jan L. Landers (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1995): 340-341.

proved difficult. But that did not prevent white chauffeurs from trying. As an occupation, driving had less prestige than the handcrafts in the building industry. Whereas employers relied heavily on building craftsmen for successful completion of construction jobs, chauffeurs never convinced the public that their occupation required as much deference despite the white supremacy discourse they used.⁷

Besides the basic requirement of having to drive an automobile, what defined a chauffeur was not always clear. What did a chauffeur transport? If he moved goods, was he still a chauffeur, or simply a trucker, a driver, a teamster, or a hackman? What if he worked for a particular company to transport goods or a particular family as a domestic chauffeur? Occupational names assigned in the 1920 census for drivers -- that is, anyone who earned a fee or wage by transporting people or goods by automobile, truck, or cart -- highlight this confusion.⁸ The terms “chauffeur,” “driver,” and “hackman,” for instance, were often unclear in regard to whether people or goods were being transported, particularly when the chauffeur reported that he earned his wages on his own account but did not provide any other information. Was he an independent contractor? Did he solicit tourists to drive them? The terms “chauffeur” and “driver” were used interchangeably through the 1920s, applying to anyone who drove for a living. By the 1940s, however, “chauffeur” took its present occupational designation as being distinct from other drivers,

⁷ Thomas A. Castillo, “Miami's Hidden Labor History,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (Spring 2004): 438-467.

⁸ Individuals who transported people or goods by rail or ship were identified separately in the U.S. Census during this period.

such as teamsters or taxi drivers.⁹ In every case, however, these jobs were open exclusively to men.

The 1920 census compilation for occupations did distinguish between domestic chauffeurs and others, though these numbers were not recorded for cities with less than 50,000 residents. But the census did not account for the type of vehicle or what was being transported. Freddie Andrews, the black Miamian whose resistance to the color line in chauffeuring helped lead to its renegotiation, described himself as a “hack driver” who owned a vehicle, but what that meant to the Census compilers was not indicated. Newspaper accounts showed that he did own an automobile (labeled as “car” or “auto” in the manuscript). The 1920 census manuscript rolls, though, demonstrate that Blacks succeeded in working as all kinds of drivers. Out of 151 men who labeled themselves as chauffeurs or drivers, Blacks constituted 22 percent (33). Out of 41 domestic chauffeurs, Blacks made up 39 percent (16). They also dominated in other driving fields that required horses, like carriage drivers (27 of 35), teamsters (35 of 37), and draymen (34 of

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Miami Census Manuscript: 1920, reels 215 & 216. I recorded all drivers appearing in the 1920 census. The labels applied were determined by whether these “drivers” drew a wage or were paid on salary, and by their place of employment (whether self-employed driving a vehicle for hire, or by the name of a particular establishment). The list of categories used to describe drivers included: chauffeur/driver (drives car and transports people), driver of jitney busses, domestic chauffeur, hackmen and carriage (transport of people not clear), deliverymen, caddying, teamster, draymen, driver (transports of goods), driver of construction materials, drivers of trucks (not clear what they transports). On the challenges of identifying occupations based on driving over this period see Kevin Borg, “The ‘Chauffeur Problem’ in Early Auto Era: Structuration Theory and the Users of Technology,” *Technology and Culture* 40, no. 4 (1999): 797-832, n70; Rachel Moshkowitz, “When the Drive Lasts All Day: Taxidivers and Chauffeurs,” *Occupational Outlook Quarterly* 37 no. 2 (1993): 32-36. The plethora of union locals for drivers in major cities like Chicago further indicates the diversity of this sector. See Sterling F. Rigg, “The Chicago Teamsters Unions,” *Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 1 (1926): 13-36.

35).¹⁰

Similar problems in accuracy persisted in the 1930 census compilations. While more clarity emerged with the various job designations than the 1920 census schedule, census compilers did not note the finer distinctions between chauffeuring individuals under different arrangements. Bus, transfer, and cab companies were accounted for in the census, for instance. However, a reader would not know from this data how many chauffeurs worked for private families, whether they were white or black, or whether their work was permanent or they were employed only as temporary servants. A quick review of the census schedule manuscripts indicates how prevalent black chauffeurs were who worked for private families. The 1930 census listed 428 chauffeurs, truck and tractor drivers (32 percent of 1,342) and 14 owners and managers of truck, transfer, and cab companies (15.2 percent of 92).¹¹

The problem of labeling represented more than just a semantic conundrum. Malleability of the labels used to describe this work reflected the newness of driving automobiles as an occupation. It also reflects the racial flexibility this work afforded, and the ease of entering into this field. Reduced to its simplest terms, anyone who purchased a car could become a chauffeur for the transport of people. Even with the high cost of purchasing an automobile, entering this profession proved relatively open, though the impact of licensing and insurance laws emerging in the late 1920s created some

¹⁰ Miami Census Manuscript: 1920, reels 215 & 216.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Miami Census Manuscript: 1930, reels 308-310; *15th Census of the United States* 4: 359.

institutional barriers. This aspect of chauffeuring needs to be studied but does not appear to have hampered the entrance of Blacks into this line of work prior to 1920.¹² At the very least, Blacks drove for other Blacks. The prevalence of black men serving as domestic chauffeurs in 1930, suggests that they also gained the opportunity to drive Whites around town, work that was perhaps seen as an extension of more servile roles.

Whatever employers thought, however, white chauffeurs across the nation identified black and immigrant men as direct competition to their livelihoods. This was particularly clear in the early 20th century. New York chauffeurs in 1912 complained that Europeans “willing to work for smaller wages than Americans” and “the negro” were lowering wages and reducing the supply of work. “Everybody wants to be a chauffeur,” related one white driver. “[S]o, of course, wages have been going down.” Black chauffeurs in New York faced sabotage of their vehicles, such as finding mothballs in their gasoline tanks, their ignition systems short-circuited, and their carburetors thrown out of adjustment. White chauffeurs were also right to perceive changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of the available labor pool. Blacks increasingly entered chauffeuring between 1900 and 1910 and continued to do so in the following years. From a national total of 4,639 (10.3 percent) in 1910, Blacks made a leap to 38,360 (13.5 percent) in

¹² Julian Street, “The Passing of the Old-School Chauffeur,” *Collier's, The National Weekly, Automobile Supplement* (Jan. 1912): 46, 48; Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (Washington, D.C.: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930): 111-112; Gorman Gilbert and Robert E. Samuels, *The Taxicab: An Urban Transportation Survivor* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982): 63, 65-66, 95; Paul S. George, “Traffic Control in Early Miami,” *Tequesta* 37 (1977): 3-18.

1920. Pressure from Blacks, therefore, increased competition throughout the country.¹³

Expectations of a chauffeur's duties also changed over time and varied with place of employment. Early on, chauffeurs tended to be skilled in mechanics. Unpredictable mechanical breakdowns, along with the lack of infrastructure needed to accommodate such situations, made skilled driver-mechanics necessary. Knowledge of how to fix cars continued to be a useful attribute whether one served as a domestic chauffeur or as a private chauffeur for hire, but technological advances made cars easier to handle, decreasing the need for such specialized knowledge. In addition, with the rise of garage mechanics as a separate and distinct occupation, chauffeurs soon became differentiated by what they drove and who employed them. A domestic chauffeur worked for a private family. Chauffeurs for hire were either independent contractors or hired by a particular company, such as a hotel or garage.¹⁴

Employers also expected chauffeurs to provide services beyond driving. "People want him not only to be a servant but to know that he is a servant," commented the manager of a garage in New York. The garage man noted that additional chores were also given to the chauffeur, such as washing windows. One writer argued that paying extra for a skilled chauffeur would save money because an employer would not be

¹³ J. Street, "The Passing": 46; Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998): 322; L. Greene and C. Woodson, *Negro Wage Earner*: 111-112; K. Borg, "The 'Chauffeur Problem'": 822; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *13th Census of the United States, 1910* 4 (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1914): 414-415; *14th Census of the Population, 1920* 3, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1922): 350-351.

¹⁴ K. Borg, "The 'Chauffeur Problem'": 809-811, 821; J. Street, "The Passing": 46, 48; "The Reform of Chauffeurs," *The Literary Digest* (Feb. 10, 1912): 273-274; T. H. Parker, "The Worth of a Good Chauffeur," *Harper's Weekly* (April 6, 1912): 14.

subject to the exorbitant prices charged in garages. He highlighted that new chauffeurs tended to be young boys “drawn to automobile-driving by the attractiveness of the work and the comparative ease with which automobile-driving is learned,” but who lack “mental balance” and were irresponsible. On the other hand, the writer argued, the “high-priced chauffeur” offered reliability and would not engage in “joyriding,” taking the car without permission for either recreational use or using it to supplement one's income by offering taxi service. Garage owners protested being identified as “high-priced,” and blamed the chauffeurs for charging commission fees for their patronage.

These debates among employers, chauffeurs, and garage owners defined the “chauffeur problem,” which peaked in the first 15 years of the 20th century. Protests by white chauffeurs suggest that white men resisted wealthy employers' desire to make them act in more servile ways. Racially defined skills and roles played no small role in these discussions. Thus, Miami's chauffeur conflict developed in the dynamic context of ongoing labor troubles, racial tension, and debates over the prestige of chauffeuring at a time of rapid change.¹⁵

The 1915-1919 Chauffeur Conflict

On February 28, 1915, a black chauffeur from Palm Beach was run out of Miami

¹⁵ J. Street, “The Passing”: 46, 48; T. Parker, “The Worth”: 14; “A Word for Chauffeurs and Garages,” *The Literary Digest* (June 8, 1912): 1215-1216; and K. Borg, “The 'Chauffeur Problem'”: 809-11, 821. The white chauffeur arguments here echo David Montgomery's on worker's control. See David Montgomery, *Worker's Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University, 1979).

for driving three white, women passengers. The *Miami Herald* reported that the black chauffeur had “wagered with a white man that he could come here, drive about the city and 'get away' with it.” He “did not realize that a strong sentiment prevails in Miami against colored chauffeurs,” the paper reported, and was soon “closely pursued by several cars containing Miami chauffeurs, realizing that unless he vacated the car he would be handled roughly, [he] abandoned the car and beat it afoot for the colored section.” The black chauffeur later appeared at the police station to ask for protection. He was put on a train to Palm Beach, while the car remained in Miami for the owner, a Mister Metcalf, to retrieve the next day. The chauffeur was “convinced that while it's healthy to drive autos in Palm Beach, a Negro has no business acting as [a] chauffeur in Miami.” The *Metropolis* reported that the black chauffeur co-owned the vehicle with three other Blacks and had come to Miami despite knowing the prejudice existing against black drivers. Instead of criticizing the white chauffeurs, both papers brushed off the incident as the black chauffeurs' failure to respect the boundaries of the color line. Business and labor, interestingly, colluded in maintaining strict segregation rules.¹⁶

Debate over the chauffeur situation lasted for the next several years, intensifying in the summer of 1915 as a result of the February incident and heightened interest in how segregation in driving would ultimately affect the city's tourist industry. Supporters of Jim Crow legislation, first accepted the racial practice of restricting African American chauffeurs from doing business, though some Whites did point out that the segregation

¹⁶ *Miami Herald* (hereafter *MH*), Feb. 28, 1915: 5; *MM*, March 1, 1915: 2.

dialogue bordered on hypocrisy. Disagreement especially centered on the practice of allowing tourists to bring their own black chauffeurs with them when visiting the city.

How many times white chauffeurs prevented Blacks from driving in the city is not known. Newspaper reports suggest that it did not occur often, though knowledge of the prejudice against black use of automobiles likely deterred many from purchasing an automobile. The high price of automobiles was another equally important obstacle. Still, the *Miami Metropolis* questioned whether allowing white chauffeurs' threats to shape the city's customs was actually in Miami's best interests. Letters from tourists to the *Metropolis* complaining about the February incident sparked further interest in the topic. In an editorial entitled, "Shall Mob Law Rule Miami," the paper indicated its own stance on the issue: the paper felt it unwise to prevent tourists from bringing their black chauffeurs to the city. Taking a law and order position, while conceding to racial etiquette, the paper's editorial staff suggested that if Miamians agreed to forbid tourists from using their black chauffeurs, then the city needed to inform the tourists of this regulation. If not, then the city of Miami should accommodate these tourists and their chauffeurs, despite the boycott of garages or intimidation from white drivers.

The *Metropolis* did not defend the right of Blacks to drive. But it did recognize the damage that the complete elimination of black drivers would have on Miami's tourist industry, its economic engine. "We want the business of these touring parties, and the value of one machine to Miami, with occupants, who are usually liberal persons, means much to the city...It would cost more than could be overcome in the way of hostile

publicity.” The completion of the Dixie Highway, designed to increase the number of tourists who flooded into the city each winter, would only exacerbate this problem, they argued. Booster ideology led to comparisons with the customs of other southern cities and merged with the racist sentiment common to the era. “In practically every southern city owners of cars have colored chauffeurs,” the *Metropolis* reported. “In Atlanta, for instance, a majority of the owned machines are driven by negroes, the same as southern carriages of the Southern gentlemen were driven years ago.” This image remained a key strand in the argument for allowing tourists to bring their black chauffeurs with them to Miami.¹⁷

The leadership role played by the *Metropolis* in Progressive Era Miami was not insignificant. Simpson Bobo Dean, part owner of the newspaper since 1904 and its sole owner from 1914 to 1923, served as a muckraking voice in early Miami. Dean lived a life in newspapers. Born in Alabama, March 21, 1871, Dean began work as a reporter for the *Journal and Tribune* in Knoxville, Tennessee when he was just 19 years of age. In the 1890s, he moved to Florida. Soon thereafter, he started the *Palm Beach Daily News*. By 1909, Dean had become a strong populist voice against Henry Flagler and the Florida East Coast (FEC) Railroad. The most famous of his criticisms of Flagler focused on lowering freight rates for growers. When local businessmen petitioned Dean to ease his

¹⁷ *MM*, June 29, 1915: 4. For images of Blacks and the shaping of segregation custom and law, see: George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University, 1984); G. Hale, *Making Whiteness*: 85-197; L. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*.

opposition to Flagler, Dean turned around and published a list of their names in the *Metropolis* on April 1, 1910. Several Miamians wrote letters of support for the paper's position and soon after "the advertisers and subscribers who had dropped their support of the paper through FEC pressure came back. The railroad finally readjusted its rates."¹⁸ The *Miami Metropolis* was also among the city's strongest supporters of Prohibition. As a "dry" paper, the *Metropolis* served as the city's gadfly. Its journalistic style contrasted sharply with the more conservative coverage of city's other newspaper, the *Miami Herald*. Therefore, when wealthy tourists began to complain about their inability to travel with their black chauffeurs, Dean and his paper pushed for a resolution that would be in the best interests of the city, while the *Herald* hesitated, expressing skepticism about whether or not a problem actually existed.

Even more important, the *Metropolis* and *Herald* disagreed about whether or not to publicize the city's race-based chauffeuring regulations. The former believed the Chamber of Commerce, "representing the progressive thought and action of the community," needed to investigate the matter and take a formal stand to protect Miami's tourist industry. The *Herald* did not believe the city had a significant chauffeur problem. Thus they saw no need to publicize the guidelines or for the city's political leaders to take

¹⁸ Howard Kleinberg, "History of *The Miami News*, 1896-1987," *Tequesta* 57 (1987): 14-16 (quote found on p. 16); Ethan V. Blackman, *Miami and Dade County, Florida: Its Settlement, Progress, and Achievement* (Washington, D.C.: Victor Rainbolt, 1921): 116; *Miami Daily News*, March 24, 1945: 1, 4; *MH*, March 25, 1945: 10-A; Nixon Smiley, *Knights of the Fourth Estate: The Story of the Miami Herald* (Miami, Fla.: E. A. Seemann Publishing, 1974): 27-29; Jeanne Bellamy, "Newspapers of America's Last Frontier," *Tequesta* 7 (1952): 7-10. Dean established the *Weekly Lake Worth News* in 1894. He then began the *Daily Lake Worth News*, later renamed the *Palm Beach Daily News*. See H. Kleinberg, "History of the *Miami News*": 14.

steps to investigate it. The *Herald* continued to refer only vaguely to the ongoing debate, even as a major public forum was convened to address the issue. News of the forum itself was kept extremely brief and relegated to the middle and end of the paper. The *Metropolis*, on the other hand, provided extensive frontpage coverage, evoking criticism from the *Herald* that the *Metropolis* was only “creating trouble” for an issue that was “not a burning question.”¹⁹ Later, even the *Herald* would be forced to concede that a problem existed. But in the summer of 1915, they continued to offer little coverage of the chauffeur debates while ostensibly deferring to the sensibilities of hard-line segregationists who did not want Blacks to drive.

A typical and especially revealing commentary on the reasons why many middle and working-class Whites opposed allowing black men to work as chauffeurs was offered by George Okell, owner of a Miami garage. In a letter to the *Metropolis*, Okell described the February incident as an exceptional case and the fault of one black driver who was “looking for trouble.” According to his re-telling, the black driver from Palm Beach had stepped out of his socially accepted place since he knew Miami's racial custom but nonetheless chose to defy it. Arguing on behalf of the white chauffeurs, Okell turned to a discourse focused on standards of living. Miami's white chauffeurs, he wrote, were family men who “organized a union for the mutual protection against low wages and demoralized labor conditions...They realize that when the door is thrown open and the negro chauffeur tolerated that the negro will work for lower wages and under conditions

¹⁹ *MM*, June 29, 1915: 4; *MM*, June 30, 1915; *MM*, Aug. 3, 1915: 1-2; *MM*, Aug. 4, 1915: 1; *MH*, June 31, 1915: 8; *MH*, Aug. 5, 1915: 8; *MH*, Aug. 8, 1915: 4, 8; *MH*, Aug. 6, 1915: 4.

that a white man can not compete.” Floyd McNeil of the chauffeurs union concurred. Moralizing a bit further, McNeil argued that accepting black chauffeurs would be like “asking them to come to the level of the negro, and that is not pleasant.” These opponents also criticized the extensive boosterism engaged in by the city's businesses for flooding the local labor market with workers.²⁰ More than race alone, the class dynamics of the growing chauffeur debate were increasingly plain.

Permeating this discourse was the idea that once one concession was made, complete integration would be the result. In a letter to the *Miami Metropolis*, the carpenter P. L. Ryan argued against allowing Blacks to compete with white chauffeurs, stating that no white man wanted competition from blacks. He questioned the racial values of advocates of a more liberal chauffeur policy when he said that some whites “would welcome even Jack Johnson had he a Negro chauffeur.” In a hopeful prediction, but one marred with a deep racial hatred, he wrote, “I do not believe there is a man, woman, or child in Miami today that will live long enough to see a Negro chauffeur on the streets of Miami.” The *Herald* elaborated on this point, stepping away from its normally more reserved stance. As one 1915 editorial intoned:

If negro men are to take up the work of chauffeurs it will be followed by garages operated by colored men in the white portion of the city, and the color line once being broken, there will be nothing to prevent other colored business from coming in the white part of the city, and for colored residents to chose any part of

²⁰ *MM*, June 30, 1915: 2. Okell's letter appeared at the end of the article starting on page 1 entitled, “Should Advise Tourists as to the Feeling in Miami [Against Negro Chauffeurs].” For McNeil's statements, see *MM* Aug. 5, 1915: 1 & 3. For an excellent study on the context of living wage discourse and linkages to exclusionary discourse, see Lawrence Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1997).

the city they desire for their homes. The question resolves itself to this, do we want any change made in the regulation that has prevailed from the beginning?

Such reports were intended to play on the race fears of many among Miami's more vulnerable classes, and unite Miami's white community against any change in the racial status quo. Such public confessions that Miami was indeed a white man's town were borrowed from language used by Whites throughout the South. Racial hyperbole functioned as a defensive barrier to feared encroachments. Still Miami's Chamber of Commerce refused to take a position on the matter, claiming it had no authority to do so.²¹

More moderate positions accepted racial segregation, but criticized the rigidity of hard-line segregationists for not being more sensitive to the finer sensibilities of the wealthy, an obvious source of increased revenues for the city. C. L. Sheeler, a resident from Buena Vista, a suburb just north of Miami, argued that Miami should imitate Baltimore, "the metropolis of the South," in allowing Blacks to drive. Sheeler criticized the white chauffeur's argument on two counts. First, he argued, employers should have the right to choose their workers; closed shops should not be allowed. And second, he noted, black chauffeurs were willing to work at cheaper rates than many Whites, and were biologically suited to service. "The negro is a servant, by nature a humble and

²¹ *MM*, Aug. 5, 1915: 8 for P. L. Ryan letter; for Ryan's occupation, see Miami Census Manuscript: 1920, reels 215 & 216; *MH*, Aug. 6, 1915; L. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*: 181. See Randy Roberts' *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983) for a history of Jack Johnson. On manliness and racial dominance, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995).

obedient servant, and a faithful one. I know such in service 20 years,” he wrote. Who were these white chauffeurs to challenge the preference for such labor? Some of these employers, Sheeler continued, “have a 'nigger mammy' cooking their dinners, nigger girls serving the guests at the table and a nigger nurse taking care of their children...Then somebody wants to howl about a black man driving his celebrated Ford car on the streets of Miami, and down Dixie Highway.” To individuals like Sheeler, barring black chauffeurs made no economic sense and directly violated not only accepted customs, but also the guiding principle of a free market. Sheeler went so far as to suggest that the white chauffeurs who interfered with black chauffeurs right to ply their trade, or the rights of white or black citizens to hire them, should be arrested.²²

T. V. Moore, a successful, pioneer farmer, highlighted the hypocrisy of garage owners who refused to cater to black patrons. His criticism demonstrated how segregation allowed for interaction between the races in the context of formal, economic exchange. Violating this right, Moore argued, created a double standard. While Moore made it clear that he was not a supporter of integration in any form, this, he argued, constituted an issue of basic economic fairness. No difference existed between Miami clerks accepting the money of black patrons and the potential exchange between blacks and garage owners, Moore concluded.

Editors at the *Metropolis* also supported this argument. They found it absurd that

²² *MM*, Aug. 5, 1915: 1, 8. Another letter by Sheeler appeared later in October where he made a sharper attack on organized labor. “Can we afford to herald abroad the fact that the Chauffeurs unions or nay other Unions dictate the policies of conduct of our city affairs?” See *MM*, Oct. 4, 1915: 1. See also K. Borg, “The 'Chauffeur Problem.’”

complaints would be raised about Whites and Blacks engaging in the exchange of goods and services when “every store in Miami has in it white men and women who wait on negro customers every day [and] are glad to have the opportunity.” The paper also argued Blacks enjoyed mobility throughout the city despite the recent protest. Potential safety concerns as a result of incompetent drivers -- another argument used by white chauffeurs to argue against allowing Blacks to enter the trade -- was also refuted. “Every train arriving in Miami is met at the depot by vehicles, drawn by horses and driven by negroes, and there is no provision that these negro drivers shall not take men, women and children to any part of the city. Nor has there been any complaint that those who use these hacks are not safely driven or that they are subject to any annoyances because of the color of the driver,” *Metropolis* editors wrote. According the city directory, the number of blacks drivers in Miami was also increasing, from 49 in 1913 to 76 in 1915.²³ Driving an automobile, however, remained a problem. At least one black physician, according to Floyd McNeil from the chauffeurs union, had to ask for permission just to drive his own car.²⁴ To hardline segregationists it was all the same: driving, for whatever reason, was a white, male right and one that they did not feel should be extended to black residents.

²³ Though the directory listed only one chauffeur, problems of categorization likely also plagued directory entries.

²⁴ *MM*, Aug. 6, 1915: 1, 3 (Moore and McNeil comments from this report); *MM*, Aug. 7, 1915: 6 (*MM* editorial). For references regarding the perceived competency of Blacks, see also: *MM*, Aug. 4, 1915: 3; *Miami City Directory*, 1913-1915. Not much is written about blacks becoming chauffeurs in the early auto years. A few references point to fluidity being the rule with attempts made by some Whites to place restrictions. See John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1977): 21; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1990): 8, 11; L. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*: 336.

The chauffeur issue remained a concern through the peak tourist season in 1915-1916, with similar discourse driving the debate. Editors at the *Herald* continued to insist that the number of black chauffeurs entering the city was so minuscule that business lost by offending tourists would either be insignificant, or that most visitors to Miami would comply. The white chauffeurs, however, decided to hedge their bets and moved to mitigate any negative associations by offering free service to any white visitors who arrived with black chauffeurs, thereby adding an incentive for white patrons to accept their demands of racial exclusion. Still, the first reported example of a black chauffeur being replaced with a white one that season demonstrated just how absurd this policy remained. White chauffeurs approached a white family who had arrived with their black chauffeur and explained the local custom, offering to drive them free of charge if they would consent to preventing their own, black chauffeur from taking the wheel as long as they were in the city of Miami. The white visitors accepted their demands. The black chauffeur changed “his seat to one of the rear seats and the Miami white chauffeur climbed and took charge of the car.” The tourists were driven around the city, apparently with the black chauffeur still in the back seat, where they spent the day shopping. Later however, the visitors commented that if they had known of Miami's custom they would never had come. The white chauffeurs' attempts to control the market hung on a tenuous line bound to break with the city's continued, steady growth and the lack of prestige associated with their occupation.²⁵

²⁵ On the continued debate, see: *MM*, Sept. 9, 1915: 2; *MM*, Sept. 22, 1915: 7; *MM*, Sept.

Not until Blacks actively resisted did black Miamians get the right to drive automobiles for a living. Freddie Andrews, a 23-year-old native Floridian, attempted to start his own chauffeur service in July 1917. To his dismay, white chauffeurs physically threatened him, forcing Andrews to retaliate. He was then arrested. Later that day, the *Metropolis* reported that Andrews stabbed Randolph Lightburne, a white chauffeur, whom Andrews believed was among his “persecutors.” Andrews was eventually sentenced to pay either a 50-dollar fine, the equivalent of two or three week's salary, or serve 60 days in jail. Andrews seems to have paid the fine since two weeks later he was arrested a second time for driving a car in one of Miami's white neighborhoods. *Metropolis* editors continued to defend Andrews, depicting the white chauffeurs as wrongdoers, noting that they “attempted to make trouble for the negro” so as to engage in his “persecution.”²⁶

The black community's response further encouraged editors at the *Metropolis* to actively protest the city's policy of exclusion. On July 14, 1917, the *Metropolis* published an article entitled, “Negroes not to Use Violence to Gain Privileges.” It reported that Miami's Colored Board of Trade did not advocate the use of violence to resolve the

25, 1915: 1; *MM*, Oct. 4, 1915: 6; *MM*, Oct. 15, 1915: 10; *MM*, Nov. 18, 1915: 2 (first reported chauffeur incident); *MM*, Jan. 4, 1916: 3; *MH*, Dec. 1, 1915: 5. On free service, see: *MM*, Aug. 6, 1915: 1, 3; *MH*, Aug. 7, 1915: 4.

²⁶ *MM*, July 9, 1917: 5; *MM*, July 11, 1917: 2; *MM*, July 12, 1917: 1; *MM*, July 23, 1917: 2; *The Carpenter*, Aug. 1917. Biographical information on Andrews is drawn from the U.S. Census schedules for 1920, reel 216 and WWI Draft Registration Cards (accessed through Ancestry.Com). Andrews had signed up at the Local Draft Board on June 6. There are no extant records recording his view on the war. Earlier in the year, the *MH* reported a tourist accepting Miami's segregation policy without incident. See *MH*, Jan. 14, 1917: 1.

chauffeur question, but that they did expect “Negro rights [to be] respected.” Resorting to symbols of a peaceful and harmonious community, the Board explicitly “denounced any resort to violence as both imprudent and lawless.” Choosing their words carefully so that it was clear they were in no way favoring racial integration, the Board was quoted as saying: “We have no controversy with any individual or body of individuals which call for a resort to violence but we do insist, that negroes as citizens of the commonwealth have certain definite legal and moral rights.” Both white and black community leaders believed in maintaining a segregated city so long as basic standards of fairness were maintained.

The Colored Board of Trade appealed to the civility of the community, pointing to the need for “protection of the courts and all law-abiding citizens.” Their comments highlighted their desire of black leaders to tap into the sympathies of the white community. “We have faith in the judgment of the best white citizens and we welcome any effort looking forward to a better understanding between the races,” the Board wrote. The Board ended their comments by assuring white Miami that they had no clandestine plans and encouraging ongoing dialogue, noting that they did “not bar the public from attendance at any of [their] meetings.” This shift in the terms of the debate away from free market exchange to principles of civility, underscored just how much the actions of white chauffeurs threatened peace and harmony across the city. As such, the Colored Board of Trade argued, the policy of excluding black drivers could no longer be accepted as either a legitimate, white, working class strategy or as central to maintaining racial

segregation.²⁷

On July 16, 1917, racial tensions reached a peak with the bombing of Colored Town's Odd Fellows Hall. The bomb wreaked incredible damage, breaking most of the building's windows, breaking off large chunks of plaster, and cracking its concrete walls. In one place along the front of the building, it knocked out a hole in the structure's facade leaving it open to the street. The bombers, who writers for the *Metropolis* believed to be white chauffeurs or individuals serving on their behalf, targeted one of the city's most important buildings. Not only was Odd Fellows Hall one of the largest structures in the neighborhood, but it also symbolized the black community's success in establishing a separate state in the “commonwealth” of Miami. For writers at the *Metropolis* and for white community leaders, the Hall also represented the social order and cohesiveness that Miami's biracial society had attained in the roughly two decades since its incorporation. Odd Fellows Hall was a cultural center in Colored Town that served as the meeting room for lodge groups. The Hall also served as a place for entertainment. As local historian Dorothy Jenkins Fields has noted, “[O]n Saturday nights the piano players at Odd Fellows Hall filled the air with music” and Blacks engaged in the latest dances. Hence, the intentions of the bombers were clear: by hitting Colored Town's largest building and damaging a concrete symbol of the community's independence, they attempted to hurt the black community's sense of accomplishment in a violent demonstration of white might.²⁸

²⁷ *MM*, Jan. 14, 1917: 2.

²⁸ *MM*, July 16, 1917: 1; P. George, “Policing Miami's Black Community”: 441; Dorothy J. Fields, “Black Entertainment, 1908-1919,” *Update* 2, no. 1 (Dec. 1974): 11. See also Walter B.

Editors at the *Metropolis* tried to ease fears of an impending race riot by reporting that conditions were under control. They blamed a few, “white rowdies” for the bombing and noted that 10 police officers had been sent to Colored Town to “prevent further disorder.” “[T]he fear of negro reprisals and of race riot, which had been generally entertained by leaders of both the whites and negroes” had been “fairly well dissipated,” writers for the *Metropolis* claimed. The writers also urged the Miami community to take action for peace, underscoring that the racial tension present in Miami was the result of criminal activity, not a larger dilemma between the city's black and white communities.²⁹

Statements made at town meetings held at the Central School and, later in the same day, at a church in Colored Town, were also published. The first meeting included white authorities and black leaders: including a local judge, the chief of police, acting mayor, and members of the Color Board of Trade. The second meeting included the same actors and a packed house of Blacks that overflowed to the streets. The paper reported that the black community did not “want any trouble” and assured readers that there would be “no trouble if the authorities will control the lawless element among the white population.” Black leaders continued to appeal to Miami's “best white citizens,” calling for community peace and asking for Whites to control those who would perpetuate this kind of violence and harassment. One black pastor went to far as to appeal to white authorities to “exercise the same control over your lawless element that

Weare's *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1973) for a similar celebration of black uplift in a southern city.

²⁹ *MM*, July 16, 1917: 1; *MM*, July 17, 1917: 2.

we do over ours.” He added, “[W]e have been segregated and do not object, but we want the line guarded and we want to be protected in our rights in our own section.”³⁰

Miami's black community also tapped into Whites' anxiety about maintaining social order by alluding to their willingness to protect themselves if continually threatened. Comparisons between Miami and East St. Louis, where a race riot had broken out just one week before, were also made. There, it was black competition for jobs that sparked the riot just two weeks earlier in which nine Whites and about 39 Blacks died. Building on the fear that tensions were such that much the same could happen in Miami, some black residents went so far as to note that they had explosives at their disposal and were ready to use them if necessary. But these comments were also tempered by uplift and patriotic discourse.

A deferential tone generally marked communication between Blacks and Whites at the town meetings, representing a clear understanding by black leaders of how to balance a level of implied threat with a persistent commitment to nationalism and civic duty. When black community leaders met in a church in Colored Town to discuss the bombing with white leaders present, they opened the meeting with black singers singing “America.” Given the context, the song was an apt choice. “America’s” poetic vision of liberty (“from every mountainside let freedom ring,” for example) evoked a moral call for justice that fit well with Woodrow Wilson’s call to make the world safe for democracy. Blacks had struggled decades to gain the freedom promised by Reconstruction, if not by

³⁰ Ibid. See also *MM*, July 16, 1917: 12.

the Declaration of Independence. While Wilson's policy of segregation in the federal government made the daily indignities of Jim Crow that much more offensive, a glimmer of hope existed in the patriotic rhetoric of democracy and liberty. Several Black leaders, including W.E.B. Dubois, would call for patriotic support for the war through service. Miami's Black community embraced the war effort, as highlighted by the Reverend Jarrel Drake in the meeting. Not only would over three-thousand men register with the local draft board to fight by the war's end, the community also did its part to volunteer in the Red Cross and push for Liberty Bonds in the spring and summer of 1917. At some level these Black leaders understood the value of performing the song "America." They never challenged a separate world but they wanted more equality in the division. The context of WWI, meeting in a church, and the threat of violent race riot sent a powerful message that Blacks had a right to drive and that Jim Crow needed to accommodate.³¹

Black leaders also understood the importance of black labor to the city's economy. They used the threat of emigration to leverage further protection from Miami's white, business elite, prompting the city's business leaders to take action to protect Miami's economic prosperity. Local newspapers had been reporting labor agents from other parts of Florida had begun infiltrating the city, seeking black workers for their own

³¹ *MM*, July 16, 1917: 12; Elliot Rudwick, *Race Relations at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1964); George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1967): 150. On racial uplift as strategy, see Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); L. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*. On WWI and African Americans, see Mark Ellis *Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).

communities. Florida historian Jerrell Shofner has observed that “between 1916 and 1920 about 40,000 blacks left the northern Florida counties,” making Miami a prime target for labor agents because of its population growth. On June 9, the *Miami Herald* reported the arrest of C.H. Bryant, a labor agent from Taylor County in northwest Florida. The *Herald* commented that the shortage of unskilled labor in Miami was the result of this recruitment, which was causing black out-migration. Two weeks later, the paper followed up this story, remarked that “the negroes of the south are migrating to the north in large numbers, leaving the fields uncultivated and the crops unharvested, and the future an unsolved problem.” Dana A. Dorsey, one of Miami's most successful black businessmen, threatened, “[I]f negroes could not be given rights and protection in Miami they have elsewhere, they would leave Miami.” Charles Thompson, a black real estate broker, observed that “many of the better class of negroes...had already left because of conditions here.” This exodus should matter to everyone in the city, they argued: If the better class of blacks left, who would maintain order in Colored Town?³²

Editors at the *Miami Metropolis* also played up this idea of “respectability.” Noting that it was the city's most industrious black residents who opposed the monopoly white chauffeurs claimed in the city, they again appealed to values of hard work and free market exchange while underscoring the threat of lost business to white prosperity. They also cased aspersions on the city's progressivism, noting, “Miami is probably the only

³² Jerrell Shofner, “Florida and the Black Migration,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Jan. 1979): 267. On growing anxiety of black migration see” *MH*, June 9, 1917: 3; *MH*, June 10, 1917: 7; *MH*, June 14, 1917: 8; *MH*, June 15, 1917: 5. Comments by black leaders from: *MM*, July 16, 1917: 12.

city of any size or importance in the United States where negroes have not been allowed to drive automobiles under any circumstances.” Noting that “there was no restriction on the age, condition or qualifications of white chauffeurs” whatsoever, and that “until recently, the police court has generally found a reason for fining the negro and discharging the white men when infrequent arrests have been made” writers for the *Metropolis* painted a sharp contrast between black residents' lawfulness and industriousness and white men's unregulated monopoly on driving.³³

Ultimately, though, it was the argument that granting black men the right to drive in Miami was central to maintaining segregation that held the most sway with many white city leaders. In an editorial published on July 16, 1917, entitled “Wise Heads and Sober Judgment Needed,” editors at the *Metropolis* declared that the people of Miami had finally “awakened to a realization of the trouble that they have permitted a bunch of irresponsible white men to stir up for their peaceful city.” Reminding readers that the editors had “warned Miami of the probability of trouble” over a year ago, they compared white chauffeurs to hounds and their victims to rabbits and foxes. What were “white rowdies doing in Colored Town at two o'clock in the morning!” they wrote. “Why are white men at any hour of the day or night permitted in Colored Town unless they can show legitimate reasons of being there!” Blacks visiting “White Town” at night would be quickly “locked up as suspicious characters,” they wrote. So why were not “the white scum that visit Colored Town all hours of the night put in jail?” “The city, county, and

³³ *MM*, July 16, 1917: 1.

state officials are white men. The courts are presided by white men,” writers for the *Metropolis* continued. “The 'justice' that is meted out is all for the White Man, and it is only wonder that negroes of Miami have kept patient as long as they have.” The burden of maintaining peace and harmony, then, rested on white community leaders. Only by “securing a common justice for the negro” within the bounds of a racially separate society, could there be “progress” in Miami.³⁴

These sentiments were taken up by a group of white and black business leaders at a community conference held the following day.³⁵ The white committee emphasized that by “unwritten law,” only white men were allowed to drive automobiles in Miami. “Miami had been built as a white man's town,” they noted. As such, the prohibition against black driving was simply “in accord with the prevailing sentiment of the white voters of the city.” Nonetheless, they consented that it was “only fair” to Blacks to set a more reasonable policy of segregation in driving. The white committee proposed three conditions: 1) Blacks would be protected when driving their own cars; 2) they would be allowed to drive buses and cars for hire, but only for transporting of other Blacks; 3) “the solicitation of negro patronage by white car and bus drivers” would be discouraged as much as possible. City officials at the conference, including the sheriff, chief of police, the acting mayor, and two councilmen, supported the resolution. Black leaders

³⁴ *MM*, July 16, 1917: 6.

³⁵ Members of the white committee included F. M. Hudson, Dr. James M. Jackson, Frank B Love, J. M. Berecegeay, A. H. Adams, J. I. Conklin, and Frank S. White; black members at the conference included Reverend S. H. Travis, Allan Stokes, R. A. Powers, H.S. Braggs, K. L. Pharr, Reverend J. W. Drake, and Dr. W. B. Sawyer.

reluctantly agreed. A week later, a curfew restricting both black and white drivers from working in any city neighborhood after 6:00 p.m. was instituted.³⁶ It was the first official statement to openly acknowledge the right of both black and white men to earn a living by driving or to place equal restrictions on what could be done in black and white neighborhoods.

With an agreement reached, members of the North Miami Improvement Association increased their calls for the police department to apprehend the bombers of Odd Fellow's Hall. Editors at the *Metropolis* seconded this call noting that they could produce a "long list" of other unsolved crimes. The Chief of Police eventually resigned, although he denied being pressured by the community's criticism. Still the bombing of Odd Fellow's Hall went unsolved. The individuals who caused this destruction and terrorized the community were never found.³⁷

In the fall of 1917, the white chauffeurs' union finally agreed not to interfere with tourists who came to Miami accompanied by their black chauffeurs. But the peace was relatively short-lived. Two years later, in November 1919, another round of violence and harassment occurred. Again, tourists who came to Miami with their own black drivers were the targets. This time, however, the city took swift action. Miami's Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution condemning the white chauffeurs' actions and called for city authorities to "prosecute anyone intimidating a chauffeur, negro or white, or else, who comes to this city." Tourists needed protection, they argued, for the sake of

³⁶ *MM*, July 17, 1917: 1-2; *MM*, July 23, 1917: 17.

³⁷ *MM*, July 18, 1917: 1; *MM*, July 21, 1917: 6.

“upholding law existing in our country.” One member compared chauffeurs' actions to closed union shops, claiming that “80 percent of the chauffeurs are under age, boys who have undertaken to run the automobile situation in the City.” Another member thought it irrational to drive tourists away from Miami. The mayor supported the Chamber of Commerce's resolution. He asserted a few days later “that if a man comes to Miami... he is going to be treated fairly.” “I am no 'nigger lover,' was born in Georgia, have no chauffeur myself,” he continued. “[B]ut if a man comes down here I am going to see that he gets square treatment.”³⁸

Coming at the same time that a series of bombings shook cities from Washington, D.C. to Chicago, including one that partially destroyed the home of U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, protests against the social status quo in any form became suspect, and labor unions proved special targets. Although no such actions occurred in Miami, the increasing hostility toward organized labor was clear in the Chamber of Commerce's statements. The chauffeur's union countered that depictions of November confrontation were “a cowardly thrust, clothed in the most cunning and deceptive language...meant to deceive the public into the belief that the union men are a lot of unprincipled, coldblooded, heartless rogues [willing] to resort to any mean and ruthless tactic in order to gain a point.” Attempting to salvage their image, the union stated that its members were “peaceful, respectable citizens in times of peace and also in times of commercial war.” But their pleas fell upon deaf ears. The tide of public opinion had

³⁸ Miami Chamber of Commerce, *Minutes of the Board of Directors Meetings*, Nov. 3, 1919: 12-13; *MM*, Nov. 6, 1919: 1; *MM*, Nov. 7, 1919: 1.

turned squarely against the union members and they were unable to garner much sympathy.³⁹

Fear of labor strikes by Miami's Central Labor Union also loomed large that fall. Still, with peace at a premium, organized labor proved far less willing to force change in the city as elsewhere in the nation. Despite the mass hiring of non-union men in construction jobs, the Central Labor Union called off a general strike in Miami because they believed it would "be for the best interests of the city of Miami." Only then did they win the support of *Metropolis* editors, who commented that these "fair-dealing Miamians" were "thinking union men [who] are the efficient, dependable workmen that Miami wants to rely upon."⁴⁰

Conclusion

The *Metropolis*'s support of the black community and the white community's concession to them in the 1917 segregation policy is indicative of what was perceived as progress in race relations at the time. The color line had been redrawn to meet the needs of both the black community and the white business leadership. In the process, community leaders, both black and white, pointed to the resolution of the chauffeur conflict as evidence that Miami's drive for economic prosperity and growth was secured in the spirit of compromise. Miami's white leaders, ever cognizant of the prevailing sentiments of their racial and economic class, were acutely aware of the benefits of

³⁹ *MM*, Nov. 5, 1919: 3.

⁴⁰ *MM*, Nov. 8, 1919: 1; *MM*, Nov. 10, 1919: 6.

making the city's black community content -- namely insuring peace and harmony and maintaining the racial status quo. This concern outweighed demands by white, working-class chauffeurs to grant them a monopoly over driving in the city. By conceding to black demands and protecting black men's right to drive, for either personal use or economic gain, they ensured that the lines of segregation in Miami would remain sharp, if somewhat redrawn. Editors at the *Metropolis* played an important role in redrawing that line.

The socially condescending and racist view that Blacks belonged in service occupations thus enabled Blacks to enter chauffeuring despite continuous violent threats from white drivers.⁴¹ Black worker insistence, as evidenced in their actions, combined with the real economic threat that if black chauffeurs were not allowed to drive, white tourists would stop coming to Miami. However, the debate was not one-sided. Black leaders, including businessmen, professionals, and Protestant pastors, took advantage of the opportunity to insist on racial uplift and the unreasonableness of the Jim Crow rule that some were advocating. Likewise, building craft workers' reluctance to support lesser skilled workers weakened the white drivers' attempts to keep blacks out of driving as a profession, even when it entailed chauffeuring tourists. This in no way should devalue black agency. Indeed, it is in the opportunities offered within this oppressive social

⁴¹ For a discussion of Blacks as servile workers, see: Beth Thompson Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001): 17-39; Doug Bristol, "From Outposts to Enclaves: A Social History of Black Barbers, 1750-1915," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2002; G. Hale, *Making Whiteness*: 85-197; W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1921; Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus-Thomson, 1975): 109-121.

system for economic improvement that one may discover “hidden” transcripts of resistance as well as open attempts by black Miamians to fight for their dignity through economic self-improvement.⁴²

These battles were also far from over. As noted in the Chapter One, Blacks for short period took advantage of the new right to drive around town to go to beach but soon faced a concerted quasi-legal barrier to the sea. The short won victory on this front did not mean an end to the push to expand other basic rights especially those pertaining to economic survival. Thanks in no small part to continued efforts by Miami's black community, between 1917 and 1923, the city's curfew was slowly extended from six to nine in the evening. While the presence of any curfew at all in this thriving tourist metropolis still surprised some northern visitors, as in much of the South, Miami leaders continued to insist that having clear boundaries offered a better solution to racial conflict than the violence that defined mob rule.⁴³ Black residents also continued to mount

⁴² On hidden transcripts see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Working Class* (New York: Free, 1994); Robin D.G. Kelley, “We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 75-112; James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1990); Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, “Unhidden’ Transcripts: Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920,” *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (1995): 372-394. For an example of these ideas applied to Florida, see Robert Cassanello, “Violence, Racial Etiquette, and African American Working-Class *Infrapolitics* in Jacksonville during World War I,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 155-169.

⁴³ Clara G. Stillman, “Florida: The Desert and the Rose,” *The Nation* (October 1923) in *These United States: Portraits of America from the 1920s*, edited by Daniel H. Borus (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1992): 87-93. On segregation culture, see G. Hale, *Making Whiteness. The Afro-American*, Baltimore, Maryland's African American newspaper, noted in passing in 1926 that “white elements” were against black chauffeurs operating in Miami. See *The Afro-American*, July 3, 1926: 14.

challenges to attempts to control their economic and physical mobility in other ways. By the early 1930s, African Americans controlled 14 bus, transfer, express, and cab companies in Miami. By 1936, the number of black jitneys had jumped to 25. The number of black owned and operated taxicabs grew apace. And while Whites continued to periodically challenge the right of black men to be able to drive, Miami's black community continued to fight to preserve this basic economic and social right.⁴⁴ For all of these reasons, the chauffeur debates proved a pivotal chapter in Miami's civil rights and labor history, foreshadowing continued controversy about taxicabs and buses, and ultimately the attempts to desegregate public transportation itself.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *15th Census of the United States* 4: 359; *Miami News*, June 18, 1936: 6; Miami Census Manuscript: 1930, reel 309; *Miami Times*, Jan. 12, 1957: 3; Polly Redford *Billion-Dollar Sandbar: A Biography of Miami Beach* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970): 211, 223-224; G. McDonough, *The Florida Negro*: 40; *MH*, June 4, 1936: 1.

⁴⁵ See Richard Wright's essay "The Ethics of Jim Crow" in *Uncle Tom's Children* (1936, reprint; New York: Harper Perennial, 1993) for a discussion on how Black movement in White neighborhoods were limited to service employs in designated times.

CHAPTER 4

Winter Playground Blues: Unemployment, Home Labor, And The Hobo Express, 1926-1937

Perusing through Miami newspapers from the late 1920s and early 1930s is a curious undertaking. Local stories celebrate economic growth and wealthy visitors comment on the leisure they were enjoying in their visits to south Florida and the sunny outlook this southern abode offered. Tobacconist Charles D. Larus, Jr., noted in his March 1933 visit that Greater Miami was heaven and the rest of America like hell. In his view, unlike the rest of the nation, Miami had plenty of work, maybe too much for its residents: “The hotels . . . are crowded; taxis are running day and night. I talked to drivers who complained they were being worked to death. The stores are crowded and the beaches crammed with people . . . People there have money and they are spending it.” Humorist George Ade agreed with Larus’s general outlook stating one would not believe a depression was underway “if you visited the beach just now. Every hotel in the wide area known as Greater Miami is packed and jammed; huge crowds in line at the betting booths, at the horse races, people waiting in line at every good picture theater; motor cars from every state of the union parked solidly, block after block, and the open lanes a never-ending parade of cars and still more cars.” One can easily be induced to rub one’s eyes and ask: did the Great Depression not hit Greater Miami? This historical exploration of the local newspapers such as the *Miami Daily News* or the *Miami Herald* would lead to hundreds and hundreds of lines of print and plenty of pictures of bathers or

people just having fun, stories of gambling raids, weddings, and testaments to the steady march of growth and development. The answer could very well be that things were not so bad and Miami escaped the worst of the depression blues.¹

In between and nearly invisible wove stories of quiet desperation and exclusion. Hidden in the back pages on March 1, 1933, the *Miami Daily News* printed a story of a jobless worker committing suicide. Entitled, “Despairing Man Takes His Life,” it told its readers how August Albreicht, a 38-year-old stationary engineer from Ocean City, New Jersey, visiting Miami with his wife “trying to obtain work here ever since his arrival ... had grown despondent because of diminishing funds.” Albreicht was lucky enough to visit with a reserve of money and thus was able to search for work in south Florida; the transient poor were often disallowed from doing so. We do not know how long he had been searching for work or the deeper psychological reasons that led August to kill himself. Awkwardly juxtaposed next to this story was a photograph of another visitor to south Florida, fishing bait manufacturer Bob Weisenfeld, posing with a large sailfish shown as “evidence” of his skill and the effectiveness of his “Calamity” baiting product. Just two pages over the article “Catholic Agency Aids Needy” told of the charitable work done by the Associated Catholic charities helping “the underprivileged and giving assistance to those who are destitute.” As a member of the network of Community Chest

¹ “Beach Booster Gets Dutch,” *MDN*, 3 March 1933, p. 8, 2nd sec.; “Ade Composes Puff for Miami,” 27 Feb 1933, p. 14. This booster practice of publishing visitors’ testimonials witnessing the good times in Miami was a steadfast tradition. During the Depression, this advertising scheme sought to illustrate how the economic downturn escaped south Florida. See the 1931-1932 winter *MDN*’s ad series, “Miami Prosperity As Others See It,” for an example of the genre (e.g., 9 Nov 1931, p. 1).

welfare agencies (in an aggressive drive soliciting donations), its primary aim was “to keep the family together whenever possible” by providing food, clothing, and shelter, never turning away “an applicant of any other religion.” Both George Ade and Charles Larus failed to comment on the numerous charitable events marking the landscape at the dog and horse racetracks and Miami’s Bayfront Park, occurring simultaneously during the tourist extravaganza they witnessed and that challenged the accuracy of their impressions.² Nor did they write about the harsh system of exclusion that kept the transient poor away from their view—evidently heaven was not for everyone. This system contributed to the possibility of a guilt-free vacation.

Amid this cacophony of joy and progress and the background of destitution and economic struggle existed a complex social and cultural history narrative. Namely, the politics of growth and the challenges of work and survival in a political economy rooted in cheap labor and the performance of servility, hospitality, and business boosterism, placed a premium on the idea of harmonious class relations. This busy business of appearances can play tricks on the historian’s eye since the demands of tourist pleasure and city growth often hid the struggles in the shadows and those beyond the stage. Miami’s tourist industry and the city’s booster interests constructed a narrative of perpetual city growth, but one framed in contradiction between the forces of modernity and the promised pleasures of a subtropical resort town. The two parallel realities of

² “Despairing Man Takes His Life,” *MDN*, 1 March 1933, p. 16; “The Evidence” and “Veteran Angler Lands Sailfish,” 1 March 1933, p. 16; “Catholic Agency Aids Needy,” *MDN*, 1 March 1933, p. 18; “Large Crowd Sees Park Performance,” *MDN*, 2 March 1933, p. 9.

pleasure and suffering, of the rich and down and out, created the potential for class tension. This strain did not lead to a break, in part, because a class perspective that emphasized harmony among the classes dominated Miami's class relations. Workers as much as business interests (and tourists) embraced growth and development and this put a high demand on compromise and quick resolution of labor conflict. This class harmony framework endured real world challenges over wages, job conditions, and labor market dynamics.

The dynamic of unemployment, underemployment, and labor competition provided an important space for the class harmony ideology to percolate and take shape. This chapter explores that space through an analysis of how three key interrelated issues shaped the politics and economics of unemployment through the 1930s in south Florida: regular seasonal unemployment, home labor protectionism, and a set of deficient private and public welfare and work programs reliant on state exclusionary practices. These three issues defined the contours of unemployment as a problem and the limitations faced by the unemployment movement in fighting the plight of poverty and joblessness. This chapter will focus on how the political economic context of scarcity reinforced localism and indirectly bolstered the sensitive tourist economy despite the social disruption that unemployment seemed to threaten to the social order. The next three chapters will trace the unemployment movement and how civic activist Perrine Palmer and others struggled to bring stability to the local economy during the 1930s: Chapter Five explores the radical potential of class harmony as an ideal; Chapter Six outlines how the unemployed

confronted their circumstances politically within this framework; and Chapter Seven examines the links between this movement and organized labor's resurgence. The limitation imposed by scarcity and how that translated to a lack of power stunted the progressive prospects of class harmony.

Tracing Unemployment

Miami's workers faced regular seasonal unemployment because of the city's reliance on the construction trades, retail and restaurant businesses, and the tourist industry. The *Miami News*, the city's labor union newspaper, commented on the seasonal work phenomenon in an April 1937 editorial celebrating the Works Progress Administration's decision to restore and expand job opportunities in the district: "In no other place in America, save perhaps California, are there such enormous variations in seasonal unemployment as are to be found in Southern Florida."³ Reliant on a primarily local economy with a small manufacturing sector, workers did not have many job options. The ebbs and flows in construction work led to inconsistent employment and so increased the pool of the unemployed and underemployed. Yet unemployed construction workers, while experiencing economic distress, had more alternatives given the continuous building projects that marked Miami's landscape and the relatively powerful position that the building trades held in the local economy. While adding to the numbers

³ "An Able Bodied and Understanding WPA Director," *Miami News*, 15 April 1937. The paper would change its name later in the year to the *Miami Citizen*. It started in April 1919 and would continue to the mid-1960s, changing its name a few more times.

of unemployed workers at any given moment during the year, construction workers were sure to find work throughout the year as long as building continued in the city.

The service jobs that defined the local economy and the tourist industry were much more problematic. In addition to being low paid, workers in these occupations faced constant fluctuations in joblessness. The short tourist season from December through March, in particular, caused a consistent pattern of unemployment from the late spring through early fall, often with the highest rates of joblessness during the hot summer months. In general, the duration and frequency of unemployment and the number of unemployed during the course of the year, even in the summer months, remains unclear as a result of an incomplete historical record.

Table 4. Unemployment for major FLA cities, 1930 census⁴

Cities	Male	Female
Miami	12.9% (4,692)	10.93% (1,702)
Jacksonville	7.6% (3,058)	6.47% (1,235)
Tampa	9.48% (3,341)	9.65% (1,490)

Few statistics chronicle these fluctuations; the most concrete and definitive numbers offered at best a static picture of unemployment. According to the 1930 U.S. Census, Miami had more unemployed than the other major cities of Florida, Jacksonville and Tampa. Miami had 5.3% and 3.42% more unemployed men than Jacksonville or

⁴ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Unemployment, Volume II, General Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 154-155, 166-167, & 223-224.

Tampa, respectively; the differences among women were slightly lower than men: more than 4.5% and 1.3% for the same cities (see Table 4 above). So in that one moment in April 1930 when the census data was gathered, Miami had the highest unemployment rate among the major cities in the state, even though it was at the tail end of the tourist season and not in the doldrums of the summer months. A downturn in tourist visitations and fewer construction projects likely contributed to this lull.

These numbers, in any case, reflected conservative estimates. The statistics in Table 4 pertain only to workers reporting that they were unemployed and searching for work or who had been laid off and were waiting to be rehired. The Census indicated how unemployed workers may have misunderstood census enumerator questions and then proceeded to be counted in other unemployment categories that excluded them from the general calculations. These statistics constituted approximately 10,000 unemployed for the entire state though breakdown by city were not calculated, so the distribution by city of these unemployed is unclear. Also unavailable was the number of individuals excluded by reason of choice or error of just being missed by enumerators, and this may have very well included the burgeoning number of transient unemployed. Excluded, as well, were all individuals not counted as gainful workers outside of children under the age of fourteen. This population constituted over 30,000 and included women deterred from looking for work for various reasons (culture and few job opportunities likely leading the list), youth attending school, and others for an array of reasons. Unfortunately, the Bureau of the U.S. Census did not select Miami as an area to

investigate in its special census of unemployment conducted in January 1931; this information would have offered a more complete picture and update to existing data.⁵

As with the rest of the country, African-Americans suffered greater official rates of unemployment, both men and women, than did whites. The same caveats about census methodology apply. This suggests that the rates may have been even higher. Nearly 17 percent of all African-American Miamians in 1930 were unemployed while whites endured just over 11 percent. African-American men and women experienced similar rates (17.1% and 16.5%, respectively), while whites experienced a larger statistical difference (12.25% and 7.1%, respectively). This reflected the reality that, as a percentage of all women, a larger number worked among black than white. Over 56 percent of African-American women were in the workforce as opposed to only about 19 percent for white women. Hence, the larger number of African-American women in the workforce meant that they risked experiencing greater rates of unemployment during economic downturns because they worked “unskilled” trades (working primarily as laundresses, maids, and other service work). In addition, the general low pay and inconsistent work endured by African Americans, among other social dynamics, often required more sources of income.⁶

⁵ *Ibid*; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Unemployment, Volume I, General Report* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 5-7, 236, & 252 & 253. Alexander Keyssar, *Out to Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) for unemployment before the 1920s; see chapter 3 and especially appendix B (342-358) about the problems researchers face with unemployment statistics pre-1940, such as the “gainful worker” concept.

⁶ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Unemployment, Volume I*, p. 236.

The next authoritative statistics appeared in the November 1937 when the U.S. government conducted an unemployment census. Continuing to use 1930 as a base year, Miami's unemployment increased for men to 14 percent (5,365) and for women to 24 percent (3,820). This change was better than the declining conditions in Jacksonville (men, 8,486 = 21% & women, 6,198 = 32.5%) and Tampa (men, 6,892 = 22.48% & women, 4,117 = 27%). The static state of Tampa's population between 1930 and 1935 (only a 1% growth rate) suggests that this city endured the most consistent rate of high unemployment. In these same years, Miami's population growth of 15 percent and Jacksonville's nearly 10 percent suggests the unemployment rates based on 1930 statistics may be off, but it is unclear how much if one were to adjust for individuals not seeking work and for continued population growth. Nonetheless, if one were to combine the number of unemployed with partly unemployed—that is, those who recorded some hours worked recently but were looking for more work—Miami's rates of underemployment shot up to 33 percent for both men and women, Jacksonville's would rise to 29 percent for men and 40 percent for women, and Tampa's would increase to nearly 29 percent for men and 32 percent for women.⁷

The category of partly unemployed represented an example of how confusing the statistical categories could be and how fluid and incomplete the actual numbers were.

The awkward and imprecise phrase “partly unemployed” used by census takers misstated

⁷ *Census of Partial Employment, Unemployment, and Occupations: 1937: Volume I* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), IX-XI, 463 & 477; Nathan Mayo, *Sixth Census of the State of Florida: 1935* (Winter Park, FL: Orange Press, 1936), 91.

the problem by not reframing the issue as underemployment or inconsistent employment. “Partly” suggested some work as opposed to not enough employment for survival—a slight semantic difference that suggests a tendency to avoid more negative assessments. The census survey evaluating hours worked by the partly unemployed during November 7-13 confirms this interpretation. More than half reported working fewer than 16 hours (almost half, 1,392 of 2,871 = 0 hours) and over two-thirds worked fewer than 24 hours. Given that no population statistics of the gainfully employed exist for 1937 and that Florida and its major cities experienced continued population growth between 1930 and 1940 (with a greater increase in the second half of the decade), it is unclear how the unemployment rate changed: though Miami, Jacksonville, and Tampa continued to hover around 10% unemployment in 1940.⁸ One must also assume that similar omissions existed in these census numbers as occurred in the 1930 census, especially with regard to the transient unemployed. It is likely that employment conditions at best remained the same or at worst declined. Again, the question of seasonal employment suggests ups and downs for a significant proportion of the population.

⁸ *Census of Partial Employment, Unemployment, and Occupations: 1937: Volume I* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), IX-XI, 463 & 477; *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population, Volume III, The Labor Force: Occupation, Industry, Employment, and Income, Part 2: Alabama-Indiana* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943), 629; Eric Beecroft and Seymour Janow, “Toward a National Policy for Migration,” *Social Forces* 16, no. 4 (May 1938): 476 (note 6). The total number in 1937 increased for both blacks (2,557 to 3,241) and whites (3,935 to 5,939). White women, though, experienced the greatest increase, 574 to 2,095 (2,465 if one adds partly unemployed). In 1940, 8.5% of whites were unemployed (men = 9% and women = 7.3%) and 11.2% of blacks (men = 11% and women = 11.4%) were jobless according to census takers.

Anecdotal observations made during and after the 1930s confirm the slipperiness of the unemployment statistics and the persistence of seasonal unemployment as suggested by the Census data. Perrine Palmer, a civic activist and social gadfly, had noted in February 1931 that over 10,000 unemployed walked the streets, a number that indicated a significant increase (about 3,000) from the previous year. Notably, this evaluation occurred during the height of the tourist season.⁹ In December 1931, W. H. Green, Chairman of Miami's Unemployment Fund Committee and later head of the New Deal local Civilian Works Administration, responded to Senator Robert La Follette Jr.'s inquiries to local relief needs by stating that "approximately 5,000 heads of families" were out of work (clearly excluding non-heads of households) but these numbers had been materially reduced because "our winter season has begun, vegetable canning factories operating, and the farming industry has picked up." He indicated an upward trend in unemployment rates noting, an increase of 40 percent since 1929 and 30 percent since 1930. Finally, Green insisted that if federal aid were extended to Miami, it would be most useful during March 1st and December 1st. This represented a ridiculous framework since his request for aid only excluded three months of the year.¹⁰

Perrine Palmer revealed a continuation of this upsurge when he reported in September and October 1933 between 25,000 to 40,000 unemployed in Miami and Dade County, which then had a population of 140,000, with many more dependents enduring difficult economic hardship. These numbers remained similar in July 1934 but slightly

⁹ Perrine Palmer, "Spreading Employment," *MDN*, 9 Feb 1931, p., 4.

¹⁰ *The Congressional Record*, 72 Cong., 1 sess., 2 Feb 1932, p. 3118.

improved by August 1935 to include about 14,000—though the number of underpaid and under worked remained high.¹¹ For many workers, ebbs and flows in unemployment forced survival strategies such as overworking during times when jobs were available. Bernice Sawyer, daughter of prominent African American resident William B. Sawyer, would recall years later that people had to work two jobs during the tourist season. “You had to make that ‘season’ because in the summer there wasn’t very much work in Miami. So usually during the winter months you worked two jobs and then in the summer you would be able to live.”¹² One suspects that only the lucky were able to hold two jobs in such a competitive environment.

These cycles of unemployment were undoubtedly exasperated by the constant influx of migrants arriving in Miami. What drew workers to the city? As discussed in earlier chapters, Miami’s big land boom and organizing city boosterism helped put south Florida into the national imagination. Beginning at the end of World War I and increasing thereafter, the real estate boom and advertising promotion lured tourists and land speculators to Miami. Get-rich-quick dreams hid the underlying instability of an

¹¹ Perrine Palmer to Harold Ickes, “Consider the Unemployed,” letter published in the *Miami News*, 28 Sept 1933; Palmer and Dade County Unemployment Citizens’ League, Inc. to Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait,” letter published in the *Miami News*, 26 Oct 1933; Palmer, “The Emergency and the Emergency Council,” *Miami News* 26 July 1934; Labor Citizenship’s Committee’s Minutes as published by the *Miami News* 8 May 1935, 8 Aug 1935, 15 Aug 1935, & 22 Aug 1935. It is unclear where Palmer derived this information: his on the ground work with the DCUCL and later in 1934 and 1935 as an assistant to the local Federal Emergency Relief Administration most likely provided the data through mandated surveys.

¹² Bernice Sawyer, “Tell the Story,” interviewed by Stephanie Wanza, 25 Oct 1997, pp. 8-9, the Black Archives, History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc. (Hereafter BAHRF).

imbalanced economy. Workers seeking jobs in construction, hotels, restaurants and other work in the bustling city were lucky to find employment. Others were not so lucky. They encountered a different reality from that being sold by boosters. Hope and optimism shaped their motivation as much as desperation or impoverishment. The barrage of advertisement selling the climate and good life in Florida and Miami surely had its effect. At the very least, new migrants to the city, such as the down-and-out, speculators and tourists, wished to partake in the promised abundance that Florida seemed to offer. These visions of abundance, however, were sullied by the economic realities of decreased business investment and maldistribution of wealth. The collapse of the Florida real estate boom of the mid 1920s, followed by the economic downturn of the Great Depression, added to the economic difficulties faced by many in Miami's seasonal local economy.

Home Labor

Seasonal and irregular employment combined with continuous population flows into South Florida created potentially a divisive class context. The persistent boosterism to attract summer tourists as a way to promote year-round employment—evident throughout the first half of the twentieth century—demonstrated how local business leaders, labor leaders, and the general citizenry recognized the need for a more stable economy. Yet, a paradox existed among permanent residents regarding migration to the city. Their own recent arrival to the city and the economy's dependence on tourism to generate growth and development did not prevent an ambivalent feeling—often of deep

disgust—to emerge about migration to Miami. From labor competition, encounters with unorthodox travelers, to ostentatious displays of wealth, Miami's residents' expressed mixed feelings about who came to Miami.

Because permanent employment would remain a challenge for many year-round residents, and because the presence of the wealthy, free-spending tourist highlighted great disparities of wealth, and because workers pouring into the city flooded the labor market, local residents used various monikers, sometimes opprobrious in tone, to distinguish the various populations arriving to the city. The term *year-round resident*, individuals and families living in Miami throughout the year, highlighted this division between visitor and permanent resident. *Winter residents* constituted a wealthy class who owned homes or had other winter residence in Miami or Miami Beach. Since they did not represent competition to workers, local businesses could openly welcome them and other well-off tourists while others ogled at their accumulated wealth with a little less guilt. Their upper-class status and leisure seeking received rare open criticism, though their presence during the economic downturn may have grated the sensibilities of the down-and-out and others with visions of greater economic equality. The Committee of One-Hundred (1926), an exclusive rich men's social club made up of wealthy magnates from the Midwest, Northeast, and a few prominent Miamians, and the Cocolobo Cay club (1916), a fishing, boating, and party club on Adams Key including some of the wealthiest men in the country, were interlocking south Florida institutions that reminded Miamians of the

U.S. hierarchal class structure.¹³ Stories of their activities filled the newspaper pages during each winter season through the 1920s and 1930s. Of course, the arrival of other rich or famous people to south Florida made good boosting news as well.

Other less-desired visitors received open disapproval. Unlike mobsters like Al Capone, who faced a *Miami Daily News* anti-mob campaign and the passage of a strict vagrancy law targeting organized crime, historians have given less attention to *tin can tourists* (an early manifestation of trailer-camp tourists) and *snowbirds* or *out-of-state employees*. Tin can tourists were working and middle-class and often-older travelers interested in exploration, freedom of movement, and lower travel costs. Not having to pay hotels because of the convenience of traveling with camping and other living accommodations, these tourists acquired opprobrium especially when residing in “immoral” tourist camps. Their status remained ambiguous, however. Some viewed them as impermanent while others argued that they sought permanent residence. In either case, they became or represented potential competitors in the job market or eyesores to

¹³ The histories of both these institutions (and other exclusive clubs such as the Surf and Bath Clubs) have not been written and, for that matter, been remembered by historians. The Committee of 100 started after the hurricane of 1926 and the Cocolobo Cay Club started by Miami Beach builder Carl Fisher and two partners in 1916. Jennifer Browne Leynes and David Cullison, *Biscayne National Park: A Historical Resource Study* (Atlanta: National Park Service, 2008), 23-24 <http://www.nps.gov/bisc/historyculture/upload/bischistoricresourcestudy.pdf>) mention the Cocolobo Cay Club and I have not found a reference to the Committee of 100 outside contemporary accounts. “Cocolobo Cay Club to Stage Initial Event,” *MDN*, 14 Dec 1930, p. 11, which highlighted that, “The clubhouse is on a 60-acre island, facing Biscayne Bay to the west, Caesar’s Creek to the south, and the ocean to the east. The only means of access to the island is by boat or airplane . . . [and the average wealth of members is] \$15,000,000.” (This amount equates, in 2008 dollars to \$191,685,642.63.) For the Committee of 100 the articles are even more numerous, for example “100 Committee Planning Party,” *MDN*, 14 Jan 1934, p. 8 or “Boating King to Tell Club of Early Life: Gar Wood, Charles Hills Honor Guests of Committee of 100,” *MDN*, 26 Feb 1933, p. 8, sec. 2.

residential neighborhoods or real estate development where their camps emerged. The Lemon City Improvement Association argued in 1930 against the presence of a tourist camp in their area of the city (northern Miami), stating that tourist camp residents “work for such small wages that our own wage earners cannot compete.” While initially, in the early 1920s, tin can tourists sometimes evoked the image of the frontiersmen seeking adventure, they soon evolved to just another group of tourists but of a more middling sort.¹⁴

While technically anyone north of Florida who arrived to the state during the winter months could be called a snowbird, those transients who ended up working in the city (often in the construction trades and the retail, hotel, and restaurant sector) became particular objects for criticism. The term snowbird denoted a transitory and ephemeral relationship between migrant/tourist and south Florida that shifted to a negative connotation if the snowbird became an “out-of-state” employee. Employers who deliberately brought out-of-state employees to south Florida to staff their jobs earned equal criticism by local residents. Such conditions contributed to class divisions and class tensions among workers and between businesses and workers. The 1941 WPA

¹⁴ Helen Muir, *Miami, U.S.A.* (reprint, 1953; Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 163-168 (on Al Capone); “Tourist Camp Fight in Lemon City Tightens,” *MDN*, 8 March 1930, p. 16 (see also *CC Minutes*, Sept 16, 1929); John D. Finley, B.S., letter to the *MDN*, “Defends Tourist Camps,” 14 Nov 1930, p. 4; “Two Men Are Held,” *MDN*, 18 Jan 1931, p. 5; “Florida—Paradise of Bootleggers, Realty Agents and the Poor Man,” *New York Times*, 31 Dec 1922, p. 82; Harris G. Sims, “Florida Expects a Big Winter,” *New York Times*, 27 Oct 1935, p. 21; Sigel Roush to *MDN*, “The Tourist Camp Evolves,” 18 Oct 1937, p. 4; “22,000 Visitors in Trailers and Camps Here, Survey Says,” *MDN*, 10 Jan 1937, p. 1D; Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1979), 56, 111-122, & passim.

guide for Miami, researched in the late 1930s, indicated the regular seasonal influx of at least 1,000 black chauffeurs, domestic workers, and hotel employees during the winter season, but even larger numbers of whites arrived searching for work. Various city leaders, small business owners, union leaders, and Perrine Palmer and the unemployment movement, among others, pressed Miami's government to hire the city or state's home labor first and to encourage local employers to hire locally.¹⁵ Such calls during the depression demonstrated how various social classes attempted to protect local workers from starvation and unemployment, and thus contributed to an effort to create a strong sense of localism while also acting as a means to provide work and reduce demands on relief.

Home labor protectionism defined an essential component of Miami's localism and also reinforced the idea of class harmony. As highlighted in Chapter Two, labor unions had pioneered the effort to control the labor market by communicating with union locals across the country about economic conditions, warning fellow unionists to avoid coming to Miami. Employers never fully supported this kind of labor market control emanating from union workers because it undermined managerial prerogative. But context was everything. The Great Depression made such efforts an ethic to be

¹⁵ *Planning Your Vacation in Florida: Miami and Dade County, Including Miami Beach and Coral Gables* (Northport, NY: Bacon, Percy, & Daggett, 1941), 4 & 5; for estimates of greater influxes of African American workers, see Gary W. McDonough, *The Florida Negro: A Federal Writers' Legacy* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1993), 39-40; "'Snow Birds' Major Social Problem," *MDN*, 29 Nov 1939, p. 13A; Geraw Eltinge letter to the *MDN*, "The Visiting Job Hunter," 21 Oct 1931, p. 4; Frank G. Roche to *MDN*, "Aims of Floridians Inc.," 5 Dec 1932, p. 4.

celebrated, by workers and businesses, as a way to improve the local economy and maintain good relations among the classes. Perhaps because of the earlier labor union efforts, workers—union and nonunion—judged employers’ localism on whether or not they hired home labor first; employers, in keeping the appearance of harmonious class relations and the loyalty of consumers and workers, advertised how they hired Miami residents. While ostensibly creating a sense of community for locals, the home labor movement created tension between resident workers and newly arrived workers and between workers and businesses. So, in not only undermining greater chances for worker solidarity, the home labor movement also faced an uphill battle in an ever-growing city. This ethic would bubble to the surface and revealed a serious local concern of how scarcity threatened workers’ lives.

Job hunters coming down to Miami could face real difficulty in finding work but as the city’s population continued to grow (over 29,000 in 1920 to more than 110,000 in 1930) and thus creating a stable workforce, some local businesses were sure to embrace localism to foster local customer loyalty and demonstrate their concern for workers. One job hunter complained in 1931 about the “sectional propaganda” to hire “only Miami help” propagated by the local papers and speakers delivering the message at Bayfront Park. Local retail stores emphasized their efforts to hire locally first and thus announced their patriotic localism. The *Miami Daily News* reported in April 1931 that customers, taking advantage of Sears Roebuck’s Biscayne Boulevard store’s two-dollar sale days, were welcomed by “familiar faces, those of Miami people. Throughout the store, it was

apparent that local people were employed, according to the established Sears, Roebuck policy.” Mayor Cliff H. Reeder “and other prominent local men and officials” of the store attended a short ceremony before the days opening. W. H. Green’s campaign “Miamians for Miami jobs,” launched in the fall of 1931, gained avid support from Burdines department store, the largest retail store (and homegrown) in the city. Burdines reportedly had made “a real effort since 1926 to employ only Miamians.” In addition to operating a training school to prepare local workers to staff the store, Burdines made “every effort to discourage any one coming to Miami looking for a job and is plainly advising applicants [from out of town] that Miami people will be sufficient to fill their requirements for the coming season.”¹⁶

In efforts to tackle the problem of unemployment and maintain harmonious class relations, local government and businesses embraced home labor protectionism. The City Commission passed resolution 6359 in August 1930 urging the federal government to hire local labor in its erection of a new federal building in downtown Miami. Several more similar home labor resolutions, lobbied by city residents, were approved through the 1930s.¹⁷ Residents founded various organizations to urge local employers to hire home labor. None seemed long lasting but the torch of the home labor movement passed

¹⁶ Geraw Eltinge letter to the *MDN*, “The Visiting Job Hunter,” 21 Oct 1931, p. 4; “Store to Hold 2 Dollar Days,” *MDN*, 21 April 1931, p. 4; “Miamians to Get Miami Jobs,” *MDN*, 13 Sept, 1931, p. 8.

¹⁷ Miami Office of the City Clerk, Resolutions and Minutes of the City Commission, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter *City Commission Minutes*), 18 August 1930; *Ibid*, Resolution 8129, 28 June 1933; *Ibid*, Resolution 9347, 28 Sept 1934; “City Will Back Organized Labor,” *MDN*, 29 June 1933, p. 1; “Use of Miami Labor is Urged by Commission,” *MDN*, 28 Sept 1934, p. 1 & 11.

on from organization to organization. Frank G. Roche of the Central Labor Union and Rabbi Jacob Kaplan of the Temple Israel, among others, helped organize Floridians Inc. in October 1932 (evidently a state-wide movement) to encourage the employment of Floridians and the purchase of “Florida-grown and Florida-made products.” Two years later United Floridians formed and in 1935 the Home Improvement League organized with the same objectives. The latter used the union fair label tactic of rewarding local merchants by advertising their support for the movement, again revealing the influence of organized labor in shaping this grassroots effort.¹⁸

Workers, businesses, and government leaders came together in apparent harmony of interests. Namely, protecting the welfare of Miamians against the pain and suffering of unemployment by accepting the home labor initiative. Such public agreements, of course, indicated businesses continued to hire outsiders regardless of the pleas and best efforts of Miami residents. Despite this important division, workers and business could agree on the need to safeguard the local economy from the depression and to push for further economic growth of south Florida.

The Hobo Express

The pattern of tourist adventure and labor migration to Miami and to Florida that had developed over the first half of the century fostered home labor protectionism as a

¹⁸ “Rally to Promote Home Labor,” *MDN*, 22 Nov 1932, p. 14; “Speakers at Rally Urge Home Labor,” *MDN*, 23 Nov 1932, p. 5; Frank G. Roche to *MDN*, “Aims of Floridians, Inc.,” 5 Dec 1932; “Employing Home Folks,” *MDN*, 9 Dec 1932, p. 6; “Dr. Kaplan Praises St. Pete Relief Job,” *MDN*, 11 Dec 1932, p. 2; Perrine Palmer, “Communication,” *Miami [Labor] News*, 13 Dec 1934; “Home Employers List Shows Gains,” *MDN*, 8 Dec 1935, p. 8.

response to job scarcity amid a competitive labor market but with limited work opportunities. The dichotomy of rich visiting tourists or wealthy winter residents and the working poor helped set the stage for the local government's maltreatment of at least one group of migrants, the "hobo" jobless poor. The transitory unemployed as represented by the "hobo" jobless worker embodied a threat of scarcity that tapped into the social taboos against poverty. Their influx into the city endangered Miami's dreams of abundance because the transient hobos' presence symbolically reminded rich and poor about the shortcomings of capitalism even while their very existence may have reinforced the cultural importance of the work ethic and the dangers of moral laxity. The hobo jobless poor, who appeared to be predominately men, also pressed local resources to accommodate a casual workforce, many of who were homeless and jobless.¹⁹

The social tension surrounding hobos may be traced through the very idea in the word, which had its origins in the late nineteenth century. Hobo was widely used by experts as a term to designate homeless, migratory labor. Some hobos appropriated the term to denote their independence and resistance to mainstream culture and political economy, even though for others "hobo" still had the negative connotations of poverty, homelessness, and dispossession. The sociologist Nels Anderson, who had spent time tramping around in the early part of the twentieth century, revealed in his 1923 study, *The Hobo*, how hobos of the Midwest and West existed on the outskirts of capitalism providing casual, temporary labor and existing in perpetual poverty. With a degree of

¹⁹ John N. Webb, *The Transient Unemployed* (Washington: Works Progress Administration, 1935), 24-42.

freedom emanating from the liberty to move from place to place searching for work, a culture emerged that embraced this varied and unpredictable life on the margin.²⁰

By the early years of the Great Depression, when increasing numbers took to the road, the term hobo often was misused as shorthand to lump together migrants traveling with different intentions. Police authorities in south Florida and the East Coast paid little attention to the differences when arresting “vagrants.” Indeed, the term hobo was used interchangeably with the terms *undesirables*, *vagrants*, *floaters*, *panhandlers*, *idlers*, and *bums*. The reality of a transient unemployed, often in such a condition because of external reasons outside of their control, complicated the easy rubric of the degenerate or criminal vagrant as public nuisance. In any case, the term hobo served to sensationalize this population and thus helped further ridicule them and justify their harsh treatment and violations of their civil rights.²¹ To many upper-and middle-class citizens, hobos

²⁰ Nels Anderson, *On Hobos and Homelessness*, edited by Raffaele Rauty (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Recent studies have offered excellent histories of hobos, see especially: Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) and Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1830-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down & Out, on the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169-237. As suggested by these titles, a relative silence remains for the east coast phenomenon, though some scholars have written on migratory farm labor. Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1992). Only one study deals with the issue of transient workers in the South but sidesteps job competition and the hobo phenomenon: Jeffery S. Cole, “‘Hopeful People on the Move’: The Urban South and the Transient Problem during the Great Depression,” in *The New Deal and Beyond: Social Welfare in the South since 1930*, edited by Elna C. Green (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2003): 47-70.

²¹ I will use the term hobo interchangeably with transient unemployed to highlight the historical context and the condescension and marginalization faced by this diverse group of

represented a public nuisance and an “unworthy” unemployed population who siphoned off relief funds from the “worthy unemployed”; to the working class, they also represented competition for scarce jobs; for all classes, hobos challenged the idea of the importance of home, arguably the quintessential symbol of the benefits of abundance and the American Dream.

These migratory, jobless and homeless individuals arrived in Miami regularly by the mid-1920s, especially during the winter months, though it is very likely that East Coast hobos made the city a regular destination even earlier. Increased job opportunities during the winter tourist season and the comfortable weather probably drew these individuals to south Florida. Karst Hofman of the Young Men’s Christian Association noted in 1928 that many simply responded “to the alluring advertisements that picture Florida as the land of opportunity.” They arrived by rail, foot, and hitching rides with travelers heading south to Miami.²² No record exists to indicate what percentage were workers looking for regular jobs, how many were embracing an untethered life on the road and simply seeking warmer weather, or how many were homeless for other reasons. It is also unclear how many (if any) self-identified as the countercultural hobo socio-type.

migrants. Joan M. Crouse, *The Homeless Transient In the Great Depression: New York State, 1929-1941* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 94-123; Depastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 195-220; Beecroft and Janow, “Toward a National Policy for Migration,” 478 (note 15 for similar derogatory terms used by the Los Angeles police for the transient unemployed).

²² Karst Hoffman letter to *MDN*, “Miami’s Unemployment Problem,” *MDN*, 1 Dec 1928, p. 4; “Miami Jailed Vagrants Vex Police as Pressing Problem,” *MDN*, 8 Dec 1929, p. 8; Harold Hallman letter to *MDN*, “As a Hitch-Hiker Sees It,” *MDN*, 8 Dec 1931, p. 4; “‘Hobo Express’ Brings Bridge Blast Threat,” *MDN*, 27 Nov 1932, p. 2; “Police, Sheriff Greet Hoboes at Miami Gate,” *MDN*, 27 Sept 1934, p. 1.

What is clear is that government officials deemed them outcasts and viewed them as costly to the city and state, particularly if the transient unemployed did not find paid work. In addition, states, towns, and cities confronted a moral dilemma when facing the transient problem as it developed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Whereas unattached men could be treated roughly and contemptuously, the presence of women and children struck a chord of sympathy in the context of the depression that left local governments in the difficult situation of not being able to aid increases in the local indigent population.²³

Beginning in the winter season of 1928-1929 (December-March), Miami police began expelling these migrants from the county.²⁴ Three years later, in 1931, the express started by mid-September, when the police first spotted “hobos” arriving earlier than what had been the case. To what extent migrants were trying to circumvent Miami’s hobo express by coming earlier is unclear. The continued economic downturn certainly helped put more individuals on the road. L. O. Scarboro, chief Miami detective who

²³ The National Association of Travelers Aid Societies (researched by Miss Margaret Hatch of Dunedin, Fla), *A Brief Report on Transient Families in Florida* (Washington, D.C.: The President’s Organization on Unemployment Relief, 1931); this report published in November gained wider circulation when parts of its findings were published in the *Monthly Labor Review*: “Transient Families in Arizona and Florida,” 33, no. 6 (Dec 1931): 1363-1365; Helen C. Mawer, *Organization and Activities of the State Board of Public Welfare, January 1, 1931 to January 1, 1933* (Tallahassee: State Board, 1933), 47-48.

²⁴ L. O. Scarboro, chief city detective, claimed in 1958 that the Express had started in 1927, which is not unlikely. However, I found no newspaper evidence to indicate that was the case. The first citation I discovered of the Express was in the fall of 1928; the coverage and newspaper description suggests this was the Express’s inaugural run. Jane Wood, “In Days When Jobless Drifted South, Miami Ran a Unique ‘Hobo Express,’” *Miami News* (name had changed from the *MDN*), 23 Feb 1958, p. 5B; J.H. W. letter to the *MDN*, “Ridding Miami of Undesirables,” *MDN*, 30 Oct 1928, p. 4; “‘Hobo Special’ Rids Miamians of 22 Floaters,” *MDN*, 21 Dec 1928, p. 1.

initiated the program, recalled in 1958 how it started: “ I picked up 15 panhandlers on Flagler Street one Saturday night and that many more blew before we could catch them.” He gained the approval of Municipal Judge Frank Stoneman. Scarboro told him “our tourists and winter visitors don’t want to be bummed and panhandled on every block. They [hobos] come down the highway, and that highway runs both ways.” Dubbed first the “hobo special” and soon after the “hobo express,” this system of handling transitory migrants operated with national notoriety through the end of the 1930s.²⁵

This ad hoc, arbitrary and aggressive measure for controlling population flows into the city emanated from the national practice of settlement law restrictions and Miami’s police powers. As enunciated in the 1921 city charter, the local government had the power “to prevent persons with no visible means of support, paupers, and persons who may be dangerous to the peace or safety of the city from” entering the city or expelled from Miami if found (Section 3, part v). This language revealed a change from the 1913 charter (Section 27) that had empowered the city to arrest vagrants but did not mandate expulsion as a means of controlling the transitory unemployed.²⁶ The adjustment to the charter suggests that the city already had experienced the migration of transitory unemployed and thus sought a legal (though morally dubious) means to prevent

²⁵ *Planning Your Vacation in Florida*, 6; Wood, “In Days When Jobless Drifted South,” p. 5B; “Hobo Special,” *MDN*, 21 Dec 1928, p. 1; “17 Vagrants Here Get Jail Penalty,” *MDN*, 3 Dec 1929; “Hobo Express’ Off on Usual Schedule,” *MDN*, 1 Dec 1931, p. 15; “Express’ Halted by Vagrant Lack,” *MDN*, 2 Dec 1931, p. 7.

²⁶ See the following link for a copy of the 1921 City of Miami Charter, <http://fulltext10.fcla.edu/DLData/FI/FI00007784/file4.pdf> and for the 1913 City of Miami Charter, <http://fulltext10.fcla.edu/DLData/FI/fi00300419/file13.pdf>.

their presence. The police justified such action in the spirit of localism and the protection of the tourist economy. Reinforced by the scarcity of public and private welfare resources, the police sought to reduce crime and protect private property as mandated by the city charter. Their argument undoubtedly was also bolstered by the influx of actual men with criminal records or engaged in illegal behavior (alcohol consumption during prohibition, narcotics use, gambling, solicitation of prostitution, etc.) with little means of financial support. This proactive approach of controlling unwanted migrant inflows seems to have predated other states in depression-era United States including California, while also borrowing from long-standing traditions of strict vagrancy laws and migration restrictions throughout the country.²⁷

Accounts of how individuals who were captured and then processed and deemed hobos are rare. The *Miami Daily News* reported in 1939 that Scarboro took no more than a minute to evaluate whether an individual was a hobo. “One by one the ragged, broke and sometimes hungry men are herded from jail and taken before the detective,” who then proceeded to uncover their criminal past or pauper status through his keen, experienced eye. Not clear how it arrived at its statistics, and in no way critical of Scarboro’s peculiar and idiosyncratic methods, the article asserted “about 40 or 50 per cent” already have police records and thus were either “habitual criminals” or bound to “become criminals” because of their pauper status. Nine out of ten men Scarboro

²⁷ Sidney L. Haring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 201-223; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 154; Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 66-69.

checked out, according to the article, would fall victim to the express. One revealing 1931 letter written to the *Miami Daily News* related an actual arrest: “Standing on the street was a truck, on it in large letters was Police Patrol, and as the crowd gathered around to look it over, there came out the post-office a policeman, and by his side a young man, thinly clad, with a pale face and holding a letter . . . the officer opened the door and said: ‘Get in.’ And in he got, with about 20 or 30 others.”²⁸ While no official records reveal the daily operations of the hobo express, newspaper reports and other contemporary observations suggest the number of average hobos being arrested or delivered to the county line varied but could range from ten to twenty individuals a day—sometimes even as high as seventy-five, according to Scarboro. Depending on city resources and needs, the police reportedly gave hobos the choice of either expulsion from the county or imprisonment with hard labor.

Such harsh treatment may have deterred hobos via grapevine communication, at least police officials hoped it would, and it surely surprised many unsuspecting fellow travelers arriving to the city. Miami’s growth gave it a big city veneer but it continued to have a small town feel with the practice of such police work. Unless trained to live in the difficult Everglades environment, unemployed hobos were forced to roam the developed areas apparently simplifying police efforts and exposing the transient poor to intimidation, imprisonment, and/or expulsion from the county. According to one newspaper police report, some of the transient population engaged in “professional”

²⁸ “‘Miami Story’: ‘Snow Birds’ Major Social Problem,” *MDN*, 29 Nov 1939, p. 13A; R. F. Harris to *MDN*, “What Would Christ Do,” *MDN*, 12 Dec 1931, p. 4.

begging along Bayfront Park. Tapping into a popular long-standing narrative trope about the immoral entrepreneur beggar, the story related how one transient allegedly was earning \$30 dollars a day playing the violin while others were carrying “several hundred dollars in their pockets.” Such behavior would not be tolerated in Miami. The paper announced that “professional beggars will be given their choice of taking a train out of Miami or being sent north with the daily patrol wagon load of vagrants.”²⁹ Who paid for the train fare is unclear (or whether or not transients were given the choice); the cost of gas was all that was needed in transporting the transient unemployed to the county line.

It did not take long before the other counties in the Gold Coast—the southeast coast of Florida—followed suit and extended a fuller operating express. Indeed, the hobo express’s success depended on the cooperation of law enforcement officials along the east coast. Once these “undesirables” reached the next county, local law enforcement officers would gather them up and take them to the adjacent county to the north. This would continue up to at least Martin County (north of Palm Beach County) and at times even as far north as the Florida-Georgia border. While at times running into snags in its operation because of strains on local resources and disagreements between county police authorities, the hobo express served the needs of local businesses interested in keeping up appearances of abundance and gained indirect support from the general populace

²⁹ “Miami to Oust Beggars from the Streets,” *MDN*, 12 Feb 1931, p. 1; “Merchants Start Avenue Clean-Up,” *MDN*, 1 October 1931, p. 3

concerned with limited job opportunities, poor wages, and scarcity of relief.³⁰ Scarboro, for instance, asserted in 1939 and again in 1958 that “the floaters” would drive down the wages of common labor and thus rob “Miami residents of the much needed jobs.”³¹

Scarboro’s sentiment reflected both a concern for the welfare of local residents and the social insensitivity born from a small and limited government ill equipped to handle even the most minor disruptions. The hobo express’s existence, thus, emerged from locales unable to handle the influx of the poor even while it held open arms to the better off and certainly the wealthy. Florida Governor Doyle E. Carlton feared in 1930 that the state would be flooded with migrants searching for work, an insight, undoubtedly, drawn from reports on the ground. By October 1931 he joined ten other states in warning unemployed transients not to expect state relief. Cora Bain, secretary of the Miami’s division of charities, embraced in September 1931 the action of Palm Beach County “in placing warning signs at the north county line limits, stating all vagrants will be prosecuted.” She believed “every Florida county should take similar action.”³² Others also called for a state coordinated effort to halt hobos and poor transients more generally

³⁰ “Dumping Vagrants Brings Protests,” *MDN*, 22 Sept 1931, p. 1; “Dade to Continue Drive on Vagrants,” *MDN*, 26 Nov 1931; “‘Hobo Express’ System Failure, Officials Say,” *MDN*, 7 Dec 1931; “‘Hobo Express’ Brings Bridge Blast Threat,” *MDN*, 27 Nov 1932, p. 2. This latter article mentioned how in 1931 a hobo “jungle” formed in the woods of Hallandale (south Broward, just north of the Dade County border), “menacing isolated homes,” because of the lack of Broward County cooperation.

³¹ “‘Snow Birds’ Major Social Problem”; Wood, “In Days When Jobless Drifted South.”

³² Harry Hopkins, *Spending and Saving: The Complete Story of Relief* (1936, Reprint; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 19; “Florida Will Ask No Federal Relief,” *New York Times*, 9 Oct 1931, p. 13 (the ten other states included, New York, Rhode Island, Indiana, Michigan, Connecticut, Illinois, California, West Virginia, Delaware, and Missouri); “Transient Vagrants Get No Aid,” *MDN*, 21 Sept 1931, p. 2.

from entering Florida via a border patrol, or at least provide a means to accommodate the transient influx. In December 1931, progressive Miami Commissioner C. H. Reeder, who had lost the mayoral seat in June, suggested giving tents to poor transients at the state border, offering them temporary tent housing, and making them work on the state highway since Florida “has no snow to be removed,” a reference to the common work relief programs of the North.³³

Conditions had improved only slightly for a select few transients in December 1933, when the Federal Emergency Relief Administration’s (FERA) funds started to pour into Florida and the Dade County Experimental Transient camp’s capacity expanded. State officials decided to set up farm work camps in the cities of Opa Locka (to serve Miami and Dade County), Jacksonville (which had started a camp in December 1932), Tampa and, if necessary, to extend such camps to Orlando and Pensacola. W. H. Green asked the police to report transients without criminal records to the Opa Locka camp, ostensibly approving the continued operation of the hobo express. The *Miami Daily News* writer S. S. Matlock highlighted this fact when he reported “persons who are criminals will be handled by the police in the usual way.” Matlock claimed this was a “humane and practical” alternative to an indiscriminate hobo express that apparently did not distinguish between the “criminals” or idle transient from the down-on-his-luck, unemployed transient. Nonetheless, individuals refusing to join farm work camps would

³³ “Miami to Discuss Plans for Unemployed,” *MDN*, 6 Dec 1931, p. 4; Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 159-160, 253-262, & 272-273.

“be sent away by the police,” according to Marcus Fagg, state chairman of the Florida Civilian Works Administration (CWA) and FERA. Limited resources also meant many were denied entry into the Opa Locka camp and risk expulsion from the county. Finally, while FERA allocated funds for transients, CWA work relief prohibited transients from participating—a policy that reflected residential fears of transient labor competition.³⁴

Miami and Dade County’s approach to the transient problem revealed a hodge-podge methodology of dealing with the poor that both imposed work discipline as a moral lesson to the lower classes and sustained the system of marginalization and segregation of the down and out. Located north of the municipal airport at Opa Locka, the Dade County Work Camp started operation in the winter of 1933, with the help from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. The infusion of more federal dollars allowed it to modestly expand. By late December seventy-five single men resided in the work camp, and Green expected that four hundred more transients eventually would labor on the farm. The Camp paid transient workers thirty cents an hour but charged for the food, clothing, lodging, and recreation (which included horseshoe, a volleyball court, and other activities) furnished by the government, leaving them with about ninety cents leftover each week.

Work consisted of farm labor though it appears that the camp required a cooperative rhythm in which individuals participated in all aspects of the camp’s upkeep.

³⁴ *The Congressional Record*, 72 Cong., 2 sess., 20 Feb 1933, pp. 4503-4504; “Transients Are Meeting Topic,” *MDN*, 17 Dec 1933, p. 1; “Transient Plan Complete, Official Says,” *MDN*, 19 Dec 1933, p. 1; S. S. Matlock, “Jobless Transients Find Work at Dade Experimental Camp,” *MDN*, 24 Dec 1933, p. 16; Cole, ““Hopeful People on the Move,”” 53-54.

Transients faced “semi-military discipline” that entailed fixed hours for rising, working, eating, recreation, and sleeping. Such a regime, Matlock asserted, would safeguard its residents as well as help teach them a useful occupation. Its laborers used any vegetables and dairy products produced in the farm, any surplus given to the county’s needy families. Green and others intended the Dade County Camp to remove transient workers from welfare relief rolls and from the job market as competitors to local workers.

While a positive and progressive development according to the social welfare terms of the time, this work relief program appears to have received limited funding, served only a small portion of the transient unemployed, and helped entrench the practice of the maltreatment of hobos. In early 1934, conditions remained meager, but expanded with the formation of a local Transient Bureau. The Bureau continued to send unattached men to the Camp, but sent unattached women and families to rooming houses “wherever reasonable rates can be obtained.” This change reflected the changing demographics of the transient migration, one that increasingly included women, children, and hopeful unemployed skilled male workers searching for work outside their home residency.³⁵

After this initial effort to assist the transient unemployed through FERA in the winter of 1933-1934, Franklin Roosevelt cut back relief funding for Florida and other states in the fall of 1934. Governor Dave Sholtz responded by instituting, between 1934

³⁵ “U.S. Employment Office to Close,” *MDN*, 25 April 1933, p. 8; Matlock, “Jobless Transients Find Work at Dade”; “Miami Transient Plans Unchanged,” *MDN*, 5 Dec 1934, p. 4. For discussion U.S. welfare and unemployment policy see, Michael Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Keyssar, *Out of Work*; and Kusmer, *Down & Out, on the Road*.

and 1936, a border patrol disallowing the “indigent non-resident” from entering the state by automobile or train and thus implemented what had been imagined for several years. The history of this institution is rather elusive. It appears to have only operated during the winter season. The Florida Emergency Relief Administration noted in its March 1935 report the border patrol’s effectiveness in reducing the number of transients entering the state. No extant public records explain how it worked; only newspaper accounts relate its existence. State police set up guard posts on major highways entering the state (and railroad police to inspect trains), stopping suspicious cars carrying individuals “who neither had the funds to keep them while they were in the state nor definite prospects of jobs.” The *Atlanta Constitution* reported in December 1934 that hobo “jungles” were forming along the Florida state border, where transients allegedly waited in hopes that Sholtz’s edict would be rescinded. Jungles had been set up off the highways from Brunswick, Georgia, on the east to Dothan, Alabama, on the west. Transients in these camps visited smaller towns to “buy or beg [for] food, but in large part” they were “congregated around rivers and swamps fishing and hunting for their living.” Sholtz claimed that more than 50,000 transients were turned away in the winter seasons of 1934-1935 and 1935-1936; another report by *New York Times*’ Florida’s winter season journalist Harris G. Sims (who was based in Lakeland in the center of the peninsula) stated that, “more than 25,000 were turned back” in these two seasons. In November 1936, about “2,000 hitchhikers, rod-riding and flivver-driving itinerants” were prevented from entering Florida. When penniless and jobless transients slipped past the border

patrols, they still risked being caught by local police, and on the east coast, including Miami, fell victim to the hobo express. Even when transients escaped capture, the cumulative effect of avoiding the vigilant eyes of the state must have added to the nervous pressures arising out of joblessness, homelessness, and hunger.³⁶

The ethic of the hobo express, of passing the burden of relief to other locales, expressed itself on a grander scale in Sholtz's border patrol policy. The state blockade had no other precedent in the country and in fact predated other draconian measures in the West. Colorado's Governor Ernest C. Johnson instituted in April 1936 the only other state executive order in the country blocking entry of "alien laborers from other states," but he rescinded the order a few weeks later because of the impossibility of maintaining the policy. The Los Angeles police in February 1936 stationed a foreign legion at the state border as a "bum blockade" but had to stop when it ran against legal obstacles.³⁷

The longer history of the hobo express influenced Sholtz's decision because it offered a

³⁶ "Florida to Rout Transient Hordes," *MDN*, 5 Dec 1934, p. 1; "Sholtz Takes Steps to Stop Transients," *MDN*, 11 Oct 1935, p. 2; "Florida Border Guard Ordered," 8 Oct 1936, p. 11; Florida Emergency Relief Administration, Department of Research and Statistics, *Review of Relief and Economic Statistics* vol. 32, no. 2 (March 1935): 9-11; "Hobo 'Jungles' Alarming FERA," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 Dec 1934, p. 10; "Hobo 'Jungles' Must Go," *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 Dec 1934, p. 8; "Georgia is Conducting Thorough Hobo Count," *Atlanta Constitution*, 21 Dec 1934, p. 6; "Idle Unwanted in Florida," *Atlanta Constitution*, 8 Oct 1936, p. 22; Harris G. Sims, "Florida Again Acts to Bar Drifters," *New York Times*, 25 Oct 1936, p. E10; "Florida Bars Out 2,000 by 'Poverty Quarantine,'" *New York Times*, p. 13; Beecroft and Janow, "Toward a National Policy for Migration," p. 479 (note 25).

³⁷ "Colorado Troops Bar Aliens Labor," *New York Times*, 10 April 1936, p. 3; "California Border Closed to Vagrants," *New York Times*, 5 Feb 1936, p. 2; "California Bars 1,000," *New York Times*, 15 Feb 1936, p. 17; Beecroft and Janow, "Toward a National Policy for Migration," 478-480; Walter J. Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport.: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 73-75.

model of how to treat unwanted migrants. The inability of private and public welfare agencies to aid more people simply sealed the deal.

The hobo express and state border patrol, interestingly, mirrored anti-immigrant public policies. Specifically, this politics of exclusion embraced what historian Roger Daniels has called the “likely to become a public charge (LPC) rubric”—a policy framework in immigrant history that sought to exclude from the nation immigrants who would become financial burdens to the state: the diseased, the poor, the criminal, the mentally ill, morally degenerate, politically suspect, and so on. Applied to immigrants before, during (as in the case of Mexican workers), and after the 1930s, it clearly also often applied to poor migrants in interstate travel during the Great Depression, especially in California, Colorado, and Florida. The 1930s great Dust Bowl migration to California for instance—when Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas and Missouri migrants moved in great numbers, made famous by Dorothea Lange’s photos and John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*—witnessed virulent anti-migrant campaigns against “Okies.” Poor, white working-class migrants faced being marginalized into crude stereotypes during weak economic conditions, when fears existed about limited job and relief opportunities. Similarly, the hobo express and border patrol marginalized the transient poor into the stereotype of hobo or vagrant, especially in light of how city and state officials regularly associated transients with crime. Miami’s home labor protectionism and tourists’

preferences (tourists not wanting to be “bummed and panhandled on every block”) justified rough treatment of the nonresident unemployed.³⁸

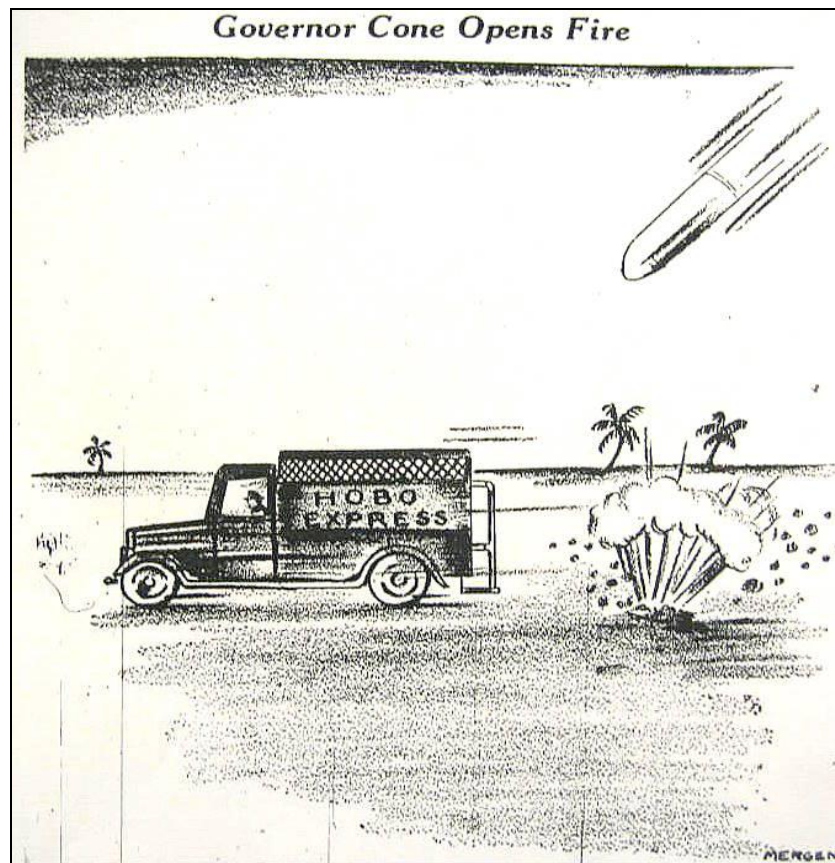


Figure 1. Hobo Express Criticism. In 1937, Florida Governor Fred Cone criticized this law and order enforcement tradition as “illegal and unconstitutional.” Cartoonist Annie Mergen’s depiction of the infamous paddy wagon is one of the few extant images of this notorious institution.³⁹

³⁸ R. Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Perennial, 2002), 274; James Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 78-113; Francisco E. Balderrama & Raymond Rodriguez, *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s* (revised edition; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2006).

³⁹ Annie Mergen, “Governor Cone Opens Fire,” *MDN*, 1 Nov 1937, p. 4; “Cone Calls Express Against All Laws,” *MDN*, 29 Oct 1937, p. 2.

This continuous pressure of keeping up appearances and protecting home residents' access to jobs and relief did receive criticism from Miamians and observers from afar. Churches and other individuals protested the hobo express since its earliest inception in 1928. The fall of 1931 witnessed an outpouring of criticism and calls for reform of the "ruthless methods" used by the police. The same writer who recorded a hobo arrest described above entitled his letter "What Would Christ Do?" He went on to write: "I realize these pressing times are hard . . . but because a man is poor, or broke, or even a law breaker, we must remember he is still human, and deal justly with him."⁴⁰

The conservative populist, columnist Westbrook Pegler took a swipe at Florida's border patrol, highlighting that the state preferred "soft hands and disposition to loaf and spend" to "calloused hands and a disposition to work and earn." Others pointed out the embarrassing situation of welcoming the affluent and barring the poor, arguing that the border patrols were tantamount to using an "instrument of dictatorship."⁴¹

Echoing these sentiments, Florida Governor Fred Cone ended the border patrols when he came to power in January 1937 on grounds that it was undemocratic. He restated his anti-border patrol policy in the fall and protested against the hobo express,

⁴⁰ "From 'One on the Other Side,'" *MDN*, 30 December 1928, p. 4; "Miami Jailed Vagrants Vex Police as Pressing Problem," *MDN*, 8 Dec 1929, p. 8; Gordon Nye letter to the *MDN*, 10 Nov 1931, p. 4; R. F. Harris letter to *MDN*, "What Would Christ Do?" 12 Dec 1931, p.4; W. F. Waller letter to *MDN*, "Kindly Submit Proof," *MDN*, 3 Dec 1931; and Harold Hallman letter to *MDN*, "As a Hitch-Hiker Sees It," *MDN*, 8 Dec 1931, p. 4.

⁴¹ Hal Foust, "Florida Chases Idle Poor as it Hails Idle Rich," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 Dec 1931, p. 13; Westbrook Pegler, "Fair Enough: Florida Fights Transient Evil," *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 Dec 1934, p. 6; "Sunny Florida: America's Winter Playground Bars the Indigent, Welcomes the Affluent," *Literary Digest*, 7 Nov 1937, p. 6-7; Sims, "Florida Again Acts to Bar Drifters"; Sims, "Florida Divided on Border Patrol," *New York Times*, 20 Dec 1936, p. E7.

calling it “absolutely illegal and unconstitutional and against all the laws of the state” (see Figure 1). The transients had the right to a trial, he argued, adding that it was “beyond understanding” how anyone living in a “free country” could be treated with so little regard of their basic civil rights. He ordered county sheriffs to cease aiding the hobo express, but city police chiefs in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach vowed to continue arresting vagrants and send them north or put them in jail or make them work on street gangs. While the state border patrol ended in 1937, the hobo express continued to make regular runs through the end of the decade but seems to have discontinued during the Second World War.⁴²

Conclusion

Cone may very well have ended the border patrol because of budgetary issues. His criticism of the hobo express suggests populist sensibilities that may have been influenced by the spirit of the times and that reflected the need to open Florida to more workers for further economic development. The period between the late 1920s and mid-1930s, nonetheless, was a rough one for the unemployed facing limited job opportunities and limited private and public welfare coffers—not that welfare was ever a satisfactory or adequate solution to the poverty endemic to capitalism.

⁴² “Florida Transient Patrol Disbanded by Gov. Cone,” *Washington Post*, 16 Jan 1937, p. 14; “Florida Lifts Ban on Idle,” *New York Times*, 11 Sept 1937, p. 4; Harris G. Sims, “Governor Permits Gambling in Miami,” *New York Times*, 3 Oct 1937, p. 77; “Cone Calls Express Against All Laws”; “‘Hobo Express’ To Continue Despite Governor’s Protest,” *MDN*, 29 Oct 1937, p. 1; “Vagrant Crop Faces Express or City Jail,” *MDN*, 30 Oct 1937, p. 1; and “Hobo Express Will Continue,” *MDN*, 31 Oct 1937, p. H6.

Florida's treatment of the transient unemployed disallowed for a greater unemployment movement to arise. While the perpetuation of a division between resident and non-resident unemployed may have met short-term relief needs and reduced job competition to some extent, its myopia hurt the chances of unemployed individuals to form greater bonds of solidarity that ignored localism as a defining characteristic of status and identity. Instead, localism increased a greater sense of community as it reinforced the attractiveness of home labor protectionism as a job saving strategy against the threat of scarcity. This was an ironic reality given the important role migration played in the population growth of Greater Miami.

Home labor protectionism existed as a strategy, in part, because of the scarcity framework defining the political economy. With a state unwilling or at least unable to provide better solutions, joined by a private sector equally reluctant, a regime based on arbitrary and harsh exclusionary practices developed and reinforced a culture of appearances. While the wealthy visitor found exclusive spaces to keep out the poorer classes, other vacationing tourists confronted a more diverse and embattled landscape. Residents, from workers to local merchants, struggled to welcome visitors. Workers feared labor competition and so pushed to limit job opportunities to residents. Local merchants wanted to ride this localism to their economic benefit. Kicked out by the shuffle were the poorest transients. Keeping up the appearances of abundance and leisure necessitated the exclusion of the living reminders that the larger political economy,

despite the political rhetoric of equal opportunity, produced large numbers of a lower class enduring unemployment or underemployment.

Class harmony discourse enabled Miami's localism as the resident unemployed struggled to rebalance the economy. Local politics over limited resources necessitated practical solutions for immediate problems and that meant at the very least tacitly accepting the politics of exclusion. The sustainability of deeper critiques of capitalism and of grassroots insurgency simply was limited amid the pressing problem of immediate scarcities and an entrenched power structure. However, harmony discourse lit the light of possibility for reasoned solutions while dissolving the threat of potential chaotic social revolution. Such a framework promised equitable distribution of abundance even while it meekly accepted the nature of power and disallowed greater class solidarities to emerge. The next chapter explores the radical potential of class harmony as it unfolded in the early depression.

CHAPTER 5

Appeals to Harmony:

Perrine Palmer and Transcending Scarcity, 1926-1933

Are we apes or are we men? To admit that there is no simple immediate and permanent remedy, at least in America, for the social disease now epidemic all over the world, is to admit ourselves of a lower order of intelligence than a population composed entirely of anthropoid [sic] apes. For the apes, surrounded as we are with everything we need and desired, would find a remedy. Certainly with less bloodshed and cruelty than man has thus far shown and with less economic loss.

Perrine Palmer, "The Palmer Plan," March 27, 1932¹

The incorporation of Miami, Florida in 1896 and its subsequent growth in the first four decades of the twentieth century occurred amid a barrage of constant boosterism. Miami, the ad men and city leaders loved to boast, represented a tropical paradise waiting to be developed by American ingenuity. Its pioneers overcame rugged terrain, sweltering heat, and bug-infested environment, particularly the hated mosquito, to establish a playground for the rich during the winter months and harmonious city for its hometown residents throughout the year. This harmony entailed a smooth running Jim Crow city, workers who knew their place, enlightened businessmen who made good with these workers, and the opportunities to making it big through real estate (the other gold) or through catering to free-spending tourists. Catch the spirit of this Magic City, the boosters would preach, and live in a paradise on earth.

Capitalism's crippled arm, however, reached down to southern Florida and ruined this idyllic vision. After experiencing rapid growth from World War I through 1926,

¹ Perrine Palmer, "The 'Palmer Plan,'" *Miami Daily News* (hereafter, *MDN*), 27 March 1932, society section, page 8.

bank collapses, real estate fraud, and rampant land speculation led to an economic downturn that by the mid-1920s left Miami tumbling into the Great Crash and Depression. Growth would continue at a slower pace, but the flaws of a local economy dependent on tourism became quite evident. Attempts to diversify the local economy with a larger manufacturing sector largely failed and thus remained small. Nonetheless, the throngs of the unemployed and the underemployed marred this landscape, threatened Miami's social harmony, and delayed the promises of abundance in this hopeful land. Evidently, the wedge of inequalities and unfair wealth distribution between the wealthy and the black and white service workers that dated back to the city's founding remained unnoticed or ignored. The visible hungry, jobless, and homeless, however, certainly highlighted that something was awry. The activism of grassroots leaders and organizations would help to bring these issues to the foreground.

Exploring how Miami's citizens confronted the issue of unemployment and economic depression, this chapter offers a close reading of the ideas and activism of Perrine Palmer, a regular contributor to the *Miami Daily News* readers' letters forum, a frequent attendee of organized labor's political meetings, and eventually a member and secretary of the Dade County Unemployment Citizens' League (DCUCL). Palmer helped articulate a critical call for social harmony amid the spiraling economic crisis, one that did not embrace corporate welfare as a model. Palmer instead envisioned harmony as promised in the ideal of a cooperative commonwealth. He did not look to the past in nostalgic delusion but rather Palmer embraced all that modernity offered, especially the promise of abundance. The next chapter will discuss more carefully the social and political history of the Dade County Unemployment Citizens' League.

Palmer was a talented individual with a middle class background who struggled for steady employment in the 1930s. An analysis of the local newspapers highlights Palmer's importance to discussions and actions that sought to alleviate and resolve unemployment in the city. Indeed, it is because of the historical trail that Palmer left behind that a more refined class history for Miami could be written. His articulate letters, reports, and general activism, though forgotten, spoke to the frustrations of many as well as their dreams and hopes; they have also left guideposts for the historian to retrace the history of unemployment and class in Miami and south Florida during the Great Depression.

Several others joined Palmer in the effort to relieve the plight of the unemployed and underemployed. Jacob H. Kaplan, rabbi of the progressive Temple Israel, Verner Townley, a pharmacist, activist, and founding pioneer of the city, various local labor leaders, William Wister, John Gaveleck and M. E. Fidler, all DCUCL officials, and several others helped organize a movement for relief, with hopes of economic recovery. The economic depression served as the primary motivation to action while the vast reformist and radical ideologies offered fertile ideas to articulate reasoned critiques of the U.S. political economy. Miami's progressives, it will be shown, exhibited an ambivalence toward leisure culture as it shaped the city's political economy. In embracing the idea that greater consumption was needed for the city's economy to end the economic depression, Palmer and others were in potential opposition to the hierarchical nature that defined class.

Consumptionist ideas were only one part of a more visionary perspective. Palmer and other progressives respected the value of work and understood its vital role in the

political economy but were equally disturbed by the lack of power workers possessed. The employment fluctuations faced by workers translated into an insecure world; the Great Depression magnified this old and persistent problem. Hence, Palmer and others attempted to reframe how work was imagined. They envisioned a world where people would work less, not be defined by their jobs, and where everyone would enjoy the vast resources of the U.S., including the available spaces for leisure and recreation.² This vision entailed passing judgment on the unequal wealth distribution that defined city life, especially during the tourist season.

At the same time, this theoretical framework was limited in its embrace of harmony as the goal of society—that is, while Palmer’s ideas were calling for a major shift in how work would be imagined, his appeals to harmony softened the revolutionary potential of his ideas. Unemployment, and the extreme poverty often resulting from it, necessitated immediate practical solutions. Hence, the appeals to harmony carried much resonance in such a climate all the while the structures of the political economy helped further limit the radical potential of the unemployed, grassroots movement. The idea of a cooperative commonwealth entailed harmony but the realities of power and the limits set by scarcity undermined the appeals of the unemployed.

Both Palmer and the broader grassroots activism are absent from local and state histories. Much of this may be explained by the myth of Miami as a frontier land controlled and dominated by heroic pioneers who succeeded in taming a tropical paradise

² Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 5-61; Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

for themselves, for the rich and for workers and families. The myth presented a whiggish formation of history, highlighting progress as inevitable and often ignoring more complex currents of the local history.³ The omission is also a function of what local histories have decided to illuminate. This literature has focused on racism, ethnicity, and urban development, but the majority of these histories offer coverage for the post World War II period.⁴ In addition, the bias in the historiography toward national narratives and more radical responses to capitalism's failures has dominated the histories of this era. This is not surprising given the vibrant class activism in the 1930s. The rise of the CIO, the sit-down strikes, increased unionism, active Communist Party, the Popular Front, and the promises of the New Deal, and among other things, point to such class activism. Miami's absence in the historical literature on this period thus may be attributed to its lack of an industrial economic base, the absence of leftist intellectuals and a Greenwich Village counterpart, to the dominance of AFL craft unions (especially in the construction trades), and to the prevalence of service work—a vital sector in the economy that expanded vastly

³ E. V. Blackman, *Miami and Dade County, Florida: Its Settlement, Progress and Achievement* (Washington D.C.: Victor Ranibolt, 1921); Isidor Cohen, *Historical Sketches and Sidelights of Miami Florida* (Miami: Privately Printed, 1925); Tracy Hollingsworth, *History of Dade County Florida* (Miami, Fl.: Miami Post, 1936); Thelma Peters, *Biscayne Country, 1870-1926* (Miami, Fl.: Banyan Books, 1981); and Arva Moore Parks, *Miami: The Magic City* (Miami, Fl.: Centennial Press, 1991).

⁴ Raymond Mohl's many works are representative. See for example, Mohl, "Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1987): 271-297; "Trouble in Paradise: Race and Housing in Miami during the New Deal Era," *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives*, 19 (1987): 7-21; *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004). Paul George has contributed much to the local history, see for example his "Passage to the New Eden: Tourism in Miami from Flagler through Everest G. Sewell," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (April 1981): 440-463; Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2009) and "'They All Came from Somewhere Else': Miami, Florida's Immigrant Communities, 1890-1970" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 2002).

during the short winter tourist season. Finally, newspapers remain the key sources in Miami history. Given the lack of rich organizational records, the incompleteness or loss of many historical sources such as the early issues of the local black and labor union newspapers, and the complexity of doing time-consuming microfilm, un-indexed newspaper research, historians and others have been unable to get to a more nuanced social history. This chapter and the next are efforts to continue this conversation.⁵

Perrine Palmer's Early History and Harmony

The story of Perrine Palmer can only be traced in Miami's local newspapers, especially *The Miami Daily News* and the city labor paper, though some evidence of his activism appear in a few other extant sources. Through numerous letters to the editor of the *Miami Daily News*, participation in local discussion groups and labor union political organizing, and activism in the unemployment movement and the local housing crisis, Palmer engaged the early depression era with calm, focused but determined civic activism. His civic sensibilities were rooted in his middle class background; however that label only scratches the surface of the complexities of his class-consciousness. His sense of his family's heritage, his education, his material experiences, and his moral and intellectual integrity shaped his passion for justice and vision for a sane, equitable, and

⁵ Some recent excellent contributions include: Melanie Shell-Weiss recent useful social history, *Coming to Miami*, focuses on ethnicity, race, and gender. Alex Lichtenstein insightful exploration of anti-communism in Miami explores a later period than this dissertation. See for example, "'We at Last Are Industrializing the Whole Ding-busted Party': The Communist Party and Florida Workers in Depression and War," *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to New Immigration*, edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) and "'Scientific Unions' and the 'Negro Question': Communists and the Transport Workers Union in Miami, 1944-1949," *Southern Labor in Transition*, Robert Zeiger, ed. (University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

harmonious society. Recounting his biography prior to the Great Depression will help offer some context and explanation for his civic engagement during the early 1930s.

This story, and particularly his later activism and written and spoken words, points to a class-consciousness comfortable with socialist ideals, and determined to establish a new, more humane capitalism. In his mind, capitalists and workers could work together peaceably and for the betterment of society if all agreed that happiness was rooted in expanding consumption, a perspective noted in the epigram opening this chapter. While one may argue that his solutions to the economic depression were impractical or his social and political theories were limited because of a lack of sophistication or ideological commitment to revolutionary change, such positions would ignore the power of imagination or at least the significance of challenging the status quo. He envisioned a more egalitarian society that embraced a humane rationality, a moral commitment to economic security to all, and a utopic imagining of the promises of abundance offering, at the very least, the opportunity to work for a living wage, indulge in various cultural experiences, and the chance to enjoy the outdoors.

Palmer was born in 1884 in Fernandina, Florida to Sarah and John D. Palmer. John was a physician and Sarah was a stay-at-home mother who, according to one history, was interested in poetry, Florida history, horticulture, and beautification. According to his 1952 obituary, Perrine was the maternal great-grandson of Dr. Henry Perrine, the famous pioneer horticulturalist who died at the hands of Seminole Indians at Indian Key in 1840. Henry had been granted a large plot of land by the U.S. government in the 1830s in the southern portion of Dade County, an area that continues to bear his name of Perrine. Sarah inherited a portion of this land in 1897 and moved to the area

sometime after the turn-of-the century. In 1925, Sarah published an article in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* entitled “Henry Perrine, Pioneer Botanist and Horticulturalist” where she discussed her grandfather’s contributions in helping make Florida the “garden spot of America.” In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Sarah lived in the Miami suburb, Buena Vista and published occasional letters and poems in the *Miami Daily News*. Besides these details, not much else is known about Perrine Palmer’s parents (Sarah was widowed by 1920), his childhood, or what happened to this inherited land.⁶

Tracing his life through the few extant records, we learn that Perrine Palmer attended the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, an Episcopalian liberal arts college and theology school, between 1904 and 1908. He likely met his wife Sallie in the area given that the University was not co-ed until 1925 and she was a native of the state. Perrine earned a law degree in 1908 and was an active student at the University. He was a member of the Phi Delta Feta fraternity, Sigma Epsilon Literary Society, Senior German Club, and he served as vice-president in the Senior Law Club. The obituary stated that he entered the lumber industry in Richmond, Virginia and worked in it for 15 years, living there with Sarah and their three children, Perrine Jr. (future mayor of Miami), Albert, and John. Census records and a court case reveal that he actually owned his own small business, the Palmer Lumber Company, though a lost legal suit brought against another company for failure to deliver goods in 1924 may have contributed to

⁶ MDN, 27 & 28 May 1952; Arva Moore Parks and Gregory W. Bush with Laura Pincus, *Miami: The American Crossroads, A Centennial Journey, 1896-1996* (Coral Gables, FL: Simon & Schuster Custom Publishing, 1996), 48 (reference to Sarah Palmer and Palmer’s son, Perrine Palmer, Jr., but the text is silent on Palmer Sr.); Michael G. Schene, “Indian Key,” *Tequesta* 36 (1976): 3-27; Sarah R. W. Palmer, “Henry Perrine, Pioneer Botanist and Horticulturalist,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (Oct 1926): 112-116. U. S. Census Manuscripts, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930.

financial troubles. Perhaps as result of this suit, Palmer and his family returned to south Florida sometime in the mid-1920s. He may have been motivated as well by the desire to succeed in another business. He tried his hand in the real estate business in Howey-in-the-Hills, a township in central Florida just northwest of Orlando, and then he moved to Miami. The first evidence of Palmer in Miami was an announcement that he had joined the Florida Historical Society in October 1926 and the earliest letter to the *Miami Daily News* that I have located appeared in the fall of 1928 (it pertained to the upcoming presidential election). Perrine appears in the 1930 U.S. census for Florida with his family, where he recorded his occupation as an attendant in a filling station. Absent from his 1952 obituary, however, was any account of his 1930s activism.⁷

This narrative highlights how Palmer was clearly a talented and fairly social being with a sense of history and his family's heritage, driven to provide for his family, flexible and resourceful enough to explore other careers (or perhaps pushed by the need to earn an income), and that his move to a new city occurred at inopportune time. Miami was in the midst of an economic downturn with the end of the great real estate boom of the early 1920s. His failure to strike success in Howey-in-the-Hills mirrored that of several others who did not get in on the riches promised in the real estate craze. I do not know for sure what happened to him and his family in this small central Florida town, envisioned by its

⁷ *MDN*, 27 & 28 May 1952; Parks and Bush with Laura Pincus, *Miami*, 48; U. S. Census Manuscripts, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930. College information obtained from the student records of the Archives and Special Collections at Jesse du Pont Library, University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee; *Palmer v. C. E. Frosst & Co.*, 139 Va. 239. *MDN*, 29 Oct. 1928, p. 4; Palmer was listed as a new member of the Florida Historical Society in "Notes and Comments" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (October 1926): 120 (his mother was also a member of the Society). His eldest son, Perrine Palmer, Jr., attended one year at Sewanee Grammar School in 1925, and would later run for the city commission in 1945 and be named mayor for receiving the highest votes. He listed his occupation in 1930, at the age of 20, as a store clerk.

founder, William John Howey, as the central point for a citrus empire.⁸ What is clear is that the subsequent move to Miami happened at a difficult time in the young city's history, at least difficult for certain classes and certainly for new migrants planning to work on a regular basis. Construction development slowed, the tourist trade decreased, and Miami continued to have a relatively undeveloped manufacturing sector. Not many employment opportunities existed, but this did not stop city boosters from selling the city or even sometimes simply bending the truth that poor economic conditions were escaping the city. This boosterism often angered local residents because it appeared insensitive to actual conditions of high unemployment and irregular unemployment. It did not take Palmer long to comment on some of the contradictions he observed in the larger economy and to engage the local problems plaguing the city.

Palmer, in any case, helped shape a discourse that was critical of America's political economy; however, he sought to fix capitalism rather than eliminate it. His perspective represented the basic outlines of what I call harmony discourse: an outlook that sought balance and peace among the social classes, held faith in rational and reasoned discourse, accepted hierarchy and the attainment of individual riches but frowned on greed and a mal-distribution of wealth, embraced individual achievement and cooperative association equally, and sought dignity and respect for all social classes through concrete protections of minimum, humane living standards defined as the right to housing and access to utilities, living wages, fair working conditions, and adequate consumer spending power regardless of occupation or work status (employed,

⁸ Information on Howey-in-the-Hills was derived from the town's history located on their website, <<http://www.hweyinthehills.org/History%20of%20Town.htm>> (Last accessed December 30, 2008).

unemployed, or unable to work). Palmer never directly described these ideas as a uniform and conscious ideology. His written words and various public actions though reveal an ideology that defined this dream and hope for class harmony. Palmer's significance, however, was deeper than simply that he acted and hoped for a better world. His help in engineering a grassroots movement and consistent critical voice of local affairs left an historical trail that has allowed for the uncovering of class harmony discourse on a local level. I suspect that it was not only prevalent in Miami but was likely embraced in many other parts of the country. Complicating the task of uncovering this class ideology has been the relative fluidity of the ideological context in which Palmer and others in the 1930s operated—a context where socialist ideals and Marxist theory reinforced critiques of the current political economy then under massive criticism because of the great economic downturn.

The framework of this discourse was often encased by a vibrant and inclusive American patriotism. This fact takes us to a well-tread path of historiographical debate that embodies the heart of the interpretive struggle for American radicalism. Gary Gerstle, in his work on Woonsocket, Rhode Island, identified Americanism as a malleable language, used by varying groups along the political spectrum “to articulate their political beliefs and press their political demands.” He took particular issue with Warren Susman's critique of Americanism as essentially pro-capitalist and pro-Fordist, and thus too dismissive of genuine, homegrown radicalism. In the case of 1930s Miami, Gerstle's assessment of the malleability of Americanism is an accurate one. Missing from Gerstle's analysis, however, was a closer inspection of how Americanism, even in its radical veins, did embrace the Industrial Americanism that Susman critically targeted

and lamented as the culprit that help develop a consumerist middle class culture.

Michael Denning critiqued both Gerstle and Susman in his attempt to rescue Americanism or what he would call the “ballads of Americans.” Denning found deeper significance for Americanism than simply Gerstle’s “politics of patriotism” and he dismissed Susman’s call for a more critical stance of the relationship between culture and political economy. Instead, Denning located crisis and struggle in Americanism over a “pan-ethnic Americanism” and, more specifically, he apparently identified a “constant cultural war” defining America’s landscape. His quest to write the history of the “laboring of American culture” took him to the industrial unions of the CIO and the working class audience taking-in the culture productions of the Popular Front. Denning argued that a “plebian sensibility confident, almost hegemonic,” that “was hardly middle class,” emerged from the 1930s and thus he seemly drove a dagger into Susman’s middle class monster and with it any whiff of harmony discourse. He also extended the scope and breadth of Gerstle’s Americanism as primarily progressive and nearly hegemonic.⁹

The beat of the industrial machine continued to thump, nonetheless, with the assistance and collusion of the working classes and its leaders. Americanism did entail a conversation between the Fordist state and culture but it did not necessarily result into Susman’s culturally and morally starved middle class or Denning’s “pan-ethnic Americanism.” Americanism was a political language used to articulate the struggles

⁹ Gary Gerstle, “The Politics of Patriotism: Americanization and the Formation of the CIO,” *Dissent* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 84-92; Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5-15, 153-195; Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution, 1973), 75-85; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), 115-159 (esp. 124-136 & 152).

over political economy often inspired by the various theoretical frameworks of the period. This struggle essentially centered on how to manage the industrial economy's wealth and how to reframe the social contract in the new political economy. The patriotic language of Americanism, however, was only one part of a larger class-conscious ideological vessel. Class harmony discourse has been largely ignored in the historiographical struggles over American radicalism and American exceptionalism; or put in another way, in attempts to answer why there is no socialism in the United States scholars have been swept away by the currents of exceptionalism and the romanticism of radicalism.

Harmony offered an alternative to classlessness and class conflict discourses, and it remains relatively unexplored in class analysis literature. It offered a middle road between the dichotomy of classlessness and class conflict that did not buy into the myths of either camp, recognized the need for human cooperation, and valued the contribution of individual effort. Shaped as early as the late nineteenth century and developed more distinctly during the Progressive Era, this push for greater social harmony by intellectuals and progressive reformers energized many as it bore hope for a better society. As historian Shelton Stromquist has argued for the early Progressive movement and Howard Brick has traced via intellectuals over the twentieth century, the critique of capitalism and desire to reform it ran deep, was visionary, and sought social justice. Palmer's ideas undoubtedly built from the zeitgeist of the era that expressed a faith in modernity and technology's ability to alleviate economic plight.¹⁰ A small dash of Taylorism faith in

¹⁰ For an introduction of this tendency in the period, see Charles Maier's "Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the

efficient production, a pinch of organized labor's vision of expanding and sharing the wealth of the industrial state, and a balanced view of the relationship between freedom and work, and one arrives at Palmer's optimistic brew for a fairer capitalism. Most immediately, he drew from the floating prescriptions that sought to alleviate unemployment and help formulate a more rational and moral economic system: the shorter hour movement and share-the-work plans and the technocracy movement of the early 1930s.

The shorter hour work plans emerged from discussions with business, labor, and individuals during the era looking to increase employment and improve the standard of living. Having roots in the nineteenth century with the movement to reduce the workday so as to create more knowledgeable and active citizens and spread the benefits of employment and leisure, its ideas gained traction as unemployment skyrocketed after 1929.¹¹ Employers such as Kellogg implemented the six-hour, four-shift workday and increased the number of employees working in the company. Along with organized labor, many looked to shorter hours as a solution to unemployment, while others imagined more time for leisure, play, and cultural and spiritual development as humane alternatives to the alienating drudgery of industrial and other forms of work. According

1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1970): 29-34; Howard Brick, *Transcending Capitalism: Visions of a New Society in Modern American Thought*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 1-151. Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 1-11 and 21-24.

¹¹ For accounts on this earlier history, see David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (1967; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Philip S. Foner and David R. Roediger, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

to historian Benjamin Hunnicutt, the shorter hours debates spurred Roosevelt's New Deal to find alternative solutions to unemployment that embraced conservative notions of work over more radical ideas. The victory of the forty-hour over the thirty-hour workweek in federal legislation, for instance, highlights one concrete manifestation of this debate.¹²

The technocracy movement, existing since at least the early twentieth century, experienced a revival and wide popularity in the fall of 1932. It expressed a faith in the power of technology to increase economic abundance and looked to engineers to figure out how to most efficiently use the vast natural resources in the United States to raise the economic well-being of all individuals. In general, technocrats of this stripe demonstrated impatience with politics, especially the two-party system and the failure of third party movements, because of their apparent inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and/or corruption. Technocracy revealed a humane and compassionate commitment to resolving human suffering and seemed to make the most sense to many in the context of the Great Depression. Most importantly, the technocracy movement invigorated social and political activism throughout the country with the hopefulness of its vision to end economic scarcity. Advocates of national economic planning and participants and heirs of the experiments and ideas from the Progressive era and World War I embraced the strand of the technocracy movement that supported central planning while discarding the

¹² Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and *Kellogg's Six-Hour Day* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). See also his wonderfully informative articles, "The End of Shorter Hours," *Labor History* 25, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 373-404 and "Kellogg's Six-Hour Day: A Capitalist Vision of Liberation through Managed Work Reduction," *Business History Review* 66, no. 3 (Summer 1992): 475-522.

more radical and technical aspects of its tenets.¹³

The desire to make abundance more available to workers living in a machine age worked hand-in-hand with a reverence of the idea that man was “endowed by his Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Palmer’s words and actions helped shape the Dade County Unemployment Citizens’ Leagues activism in resolving the problems of hunger, homelessness, and joblessness, and in the process he succeeded in creating a sense of community. Palmer and the Unemployment League’s quest for equal opportunity and social justice, and not merely a more adequate social welfare net, were driven by their desire for greater social harmony. Class harmony discourse allowed for grassroots activists to dissociate from socialism and communism even when their goals for greater equality and social justice overlapped and echoed each other. This balancing act in a red scare culture was difficult to be sure but essential to maintain political legitimacy in the eyes of the greater public and the local business, religious, and government leaders. Poverty in the midst of economic abundance perplexed many in the early 1930s. Palmer and the Unemployment League merely highlighted the need to close the gap, challenge the ideological reverence of scarcity in economic thought, and they imagined a world where abundance would allow for basic economic security.

¹³ For short overviews of this later phase of the technocracy movement, see Henry Elsner, Jr., *The Technocrats: Prophets of Automation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967); William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Much has been written on the advocates of planning. See for example, Patrick D. Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890-1943* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

The Palmer Plan

Like many other Americans, Perrine Palmer was often unemployed or inconsistently employed during the 1930s. His response to economic depression was first to keep trying to find employment (and this included work on local and later federal government relief jobs) and second to try to imagine how society would get out of this crisis. As he shared the plight of the more than 25 percent of America's workforce that was officially unemployed, members of Miami's upper class clung to the power of cheerful boosterism. On January 30, 1931 members of the Miami Chamber of Commerce listened to Clayton Sedgwick Cooper preach about what Miamians needed to get out of this period of economic depression. Few others garnered more legitimacy in the eyes of the business community than Cooper. Writing several books moral and didactic in tone, with a western-centered, missionary vision, Cooper the world traveler had in 1926 founded the Committee of One-Hundred, a millionaires' social club based in Miami Beach (and lasting into the late twentieth century). The club catered to wealthy winter visitors interested in both spectator sports such as horse racing and polo and individual recreation such as swimming, golf, and yachting. The club also invited speakers to lecture on the topics of the day and other cultural entertainments. Cooper's reputation and status also stood on his early association with the elite *Miami Tribune* (as long as it lasted: 1924-1927) and his many publications. An exemplary example of his style was his 1927 book, *The Philosophy of Business*, a collection of optimistic "essays" he had published in the local newspapers as part of Burdines department store's advertisement scheme to bolster local morale after the devastating 1926 hurricane hit Miami. Cooper reminded Miami citizens about the greatness of south Florida, "the birthland of health

and happiness,” and that “the worst form of civic anaemia is negative criticism.”¹⁴ He exhorted members of the Miami Chamber of Commerce in a similar vein in the current context. Perrine Palmer’s encounter with news of this gathering sparked a response.

Palmer, in a letter to the *Miami Daily News*, related how Cooper told his audience “that what Miami needs is a spirit of optimism and faith in the future of our city.” The only problem with this was that “some 10,000 unemployed wage earners were at home or walking the streets, wondering where their next meal was coming.” Palmer was impatient and indignant with Cooper’s booster optimism and its appearance in the paper amid the depression. But his concern extended as well to every merchant, businessman, banker, and professional who wondered “how much longer he can keep his doors open.” With a controlled vehemence, Palmer continued: “The preachers might just as well continue to cram creeds and morals down our hungry throats and laws down the thirsty ones as for business and civic leaders to continue to put off the smash they fear with high-sounding words.”¹⁵ Smash in this context referred to social breakdown and possibly a revolution from below resulting from social chaos induced, of course, by the rampant hunger and homelessness.

He demanded action, collective action, and from all groups and individuals in

¹⁴ “Cooper Speaks Before Chamber,” *MDN*, 31 Jan 1931, p. 2; Clayton Sedgwick Cooper, *The Philosophy of Business* (Miami: Burdine’s Inc., 1927), 10. The book’s foreword stated, “It is hoped that the thoughts expressed in these editorials may bring to this community inspiration and incentive toward a type and character of business life in keeping with the beauty of nature and the general surroundings of our Magic City.” A few examples of his vast travel and missionary publications include: *College Men and the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1911); *The Modernizing of the Orient* (New York: McBride, Nast, and Company, 1914); *Understanding South America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918); and *Latin America: Men and Markets* (New York: Ginn and Company, 1927).

¹⁵ “Millionaires’ Talk,” *Time Magazine* (Oct 14, 1935), p. 68-69; Perrine Palmer, “Spreading Employment,” *MDN*, 9 Feb 1931, p., 4; Palmer, “It Was Lack of Space, Mr. Palmer,” *MDN*, 13 Feb 1931, p. 6.

society. Charity offered, at best, temporary relief. “The Unemployment and consequent business depression problems,” Palmer continued, “will be solved when, and only when, our business, civic and religious leaders face squarely the real cause of these things.”

The lack of consumption was the key factor in causing and maintaining the economic depression, according to Palmer and other contemporaries in the country. It would not be until the second New Deal (post 1935) that the federal government would identify underconsumption as a problem and embrace specific policy to encourage consumption. The early 1930s identified overproduction as a primary cause to the sluggish economy. Cutting back production and the subsequent reduction in hours and jobs was intended to bring balance to the economy. The National Recovery Administration and Agriculture Administration in the summer of 1933 would begin to impose such measures. As with others in the country, Palmer pointed to consumption as the solution to bring the nation out of depression.¹⁶ The potential buying power of “our vast army of wage earners” would far outpace the purchasing power of the concentrated wealth of the rich. The need to “find work that will assure a decent living for [the unemployed] and their dependents” was imperative to get out of depression and avoid “the hungry masses” from changing the

¹⁶ Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, 94-135; Hunnicutt, *Work Without End*, 67-108; Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991): 259-267. Hunnicutt offers an interesting discussion on how William Green and the American Federation of Labor pressed for shorter hours and increased wages as a way to redefine leisure as positive (discussed at greater length below). While Fraser highlights Hillman’s embrace of consumption and underconsumptionist views, his emphasis remained more on an industrial democracy line of reasoning: coming to terms with the new mass consumption economy and attempting to protect labor’s power within industry. Hunnicutt elaborates more on how the debates discussed the benefits of leisure and the shortcomings of work. On the changes in advertising and the consumption ethic, see Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 117-163.

present form “of government by revolution.”¹⁷

This revolution would be unreasonable but just if conditions persisted. It could be avoided with wise leadership, thought, and a humane vision of reform. Palmer called for the voluntary action of business leaders to reduce the hours of workers, not to reduce production, but rather to distribute employment among more (or all) workers and thus increase the purchasing potential of the masses. The logic and humaneness of this perspective is both striking and consistent with the larger shorter-hours movement of the period, including that of the American Federation of Labor and many business leaders. In this early formulation of his ideas, Palmer already was highlighting the need to tackle technological unemployment and to use the potential economic and social power of technology or machines, as he would have put it, for social good and improving the quality of life. Connecting technology with the need to increase consumption and spread employment so as to lessen the burdens of work and thus improve the quality of life challenged mainstream business thought.¹⁸ It also offered a reasoned alternative to revolution and violence.

As importantly, it infused ethics and morality into the questions of political economy. As he wrote: “Blaming overproduction on the machine age is only an admission of defeat. We might just as well say that progress defeats its own purpose: that God’s highest law is the survival of the fittest and, in the name of religion, knock some 30,000,000 men, women and children in the head and let it go at that.” He was quick to point out that “machines have not been used to shorten man’s hours of labor; nor

¹⁷ Palmer, “Spreading Employment,” *MDN*, 9 Feb 1931, p., 4; Idem, “It Was Lack of Space, Mr. Palmer,” *MDN*, 13 Feb 1931, p. 6; Idem, “From One Now Employed Through Jobless Fund,” *MDN*, 6 April 1931, p. 4.

¹⁸ Hunnecutt, *Work Without End*, 147-190; Idem, *Kellogg’s Six-Hour Day*, 1-84.

primarily, even to save his back. They have been used to get rid of him entirely.” One may claim that he was overstating the case of technological unemployment, but that would miss the point and the morality. Palmer’s argument for greater distribution of abundance implicitly challenged rugged individualism while maintaining a deep respect for the drive for individuality. In his deference to the dignity of men, he was ambivalent about charity, not because he feared “chislers” taking advantage of being on the dole, but because it damaged one’s quest for independence and thus subordinated them as human beings. This clearly hit home as he struggled to find work to support his family. His attack on the doctrine of survival of the fittest equally carried weight. Linking God, progress, and the contradictory moral association of religion and a cold, cruel Social Darwinism, would not have escaped his readers’ moral sensibilities. Nor the common sense that “the happiness and well being of the masses” required that they have the basic means to existence and that an economy and business unable to provide this eventually would collapse. The collective nature of the depression experience revealed how, out of no fault of their own, a breakdown in economic structure could victimize them despite their most valiant efforts. Palmer’s God found unacceptable the moral justifications explaining the depression as well as the lack of more effective, creative and humane responses to the economic downturn.¹⁹

This discourse took sharper form over the next year and led eventually to the

¹⁹ Palmer, “Spreading Employment,” *MDN*, 9 Feb 1931, p., 4; Palmer, “It Was Lack of Space, Mr. Palmer,” *MDN*, 13 Feb 1931, p. 6; H.C. Morris, “To Relieve Distress,” *MDN*, 17 Feb 1931, p. 6, offered a positive response to Palmer’s two letters calling for the need to enact into law the Golden Rule. M. E. Fidler, future president of the Dade County Unemployment Citizens’ League, also seems to have been inspired by Palmer though he was a bit darker in his assessment of conditions. See his letters to the paper: “Will Greed Ever Have a Conscience?” *MDN*, 12 April 1931, p. 4; ““Will We Ever Grow Up?” *MDN*, 8 May 1931, p. 4.

publication in March 1932 of the Palmer Plan by the *Miami Daily News*, a newspaper that had published several of his letters. It was a full-page article, over 4,500 words in length. The paper introduced Palmer as a representative of the unemployed perspective. The main ideas discussed in February 1931 reappeared in the essay, though the length offered Palmer the opportunity to elaborate on points his two shorter letters could not. The time that elapsed also gave Palmer time to circulate and refine his ideas. Verner Townley, a fifty-year old Miami pioneer (a resident of the city since 1896), wrote a 1933 retrospective account of the timeline and the crafting of the Palmer Plan. Townley described how Palmer corresponded with his friend Dr. Walter Montgomery, professor of Latin at the University of Virginia, who asked him what his ideas were on ending the depression. More notable was his correspondence with John Dewey, famed pragmatist, philosopher of education, and chairman of the League of Independent Political Action. Dewey, who endorsed Palmer's ideas, described him to Verner Townley (also active in local discussions and activism, and perhaps Palmer's biggest fan), this way: "He has many excellent ideas about the present situation. He has, I think, lost employment, and is not well off in worldly goods, but he has a fine mind and fine ideas, judging from his letter. You might be interested in seeing him." Dewey was responding to Townley's own letter that posed eight questions regarding the depression and that echoed Palmer's ideas of nearly a year earlier.²⁰

The Plan's publication occurred after Palmer presented his ideas to a class held by Dr. Jacob H. Kaplan, a part-time University of Miami faculty member and a respected

²⁰ Verner Townley, "Dr. John Dewey's Reply," *MDN*, 8 Jan 1932, p. 6 (also available in the John Dewey Collection, Special Collections/Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Dewey VFM 79); Townley, "'Getting into Hot Water,'" *MDN*, 27 Jan 1932, p. 6; Perrine Palmer, "Perrine Palmer's Plan," *MDN*, 3 March 1932, p. 4.

and active rabbi in the small Jewish community then existing in the city and in Dade County.²¹ Kaplan endorsed his thesis and arranged a meeting with the “foremost business men and civic leaders” including former mayor and Chamber of Commerce founder, E. G. Sewell, three members of the Committee of 100, and two others, as well as Verner Townley. Once the plan was published, Palmer and Townley distributed hundreds of copies to leading industrialists and the “foremost men in public life.” This list included Mayor Frank Murphy of Detroit, Governor Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania, Owen D. Young, chairman of General Electric, and Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt. According to Townley, Murphy and Pinchot endorsed the plan while Young offered a favorable response. It is unknown how Roosevelt reacted to the plan, but in Townley’s view he felt the plan was “identical with the national recovery act.” Townley’s retrospective, at the very least, highlights the local enthusiasm for the plan, its embrace of a consumptionist approach to political economy, and that Palmer’s ideas were gaining a wide audience.²²

The Palmer Plan, as presented in March 1932, now presented a clearer role for the government and elaborated on the idea of increased consumption and its significance. The calls for voluntarism as the framework of the plan remained, though Palmer now evoked the patriotism used so effectively during World War I when wide-scale government planning occurred. In the coming months and years several individuals and

²¹ Carlton W. Tebeau, *Synagogue in the Central City: Temple Israel of Greater Miami, 1922-1972* (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1972), 84-98.

²² Palmer, “The ‘Palmer Plan,’” *MDN*, 27 March 1932, Society Section, p. 8; Verner Townley, “The Palmer Plan,” *MDN*, 19 March 1932, p. 4 (meeting was held on March 16); Idem, “The Palmer Plan and N. R. A.,” *MDN*, 8 Aug 1933, p. 4 (Sewell would win the mayoralty again in 1933); Palmer’s letter, “Communism No Remedy,” *MDN*, 23 December 1931, p. 6, suggested communism’s appeal was obvious in the current economic context of high unemployment and the threat of eviction widely prevalent.

New Dealers would point to the War planning as a successful model from which to build. Specifically, Palmer envisioned a Presidential proclamation declaring the patriotic duty of businesses to try out voluntarily, and for only a sixty-day period, the plan of increasing employment opportunities by reducing hours and offering more jobs. He pointed to the successful implementation of the six-hour-a-day program in Kellogg Company's Battle Creek, Michigan factory, which had started the program in December 1930. However, for Miami and Dade County the reduced hour program would drop to no more than five hours per worker per day and include all jobs, including agriculture and domestic service. The idea was clearly tailored for Miami and Dade's economy. At least one local employer implemented a program of spreading employment. What is more important though is the argument Palmer made for raising the standard of living for workers without challenging the right of capitalists to attain grand wealth. He called for emancipating workers from the drudgery of work and empowering them with the buying power to purchase goods to enjoy their free time. In this way, he viewed the depression as primarily a social problem and not an economic one. Here is an extended quote that offers his perspective succinctly:

Our vast army of wage and salary earners, on whose buying power the whole capitalistic system of government must finally stand or fall, would be buying things for which they have never before had any use; because they have never before had time each day to use those things; time each day for the fresh air and sunshine now arbitrarily and foolishly denied them; for the recreational and cultural pursuits so vital for the physical, spiritual, and economic well-being of all nations.

Did you ever stop to think how many bathing suits, fishing tackles, garden tools, tennis racquets, golf sticks, sport clothes, motor boats, skates, sleds, automobiles, matinee tickets and countless other things that vast army might buy, if they had time each day to use them? How much time has that vast army to buy anything, even when employed?

Absent is the guilt of consuming unneeded goods, a dilemma for many

consumptionists of the 1920s. He combined producerist and consumptionist ideas when he highlighted the value of labor as “the thing that constitutes both the supply and demand for all our products.” Palmer presented here a conception and outlook that was grounded in the Miami of recreation and leisure. Work was relegated as a vital need but not the only vital need in the pursuit of happiness.

Society’s inability to see the connection between work and consumption revealed a moral failure and a misuse of technology. The article pointed to several examples of technological unemployment. One example highlighted how recent capitalization in Everglades sugar farming displaced over 500 cane-cutters. Palmer quoted a passage from a 1931 article by the progressive Colorado Senator, Edward P. Costigan, that reminded its readers that ““the unhappy plight of industrial workers, our farm population, and moderate business was treated . . . for the most part with indifference [in the years preceding the panic]. The steady decrease in employment . . . was noted then forgotten. Diminishing pay rolls were overshadowed by increasing machine production.”

According to Palmer, machinery had lessened the demand on individuals to labor as long as they once had. This had been ignored because “we have utterly failed to recognize that sound economics, sound religion, good sportsmanship, are all one and the same thing: Inseparable. For it would have indeed been a foolish God who would have decreed an economically unprofitable code of morals.” The social order, in other words, should be rational and moral, which of course implied that things had been irrational and immoral up to this point in history. Nothing was necessarily wrong with technology, but since the efficient tools shaping production help push workers out of jobs, society needed to confront this phenomenon and reorder access to abundance. Technological

unemployment certainly suggested an irrational path that contradicted the rational and efficient veneer that the modern industrial state promised. The disparity in the standard of living between the rich and ordinary people contradicted the ideals of social harmony when workers and the unemployed could not share in the nation's abundance, particularly since the latter were the producers of this wealth.²³

The call for balance and fair and equal opportunities to enjoy life carried a radical edge even if Palmer was not advocating equalizing of conditions and abolishing hierarchy. However, to equate the lives of rich capitalists in the same breath as cooks certainly was: "Will you tell me that those great financial and religious leaders, J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, are entitled each day to fresh air and sunshine, recreation and culture, but that the girls in our stores, the clerks in our office, the cooks in our kitchens, are not?" Palmer wrote. He continued, "And do you think we can promote the wealth of this nation by continuing a system that denies to human beings those gifts of God?" How Palmer's Episcopalianism influenced his thinking is not clear from the extant historical evidence other than he attended the University of the South. But clearly the evoking of God and the concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of individuals and the nation promoted a moral world outlook. One that showed concern for each individual's happiness and how that was predicated on the need for economic independence and economic security. That "sound economics, sound religion, and good sportsmanship" were inseparable in Palmer's mind points to the power of class harmony. While his plan was neither detailed nor permanent, he offered a vision that was hopeful and suggested an alternative capitalism that thus far had not existed or at least only in

²³ Palmer, "The 'Palmer Plan'"; Edward P. Costigan, "A National Political Armistice?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, Feb 1931, p. 258-267 (quote from p. 262).

some quarters. Most concretely, by advocating a “shortage of labor” (or labor scarcity), opposed to a surplus of labor, he pushed for labor market conditions favorable for workers that would eventually allow for a fair and moral working of the laws of supply and demand that echoed an older tradition of moral economy rooted in competency and communalism.²⁴

Shorter Hours, Technocracy and Activism

Palmer’s ideas would gain traction in two developments later in 1932: the introduction of the Black bill in the U.S. Senate and the resurgence of the technocracy movement. The American Federation of Labor drafted thirty-hour’s legislation that Senator Hugo Black introduced to the 72nd Congress in December 1932 (and as the Connery bill in the House). The bill would “prohibit, in interstate or foreign commerce, all goods produced by establishments where workers were employed more than five days a week or 6 hours a day.” The AFL’s logic echoed Palmer’s Plan to an amazing degree: shortening hours would provide more work thus offering immediate “work relief” and once recovery occurred, as historian Benjamin Hunnicutt pointed out, “labor could bargain effectively for higher wages in a condition of continued labor scarcity.” The Black bill represented a break from the AFL’s traditional voluntarism and reliance on collective bargaining as the means of improving working conditions and pay because it sought government intervention.²⁵

²⁴ Palmer, “The ‘Palmer Plan.’” For reactions to Palmer, see Verner Townley, “‘A Sound Premise,’” *MDN*, 1 April 1932, p. 4; William Richard Twiford, “Urges Fiat Money,” *MDN*, 11 April 1932, p. 4.

²⁵ Hunnicutt, *Work Without End*, 150-151; Perrine Palmer, “The 30-Hour Week Bill,” *MDN*, 16 April 1933, p. 4. Palmer seems to have been influenced or at least in-step with organized labor from an early date. Early discussions of the AFL Executive committee, which

Palmer argued for the importance of the Black bill but he felt it did not go far enough. He feared it might be unconstitutional because it singled out businesses involved in interstate or international commerce while leaving workers in local businesses uncovered. Like a good lawyer, Palmer understood that Miami's local based economy with little interstate and international commerce (and here it seems he did not define tourist trade along these lines) would make the bill inapplicable in his hometown. He thus argued for the principle "equal rights to all, special privileges to none," a hopeful formulation that equated the current bill as "class legislation of the most vicious sort" for not including all commerce. Conditions were unreasonable in the Magic City. As he wrote, "*You'll be surprised at the average work hours in Miami*, if you'll take the trouble to investigate" (my italics). Palmer applied the idea of class harmony by advocating that all businesses be required to adopt shorter hours and thus offering no group or individual a way of avoiding the law. The merging of the goals of the AFL with that of Palmer rooted the latter with the labor movement on a national and local level.²⁶ Beginning at least by 1933, Palmer attended regularly the weekly Labors' Citizenship Committee

held its closed meetings in Miami in January 1931, pointed to a shorter-hour and share-the-work plan: The *MDN* quoted William Green, president of the AFL, as saying, "Personally, I believe the five-day work week is the most important issue with the seven-hour working day next in importance . . . it would be of great value in putting the nation back on a spending basis." "Labor Leaders to Wage War on Depression," *MDN*, 13 Jan 1931, p. 1 & 2. Later in the week, in a speech that Green made at the Carpenters union hall, the paper reported Green's views: "Reduction of working hours a week, so all labor would share in the benefits, is necessary because of the increase in the use of machinery." "Labor's Chief Speaks Before Union in Miami," *MDN*, 18 Jan 1931, p. 5. It is very likely that Palmer attended this meeting though no evidence exists to confirm this.

²⁶ *Report of the Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1931*, p. 278-281; Idem, 1932, p. 284-297; Idem, 1933, p. 362-369, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Records, University of Maryland Special Collections, Series IV, Sub-series 2, Box 8; Hunnicutt, *Work Without End*, 76-84, 148-153, & 186-187; Idem, "The End of Shorter Hours," 396-397; Roediger and Foner, *Our Own Time*, 243-256; Palmer, "The 30-Hour Week Bill," *MDN*, 16 April 1933, p. 4; "Labor Leaders to Wage War on Depression," *MDN*, 13 Jan 1931, p. 1 & 2; "Labor's Chief Speaks Before Union in Miami," *MDN*, 18 Jan 1931, p. 5.

(organized in 1929), the political and civic arm of the AFL's Central Labor Union of Dade County in existence since 1914.

The idea of shorter hours, as it evolved over the 1920s, sought to ameliorate the worst aspects of industrial capitalism and offer the opportunity for greater cultural and personal development. This quest for freedom to attain happiness outside of work challenged the industrial order and the power of work over individuals' lives. Citing Edward Sapir, the early twentieth century linguist and anthropologist, Benjamin Hunnicutt highlighted the visionary turn of the Progressive agenda in the 1920s. Paraphrasing Sapir, Hunnicutt wrote: "The human standards of the 'harmonious, balanced, and self-satisfactory' society and the 'spiritual primacy of the individual soul,' were the bases of 'genuine' progress but were being ignored, since 'part of the time we are dray horses: the rest of the time we are listless consumers of goods which receive not the least impression of our personalities.'" ²⁷ This call for a more ethical society underpinned Palmer's politics. Picking up from this intellectual current and the AFL's embrace of shorter hours, Palmer sought to attain societal harmony by pushing for the spread of abundance through the shortening of the work day and greater democratic cooperation. The elimination of scarcity teased the idea of transcending capitalism, even if Palmer was not aware of such possibilities at the root of his pleas. ²⁸

Palmer's vision also merged and was bolstered by the technocracy movement that

²⁷ Hunnicutt, *Work Without End*, 105; Brick, *Transcending Capitalism*, 86-117.

²⁸ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I* (1976, reprint; London: Penguin Books, 1990), 375-389, esp., 381, where Marx points out the drive for profit and its relation to the worker and workday: "Après moi le déluge!" is the watchword of every capitalist and of every capitalist nation. Capital therefore takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker, unless society forces it to do so" (381). And here Palmer and others were pushing capital to account more for the worker. Brick, *Transcending Capitalism*, 38-43, on Marx's influence on a post-capitalist vision.

developed at the end of the year. Made popular by journalist William Parrish's essays in the *New Outlook*, several Miamians were excited by the scientific-sounding analysis of technocrats who both helped explain the ongoing economic depression and offered hope of a future where economic abundance guaranteed economic security for all. Organized by a group of engineers in Columbia University in the spring of 1932, Technocracy sought to rationalize the use of the country's resources and maximize the use of technology for this purpose. It also envisioned the elimination of politics and the distribution of resources to all.²⁹ Though gaining some press coverage in the summer of 1932, it was not until Parrish's essays, first published in November, that Technocracy lit a fire among Miamians. Through the editorial pages of the *Miami Daily News*, Verner Townley, Perrine Palmer, Charles Nicholson (critical founder of the Dade County Unemployment League), and others discussed its ideas, at least as outlined by Parrish. Palmer's letter entitled "We Must Have Action," deemed Parrish's November essay, "What is Technocracy?" "The most vital document of our age."³⁰

Parrish laid out the ideas of the growing and rejuvenated technocracy movement in this essay but only after outlining the dire economic conditions in the country. Palmer quoted the ominous first sentence of Parrish's article, "The United States is much nearer

²⁹ Wayne W. Parrish, "What is Technocracy?" *New Outlook* (Nov 1932): 13-18; Parrish, "Technocracy's Question," *New Outlook* (Dec 1932): 13-17; Parrish, "Technocracy's Challenge," *New Outlook* (Jan 1933): 13-16; Elsner, Jr., *The Technocrats*; Akin, *Technocracy*; Robert Westbrook, "Tribune of the Technocratic Structure: The Popular Economics of Stuart Chase," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 1980): 387-408. Harold Loeb, *Life in a Technocracy: What it Might Be Like* with an introduction by Howard P. Segal (1933, reprint; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

³⁰ Perrine Palmer, "We Must Have Action," *MDN*, 29 Nov 1932, p. 4; W. J. Fripp, "Technocracy," *MDN*, 22 Nov 1932, p. 4; Verner Townley, "Technocracy," *MDN*, 27 Nov 1932, p. 4; A Contributor, "Individualism's Test," *MDN*, 30 Nov 1932, p. 4; Charles W. Nicholson, "A 'Technocracy' Convert," *MDN*, 3 Dec 1932, p. 4; T. E. Brock, "A Plan for Utopia," *MDN*, 11 Dec 1932, p. 4.

a complete industrial collapse, as a result of the events of the last three years, than the vast majority of its citizens realize.” For Palmer and many others such a diagnosis rang true, offered an accurate assessment, and suggested an appropriate response that side-stepped politics by offering solutions from technocratic experts concerned with the humane and fair distribution of the nation’s resources. The outlook echoed the most hopeful aspects of modernity, particularly in its faith in technology and its indictment of the current social and political order. It is no surprise that down and out workers and other sufferers of depression conditions found Technocracy appealing. According to Technocracy advocates, the biggest cause of unemployment was technology but this very force that led to such fluctuations in employment and instability in the economy could also liberate the masses with the proper manipulation, guidance, and the abandonment of partisan politics. So while images and discussions abounded in newspapers, magazines, and other venues about workers being displaced by machines (see Figure 2), the cover of journalist Frank Arkright’s short book *The ABC of Technocracy* (see Figure 3) suggested how Technocracy promised the abundance of modernity while discarding (perhaps naively and too hastily) the older conceptions of political economy guilty of maintaining scarcity. In scratching out capitalism, socialism, and communism, Arkright’s cover highlighted the hopefulness of the moment.³¹

³¹ Parrish, “What is Technocracy?” p. 13-18; Palmer, ““We Must Have Action,”” p. 4. On the pervasiveness of the technological unemployment discussion, see Amy Bix, *Inventing Ourselves Out of Jobs: America’s Debate over Technological Unemployment, 1929-1981* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000); Frank Arkright, *The ABCs of Technocracy* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1930).

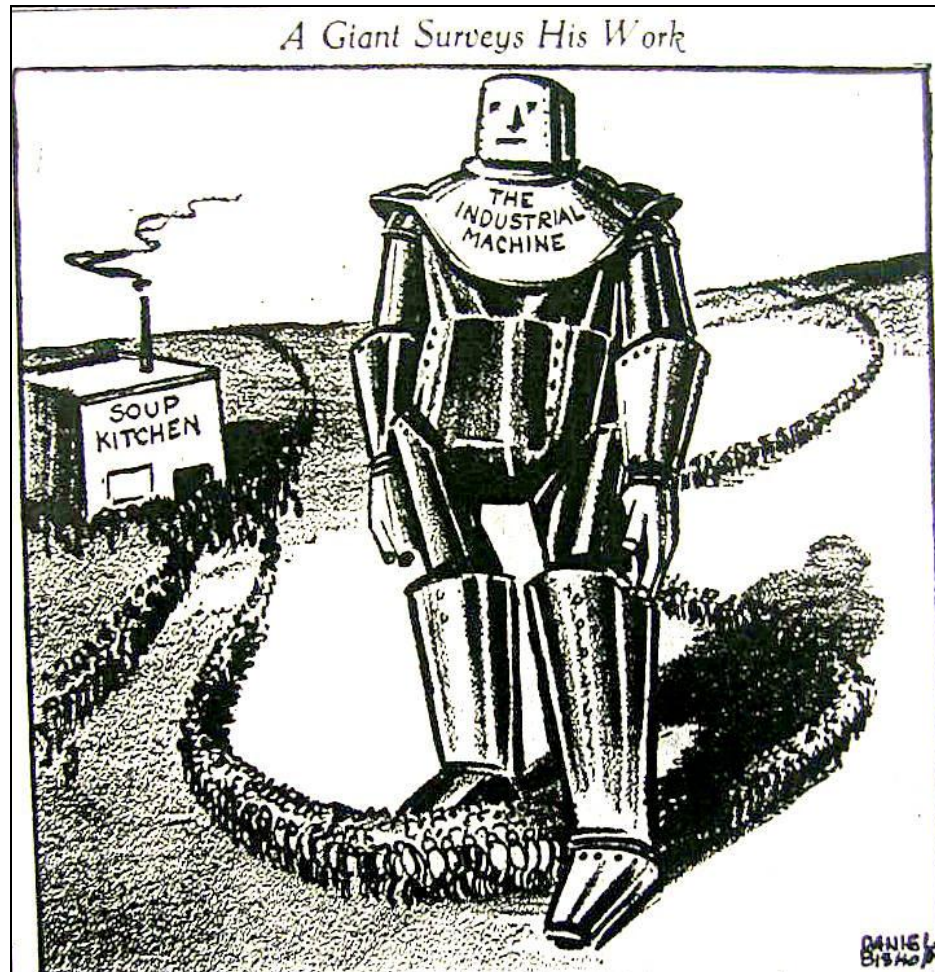


Figure 2. Technological Unemployment. One of the many images appearing in the pages of the Miami Daily News in the early 1930s; such imagery was prominent throughout the local and national media. This cartoon appeared on the editorial page, December 13, 1932, p. 4.

The Technocracy craze lasted for a short period, in part, because it was quickly discredited and ridiculed by economists and other intellectuals. The high expectations its dubious statistics produced, and the hyperbole and egomania of its leader, Howard Scott, helped ruin the nascent movement. Nonetheless, the essence of its ideas continued to live on in the imagination of many around the country and even sparked a short-lived

movement as Scott continued to linger in the shadows.³²

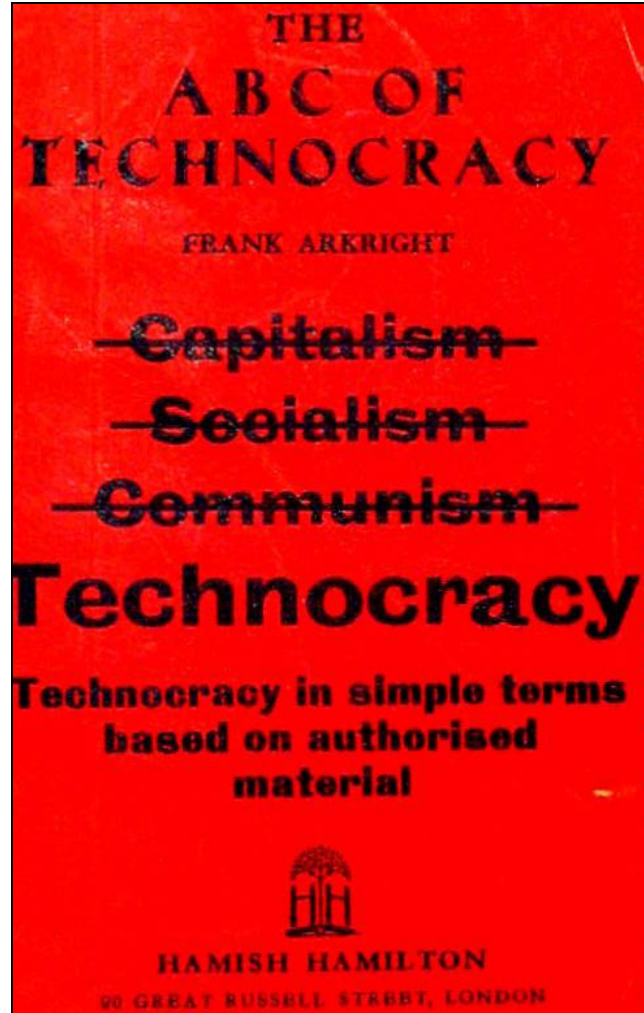


Figure 3. Spreading Abundance. Exciting and hopeful at first, Technocracy soon faced lampooning and marginalization for an array of reasons. Technocratic remedies of societal problems would persist throughout the century even as Technocracy faded in the historical memory.

This movement helped inform the politics of Perrine Palmer and the Dade County's Citizens' Unemployment League. In July of 1933, the Continental Committee of Technocracy (CCT) held a convention in Colorado where it issued its *Plan of Plenty*, a fifteen-page pamphlet outlining the political and social vision of the movement. Palmer,

³² Elsner, Jr., *The Technocrats*, 44-97; Akin, *Technocracy*, 116-170.

on behalf of the Dade County Unemployment Citizens' League, referenced the *Plan of Plenty* in an October 1933 letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He called it a "simple, practical, brief statement" seeking "scientific distribution through constitutional means without doing violence to existing laws or private property rights." The *Plan*, issued on July Fourth—"How insignificant that date, Mr. President," Palmer wrote—challenged the liberal capitalist framework in that it proposed to abolish exploitative labor relations and replace it with a cooperative vision of shared obligations and responsibilities. It called for the intellectual community to "prepare the people for the replacement of the present greed motif by an older and more efficient one, the instinctive desire for all human beings for prestige, for the appreciation of their fellows." The goal of "plenty for all" countered scarcity as an organizing principle, and the CCT stressed, "reason must be allowed to rule, unhampered by anxiety" (i.e., the concerns for "food, shelter or any of the necessities of life"). The call for community cooperation and abundance for all, thus, held its appeal and inspired Palmer and the League in the hopeful moments of the early New Deal.³³

Technocracy, in any case, was only one of the many responses emerging in the late 1920s and early 1930s that deviated from communism and socialism's more radical approaches to capitalist (near) collapse. As the historian Donald Miller has argued, a whole array of "non-Marxist" independent leftists pushed for a democratic socialism or at least a more humane capitalism. Such organizations as John Dewey's League of Independent Political Action, formed in 1928, reflected the frustration with partisan

³³ Perrine Palmer letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait," *Miami News*, 26 Oct 1933; Harold Loeb and others, *Technocracy*, "Plan of Plenty" 4 July 1933, Bear Lake, Estes Park, Colorado, Special Collections, Morris Library Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; Elsner, Jr., *The Technocrats*, 52-56;

politics shared by so many; this disorganized movement but vibrant current of the time pressed to accomplish a progressive solution to economic and social injustice. Alfred Bingham's *Common Cause*, linked to the League of Independent Political Action and established in November 1932, provided one of the platforms for these independent leftists to engage the issues of the day. Hence, it was by no accident that Palmer and Townley reached out and communicated with John Dewey, a paragon of progressive ideals and pragmatic philosophy.³⁴

While the faith in Technocracy as a solution to scarcity inspired hope in many, it also increased frustration at the “mishandling” of the economy. This frustration, along with the need for immediate action, was at the core of much activism around the country. Miami's unemployment movement was just one example. However, in embracing an economics of growth Technocracy slipped into a futile, direct competition with capitalism. At least socialists and communists offered more radical alternatives to the corporate economy and the existing power structure. Palmer, and the unemployment movement he was a part of, thus faced the perennial question faced by any political movement: to what extent will compromise and trade-offs sacrifice the goals of the movement?

Given the similar vision of both corporate capitalism and Technocracy—an outlook of growth—the battle for legitimacy occurred on the terrain of economic convention. Success of the unemployment movement, of course, was not determined by

³⁴ Donald L. Miller, *The American Radicalism: Alfred M. Bingham and Non-Marxian Insurgency in the New Deal Era* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1979), 3-8 and passim; Edward J. Bordeau, “John Dewey's Ideas and the Great Depression,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32, no. 1 (1971): 67-84; Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 443-458.

the merits of its arguments for a cooperative commonwealth. The nature of power and its resiliency help prevent Dewey, other “non-Marxists” radicals, Technocrats, socialists, or communists to crack the system. The significance of political activism and criticisms of the larger political economy, however, does not rest on the track record of concrete markers of success as in specific political victories. Influence on the mainstream, while often less obvious, is significant and can only be measured by tracing the activism of such grassroots movements.³⁵

Inspired by his own sense of justice and the morality of a cooperative commonwealth and the vision of shared abundance promised by Technocracy, Palmer pressed for grassroots activism in Miami and Dade County. Something had to be done that would end the evictions, the cutting of water services, and the paying of miserly public and private doles. In the letter “We Must Have Action,” Palmer stated, “There is only one thing we can do, and that is to organize the unemployed of our own community for the manning of our surplus tools of production and distribution, not for sale but for use.” Yet again, Palmer’s ideas tapped into larger currents of the era, especially the various unemployed self-help groups in the country (his knowledge of these efforts is unknown) and the growing activism of unemployment leagues throughout the country.³⁶

His idea was consistent with socialist principles and it anticipated the production-for-use

³⁵ Frank A. Warren, *An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 109-20 and passim, offers a fruitful discussion on how to not to judge political and moral significance of a movement by the record of its “success.”

³⁶ Palmer, “We Must Have Action,” *MDN*, 29 Nov 1932, p. 4; Roy Rosenzweig, “Radicals and the Jobless: The Musteites and the Unemployed Leagues, 1932-1936,” *Labor History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 52-77; Idem., “Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929-1933,” *Radical America* 10, no. 4 (July 1976): 37-61; Idem., “‘Socialism In Our Time’: The Socialist Party and the Unemployed, 1929-1936,” *Labor History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 485-509.

ideas of the popular Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California campaign of 1934.³⁷

Palmer's production-for-use prescription stemmed from a pragmatic sensibility and hopefulness about the possibilities of abundance. Technocracy stressed U.S. abundant natural resources. For the unemployed, evicted, and down-and-out the sight of unused resources must have been frustrating. Even more importantly, it helped stir the imagination about abundance, frame scarcity as a thing of the past, and reduce economics to questions of production output to meet the needs of a consuming public. Palmer called for the local leaders (those with immediate power) to act and thus seemed deferential or possibly even paternalistic. However, he simultaneously embraced grassroots, democratic organization as a means to enact change. Palmer targeted his message to institutions of power: the mayor, city and county commission, sheriff, and the courts.³⁸ He envisioned Miami serving as a model for the rest of the country and thus harked back to the Wisconsin Idea from the Progressive era where reform on the local and state level would inform wider progressive change.

Conclusion

Palmer revealed a deep faith in rational discourse and its ability to arrive at reasoned, moral, and ethical solutions to the Great Depression. His humanistic politics drew him to hopeful and optimistic visions of abundance built on the ideals of a cooperative commonwealth. Palmer and others in Miami and across the world were

³⁷ Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 121-155; George E. Rising, "An Epic Encounter: Upton Sinclair's 1934 California Campaign," *Southern California Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 101-124. On socialism and production-for-use, see Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, 62-68.

³⁸ Palmer, "'We Must Have Action,'" *MDN*, 29 Nov 1932, p. 4; Palmer will echo this call seven months later, Palmer letter to *MDN*, "The Jobless Organize," *MDN*, 8 May 1933, p. 4.

perplexed by the apparent contradiction between the persistence of impoverishment amid abundance. Growing up middle class, Palmer seems to have been educated to believe in the American dream that hard work would lead to economic success or at least economic security for oneself and family. Depressed economic conditions and the lack of opportunities afforded individuals to rise above these circumstances struck Palmer and others as evidence that the conservative rhetorical strands of individualism could not stand up to the overwhelming evidence that the game was rigged. In light of the productive capacities of the modern economy, cooperative, democratic engagement seemed to offer the best opportunity to attain social harmony.

Instead of advocating revolution, supporting violent political demonstrations, or embracing a radical political leftist philosophy, he and eventually the Unemployed Citizens' League chose to express their right to freedom of speech and try to find practical solutions to the unemployment affecting their community. The next chapter will explore the history the Unemployed Citizens' League more carefully. Suffice it to highlight here that Palmer made no effort to turn to the ideologies or the party organizations of Socialism or Communism as solutions to the existing political economy. His perspective, nonetheless, suggested a post-capitalist vision. Palmer's faith in the power of reasoned, rational discourse to cause change without advocating revolution might be interpreted as reformist, idealistic, or even utopic, the ultimate discrediting accusation from cynics. However, that would only reduce his and the DCUCL's activism's significance and potentially slip one's judgments down to condescension or cynicism.

A more fruitful perspective would be to take David Montgomery's assessment of

early twentieth century socialism's significance to heart. Montgomery argued that the Socialist Party's success, as little as it may have been in the aggregate, appealed to workers most when they pushed for practical solutions to workers' concerns, such as in the Tri-Cities of Rock Island and Moline Illinois, and Davenport Iowa, where the Party crusaded for kindergartens, improving consumer debt, and tackling home ownership issues. To denigrate this as evidence of the "bourgeois influence on the party" and thus really representing a "sewer socialism," was to ignore the fact that "the bourgeois, and only they, already had good sewers." One should not necessarily be distracted by the kinds of demands being made, but rather on the real economic needs existing. As he argued about the machinists supporting or at least sympathizing with the Socialist party, workers took issue with the ethic of competition and greed, particularly when their own economic wellbeing was threatened. Montgomery wrote, "The intellectual dichotomy of reformism versus revolutionary activity obscures, rather than clarifies, the ideology of these workers."³⁹

The same may be said of activists in Miami during the 1930s, though with an important caveat: Miami was less exposed to Communist and Socialist organizing, at least in the first half of the 1930s, and thus never quite established a significant story of radical activism to catch the historian's eye. Reformism may have ruled the discourse, however, the various activists were motivated and inspired by a critique of capitalism that

³⁹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 282-288 (quotes on 286 & 288). Russell Jacoby's *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought in An Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) suggests an interesting way to frame utopian thought. He argues "utopianism demands boldness and audacity in dreaming . . . without a utopian impulse, politics turns pallid, mechanical, and often Sisyphean" (148-149). Such a framework presents a useful model to understanding Palmer's ideas.

did not accept the status quo. Palmer represented one important example. Miamians who analyzed and critiqued the political economy did so in a context where abundance and scarcity were as acute as anywhere else in the country, perhaps even more so. As a resort town and winter playground for the rich and upper middle class, Miami served as a virtual laboratory of class relations. The discourse of class harmony played a significant role in class relations, at least in offering an alternative worldview that challenged class conflict discourses.⁴⁰ How this was the case is the subject of the next chapter.

⁴⁰ Frank A. Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, offers an instructive discussion on how to understand critical perspectives of the political economy and liberalism's tendency to discredit and frame as unreasonable (charging the threat of totalitarianism, the bugaboo of the 20th century) any political activism or ideology challenging the status quo. While his book focuses on Socialism, I suspect that Palmer and the Unemployed Citizens' League would confront similar critiques of not being popular or persuasive enough, perhaps being too dogmatic, and certainly being overwhelmed by the New Deal welfare program or subsumed by a consumptionist politics. Their omission in the historical record is in part a function of narratives focusing on "successful" movements and the nature of existing archives. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), reminds us, "History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots" (xix).

CHAPTER 6

Fighting for Social Harmony: Relief, New Deals, And the Unemployed, 1930-1934

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a small industry funded by conservative think tanks (the Cato Institute and the Ludwig von Mises Institute, for example) published anti-New Deal books lambasting Franklin Delano Roosevelt for incompetence and the inability of his administration to end the economic depression. We were reminded how it was World War II that got the nation back on its feet, not the failed liberal policies of the “radical” New Dealers. The appearances of academic protocol crumbled with the flimsy construction of their inaccurate, simplistic, and narrow conceptions of human nature, politics, and history. The literature was painful to plod through and the book titles highlighted a clear presentist agenda guiding its authors. Jim Powell’s *FDR’s Folly* (2003) explained to us *How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression*, while Burton W. Folsom, Jr.’s *New Deal or Raw Deal?* (2008) discussed *How FDR’s Economic Legacy Damaged America*. Such ahistorical treatments revealed how libertarians and conservatives were committed to producing agitprop for like-minded politicians and activists. This trend revealed a deep cynicism shaping American politics at the turn of the century: an inability to imagine positive framings of government’s potential and visions of a better more humane society.¹

¹ Jim Powell, *FDR’s Folly* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003); Burton W. Folsom Jr., *New Deal or Raw Deal* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008). Amity Shlaes, *The Forgotten Man: A New History of the Great Depression* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), while more moderate, is equally ahistorical. Shlaes website (<http://www.amityshlaes.com/>) has links to Powell’s and Folsom’s books among other libertarian favorites (last visited on 5-27-2009). There is one nod to David Kennedy’s *Freedom from Fear*—as a “journalist,” she must genuflect to the

Nels Anderson's opening anecdote in his 1938 book, *The Right to Work*, serves as a good antidote to the hypocrisy often characteristic of self-interested and aloof theorizing. He related how an economics professor, who at the start of the depression was an avid advocate of laissez faire, became a supporter of government intervention as a result of losing purchasing power and experiencing joblessness in his own family. Whereas in 1930 he was against relief and argued the laws of supply and demand would work if given a chance, his blind faith in competition and individualism dissipated in subsequent years as he and his family continued to endure economic hardship. Employment in government jobs for his family and the return of lost teaching assignments helped transform his thinking. He now argued for government to work efficiently, effectively, and with little debt, as any good businessperson would expect of their venture, for the sake of promoting and insuring the general welfare.²

Perhaps apocryphal, Anderson's anecdote revealed his own faith in government as Director of Labor Relations in the Works Progress Administration. The book was filled with photos of major public works projects completed or underway: the iconography of the New Deal abounded in the images of shared experiences, collective efforts, and individual dignity. This undoubtedly represented the New Deal at its best. However, historian Jason Scott Smith argued in *Building New Deal Liberalism* (2006) that the New Deal's "public works revolution ... was a political project not centrally concerned with advancing racial equality, redistribution of wealth, or social democratic

god of objectivity. However, George Will advised readers not to read "this book" and to shun Kennedy's classes if they attended Stanford: "A Stinker of a Prize," *National Review Online*, 11 April 2000, <http://www.nationalreview.com/will/will041100.html>.

² Nels Anderson, *The Right to Work* (reprint, 1938; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1973), 3-5.

ideals.” He asserted that New Dealers set out to administer and manage resources efficiently while essentially “preserving the social order.” He confirmed indirectly Anderson’s economics professor’s conservative tendencies and its predominance among many New Dealers. The New Deal adopted “commercial” Keynesianism over a “social” Keynesianism, according to Smith. The reality of a weak welfare state need not surprise since professional builders and engineers controlled and ran the various public works programs not “experts in solving a crisis in unemployment.”³

Smith’s sobering account of government growth and intervention during the 1930s and after suggests the Herculean if not Sisyphean struggle dreamers of a different world faced. And this was perhaps most valid for individuals fighting on the local and grassroots level for economic and social justice. Perrine Palmer of the Dade County Unemployed Citizens’ League in September 1933 alerted Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and in charge of the Public Works Administration, “that not a single project yet proposed or sponsored by our local city government has been designed primarily for the protection of the lives, health and happiness of those most vitally interested: the unemployed.” He went on to account the various Florida projects then pending or under discussion, the Overseas Highway, Chapman Air Field, the Pan-American exposition building, and harbor improvements. While all “probably meritorious as business propositions ... not a single one of them [carry] any provision whatever to engage the full mental and physical participation of the commercially unemployed in a manner that

³ Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 263; Bonnie Fox Schwartz’s *The Civil Works Administration, 1933-1934: The Business of Emergency Employment in the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) highlights the importance of engineers to the CWA and supports Smith’s larger thesis.

would permit decent housing, proper food, ample water and ample medical care, dental and ocular attention.”⁴ Palmer here highlighted how the unemployed were often marginalized in the grander visions of development pressed by Florida’s and Miami’s investors and boosters, confirming Jason Smith’s fundamental argument.

This chapter explores the history of the founding of the Dade County Unemployed Citizens’ League (DCUCL) and their refusal to idly wait for things to change. As opposed to the cynical individualists’ skepticism about the intervention of government, they chose to imagine a better world. Not as utopic dreamers, but as active and engaged citizens unwilling to accept the existing economic and political structure. They sought to preserve private property as an institution though they challenged the terms of individualism and called for collective responses and solutions to the widespread problem of unemployment and scarcity. In this way, they ran counter to mainstream liberalism. Arguing for production-for-use and economic security for all, the DCUCL offered an alternative vision of how things should be ordered. This meant, of course, fighting on the local front in terms of class harmony and for the goal of a cooperative commonwealth.

The League’s history has an important historiographic significance. Namely, the formation of this unemployed organization, and the continued activism of the local labor movement, represents yet another example of the existence of U.S. worker class-consciousness. Where conservative limited government advocates have argued for the New Deal’s detrimental effects and have ignored or understated the significance of grassroots activism; and where liberal scholars have argued for the benevolent and

⁴ Perrine Palmer letter to Harold L. Ickes, “Consider the Unemployed,” in the *Miami News*, 5 Oct 1933.

progressive role government expansion played in society and the economy but who have questioned the soundness and significance of radical voices; the historical evidence suggests an alternative perspective. The breadth and liveliness of grassroots activism reflected in the rise of movements like the DCUCL show that Miami residents in the 1930s, without the intervention of socialist and communist activists, developed a robust working-class consciousness, were not merely wage conscious, and embraced communal rather than individualistic solutions to their economic problems. It further illustrates that although the generally widespread support for the New Deal (as expressed in the political dominance of the Democratic Party) among working people has clouded the search for a more pervasive working-class consciousness, Miami labor history of this period contradicts the idea of ‘American Exceptionalism,’ that U.S. workers, unlike their European brethren, never developed class-consciousness. Many in the labor movement (broadly conceived) understood the contradictions and inadequacies of New Deal policies, as Palmer’s insight’s suggests above. The story of the DCUCL, as with the many accounted and unaccounted grassroots efforts around the country, indicates a more complicated dynamic of class existed than usually imagined. When one operates outside the rigid frameworks of Socialist or Communist Party intrigue and internal conflicts, the profoundness of their class perspective and the pervasiveness of disgust about the nature of class relations and power become not only more reasonable but possible.

Chapters four and five contextualized the political and economic landscape and they dissected the fundamental ideology fueling the activism of the unemployed. This chapter follows how that ideology translated into an actual movement, and thus begins to investigate how class and power relations worked in Miami. The next chapter will

broaden the exploration of class and power, evaluating the connections between the local and national more carefully. Before I make these connections, I will offer a more careful analysis of the local welfare context, the history of the national unemployment movement, and the founding and general history of the DCUCL. In order to reconstruct this story, I had to engage in the excavation of an archaeological site left unexplored and with few artifacts. The chapter thus explores the history of class as it was revealed in the inadequate local, state, and national welfare system, the national and local context that sparked the unemployed to action, and it offers a general outline of this activism. Survival for the down-and-out was the most immediate struggle for the organized unemployed; the more visionary issue at stake was how society would end its regular bouts with scarcity and the persistence of rampant inequality and unfair distribution of wealth.

Miami Confronts Local Unemployment

Turning back the historical lens to the conditions of home residents, one sees the frustrating situation created by unequal wealth distribution, limited government agendas, and a holy reverence of the work ethic. The hobo express and state patrol were as much an extension of a cultural bias against public and private welfare as it was a means to protect home labor and maintain an idyllic landscape for tourists (see chapter 4). The harsh treatment of transients mirrored a nearly equal harsh system of welfare for the poor and unemployed home residents. As the social scientists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward remind us, “The more important function of the relief system was accomplished, not by refusing relief, but by degrading and making outcasts of those few who did get aid.” With the continuous problem of seasonal unemployment and the overall increase in

the number of unemployed during the Great Depression, the existing welfare system simply failed to accommodate the social need in Miami and elsewhere. Helen C. Mawer, Commissioner of the Florida State Board of Public Welfare, claimed that by the middle of 1932 “communities were meeting the problem only by a continuous process of spreading relief,” which meant giving less to each welfare case whether it was direct payment or work relief.⁵ The unemployment movement reacted to the diminishing economic conditions as well as the poor welfare system with a hope in the possibilities of reform and the vision of forming a humane capitalism.

Like other local governments overwhelmed by the Great Depression, Miami and Florida did not offer much assistance to the unemployed allocating few dollars to its welfare coffers. Paltry mother-aid pensions and a meager county poor relief system defined the state welfare system before the New Deal. Miami, Lakeland, and St. Petersburg had city welfare departments staffing a caseworker, while other cities coordinated public funds for private welfare organizations. Throughout the state local charities, the Salvation Army, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A., and churches administered welfare programs that included food distribution and other aid in kind. The Dade County commission expended \$286,766 in poor relief in 1931 far surpassing any other county in the state, but the average of state relief payouts was \$5.00 per month, per family, and the payment was only given after close scrutiny by county social caseworkers and only after

⁵ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 42; Helen C. Mawer, *Organization and Activities of the State Board of Public Welfare, January 1, 1931 to January 1, 1933* (Tallahassee: State Board, 1933), 7; Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poor House of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 206-224 and passim.

the impoverished resident petitioned the county commission for assistance.⁶ Variety in local conditions in such a wide and economically diverse state as Florida led to different responses, with urban areas such as Miami, Jacksonville, St. Petersburg, and Tampa turning to greater government involvement in welfare efforts.

Each area relied on the voluntary, charity ethic for organized relief efforts. This social welfare net would not catch the rising numbers of unemployed and offered little help to the impoverished. The Community Chest, a coordinated effort of charity led by prominent local citizens, struggled to maintain steady flows of charity. Newspaper advertisements in the late 1920s and early 1930s abounded with calls to contribute to the Community Chest. One set of ads featured workers (from postal to retail) offering testimonials of their small but significant contributions thereby infusing (or manufacturing) enthusiasm for voluntary charity. Other ads featured prominent local community leaders, such as Rabbi Jacob Kaplan of the Temple Israel, city commissioner and building contractor Alexander Orr Jr. and others, urging for continued commitment to the Community Chest. These efforts revealed, if nothing else, a commitment to the volunteer ethic and the inability of government to provide relief and solutions to the economic downturn. The small coffers and enduring cultural taboos toward public welfare limited the Community Chest's effectiveness throughout its existence despite the well-intentioned efforts of its advocates and volunteers.⁷ Nor was the end of the year

⁶ Mawer, *Organization and Activities of the State Board of Public Welfare*, 32-33.

⁷ "Trolley Worker To Help Relieve Community Woes," *MDN*, 29 Jan 1932, p. 1; "Rabbi Jacob H. Kaplan Says of the Community Chest Campaign," *MDN*, 26 Feb 1933, p. 12, 2nd section. "Says of the Community Chest Campaign" was a 1933 ad campaign by the Community Chest Committee to solicit donations for charity efforts and featured prominent Miamians in support of the philanthropy drives offering their insight on depressed economic conditions and the need to donate for the common good.

Empty Stocking Fund an adequate measure either. Established in 1928 by the *Miami Daily News* as a holiday philanthropy effort for the impoverished specifically targeted to improve the Christmas experience of the poor, it continued over the years mainly as a yearly fund raising charity entertainment event that occasionally lent its resources to wider relief efforts.⁸ The Empty Stocking Fund was at best a momentary and temporary solution to poverty and unemployment as much as was the Community Chest.

In the winter season of 1930-1931, Cliff H. Reeder, City of Miami mayor, succeeded in creating the Committee for the Worthy Unemployed and the formation of an unemployment fund. Reeder was born in 1882 in Tennessee and moved to Miami in 1912. He had worked in the railroad industry as a telegraph operator, switchman, yardmaster, and train master before coming to Miami where he worked as a city auditor. After serving in the 29th Engineer Battalion of the American Expeditionary Force in WWI, he returned to the city and engaged in the real estate business and later was elected city commissioner in 1927. Reeder seems to have built from this experience when he initiated the unemployment fund. The fund set out to sidestep the negative baggage of charity through an unemployment work relief program. Reeder wanted the work relief effort to sustain “the morale of hundreds of its citizens” and to help “able bodied men and women willing to work for the right to eat” a self-respecting alternative to charity. It was to give temporary employment to bona fide Greater Miami residents in two-week stints and for \$2 a day for what appeared to be full days of work. By restricting employment to

⁸ “Miami Responds Generously With ‘Empty Stocking’ Sugar,” *MDN*, 21 Dec 1928 (started as a *MDN* initiative to make candy to distribute to “needy children”); “Phantom Fiesta Will Open Huge Circus Tonight,” *MDN*, 19 Dec 1930, p. 1; “Empty Stocking ‘Last Roundup’ Ready Tonight,” *MDN*, 23 Dec 1933, p. 1; a quick review of December for the 1930s will yield more examples.

residents it further limited the relief opportunities for the transient unemployed. Directed by the City but building its coffers solely through donations and charity entertainment events, the unemployment fund offered work in “cleaning up unsightly spots and in putting city parks and playgrounds in order.”⁹

Reeder and the Unemployment Relief Committee Fund—the label of worthy unemployed was dropped later in the winter season though the concept persisted—used a portion of the Empty Stocking Fund in December 1930 for starting the work relief program: later during the winter season horse and dog racing throughout Greater Miami and various other fund raising events contributed to the fund. Reeder’s political profile, as written by the *Miami Daily News* prior to the 1931 City Commission election, highlighted how he had been “active in soliciting government interest in Miami aviation, in hastening expenditure of public monies for the relief of unemployment, especially government funds, and in behalf of the financial betterment of the city.” The coffers of this effort, however, remained small (netting over \$32,000 for the winter season) because it remained dependent on charity raising events. Perrine Palmer appreciated Reeder’s efforts and recognized how charity often whittled away at one’s dignity. While working a two-week stint himself, Palmer claimed that individuals receiving work relief “would starve rather than accept charity,” devoting the majority of his letter celebrating the humanity and work ethic of those turning to the fund for aid. Palmer added the Mayor go one step further and “not to let the water company cut off the water on the premises of any of these men who cannot pay for water now,” succinctly reminding readers of the

⁹ “Life Sketches of Candidates for City Commission---No.4,” *MDN*, 27 April 1931, p. 3.

insufficient wages earned by the workers on the fund.¹⁰

Reeder's approach, though limited in scope and offering meager assistance as Palmer highlighted, revealed a progressive effort to have local government initiate positive actions to alleviate unemployment and poverty caused by the economic depression. While several other areas in the country turned by 1930 to public work relief, the effort nonetheless demonstrated an innovative associational spirit because Reeder had the city government take a lead role in coordinating work relief efforts while working with private interests, especially in regards to fund raising. It also represented a significant symbol that Miami's mayor took a lead role in the unemployment problem.¹¹ However, the punitive nature of the relief, understanding the unemployment fund effort as "rehabilitation, not charity," had its negative drawbacks and explains Palmer's inspiration to comment on the jobless fund. First, the idea of a "worthy unemployed" undoubtedly produced resentment among the unemployed while it satisfied many with its moral measuring stick and frustrated hard-nosed Social Darwinists insensitive to the plight of the down-and-out. Second, single individuals were discouraged, as were the transient unemployed, from applying for aid; (male) heads of households had priority status. However, in one instance, beginning in April 1931, the unemployment committee

¹⁰ "Rehabilitating Jobless," *MDN*, 29 Dec 1930, p. 4; "Labor Backing Reeder's Move to Aid Jobless," *MDN*, 27 May 1931, p. 1 & 14; "Mayor's Group to Employ 50 Needy Monday," 1 Feb 1931, p. 2; "Life Sketches of Candidates for City Commission---No. 4,"; "Mayor's Unemployment Fund Committee Reports \$ 26,575," *MDN*, 14 March 1931, p. 2; "Sewing Machines Will be Supplied," *MDN*, 10 April 1931, p. 1; Palmer, "From One Now Employed Through Jobless Fund," *MDN*, 6 April 1931, p. 4.

¹¹ "Rehabilitating Jobless," *MDN*, 29 Dec 1930, p. 4; Udo Sautter, *Three Cheers for the Unemployed: Government and Unemployment before the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 94-110 & 268-318; and Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 286-298.

gave employment to twenty-five women to sew clothing for needy children (a precursor to a program embraced later in the New Deal). They were to be paid \$2.50 a day and had the additional function of serving as self-help for the poor.¹² Finally, if this head of household refused the work offered, he would be denied any aid. The first fifty attaining work from the fund relief were all over fifty years old and had “large families to support.” The group consisted of carpenters, accountants, grocers, “and at least one business man who a few years ago, was independently wealthy.” Even if the phrase “worthy unemployed” represented a delicate political balancing act for politicians handling the crumbling general welfare amid skeptics, such language only helped to narrow eligible recipients and unburden the state and private charities from providing relief to a wider population of the unemployed.

Strangely and for unclear reasons, C. H. Reeder lost his mayoral seat in the 1931 May/June city commissioners’ election, even though he was the top vote getter in the run-off election. Custom had been and continued to be in subsequent city commissioners’ elections that the other commissioners would select the top vote getter as mayor. One suspects that Reeder’s efforts to relieve the unemployed may not have been appreciated as much by the other city commissioners because he threatened the Miami optimistic, booster tradition that dictated the City’s mayor don the cap as South Florida’s number one booster. Palmer argued that, “Cliff Reeder is not a politician. He doesn’t know how to go after votes, and probably wouldn’t if he did. He proved that by the way he spread out the city’s unemployment fund.... He was making the money he had do the

¹² “Shrine Nobles Boost Benefit Night at Track,” *MDN*, 30 March 1931, p. 1; “Needy Women Will Get Work in Courthouse,” *MDN*, 6 April 1931, p. 1; “Sewing Machines Will be Supplied,” *MDN*, 10 April 1931, p. 1.

most for the greatest number, let the votes fall where they might.” Even though he received the endorsement of Labor’s Citizenship Committee, the political arm of the Central Labor Union, and won reelection to the City Commission, he lost his bid to be reelected mayor by his fellow commissioners. The *Miami Daily News* highlighted how the other commissioners aspired to the mayoralty, so perhaps Palmer was correct in Reeder not being a typical politician; he nonetheless remained a commissioner despite the loss and would later become mayor again in the early 1940s.¹³ In any case, continued economic problems hamstrung local relief efforts and pressed local politics to seek immediate solutions to the rampant suffering.

In June 1932 Mayor Redmond B. Gautier joined twenty-eight other U.S. mayors in Detroit “calling upon Congress for a \$5,000,000,000 loan to build public works, mobilization of a ‘work army,’ and authorization for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) to advance credits to cities during the distress.” Mayors Frank Murphy of Detroit and Jacob S. Coxey of Massillon, Ohio (of 1890s Coxey’s Army fame), as well the mayors of New York City and Boston among others, attended the meeting.¹⁴ That same month Gautier and the City Commission passed resolution 7495 to

¹³ “Reeder, Platt and Gautier Are Elected,” *MDN* 3 June 1931, p. 1 & 2; “When Pride Must Yield,” *MDN* 9 June 1931, p. 4 (editorial), which pointed out that a delay occurred in selecting a mayor because “all three of the newly elected commissioners aspire to the mayoralty”; *Miami Herald* 16 June 1931, p. 1 (which announced that Redmond B. Gautier had been elected mayor). The *City Commission Minutes* were silent on this matter: Miami Office of the City Clerk, Resolutions and Minutes of the City Commission, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter, *City Commission Minutes*). Reeder would win reelection to the mayoralty in 1941. Perrine Palmer letter to the *MDN*, “How Shall I Vote,” 1 June 1931, p. 4. “Labor Backing Reeder’s Move to Aid Jobless,” *MDN*, 27 May 1931, p. 1 & 14; “Labor Launches Active Battle for Candidates,” 28 May 1931, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Conference of Mayors of the United States, Detroit Michigan, June 1, 1932*, Frank Murphy Papers, Bentley Historical Library, Reel 98, p. 42 & 120-121 (Gautier announces he supports the \$5 billion dollar relief plan). The accepted resolution read in part: “We propose a five billion dollar prosperity loan to be made available immediately for national projects to

appropriate all funds collected from the issuance of drivers' licenses for relief of the unemployed. Gautier estimated this would amount to about \$100,000 for 6,000 unemployed, a meager \$16.67 for each person if his unemployment figures were accurate. Despite these efforts and others, the Unemployment Fund dwindled even more in its already very limited effectiveness amid the increasing number of unemployed and underemployed and continued resistance to increase welfare coffers.¹⁵

The framework of an unemployment relief council seeking to extend welfare through public works continued and extended to the entire county later in 1932 and early 1933 when RFC funds became available for states and counties (as in the formation of the Dade County Transient Farm, discussed in Chapter 4). Helen Mawer stated that fifteen to twenty percent of Florida's population in August 1932 was unemployed and not getting enough relief if any. By January 1933 twenty-eight percent of Floridians were getting some Federal relief but many who needed assistance, "particularly single men and women, were not being reached."¹⁶ Given the limited state and city budget and President Herbert Hoover's administration's reluctance in enacting a substantial relief program, local governments were forced to find their own creative solutions while also depending

effectuate the employment of millions of men and in this manner obtain work for our jobless, redistribute purchasing power and thereby stimulate industry," p. 101. "28 Mayors Demand Federal Idle Relief," *New York Times*, 2 June 1932, p. 1.

¹⁵ "All Auto Drivers in Miami to be Taxed \$1 to Aid Jobless," *New York Times*, 8 June 1932, p. 28; *City Commission Minutes*, 25 May 1932 & 8 June 1932; "Get Your License Early," *MH*, 3 June 1932, p. 6. The *MH* was critical of the Detroit meeting entitling its editorial on it, "Cities Beg" (7 June 1932, p. 4). Their criticism targeted the need for balanced budgets and alleged corruption from local governments using welfare funds as political capital and thus sources for political scandal. Days later the Miami Realty Board targeted the license tax as a "gigantic political fund masquerading under the guise of [an] unemployment fund." They labeled any taxing power as essentially a "power to destroy." Such a libertarian conclusion from the realty board was not surprising and reflected Florida's strong anti-tax political tradition. "Gigantic Political Fund Seen in Tax," *MH*, 10 June 1932, p. 10.

¹⁶ Mawer, *Organization and Activities of the State Board of Public Welfare*, 28-29.

on charity and other voluntary relief efforts. Perhaps inspired by Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the fall of 1932 that promised better times and the possibility of securing greater economic growth and development as well as more adequate relief, many private citizens chose to organize to get results. It was in this context that the Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League emerged.

Origins of Miami's Unemployment Movement

Few histories have been written on the 1930s unemployment movement in general; the most influential and lasting studies were done in the 1970s and few exist for the South or Florida. In other places around the country, Communists played important roles in organizing demonstrations, such as the hunger marches of 1930 and 1931, or in trying to organize grassroots movements after spontaneous actions from the unemployed such as in the community block mobilizations that prevented evictions. Communist led Unemployed Councils propped up in Chicago, Detroit, New York, and elsewhere, however the party remained small even in these hotbeds of activism and the members were not long lasting. Communists practically had no presence in Florida in the early 1930s and only started to have some limited influence in the labor movement in the late 1930s and only in a couple of industries.¹⁷ Socialists fared a little better but again only had limited influence, especially in Tampa. While Socialists operated in Miami and Jacksonville, they were unsuccessful in garnering a significant presence or movement.

¹⁷ Alex Lichtenstein, "'We at Last Are Industrializing the Whole Ding-busted Party': The Communist Party and Florida Workers in Depression and War," *Florida's Working-Class Past: Current Perspectives on Labor, Race, and Gender from Spanish Florida to New Immigration*, edited by Robert Cassanello and Melanie Shell-Weiss, eds. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009) and "'Scientific Unions' and the 'Negro Question': Communists and the Transport Workers Union in Miami, 1944-1949," *Southern Labor in Transition*, Robert Zeiger, ed. (University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

This, of course, did not mean that Marxist ideas did not float in the air or that critical perspectives of capitalism as it existed did not help frame arguments.

A third group described by Roy Rosenzweig in his still relevant 1970s articles on the unemployment movement was inspired by the ideas of Abraham J. Muste. Students of his from the progressive Brookwood Labor College started in the early thirties to organize Unemployed Leagues where they moved, but their primary base was in Ohio and included at least 13 other states. The Musteites, shaped by socialist ideas, tended to rely on patriotic rhetoric and looked to American traditions for inspiration and justification for their actions. Some Unemployed Leagues gradually became more radical in outlook as they sensed that a revolution was imminent and/or frustration compounded with the lack of change and reform of the existing poor economic conditions. All three groups, while moved to unemployed causes for varying reasons, eventually relied on bread and butter issues as rallying points for organizing. They often turned to the following actions as assistance to the unemployed: serving as advocates of the unemployed struggling with relief agencies, engaging in eviction resistance, starting relief kitchens, lobbying government officials and legislatures, aiding self-help efforts, organizing direct food collection, and other immediate solutions to immediate needs. Communists, Socialists, and Musteites struggled in maintaining membership and thus struggled surviving as organizations. While each group attempted to have national organizations, they failed to establish a unified national presence. The unemployment movement was wholly a local phenomenon.¹⁸

¹⁸ On the unemployment movement, see the following: Roy Rosenzweig, "Radicals and the Jobless: The Musteites and the Unemployed Leagues, 1932-1936," *Labor History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 52-77; Idem., "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great

Miamians joined this wave of national activism after years of inadequate relief and disappointing local government leadership. The Miami unemployment movement appears to have been unaffiliated to the Communists, Socialists, or Mustetites. While no clear connections existed between the three primary groups organizing the unemployed, it does appear that the Mustetite Unemployed Leagues provided a model and that the Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers for Economic Reconstruction, held in Washington D.C., May 6-7, 1933, triggered the formation of the DCUCL. The first connection was an obvious one. The Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League adopted the name of the Mustetite leagues with the key addition of Citizens to the organization's name. This modification served to emphasize even more the patriotic tradition the DCUCL sought to engender—embodying the ideals of the right to free speech, assembly, and petitioning the government. Like the Mustetite's, it embraced a tradition that envisioned a cooperative commonwealth protected by the political principles as defined in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. The history of the League also demonstrated an equal commitment to peaceful protest, picketing, self-help, and an avoidance of violent tactics to enact change. This approach,

Depression, 1929-1933,” *Radical America* 10, no. 4 (July 1976): 37-61; Idem., “‘Socialism In Our Time’: The Socialist Party and the Unemployed, 1929-1936,” *Labor History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 485-509. Daniel J. Leab, “‘United We Eat’: The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930,” *Labor History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1967): 300-315; Alex Baskin, “the Ford Hunger March—1932,” *Labor History* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 331-360; Albert Prago, “The Organization of the Unemployed and the Role of the Radicals, 1929-1935,” (Ph.D. Union Graduate School, 1976); Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movement*, 41-95; Steve Valocchi, “The Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s: A Reexamination of the Piven and Cloward Thesis,” *Social Problems* 37, no. 2 (May 1990): 191-205; James J. Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1996) and his recent *The Unemployment People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), the first general sustained study for the South (or at least Georgia); Robing Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), chapter one.

too, was consistent with the philosophy of democratic change through education, grassroots organizing, and general civic engagement that marked the Mustetite movement.¹⁹

Another immediate influence in the formation of the DCUCL, working along a similar vein of patriotic leftist activism, was the two-day Continental Congress. Various progressive groups, including local and state AFL unions, farmer organizations and unions, cooperative societies, unemployed leagues, and the Socialist Party—who were central in organizing the event and who seemingly dominated the two-day conference—organized the conference. The Continental Congress sought reform, immediate solutions, and hopes to organize “liberal independent action on state and local levels.” Perrine Palmer drew attention to this conference in a published letter entitled “The Jobless Organize.” Written before the start of the conference on May 5, he apparently had received a copy of the announcement of the meeting, if not an invitation to him, the local Central Labor Union, or to the DCUCL.²⁰

While the conference did not lead to a larger successful national coalition or movement, members did craft a new Declaration of Independence resounding many of the themes of the recent technocracy craze and adding a socialist edge in its criticism of the current political economy. Referencing the older Declaration’s call for the right to abolish a destructive government, it targeted monopolistic power, the profit system, the waste of the country’s abundant resources, and the maldistribution of wealth, among other things. It called also for a “a new economic system based upon the principles of

¹⁹ Rosenzweig, “Radicals and the Jobless,” 52-64.

²⁰ It is quite possible that Palmer received a copy from a CLU member during a session of the weekly Labor Citizenship Committee meeting (see the discussion below).

cooperation, public ownership and democratic management, in which the planlessness, the waste, and the exploitation of our present order shall be eliminated and in which the natural resources and the basic industries of the country shall be planned and operated for the common good.” The D.C. meeting, however, would have passed unnoticed if there had not been a receptive base prepared to organize and act. Palmer had already announced in November 1932 the need to organize the unemployed pointing to Wayne Parrish’s analysis of Technocracy as testament of the U.S. economy’s capacity to exploit the vast resources of the country and provide for all. Technocracy reinforced many of Palmer’s assumptions extrapolated from the literature of the time and as articulated in his letters in 1931 and his 1932 Plan to end the economic depression.²¹

While the reasons to organize a movement for the improvement of economic conditions were clear, the history of the founding of the Dade County Unemployed Citizens’ League is not. It appears the future founders of the League read each other’s letters in the readers’ forum of the *Miami Daily News*, encountered each other in weekly meetings of Labor’s Citizenship Committee (LCC), and sometime in the spring of 1933 decided to launch South Florida’s own Unemployed League. In addition to Perrine Palmer’s ample letters, M. E. Fidler (former president of Central Labor Union during WWI), Charles Nicholson and William Wister—to name three other leaders in the League—also published letters in the paper, as noted in the example of discussions

²¹ Perrine Palmer letter to *MDN*, “The Jobless Organize,” *MDN*, 8 May 1933, p. 4; “The Continental Congress,” *The World Tomorrow* 16, no. 17 (May 1933): 388; Devere Allen, “A New Declaration of Independence,” *The World Tomorrow* 16, no. 18 (June 1933): 416-417; Donald W. Whisenhunt, “Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers, 1933,” *Studies in History and Society* 6, no. 1 (1974): 1-14; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1955), 227-228; Donald R. McCoy, *Angry Voices: Left-of-Center Politics in the New Deal Era* (reprint, 1958; Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1971), 30; Palmer, “We Must Have Action,” *MDN*, 29 Nov 1932, p. 4.

surrounding Technocracy in Chapter Five. These activists and others benefited from the *Miami Daily News*' liberal policy of publishing readers' letters, a practice that built on its muckraking tradition of engaged journalism and civic duty to the community. On the masthead of the readers forum read the famous quote supporting the right to freedom of speech: "I wholly disapprove of what you say and will defend to the death your right to say it."²² Along with the concerned activist citizen Verner Townley, unionists W. J. Fripp (Typographical Union), and Chas Poore (Carpenters Union), and several other vocal citizens, a lively debate filled the readers' forum section of the *Miami Daily News* on unemployment concerns and many other relevant issues affecting residents of the city.

Launched in latter half of 1929 by Miami AFL's Central Labor Union President Harry McClurg as its "political arm," LCC weekly meetings offered a physical forum for chance encounters of concerned citizens. John M. Harding, member of the LCC executive board, stated in June 1931 that we "have been consistently educating our membership in practical politics and breaking down individualism." Acting on the logic that "whatever benefits labor directly, reacts indirectly for the betterment of all the people," the LCC soon morphed after into an ambitious, progressive forum engaging pertinent South Florida and national issues.²³ Held in Carpenters Hall, local politicians running for City Commission and other political offices were sure to give their campaign pitches in front of LCC meetings. Perrine Palmer attributed his first meeting with Charles Nicholson, the individual most active in organizing the League (according to

²² Burdette Kinne, "Voltaire Never Said It!" *Modern Language Notes* 58, no. 7 (Nov 1943): 534-535. The quote appeared in a book on Voltaire and not said by him.

²³ "Labor's Citizenship Committee a Factor in Gains by Labor Here," *Miami News*, 5 March 1936; John M. Harding letter to the *MDN*, "Labor's Indorsement, [sic]," 2 June 1931, p. 4.

Palmer), to a session of the LCC.²⁴ The LCC sought to increase citizen participation and awareness of local and national issues of civic concern and encouraged nonunion members to attend its weekly meetings. From presentations from local unionists and other activists to guest lecturers and presenters, the LCC educated and informed the local citizenry. So when in March 1933, the *American Federationist*, the AFL's monthly journal, issued a vague request to Central Labor Unions around the country to "serve as advocate[s] of the unemployed," helping them organize for relief, and to persuade them to turn to the AFL for leadership, Miami's labor movement had already started a tradition that included reaching out to the larger citizenry. The DCUCL took advantage of such venues to organize and also to gain access to such grassroots, community-oriented weekly gatherings.²⁵

Palmer and the DCUCL were vital in articulating the hardship of the down-and-out that went beyond simple moral, philanthropic pleas. They also rose above moralistic criticisms of the dole. While critical of the inconsistent nature of the dole and unfair judgments against public welfare, they pressed for larger solutions to the capitalist order—solutions that borrowed freely from the vibrant ideological milieu of the early twentieth century. They were firm critics of the money system, especially the reliance on "green paper" and "yellow metal" as the system of economic exchange, and thus linked themselves to a longer tradition going back to the late nineteenth century. Palmer emphasized the need to organize during the economic downturn and press for production for use to meet immediate needs. Writing in March 1933, he argued,

²⁴ Perrine Palmer letter to the *MDN*, "Another Casualty," *MDN*, 3 Sept 1933, p. 4; Verner Townley to *MDN*, "Praises Nicholson," *MDN*, 8 Sept 1933, p. 6.

²⁵ "Central Labor Unions and Our Unemployed," *American Federationist* 4, no. 3 (March 1933): 234-235; "Labor's Citizenship Committee a Factor."

We can do a lot and WE are the only ones who can. The president can't do it all for us. All he can do is to furnish the leadership. But this leadership will fall flat unless we organize to help him, just as we did during the war [WWI] . . . What are all these idle acres, these empty houses, tools of production and distribution for? Are they no more valuable to us than pieces of green paper and yellow metal? Are we in Miami and Dade county going to continue to sit idly by and do nothing but talk, while our president works night and day, merely in hope that his efforts will induce some speculator to take a chance and start a buying wave and that chance will bring it our way? Shame on us.

As noted in Chapter Five, Palmer supported the shorter hour movement and found the thirty-hour legislation pending in Congress to be promising and offering a real solution to the depression. He commented on how the long hours being worked by Miami workers contributed to general economic plight and the need for the Dade County Red Cross to ask the federal government for 3,700 barrels of flour—the government only allocated 400.²⁶

From the shorter hour movement and expansive notions of leisure to loose class conflict Marxist readings of the capitalist downturn, these grassroots, and organic intellectuals called for change of the status quo through a radical embrace of class harmony. However, they were not advocates of revolution, or at least violent revolution. Verner Townley, regular attendee of LCC meetings, argued this point in one letter, “Violent Revolt Unlikely.” He called for change of the current economic order along class harmony lines, commenting that America had not “developed class consciousness and class hatred as have many of the European countries.” Indeed, workers and capitalists could find common ground as the former slipped in the wage-working class making “their economic interest identical.” As importantly, “the class with which is able

²⁶ Perrine Palmer to *MDN*, “What Would the Ants Do?” *MDN*, 11 March 1933, p. 11; Idem, “The 30-Hour Week Bill,” *MDN*, 16 April 1933, p. 4.

to contribute to the welfare of the unemployed” needed to work along with the working class, including the unemployed, for the “economic security of all.” Such stretched conceptions of class relations revealed hopeful dreams of cooperation as it also subtly argued for action. Townley made an interesting assertion that members of each class “have close relatives and very dear friends in the opposite class.” This point suggested both the possibilities of economic mobility (even within families) and the promise of equality as stated in the Declaration of Independence.²⁷

Speaking perhaps from experience, Townley tapped here into the spirit of American exceptionalism as well as hopes for class harmony. His analysis, however, did not assert that classlessness had been achieved and in fact he held out the possibility that revolution could occur if economic conditions did not begin to ameliorate. That Townley associated class-consciousness with class hatred revealed the anathema felt toward violent revolution—a reality not far from the imagination from someone who lived in the early twentieth century. He, however, substituted conflict with common interest and the human need for economic security, but much of this was predicated on the assumption of American abundance, the inefficiency of wealth distribution and the need to increase workers’ power in the current economic system. Such a substitution revealed how

²⁷ Verner Townley to *MDN*, “Violent Revolt Unlikely,” 4 May 1933, p. 4. Townley’s letter also points to the subjective nature of class identity, an idea discussed by Elizabeth Faue in her provocative essay, “Retooling the Class Factory: United States Labour History after Marx, Montgomery, and Postmodernism,” *Labour History* 82 (May 2002): 109-119. Faue highlights the contingent nature of becoming or finding oneself working class. She asserts that scholars often assume that class-consciousness or identity exists without showing how it develops and takes shape—a point she substantiates with an unfair assessment of David Montgomery. What is needed, she argues, is a closer inspection of the “sporadic nature of work” and its effects on the reproduction of community. Her emphasis on the idea “that individuals rework and recreate class relations and location over the life course” is instructive and lends to the potential poignancy of class harmony as an ideal amid changing class positions during individuals’ lives.

Townley's desire for a greater sense of community and social harmony was rooted in the idea that workers had an important role in society. Indeed, he often argued that workers were the producers of the nation's economic wealth.²⁸

The founding of the DCUCL revealed a comfortable convergence of organized labor's goals, socialist ideals, and an Americanism comfortable with pushing the liberal political economy beyond normative conceptions of capitalism into a realm of greater equality and democracy. Palmer's letter, "The Jobless Organize," was a case in point. The Continental Congress, as noted above, was a gathering of various progressive organizations. In the pamphlet calling for delegates around the country to attend, organizers of the conference pointed to mounting numbers of the unemployed, the foreclosures, the long breadlines, the inadequacy of relief, and the transient poor as evidence of rampant economic plight. It urged action against the "insane economic order," "the greed of the captains of industry," and "the denial of relief by their political leaders." Appended to this pamphlet was a call by William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor, announcing that, "LABOR IS ON THE MARCH!" A cartoon depicting three workers, two men (one a farmer) and a woman, marching forward toward the Congressional Capitol in D.C. amid scurrying fat black top hat and tuxedoed

²⁸ "Violent Revolt Unlikely." Townley held, at best, an historical evolutionary, Marxist view of change. He argued in 1932 that communism would arrive only "when capitalism fails to function" which will happen if capitalists neglect the foundation of the economy: "wealth is not produced at the top of society but is produced by labor power in mines, mills, factories, workshops, farms, and only labor power gives it value." Only by reducing the length of the workday [i.e., the shorter workday], ridding the country of the problem of unemployment, and increasing consumer purchasing power would capitalism avoid failure. Hence, Townley appears to have been a social democrat quite cognizant of a vibrant class society. Townley to the *MDN*, "To Avoid Communism," 5 Jan 1932, p. 6. In addition to his regular attendance to LCC meetings, he once gave a speech to striking workers and helped their effort with volunteer work feeding them (that is, peeling potatoes). Townley to *Miami News*, "Knows His Potatoes," 2 Aug 1934.

capitalists getting away with bags of money (see figure 1). Green announced the time had come to wage a battle to end the suffering caused by “the fat enemies of America, who through one device or another, have wrung from the people such a proportion of the fruit of their toil that they are stranded in a motionless sea of unemployment.” He continued, “we prefer the council table but we do not shun the battlefield . . . a battle out of which labor expects a new America.” Juxtaposed together, these images and words pointed to the failure of the economic system and the democratic process. William Green, marginalized in the histories of the 1930s, appears here as an inspiring and progressive force.²⁹

²⁹ The Continental Congress Pamphlet is located in numerous archives. See the “Socialist Party” folder in the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People Papers, Library of Congress, Administrative File, Socialist Party, Part I, C399 (NAACP Papers); or “The Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers,” Mildred and Mary Hicks Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, box 3, folder 5 (Hicks Papers).

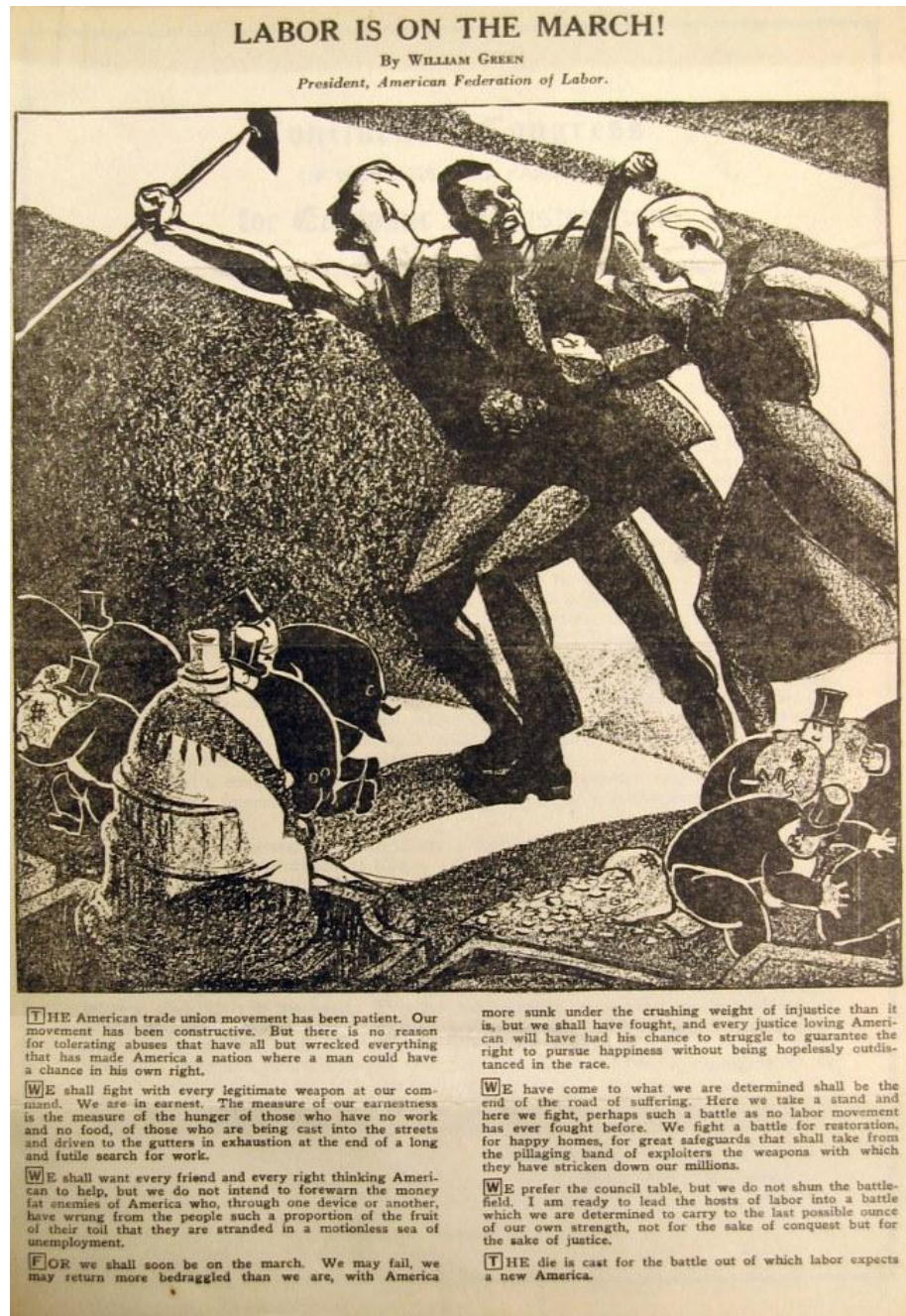


Figure 4. Labor is on the March. William Green's 1933 AFL Leaflet

Perrine Palmer echoed these progressive voices and his reading of the Continental Congress pamphlet and Green's flyer suggests the creative and hopeful insights activists around the country made of such events. He argued that Dade County's Unemployed

Citizens' League was similar to World War I "shock-troops" but in this context they were leading the charge against their economic plight while fighting for the survival of the unemployed and for the entire community. The insertion of Green into this radical milieu serves as an interesting reminder of how many yearned for improved conditions along imaginative and progressive lines that transcended strident political entanglements. Green and the AFL Executive Committee issued a public statement announcing they did not support or sanction the Congress and they urged national and international unions not to attend. Many AFL locals still decided to attend, though none in Miami did so—as far as the limited historical evidence indicates. This action, evidently, reflected the AFL's concern that Socialists were playing a leading role in the organizing of the Congress and that its organizers used Green's flyer "LABOR IS ON THE MARCH!" without approval. At the very least, Green's public statement served to officially disassociate the AFL from more radical organizations. This way the AFL could appear progressive in some circles (those receiving this pamphlet) while also appearing mainstream. Regardless of the public or private political positioning, the AFL continued the long practiced strategy of political lobbying and trade union organizing to enact change.³⁰

Palmer quoted in his letter the circulating pamphlet's message of economic security for "ALL men, ALL women, [and] ALL children" adding not only the capital letters but also the phrase "whether they be street cleaners or bank presidents," an idea

³⁰ Palmer, "Jobless Organize"; Continental Congress Pamphlet, NAACP Papers and Hicks Papers; "A.F. of L. Executive Committee Council Places Ban on Congress of Farmers and Workers," *The Journal of Labor*, 5 May 1933, Hicks Papers; article originally published in American Federation of Labor, *Weekly News Service* 29 April 1933; AFL Minutes of the Executive Council, Washington, D.C., April 20-May 2, 1933, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Records, University of Maryland Special Collections, Series IV, Sub-series 1, Box 2.

that framed the goals of the Continental Congress, socialists, the AFL, and the unemployed into their simplest and most visionary terms. He went on to urge Miamians to support the Unemployed Citizens' League and their goal of making production and distribution a function of need and willingness to serve rather than for profit, at least at the level of independent self-help efforts for the down and out. Only through covenants "openly arrived at around the council table" could such an adjustment to the economic situation occur. Palmer ventured the idea of using unoccupied property, both land and buildings, for the application of production for use not profit. His pitch worked within class harmony logic: "A preliminary conference composed of the city and county commissions, city manager, city and tax assessors, city building inspector, county agricultural agent, sheriff and judges of the courts, together with spokesmen for our business and agricultural interests, organized labor and the Unemployed Citizens' league and the press could accomplish much *with such a high purpose in view*" (italics added). He reiterated these points in a letter written a week later calling for such a meeting and local cooperation in the community.

Palmer premised his call on the idea that Roosevelt could not succeed alone; that civic responsibility necessitated grassroots organizing and local efforts to alleviate the suffering. In this light, the WWI reference in his letter and in earlier ones revealed a faith in collective resolve, drawn from actual experience, to protect individuals, families, and the nation. Class harmony could be achieved in the midst of abundance but only through hard work and vigilant local civic action—perhaps an early version of what would be called in the 1960s participatory democracy. The Continental Congress and Green's vision, as expressed in the flyer, thus merged as a consistent message despite the real

world rift between Socialists and the AFL. The high purpose to produce for use rather than profit suggested a socialist inspiration shaping the League's vision while Palmer's call for working around the council table embraced a faith in collective resolution consistent with AFL negotiation practices. Production for use not for profit anticipated Upton Sinclair's *End Poverty in California* platform of a year later. Miami was only one place of certainly many across the country where such imaginative "policies" were discussed and where grassroots groups were pressing for its practical applications.³¹

The Unemployed Citizens' League in Action

Mirroring the AFL and Unemployed Leagues across the country, the DCUCL's larger vision did not prevent them from embracing practical strategies to confront the day-to-day problems faced by the unemployed. This reflected a willingness to engage and work for reform even as frustrating as the political process may have been. Once the Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League formed in 1933 it worked to keep the concerns of the unemployed in the forefront of Miami life while also relieving the difficult material conditions faced by the down-and-out. Making regular appearances in the City Commission, announcements in the local papers, and in presentations to the Labor Citizenship Committee, the Dade County Citizens' Unemployed League kept up a

³¹ Palmer, "Jobless Organize"; Palmer, "Urges Job-Aid Meeting," *MDN*, 16 May 1933, p. 4; Continental Congress Pamphlet, NAACP Papers and Hicks Papers; Whisenhunt, "The Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers, 1933" (p. 5) suggests there were varying interpretations of the purpose and goals of the Congress, as in the case of one New Mexican who saw the Congress as an attempt to support Roosevelt not undermine him—the ostensible goal of socialists. I would go further than Whisenhunt and argue that it was not simply a misunderstanding of the goals and nature of the Congress, but rather the meeting represented a moment when red scare culture failed to corrupt the imagination of some around the country. That is, socialist ideals overlapped with the more progressive aspects of Roosevelt's political rhetoric to allow for a tolerant, though Americanist, reading of the event.

persistent effort to help the immediate material needs of the unemployed. The League would remain in existence to at least 1940.

Through 1935, they held a membership of at least 1,500, holding regular weekly meetings and occasional picnics to educate, organize, strategize, and bolster spirits in the tough economic times. Their membership was as high as 6,000 members (May 1934), far surpassing the numbers of any union local during this period. However, DCUCL leaders commented how they represented between, according to their own estimates, 20,000 and 35,000 nonmember unemployed residing in the city and county. Information about its leadership or the day-to-day operation of the League is incomplete. The sketchy evidence indicates that it was an incorporated organization, having Inc. appear after its name; it had annual elections of officers, including president, at least one vice-president, two secretaries (including a treasurer); women were active participants if not equal members (a Mrs. John Hunter served as a vice-president for at least two consecutive years, 1934-1935); the DCUCL formed committees to tackle specific issues; it contained an advisory committee often led by Perrine Palmer; and it reached out on a regular basis to organized labor, especially in its regular attendance of LCC meetings.³²

The League operated within the mainstream of Miami efforts to relieve the economic conditions faced by the unemployed and this received tacit support from the government and business interests. Self-help relief efforts received official sanction. Throughout the summer of 1933, the DCUCL placed want ads in the *Miami Daily News* offering workers for skilled and unskilled jobs. This strategy was a response to shady

³² Perrine Palmer to Harold Ickes, "Consider the Unemployed"; "League Will Give Dance for Charity," *MDN*, 22 Dec 1933, p. 11; "Citizens' League Seeking Charter," *MDN*, 16 Jan 1934, p. 2; Palmer to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "A Self-Explanatory Telegram," *Miami News*, 10 May 1934; Palmer to *MDN*, "A Sorry Spectacle," *MDN* 1 Nov 1933, p. 4.

and unfair private employment agencies that required exorbitant fees for work, which often was temporary and very exploitative.³³ Throughout the 1930s the City Commission gave the DCUCL permission to conduct tag days—charity drives authorized through the city where donators were given tags indicating they had donated to the League. Often women members and volunteers would dominate the work of canvassing the city for donations. The DCUCL also lobbied the City Commission for an eight-week charity bazaar in the winter of 1934 but seemed to have been denied permission since the Commission minutes and local newspapers offer no evidence that it ever occurred. The League also conducted a “Repair, Clean-Up, and Paint-Up” campaign as a way to relieve unemployment. This mirrored an earlier effort from the summer of 1931 when the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a similar drive.³⁴

Other fund raising initiatives blended with the accepted practice of organizing charity events as relief efforts as well as walking in-step with common cultural ways of the times and place. An incomplete historical record provides a sketchy picture of these initiatives. Working within the tradition of the Unemployment Fund’s framework of raising funds for relief, the DCUCL organized three social events in the late summer and fall of 1933. The League sponsored at least two minstrel shows in Miami’s famous

³³ The Papoose, “On and Off the Reservation,” *Miami News*, 8 Feb 1934, stated this about employment agencies: “Many thought, with the coming of the government employment bureaus that the privately owned concerns would fade out of the picture. Some have ceased to function, but a few still are taking in the 50c pieces and getting a cut on the first job the application secures. We are informed from a reliable source that few of these jobs last longer than a week or two—or until the agency gets their commission. The applicant must deposit another 50c, secure another job and help the agency get another commission. And so, on and on. You see how it works!”

³⁴ *City Commission Minutes*, 26 June 1933, 7 Feb 1934, 18 & 25 April 1934; *Minutes of the Miami of Chamber of Commerce*, South Florida Historical Museum, 22 June 1931, 14 August 1931, & 28 August 1931 (for Paint & Clean-Up initiative). “Unemployed Body Elects Officers,” *Miami News*, 5 July 1934; “Tag Day Granted City’s Approval,” *MDN*, 7 Jan 1938, p. 8; see *MDN*, 31 July 1933, p. 8 and 11 Sept 1933, p. 9 for examples of want ads.

Bayfront Park for two nights in mid-August and in mid-September. The proceeds from the first show went to the League's treasury and the second show went toward relief. Minstrel shows were a common practice throughout Miami and Dade County and had been a featured event during the yearly Empty Stocking Fund. Local schools, social clubs (even the Mickey Mouse Club), and some union labor locals—such as the Typographical workers—organized regular minstrel blackface shows. The first show included several vaudeville acts and the second starred the minstrel pair “Duke” Brown and “Dutch” Slawson as well as Madeline “the Egyptian.” The second show also included Roland C. McLaughlin, a regular performer at the Alcazar, Antilla, and Floridian hotels, while also featuring the Miami Melody Makers.

The minstrel shows' loaded cultural significance becomes a bit more complicated in the fund raising for-a-good-cause context. While easily denigrated as a racist cultural artifact, it also was part of a longer evolving history of communal, musical, and comedic styles, intonations, and creative spaces that by the 1930s was near extinction nationally but which remained a conventional entertainment form on the local level. Its appearances as a fund-raising tool served a political purpose for the DCUCL, but whether or not that revealed a racist bent in its members that disallowed cross-racial alliances is less clear. No other evidence, however, exists of the DCUCL turning again to the minstrel show for fund-raising after September 1933. Indeed, three months later the League held a charity dance featuring “a 10-act floor show.” League members were admitted “without charge by showing their membership cards at the gate.” The DCUCL was going to use the proceeds from the show as relief and added, in this rare newspaper advertisement announcing the charity dance, a call for Miamians to give donations “in the form of food,

old clothes, or checks” to League headquarters.³⁵ These strategies to cope with unemployment only served to confirm the benevolent civic profile the DCUCL wished to portray and suggested the conservative nature of the cultural landscape in which they were operating.

The DCUCL maintained a lively civic activism and sense of community, thus creating class solidarity by conducting regular weekly meetings and having occasional picnics while remaining aware of the conservative social and political landscape. On one occasion in the summer of 1934, the DCUCL announced an all-day picnic for the “white unemployed and their families and their friends, whether unemployed or not.” Two facts stand out in this announcement: 1) the DCUCL sought to gain a larger class solidarity, one that did not marginalize the unemployed and instead broaden the conception of class beyond employment status; 2) the practice of segregation was not beyond their purview. While there is little doubt that they embraced Jim Crow as revealed in this public announcement, it is unclear whether or not blacks were disallowed from attending weekly meetings. One can only speculate whether or not this was the case given the few extant DCUCL records.

The announcement’s statement that whites were invited suggests that blacks did participate in League activities and that the DCUCL recognized that African Americans also faced the problems of unemployment. Rarely (if ever) would one see such racial parameters stated openly in the newspapers for social events given that “normal” social practice in Jim Crow Miami implied racial segregation. That is, few advertisements of

³⁵ “Jobless Will Give Show,” *MDN*, 10 August 1933, p. 1; “Minstrel Program Will Aid Jobless,” *MDN*, 15 Sept 1933; “Pier Ball, Show Will Aid Jobless,” *MDN*, 21 Dec 1933, p. 11; “League Will Give Dance to Charity,” *MDN*, 22 Dec 1933, p. 11.

black social events ever appeared in the local papers and when they did, it usually included an invitation to whites or simply highlighted that “colored” individuals would participate. Yet, in this picnic affair, League leaders deemed necessary to invite only whites. It suggests, evoking Booker T. Washington’s famous 1895 Atlanta Compromise, that in all things social segregation was the rule but “in all things essential to mutual progress” whites and blacks were united. However, this rare announcement also reflected the very real concern that racial cooperation could be used to bolster radical accusations.³⁶

The DCUCL’s legitimacy stemmed from the conditions of the times as well as the lack of any ties with known radical organizations. Indeed, the City Commission at first gave a room in the old City Hall annex building to serve as the League’s headquarters but then took this away when the annex was torn down. William Wister, chairman of the DCUCL grievance committee, and the League were unhappy with this move, especially since they had made a request for a new space two months before the annex was eliminated. In July, when the initial League’s request was made, Wister and mayor E. G. Sewell indirectly debated the need for an unemployed organization: the latter highlighted his quest for government funding for public works projects and the former arguing “if you get all the projects going here at one time it would leave 10,000 unemployed [and so] there would still be a need for the unemployed headquarters.” In September when their headquarters was finally torn down, the League took issue with Sewell’s appointment of two associates of his to two municipal jobs, one of which was a newly created position. While suggesting a misuse of power and political favoritism if not corruption, Wister

³⁶ “Unemployed League to have All-Day Picnic,” *Miami News* 16 August 1934; Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery in Three Negro Classics*, (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 148.

pleaded that the DCUCL was “without a roof over its head, must hunt for a meeting place and has members who are in the hospital” (and that included Charles Nicholson). All he asked for was “cooperation.” Such exchanges highlighted the tension just beneath the surface as well as the desire for greater class harmony as when commissioner C. H. Reeder commented on the Commission’s continued efforts to obtain federal aid for local relief. The DCUCL’s disappointment did not lead to any radical action, though the League did gain access to the Central school building but it is unclear how this transpired. The noble and patriotic efforts of the Unemployed Citizens’ League garnered the sympathy and support of many; so in this moment of need, either the school or the County school board extended help in offering this new headquarters.³⁷

The League had quickly earned the reputation of being enthusiastic and persistent voices for the unemployed interests by the time of these 1933 City Commission exchanges. In addition to conducting fund drives, the DCUCL had pressed for the protection of unemployed rights to relief coffers and the need to share the work in the government and schools. A heated political battle between the Voters Recall League (formed in May 1933 by realty interests) determined to recall city commissioner Harry Platt³⁸ and those opposed to this effort spilled over into a controversy over food relief distribution. Relief clients were approached by anti-recall proponents while in queue for food and threatened that they would be refused relief if they did not sign a form letter to

³⁷ “Quarters Requested by League Speaker,” *MH*, 13 July 1933, p. 6; “Mayor, Scoring Critics, Gets Bid to Fight,” *MDN*, 14 Sept 1933. The married teachers’ controversy discussed below suggests County School Superintendent Charles Fisher sympathized with the DCUCL and thus may have offered his support by granting them access to the school facilities.

³⁸ A native of New Orleans, Louisiana, Miami resident since 1920, and owner of Platt & Tingle Paint Co. “Life Sketches of Candidates For City Commission---No. 3,” *MDN*, 25 April 1931, p. 3.

remove their names from Platt's recall petition—that is, if they had initially supported it. A conflict of interest did appear when Henry Shaw, chairman of the Miami Rate and Traffic Board, and Eli McDonald, an independent citizen, gave Ruth Gaskill of the city welfare agency copies of this letter to distribute to food relief clients.³⁹

The DCUCL protested this real and perceived threat to welfare access. The League called for the city commission to conduct a thorough investigation of this conflict of interest and political threats, but they did not side with the Voters Recall League's efforts. The DCUCL sought protection of the right to relief and particularly looked to safeguard the unemployed from political intrigue and corruption. The lack of independence resulting from joblessness made the unemployed particularly vulnerable to the changing winds of political squabbles. Hence, they called for "dismissal of all persons responsible." The realty interests, however, exploited this food distribution controversy as a means to frame their political struggle in starker moral terms though they were not above using their own questionable politicking strategies. They had first circulated the recall petition at a Red Cross clothing distribution center during their campaign and thus solicited the pro-Platt counter reaction. The Voters Recall League's interest lay not in the unemployed right to survival, but in bolstering their efforts to influence the city's tax and bond policies and repayment proposals then under consideration. Interestingly, Gaskill herself was an unemployed worker lucky to attain temporary employment in the welfare agency through the city's unemployment fund. The DCUCL stepped into this fray to keep the lifeline that food and other forms of relief

³⁹ "Platt Recall Move Started," *MDN*, 30 April 1933, p. 1; "Aroused Miami Hits Bill Amid Recall Right," *MDN*, 6 May 1933, p. 1; "Papers Asking Platt Ouster Are Circulated," *MDN*, 20 May 1933, p. 1; "Lee Will Not Call Shaw in Probe," *MDN*, 15 June 1933, p. 1; and "Probe of Food Refusal to Needy Petering Out," *MDN*, 16 June 1933, p. 1.

represented free of manipulation and intimidation from either end of the political battle. They never took a public stand on the Platt recall issue.⁴⁰

In another advocacy issue relating to job opportunities and relief efforts, the DCUCL urged the city government to implement a share-the-work relief strategy in local government employment and to increase welfare funds. Both netted unsatisfactory results. The Unemployed Citizens' League found that numerous families had two or more members working for the city government. Calling it "a drive against nepotism," they pressed the City Commission to get the various government departments to offer these jobs to "other persons equally qualified" but who were jobless. They acted on both what they deemed was fair and an advantageous political moment. The City Commission, led by newly elected commissioners E. G. Sewell, Orville Rigby, A. D. H. (Alexander David Henry) Fossey, and holdovers Reeder and Platt, formed an independent budget committee with the mandate to consolidate departments, salary equalization, and offer a critical review of the city manager's budget proposal. The pending bond repayment proposals and tax debates led to this action. The commissioners and the budget committee they selected were all businessmen (construction, real estate, retail, and restaurant and/or hotel investments), even though Rigby remained tied with the local

⁴⁰ "Board of Trade Asks for Probe of Relief Dept.," *MDN*, 18 June 1933, p. 1; "Realtors Demand City Board Push Food Probe," *MDN*, 19 June 1933, p. 1; "Platt Recall Seen as Many Sign Petitions," *MDN*, 20 June 1933, p. 1; "Board to Get Stern Demands for Food Probe," *MDN*, 21 June 1933, p. 1 & 2; "Platt Worker Moves Outside Relief Office," *MDN*, 22 June 1933, p. 1 & 2 (DCUCL quote on page 2). Shaw's position was dissolved a few weeks later amid budget cuts and perhaps motivated by the food distribution/Platt recall controversy: "Commission Abolishes Shaw's, Other Boards," *MDN*, 8 July 1933, p. 1. City Manager L. L. Lee reassigned Gaskill to another relief program job, judged prejudicially for her gender. Her job was given to a man, who the City Commission ordered have a "diplomatic manner and enough business ability to handle this office in such a way that a matter of this kind will not again occur." Resolution 8145, *City Commission Minutes*, 8 July 1933.

labor union movement attending meetings and giving frequent presentations to Labor's Citizenship Committee, serving's as "labor's representative" on the commission.⁴¹

Given the wider mood for budget reform, the DCUCL submitted a questionnaire to the City Commission to be given to each government department head inquiring on the extent of family hires. Whether or not this inquiry was conducted is unclear, though if it was, the findings never appeared. The City Commission either ignored or simply avoided the questionnaire request, a maneuver made easier amid the budget reform discussions. In this political context and with continued high rates of unemployment, the League lobbied for an increased budget allocation for unemployment relief, however, below what they deemed was the minimum needed. What they got instead was a consolidation of the various public and private welfare agencies under one Social Services Exchange to avoid "overlapping" cases, save the city money by making it more efficient, and thus maintaining a miserly welfare system in place. The city had its hopes on future federal funds entering the region to relieve its welfare burden, as indicated by Sewell's and Reeder's pronouncements about the Commission's efforts on this front.⁴²

⁴¹ Sewell was selected mayor but also served as mayor before and after this term, he was a founding "pioneer" of the city, local merchant and hotel owner, and founder of the Chamber of Commerce; Rigby was member and former business agent of the Bricklayers and Masons Union and former president of the Central Labor Union but now had become a building contractor; Fossey also served as mayor and was a former president of the Miami Board of Realtors; Paul George, "Passage to the New Eden: Tourism in Miami from Flagler Through Everest G. Sewell," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (April 1981): 440-463; Stuart B. McIver, *The Greatest Sale on Earth: The Story of the Miami Board of Realtors* (Miami, Fla.: E. A. Seemann Publishing, Inc., 1980), 50, 100, 108, & 112.

⁴² "Jobless League Says Nepotism Rife in Miami," *MDN*, 29 June 1933, p. 15; "Quarters Requested by League Speaker," *MH*, 13 July 1933, p. 6; "Miami Budget Group Starts Deliberations," *MDN*, 30 June 1933, p. 10; "Chest Problems is Momentous, Taylor States," *MDN*, 9 July 1933, p. 7; "Welfare Consolidation Urged Upon Committee," *MH*, 18 July 1933, p. 3; "Every Tub on its Bottom" (editorial), *MH*, 18 July 1933, p. 4; Resolution 8237, *City Commission Minutes*, 30 Aug 1933.

The DCUCL's frustrations with rampant unemployment and an inadequate welfare system compounded in an uphill and controversial struggle over another share-the-work scheme among the public school teachers. The Unemployed Citizens' League lobbied the county school board to not extend contracts to married women with gainfully employed husbands. These jobs, they argued, should go to unemployed widows, single women and men teachers. The school board, after first deciding not to extend contracts to 287 married teachers if their husbands were employed, reversed their decision despite protest from the DCUCL. The logic behind the Unemployed Citizens' League's actions was consistent with their overall objective: advocate for the unemployed, foster community, and emphasize civic responsibility during the economic crisis.

The married teacher controversy points to long-standing gender discrimination women have had to face. However, in the context of high unemployment and share-the-work strategies, the matter becomes more complicated. The pro-married teacher advocates argued along the lines of professional expertise and work experience; the anti-married advocates asserted the need for employment and economic survival. One letter writer to the *Miami Herald*, by Mrs. Vella Thomas, advocated for the employment of recent women college graduates to the many elementary school jobs (177) and, she insisted, only married teachers in financial need (i.e., having unemployed husbands) should be offered employment. Charles Fisher, county school superintendent, and the DCUCL eventually called for the married teachers to voluntarily give up their contracts. This apparently never occurred despite the example set by Tampa's married teachers to

take this action or the Unemployed Citizens' League's patriotic calls for married teachers (with employed husbands) to "Do your part."⁴³

The married school controversy did not reveal a simple right to work story, where women faced second-class citizenship and emerged victorious in a civil rights battle. The context of economic depression and the centrality of the family ideal inspired a community approach to unemployment. The DCUCL expected government to act in a communitarian manner and not give employment to more than one family member. In the Unemployed Citizens' League simultaneous battle against "nepotism" in government, they targeted brothers and other relatives and not just marital ties. That married women now faced disapproval for their jobs only exacerbated the nature of their second-class citizenship, but the possibility that younger women teachers may gain these positions highlighted the extent of limited job opportunities and the magnitude and diversity of the unemployment problem. The failure of married teachers and the school board to accommodate the Unemployed Citizens' League's demands revealed the limits of community over individualistic strategies. The Florida Supreme Court would rule the following year that a woman's marital status could not bar her from employment as a

⁴³ "Dade Teachers Will be Hired for Efficiency," *MDN*, 8 July 1933, p. 5; "School Board to Hire Wives as Teachers," *MH*, 8 July 1933, p. 1; "School Board Criticized for Hiring Wives," *MH*, 13 July 1933, p. 1 & 2; (Mrs. E. T.) Vella L. Thomas to *MH*, "Married Teachers," 13 July 1933, p. 6; "School Board About Faces in Wife Cases," *MH*, 14 July 1933, p. 1 & 2; "Working Mates May be Asked to Recover School Contracts," *MDN*, 15 July 1933, p. 1; Mother and teacher to *MDN*, "Picking School Teachers," 15 July 1933, p. 4 (in favor of married teachers); J. H. Brinson to *MDN*, "Mob Government," 18 July 1933, p. 4; "School Board Drops Married Teacher Rule," *MDN*, 20 July 1933, p. 14 William Wister to *MDN*, "School Board and 'Mob,'" July 24, 1933, p. 4; Wister to *MDN*, "Married Teachers," 7 Sept 1933, p. 4; John Rigby to *MDN*, "One Job to a Family," 11 Sept 1933, p. 1.

teacher as long as she passed the certification tests. The League's embrace of share-the-work principles attempted to make unemployment a shared civic experience.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Historian Alex Lichtenstein explored an important historical question about why the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) failed to mount any successful campaign in Florida prior to the 1940s. Whereas during WWII the transplanted New Yorker and communist Charles Smolikoff succeeded in his CIO organizing drives of shipyard, transport, and laundry workers in Miami and Jacksonville, the CPUSA's and CIO's "dismal failure" in the 1930s serves as a notable contrast that Lichtenstein was not quite sure how to explain. He offered several possibilities: that authorities and the KKK threatened and used violence against organizing workers; that culture divided workers, whether it was language, gender and/or racial factors; that workers, such as African American longshoremen, attained useful and effective alliance and association with the AFL; and that in the case of the rural proletariat, migratory labor patterns and the combination of an agricultural industrial work regime and a southern plantation mentality isolated workers and created a very unfavorable political economic context not conducive to effective

⁴⁴ Whirligig, "Husbands and Wife," *MDN*, 17 Sept 1933, p. 1; "Orlando Teachers Win Jobs in Court," *MDN*, 7 Sept 1934, p. 1. For other examples of restricting married women's employment, see: Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993), 182-187; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Ideology in Historical Reconstruction: A Case Study from the 1930s," *Gender & Ideology* 1, no.1 (1989): 31-49; Idem, *In Pursuit Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19-63. Susan Porter Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007) is an excellent account of the practice of mutuality in working-class families.

organization. The suggestion, it appears, is that things opened up in the 1940s, for at least a short while.⁴⁵

Miami's unemployment movement offers an additional reason for the failure of the Communist party to gain any Florida roots: class harmony as ideology translated to class organization and coalition that lay outside the Communist and Socialist parties. Alternative grassroots movements existed that worked within the restrictive context that Lichtenstein highlighted. If the threat of violence was not enough to frighten people away from left alternatives, then redundancy may have crowded out radical organizations. The homegrown grassroots movement that emerged in Florida represented a creative democratic moment. The DCUCL and the efforts of organic intellectuals such as Perrine Palmer demonstrates that the histories of the Communist and Socialist Parties while important on their own merits, does not tell the whole story of radicalism in America. Unfortunately, in the quest for the American mind, scholars have been too quick to defer to conventional logic. The failure of socialism in America represents a calculation arrived at after the simple arithmetic of no labor party plus no significant radical organization plus the absence of labor union dominance equals conservative mind. In fact, the history of the DCUCL suggests that historians need to continue to search for how workers responded to the oppressive and dehumanizing aspects of capitalism.

As important is how capitalism responded to the economic downturn. The next chapter explores capitalism's resiliency. The DCUCL sought to create community and share the economic burden of depression but more importantly they wanted to prevent the

⁴⁵ Lichtenstein, "'We at Last Are Industrializing the Whole Ding-Busted Party,'" 167-197; Jerrell Shofner, "Communists, Klansmen, and the CIO in the Florida Citrus Industry," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (Jan. 1993): 300-309.

conditions that would allow for such hardship to occur again. Individuals such as Palmer sought communal resolution to what appeared a larger systemic breakdown. While motivated by the sweeping generalizations of modern utopic visions such as Technocracy, Palmer and others were also keen to the basic contradictions that kept the machine running. The New Deal's poetic and visionary words and images that inspired so many suggested that collectively the U.S. would be that beacon upon a hill for the world to see. The experiment of the Declaration of Independence, American Revolution, and Constitution would work out and thus create true class harmony and collective security. As with many Americans, Palmer believed that only through grassroots organization—and eventually cross class unity and collaboration—would a democratic promise come to fruition.

CHAPTER 7

Labor Marches: Class Struggle, American Exceptionalism, and the Marginalization of Class, 1933-1937

Despite its grassroots origins, the Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League was viewed with suspicion by most Miami business interests. The League's eventual marginalization to the radical fringes of influence reflected more perception than any actual adherence to a revolutionary platform. Viewed from another angle, however, the organization's advocacy for the poor outside the philanthropy, charity, or rigid social welfare traditions suggested an association with Marxist political philosophies, especially during the twentieth century.

The League's adherence to a radical conception of class harmony sought to reform what Perrine Palmer called in 1935 the "profit-wage-charity system" on the local level, something the federal government through the New Deal was attempting on the national level. The DCUCL worked to make capitalism more humane, however illogical that may have been; members were not necessarily naïve but they did express hope for a progressive interpretation of the U.S. Constitution's preamble phrase, "to promote the general welfare." After 1935, the League evolved from a grassroots activist organization into a volunteer charity outfit. The transformation was precipitous and came for no apparent reason. Perrine Palmer continued to advocate for the homeless and larger economic justice, appearing in Labor Citizenship Committee meetings through at least 1937. But he too faded away in the historical record, though his son, Perrine Palmer Jr., would become mayor in 1945 as one of the many WWII veterans to enter political office after the war, and he would remain active in local politics into the 1960s.

By 1935-1936 the activism of the unemployed, the influx of New Deal monies into the area, and the nationally reenergized labor movement spurred a broader labor and civil rights movement in south Florida.¹ Historical circumstances made the League impatient and frustrated over time, pushing members to search for wider alliances and more immediate resolution of continued poverty and joblessness. Extant sources suggests that their “radicalization” unfolded in three stages.

The *first stage* united the DCUCL with the New Deal and built on Palmer’s ideas from the previous three years. As discussed in the Chapter Six, Palmer and the League’s May 1933 call for a community meeting never transpired. Embracing the National Recovery Administration as a genuine effort for economic recovery along Palmer’s earlier vision, the DCUCL sought consistency and successful implementation of accepted industry codes. Later in the year, the League embraced the Civil Works Administration’s efforts to alleviate joblessness and extreme poverty. Given the disempowered status of the unemployed and the limitations of the code-writing process, the League worked alongside organized labor and the larger community to see the NRA through in an apparently futile endeavor. An important collaboration, as noted in Chapters Three and Five, had the AFL Central Labor Union and the DCUCL insisting on home labor protectionism, a linchpin of workers’ localism, as a means of defining fair labor conditions. This effort ran parallel to the NRA movement, continued a well-worn strategy in controlling the labor market, and was consistent with a progressive class harmony. The League’s efforts here appear to have pointed to the possibility for radical

¹ Perrine Palmer, “Palmer Denies He’s a Candidate,” *MDN*, 31 March 1935, p. 7.

inclinations even if embedded in the patriotic rubric of national economic recovery and traditional trade unionism.

The *second stage* developed as the economic depression persisted, the New Deal became mired in conservative quicksand, and the unemployed remained economically insecure and politically frustrated. By the spring of 1934, the DCUCL started to look to form statewide alliances and articulated with even deeper pathos the plight of the poor and unemployed while pressing for resolutions to immediate problems. The *third stage* saw some of the work of 1933-1934 come to fruition but revealed the limitations of class harmony discourse amid a conservative and individualistic setting. State and local business interests turned to the tradition of using red scare culture as a way to protect the economic and political status quo. This further limited the DCUCL as it did other grassroots movements around the country. The League lobbied the Florida legislature in the late spring and summer of 1935 for progressive legislation and eventually orchestrated a mass demonstration at Miami's City Hall, only to be accused in both instances as being motivated by communist ideas.

DCUCL efforts at grassroots organizing were co-opted or undermined by commission politics, business interests, organized labor's adherence to economic growth politics, mainstream social welfare strategies, the lack of federal political will, and improved economic conditions. Each of these developments, combined with the limited resources and power of the unemployed, nearly marginalized the League into oblivion. Perhaps conservatives within the DCUCL blocked increased activism and prevented the possibility of combining with more radical threads in the unemployment movement across the state and nation; or simply political fatigue finally set in after years of

struggling on the margins. The lack of historical evidence at this point leads to tentative conclusions about the causes for the demise of Miami's unemployment movement.

The DCUCL would continue operating until at least 1940, but in a much reduced charity-funding capacity—the heyday of its politicking and advocacy long past.

Progressive conceptions of class harmony discourse continued to bubble to the surface after 1935 as calls for harmony, tamed lobbying, an embrace of expertise, and specific policy initiatives, as in those targeting the housing shortage problem, fused into a buoyant liberalism. A reenergized labor movement, motivated by national initiatives and by local efforts like those sponsored by the DCUCL helped keep radical conceptions of class harmony alive. The hopefulness of the early New Deal eventually turned into the reality of politics as usual. Harmony as reality fizzled into mere political rhetoric and an opportunity for conservative, paternalistic notions to resurface, particularly during WWII. While the alternative visions Perrine Palmer and the DCUCL articulated disappeared from historical memory, their efforts suggest a class perspective beyond class conflict and classlessness, one that envisioned community and civic activism as central in the struggle for economic recovery.²

² For an excellent dialogue on alternative activism emphasizing grassroots community organizing over bureaucratic hierarchical forms, see the essays in Staughton Lynd, ed., *We Are All Leaders: The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996). And for the limitations faced by socialists, see Frank A. Warren, *An Alternative Vision: The Socialist Party in the 1930s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974). Warren makes a compelling argument about the relevancy of combining moral and practical approaches to building a movement that challenged the conservative tendencies in the New Deal.

Stage One

The DCUCL worked to insure the success of the National Recovery Administration production codes in Miami, an effort that highlighted their commitment to economic recovery and how, for a moment, the times must have appeared hopeful for Palmer. The NRA Movement built on voluntarism, patriotism, and collectivism—at least in the sense that the national economic plight necessitated a collective response. Verner Townley thought the NRA was “identical” to Palmer’s 1932 plan to end the depression.³ Well, not quite. Palmer’s plan was more visionary in its embrace of shorter hours, in viewing production as a means to assure abundance for all, and in raising the standard of living for all workers despite the status of their occupation. The similarities were striking, nonetheless.

Working in the shadow of WWI’s War Industries Board and in the framework of Hoover’s associationalism philosophy, the spirit of the NRA was consistent with Palmer’s vision, particularly in its emphasis on increasing general purchasing power, although its simultaneous emphasis on scaling back “overproduction” ran counter to that goal. Employers’ continuing quest for profit (especially in the major industries) motivated them to reclassify job assignments to assure lower pay rates, which thus revealed their recalcitrant attitude toward government intervention, their paternal instincts toward workers, and their resistance to organized labor. The proliferation of company unions undermined the cooperative dream and with it hopes for radical class harmony.

³ Townley, “Palmer Plan and N.R.A.,” *MDN*, 8 Aug 1933, p. 4; see Chapter Four for discussion of Palmer’s Plan.

This reality unfolded in the coming weeks and months after the passage of the National Recovery Act.⁴

In July and August 1933, hopes for class harmony were reinforced by the call for civic activism and patriotic duty. General Hugh Johnson, head of the National Recovery Administration, framed the NRA along the lines of a proclamation (the President's Reemployment Agreement), as Palmer had envisioned, using the industry code system as the instrument to bring economic recovery. Bouyed by President Roosevelt's fireside chat in late July, many in the nation, including Miami's unemployed and employed workers, had reason to hope for better days. Johnson's patriotic propaganda scheme for the NRA awarded a Blue Eagle insignia, announcing "We Do Our Part," for businesses that complied with industry codes⁵ The DCUCL pledged its support of the NRA movement in August 1933, in part by setting up a code committee "by which the members will be guided," staffed by William U. Wister, Perrine Palmer (who served as its chairman), and J. F. Mack.

Even at this early date, more than two-dozen complaints flooded the Miami Chamber of Commerce, headquarters of the local NRA, the bulk of which charged overwork and the "failure to pay minimum wages," and at least one employer risked losing the NRA insignia. The DCUCL and Miami workers more generally embraced the New Deal's intentions, or at least what they perceived them to be. The NRA Legal Division, however, only threatened removal of the Blue Eagle insignia at this nascent

⁴ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 177-189; Ellis Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 19-146.

⁵ Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 183-184; Hugh Johnson, *The Blue Eagle from Egg to Earth* (reprint 1935; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 250-270.

moment in its short history. The limitations of the Constitution, federal law, and federal court system packed with conservative judges along with bureaucratic disagreements among New Deal lawyers in the NRA and Justice Department and between other agencies made for a slow and weak institution. The high number of complaints across the country created an enormous backlog, further bogged down by the NRA's lack of enforcement power.⁶

The limits of harmony were demonstrated quickly as local employers continued to violate the blanket code regulations and local NRA leaders acted to reduce the number of complaints. The activities of the League's NRA committee remain unclear. Palmer criticized business, as well as state and local governments, for failing to support the federal government's NRA efforts to shorten hours, pay inadequate wages, and organize "as commercial groups seeking group advantages." Complaints continued to pile up in September about businesses violating code regulations, suggesting that the DCUCL was helping if not leading this charge. The terms of grievance reviews, however, changed for the worse by this time. While the local NRA continued getting "scores of complaints," none were "honored unless they [were] delivered in person or signed with the name and address of the complaint," the Chamber of Commerce and later the local NRA compliance board asserted. Fears of reprisal from employers also surely created an obstacle for workers to pursue their grievances over hours and wages. The NRA's

⁶ "N.R.A. Workers Probe Charges Against Firms," *MDN*, 15 Aug 1933, p. 1. Peter Irons, *The New Deal Lawyers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 17-107 (35-57 for the "non-litigious approach to enforcement" and the NRA's reluctance to test the codes in court).

leadership could not disassociate itself from the local power structure, given its connections with the Chamber of Commerce.⁷

The demand for workers to disclose personal information to an institution representing local business interests likely diminished the number and quality of complaints subsequently submitted. There was also a threat of being blacklisted. One restaurant employee wrote anonymously to William Farmsworth, NRA assistant counsel, alerting him that: “one must make an affidavit [to the local board] or they do not investigate and you might as well move out of Miami when you do that as no one will hire you.” All he asked was for a “living wage and justice.”⁸ Before any worker acted, common sense dictated he consider the competitive job market, high unemployment rate, and the possibility of being blacklisted. The local NRA board preferred only to verbally warn businesses violating the codes to comply, accepting their assurances they would correct the problems. They also pushed for “consumer pledges” to support Blue Eagle establishments, in that way urging code compliance through a loose conception of community pressure.

Getting the NRA to work was clearly turning out to be a difficult task, but workers and the unemployed resorted to various means to help the cause. Workers in

⁷ “NRA Leaders Turn Attention to Violations,” *MDN*, 11 Sept 1933, p. 1; Perrine Palmer to *MDN*, “If N.R.A Fails,” *MDN*, 19 Sept 1933, p. 4. I have been unable to locate these complaints but letters to Hugh Johnson, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and others can be found in the National Archives Record Group 9. The *Miami Chamber of Commerce Minutes*, located in the South Florida Historical Museum, interestingly do not include the period between May 22, 1933 and May 7, 1934, in an otherwise complete run of their minutes through 1967. More will be discussed about the nature of work and working-class life in the next chapter, “Class, Race, and Civil Rights in 1930s Miami.”

⁸ Unnamed letter writer to William F. Farmsworth (Assistant Counsel, Blue Eagle Division, NRA), 22 October 1933, Records of the National Recovery Administration, Compliance Division, PRA Complaints, July 1933-Feb 1934, Record Group 9, National Archives, College Park, Md., Box 6, Entry 109.

numerous trades—restaurant and hotel workers, cigar makers, beauticians, retail clerks, and bakery drivers, for example—organized locals in September as a way to improve job conditions in the city. A renewed urgency to organize emerged in these early days of the New Deal, an urgency that would continue to gather steam in the coming months and years.⁹ Beginning in late October, local unions also advocated on behalf of workers, organized and unorganized, who had evidence that their employers were violating the NRA. Organized labor promised that, “The name of the one making the complaint will not be made known to the employer, so one need have no fear of losing his position.” This particular worker’s complaint, evidently, would be sent to the impotent national NRA officials, though it is unclear how many complaints were given to the local unions and how they used them.¹⁰

Another strategy involved educating and conjuring up the community to pressure the local NRA board. Labor’s Citizenship Committee conducted several educational meetings about the NRA. In addition to its weekly discussions and those of the DCUCL, the Building Trades Council, the Central Labor Union, the Consumers League, and the twenty-seven affiliated locals, the LCC held several evening educational events in local schools in November and December 1933. One meeting at the Glade View School house

⁹ “Miami Workers Keep Forming Unions,” *Miami News*, 28 Sept 1933; “Miami Restaurant Wages Too Low for Jacksonville,” *Miami News*, 12 Oct 1933; “Unorganized are Misfits in Day of Organization,” *Miami News*, 2 Nov 1933.

¹⁰ The Papoose, “ON and OFF THE RESERVATION” (a weekly column), *Miami News*, 26 October 1933 and 2 Nov 1933; “Compliance Board Can Make or Break National Recovery Act in Miami Area,” *Miami News*, 2 Nov 1933. The NRA responses to workers’ complaints, as filed in RG 9, advised to direct their grievances to the local compliance board. Such responses from the NRA speak volumes. Given the extent of local control and discretion (and the deference to local authorities from the national and regional divisions) and the limited power of the NRA, it is no wonder it failed as recovery, reform, and as a means to win greater support from the public for greater government intervention and collectivism. See RG 9, Box 6, Entry 109 for examples.

attracted several union leaders, including the LCC chairman and member of the electrical workers union, Frank G. Roche, and Mrs. E. L. Thayer, president of the Consumers League and regular attendee of the LCC, who gave speeches on various aspects of the NRA. Some of these gatherings included musical entertainment.¹¹ Later in December 1933, Frank G. Roche and Labor's Citizenship Committee and the DCUCL organized a public NRA discussion in Bayfront Park, where Blackwell Smith, assistant counsel of the NRA, gave a speech at the well-attended event. The initial idea for a NRA parade had been made by the DCUCL in mid-November, but Roche apparently accommodated local retail merchants by scaling down these plans and conducting a more formal educational event.¹²

The LCC and the DCUCL also turned to local government to help get resident workers back to work. The strategy was to institutionalize a home labor ideology infused with patriotic localism. Members pressed the City Commission in the fall of 1933 to pass a labor ordinance that would require the city to hire resident workers for municipal contract work at prevailing wages and for eight-hour days. Both groups sought to limit if not prevent job competition from snowbirds (out of state, transient workers) who would enter the area during the upcoming winter tourist season.

¹¹ "N.R.A. Meeting At Glade View," *Miami News*, 23 Nov 1933. The *Miami News* provided reports on the local meetings of the Building Trades Council, Central Labor Union, and Labor's Citizenship Committee, among other things. A reading of these reports for 1933 and 1934 demonstrate organized labor's overall activism.

¹² "N.R.A. Meeting at Glade View School," *Miami News*, 16 Nov 1933 (William Wister offers DCUCL support and introduces idea for parade in LCC meeting); "NRA Meeting for Tuesday Night at Gladeview School," *Miami News*, 16 Nov 1933; "Johnson Coming Citizenship Body Told by Chairman," *Miami News*, 30 Nov 1933; "Mammoth N.R.A. Parade Here to be Held Next Week," *Miami News*, 7 Dec 1933; "Intelligence is Called Keynote of the N.R.A.," *Miami News*, 14 Dec 1933; "Citizenship Body Hears Good Talks on N.R.A. Matters," 21 Dec 1933; ("Date of Holding N.R.A. Parade Changed to Mar. 2," *Miami News*, 15 Feb 1934.

In spite of such lobbying efforts, the best the unions and the DCUCL could do was to get the City Commission to pass a resolution requesting that bona fide residents (having lived in Dade County for at least one year) be employed first on city contracts but the Commission took no action on the issue of wages or hours.¹³ The *Miami Daily News* reported that employers continued to hire snowbirds willing to accept low wages, some of whom worked only for room and board. Local officials urged workers with cars to make sure they carried Florida license tags in an effort to crack down on snowbird employment.¹⁴ These various strategies, however, offered few immediate results. Union organizing proved to be a protracted struggle, public pressure tactics remained dubious at best, and weak political and patriotic pronouncements marshaled little legal pressure.

This local context pushed the DCUCL to lobby the city commission and reach out to the federal government for assistance. In two letters to the national government—one to Harold Ickes in September and the other to President Roosevelt in October—Perrine Palmer expressed frustration at the failures he and the League were witnessing. Palmer highlighted to Ickes the inadequacy of local projects for alleviating poverty and unemployment. Entitled, “Consider the Unemployed,” the letter argued for the need for a large-scale housing construction endeavor as well as attention to other immediate welfare

¹³ See the *Miami News* fall 1933 (September through December) for activism to pass the home labor, prevailing wage-hour ordinance. *City Commission Minutes*, Resolution 8129, 28 June 1933; Ibid, Resolution 8372, 26 Oct 1933 (reaffirmed earlier action by the Commission). “City Will Back Organized Labor,” *MDN*, 29 June 1933, p. 1; “Labor to Demand Government Scale,” *MDN*, 13 Sept 1933, p. 1; W. J. Fripp letter to *MDN*, “Work-Service Ordinance,” 15 Sept 1933, p.4; Ibid, “Pending Labor Ordinance,” 18 Sept 1933, p. 4; J. J. Bridges to *MDN*, “Proposes Local Job Drive,” 13 Sept 1933, p. 4; William Wister to *MDN*, “Answering Mr. Bridges,” 16 Sept 1933, p. 4. Candidates for the 1933 City Commissioner race pledged support of such a measure when questioned in their meetings with the LCC at Carpenters Hall in April and May.

¹⁴ Miami’s Own Whirligig, “Employment,” *MDN*, 27 Oct 1933, p. 1 “Transients,” *MDN*, 31 Oct 1933, p. 1; “Workers Warned to Get Auto Tags,” *MDN*, 3 Nov 1933, p.3.

needs such as health, food and water, instead of huge building projects not intended directly for the unemployed. Palmer urged the City Commission to lobby the federal government for such projects and increased direct relief and work opportunities for a diverse workforce. He also suggested that the city, county, and/or state needed to donate unused land in their possession, especially property gained “through the nonpayment of taxes,” to the local government.¹⁵ The City Commission acted on Palmer’s request by passing a resolution to pay a full-time lobbyist in Washington D.C. He further informed Ickes that Florida’s unemployment had increased between 6 and 7 percent over the past month, according to city commissioner Orville Rigby (former CLU president); county records also revealed that “an average of more than one legal eviction per day for non-payment of rent” had occurred in 1933, adding that “for every legal eviction [however] there are probably ten that do not go through the courts.”¹⁶

The DCUCL’s reaction to the NRA reflected how Palmer’s plan differed from the actual practice of the National Recovery Act. “The whole program is failing now,” Palmer wrote, “for no other reason on earth than too many exemptions from its obligations and benefits.” He expressed a lingering concern that the city, county, and state governments were engaging in “the most flagrant exemptions.” He also lobbied the City Commission to get federal support to allow Miami and Dade County to provide “a practical demonstration of the business possibilities of a shorter work day and week by

¹⁵ McIver, *Greatest Sale on Earth*, 112, writes: “People who had bought property in the heady days of the twenties were unable to raise even enough money to pay their taxes... The total number of tax delinquencies was staggering. Printed in the Sunday paper, the list of delinquencies once ran to forty-one pages, of small type.” (McIver failed to provide a date.)

¹⁶ Perrine Palmer letter to Harold L. Ickes, “Consider the Unemployed,” in the *Miami News*, 5 Oct 1933. Palmer was reacting to a speech Ickes had made in Chicago: “Ickes Prods Cities on Work Delays,” *New York Times*, 24 Sept 1933, p. 32; Resolution 8312, *City Commission Minutes*, 27 Sept 1933.

trying out, at the same time, in all lines of economic endeavor, or whatever nature, the same number of hours (30 per week) required on public works and relief projects.” Until “a shortage of labor is created” including everyone simultaneously, the problems of “overproduction and ruinous competition” would not be eliminated. “In no other way is it possible,” Palmer insisted, “to do justice to ALL and make increased pay rolls create new business and new business finance increased pay rolls SIMULTANEOUSLY.” Palmer’s more cooperative vision, it appears, was undercut by the NRA’s complicated, inefficient, and ineffective operation as well as businesses unwilling to follow the blanket code.¹⁷

Palmer’s letter to Roosevelt expressed an even deeper frustration with the persistence of unemployment and the inaction or slowness in confronting the problem. Such drastic conditions necessitated radical criticism. In a missive entitled “Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait,” Palmer cited how B. R. Kessler, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, was quoted by the *Miami Herald* as pushing Miami businessmen to petition “Washington in support of a general demand for exemptions under the national recovery act for this area because of seasonal conditions.” Kessler spoke in front of the newly formed Greater Miami Recovery Association (GMRA), a business organization

¹⁷ “Consider the Unemployed.” In his 19 Sept letter to the *MDN*, “If N.R.A. Fails,” Palmer complained of business’ and local and state government’s lack of cooperation and he argued again for the need for greater class harmony. Hawley, *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly*, 19-146 (especially 130-146) offers an excellent discussion of the three main positions (business planners and associationists, national economic planners, and the antitrusters) shaping the implementation of the NRA. Also suggestive of how small and medium size businesses favored the NRA or at least some version of it, is Donald R. Brand, *Corporatism and the Rule of Law: A Study of the National Recovery Administration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 125-174. However, small and medium sized-businesses complained about the higher costs imposed by wage and hour provisions during the early period of NRA implementation (Bland, 150-157; Johnson, *The Blue Eagle*, 274-282). This highlighted the situation in Miami as well.

representing 107 industries in the area. That the NRA's plan was being executed so poorly was an indication that a cooperative will was lacking and that such "commercial groups seeking group advantages" undermined the recovery effort. Palmer wrote that the DCUCL had "no quarrel with business for not employing them [the unemployed]; nor with the government for not forcing business to do so. But we have a very serious quarrel with both business and government for not permitting us to use the idle means of production and distribution now being denied us ... because some one else can not make a profit on our labor."¹⁸

Palmer's bold words revealed a real commitment to cooperation and to the elimination of poverty, but a commitment that operated within the confines of a radical class harmony, not the socialist's more far-reaching and penetrating anti-capitalist criticism. Evoking the passion from the Continental Congress's Declaration (see chapter 5) and its criticism of the profit motive, Palmer attacked the tyranny of the small minority "owning and controlling the means of existence of all and thereby dictating the manner in which the majority shall live." "The rights of life, liberty, and happiness" (he omitted the pursuit of) needed to be measured not by profit or wealth but by cooperation and "the mutual and equal protection of ALL." Freedom could be measured no other way, according to Palmer. He referenced the "conservative" Continental Committee on Technocracy's *Plan of Plenty*, as noted in Chapter Five, as an alternative approach to dealing with the economic depression. Palmer's boldness along one line of reasoning was logically undermined by his support of the current legal system and private property.

¹⁸ Perrine Palmer letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait," *Miami News*, 26 Oct 1933 (sent on October 8). Signed the letter as a representative of the DCUCL and as Chairman of the NRA Committee. "Recovery Group to Pick Officers," *MDN*, 4 Oct 1933, p. 5 (reported GMRA meeting); Palmer, "If N.R.A. Fails" (on commercial groups).

Only in the context of class harmony, albeit a radical rendition, could such contradictions not seem unreasonable. That is, the current legal system needed radical change, as did private property rights, if his larger vision was to come into fruition.

However, Palmer and the DCUCL did not go that far even while the Unemployed Citizens' Leagues' prescriptions radically challenged the legal and social order. Hope for a cooperative ethic went hand-in-hand with a vision and expectation that a vibrant civic ethic, with the goal of equality for all, necessitated plenty of vigilance, flexibility, and pragmatism – not conservative ideological economic dogmatism. His postscript revealed the desperate state of things: he had been “discharged from a 91 hour, \$15 a-week [state] job. ‘We just had another man we had to take care of,’ said the state.” Palmer and the DCUCL embraced as their patriotic duty to assist the President, both on the ground through grassroots organization and by offering legitimate criticisms through correspondence.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid. Robert S. McElvaine, *Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the “Forgotten Man”* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983) offers a fair selection of letters to the government, and Eleanor and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Elna C. Green, *Looking for the New Deal: Florida Women’s Letters during the Great Depression* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2007) gives a selection of Florida’s women’s letters. I was informed by Virginia Lewick, archivist at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, that the correspondence record to the President was far from complete: “The [President’s Alphabetical File, 1933-1945] occupied approximately 3,000 linear feet of shelving with one quarter of its volume composed of correspondence from the general public. Most of its content referred to topics of importance to the White House and was divided into 3 series: 1933-36, 1937-41, and 1941-45. In the early 1950s, microfilming of the first series was begun and completed from ‘Aa to Fleming, Miner.’ However, in 1976, it was decided to wean the remaining collection using random sampling, and approximately 2% of the correspondence was retained.” Virginia Lewick to Thomas A. Castillo, Email Correspondence, 8 Jan 2007. Hence, to the social historian’s chagrin, shrinking the evidentiary base, while practical for the archives, removed permanently from the historical record the possibility for closer inspection correspondence offering insight to local social histories. Palmer’s letter here (among many others), for example, was not in the archival record. Its publication in the *Miami News* (the Central Labor Union’s newspaper) saved it for posterity—that is, for those individuals able to locate and acquire the extant issues found at

Palmer's letters and earlier comments suggest citizens across the country were civically engaged beyond the vote or adherence to "radical" political parties. He, as with others, argued for imaginative progressive solutions that implicitly challenged the status quo. His letters contrast sharply with the views of supplicant and leader-worshipping citizens commonly highlighted by historians of the period. For example, Lizabeth Cohen and Robert McElvaine have offered compelling and sensitive histories of the New Deal. Yet citizens discussed in their work were mostly enamored by Roosevelt and committed to using their vote to support him and other Democrats. As true as this may have been, snippets of random letters hardly allows for more nuanced and fuller analysis of the correspondents, the lives they lived or their hopes and aspirations, or the level of their political engagement. Both Cohen and McElvaine embraced an essentialist paternalistic model to explain civic consciousness. Anthony Badger's *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* delivered a much narrower verdict, judging the American worker as essentially conservative. Obsessed with final results and tallies, Badger found little evidence of progressive leftism, and concluded that the New Deal was about as liberal as the majority would go because the dominance of individualism and an American aversion to collectivist alternatives.

Palmer and DCUCL's activism suggests a different framework, one not mired on the shoals of political cynicism or tenuous formulations of worker agency. A broader activism existed that stood outside the Socialist Party and Communist Party, that looked to consumption and production as sides of the same coin, and that challenged the status quo. While outside the more traditional sites of radicalism, Palmer and the DCUCL

the University of Wisconsin at Madison. As far as I know, I am the only historian to have read his letters.

engaged in a participatory democracy that embraced the radical spirit of a moral and liberal humanism. Arguments that would marginalize Palmer or the DCUCL as exceptional would have to ignore or understate the popularity of ideas such as production for use rather than for profit, or denigrate it as simple idealism. The political and economic “success” attained by this activism may have been limited and missed the headlines or in some cases was never recorded, but the spirit and the humaneness of the vision and effort rises above pedestrian assessments of what the American people want or didn’t want. This progressive outlook, nonetheless, ran up against a rigid power structure set against substantial solutions to unemployment, one that operated from the local to the state to the national levels.²⁰

Stage Two

The CWA and Blue Eagle Picketing

The DCUCL acted in December 1933 to preempt local politics from influencing how relief work would be distributed under the short-lived Civilian Works Administration. The affairs over the summer and the subsequent complications with the NRA colored their perspective. The League supported William Green, the experienced welfare director of Miami, as the local Civilian Works Administrator. Fearing a local effort to remove Green as its director, the League sent a letter of support to the City Commission, Dade County Commission, the press, Harry L. Hopkins (the national CWA

²⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); McElvaine, *The Great Depression*, 170-195; Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (reprint, 1989; Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002); Frank Warren’s *An Alternative Vision*’s offer an interesting assessment of how to judge “failure,” see p. 109-133.

Administrator), and Marcus Fagg (the Florida Emergency Relief Administrator). The League complimented Green's "ability, integrity, human understanding, and kindness," evidently impressed by his earlier administrative efforts running the city's Unemployment Fund despite its small relief coffers. They feared that another business representative or political appointee would hold the government relief post and thus hurt the fair and efficient distribution of work in CWA projects. Employer concerns that CWA jobs would lure workers away because of their better pay and better working conditions (as a result of the Davis-Bacon Act—prevailing wage—and the wage and hour stipulations of the CWA) caused the DCUCL to preempt the politicization of the directorship. They sought to prevent a similar cooptation of this post as had occurred to the local NRA board. Luckily, from their perspective, Green held on to the post and retained it under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration through July 1935.²¹

The meager allotments allocated to the Florida CWA could not meet the great demand for work and relief, nor did the work projects rescue workers from the state's low wage economy. Marcus Fagg received complaints over lower wages (as in unskilled labor in highway construction, 30 cents instead of 40 cents an hour) and some working over the allowed hours (thirty). In some instances, as in the citrus farms and timber and turpentine industry of central Florida, employers complained that the CWA drained their workforces because their workers preferred the higher weekly wage rate (\$12 over \$9). The *Miami Daily News* argued, in fact, that the "lowness" of these workers (most of whom were African American) made it unwise to pay them high wages. They lacked

²¹ "League Favors W. H. Green," *Miami News*, 28 Dec 1933 (sent on Dec 18); Records of the Works Projects Administration, Civil Works Administration, Record Group 69, National Archives, College Park Md., (Hereafter RG 69), Box 13.

habits of frugality, not saving any surplus income, preferring instead to shuffle “along year to year with the subsistence to which he his accustomed.” “He presents a problem, this fellow, but not one to be solved in the rush of a civil works program... To raise his status [would require] nearer three generations than three months.”

Seemly unswayed by such racist and classist prejudices, Fagg removed workers off relief rolls who allegedly engaged in such defiant acts so as to provide aid and work for more of the unemployed. While such solutions by Fagg and the government sought to spread the meager relief coffers as far as possible, they had the effect of subjecting these workers to worse conditions; it also helped reinforce racism in the class structure. The *Miami Daily News* reported in mid-December that the local CWA removed a considerable number of African Americans in Dade County from the eligible unemployed for “refusing work when offered it.” This report indicated that the results were that 4,000 of 4,400 eligible unemployed whites were put to work, whereas only 1,500 of 4,300 blacks attained temporary positions—such as ditch digging and mosquito control. Fagg’s policy, though operating in a scarcity framework, also revealed his political awareness to not disturb Florida’s status quo.²²

The bulk of complaints from the unemployed inveighed against the CWA’s inability to provide work, highlighting the scarce resources at the disposal of government bureaucrats. Marcus Fagg in January 1934 explained to John Carmody, CWA engineer, that the work allotments simply did not meet demand: “The real trouble all over Florida is the fact that there are thousands of men out of employment for whom we cannot

²² “C.W.A. Limitations,” *MDN*, 28 Nov 1933, p. 4; “Dade Jobless to Start Tasks,” *MDN*, 14 December 1933, p. 1; Marcus Fagg to John Carmody, 6 Dec 1933 (regarding road work); notes from telephone conversation between Frank Bane of the federal CWA and Marcus Fagg, 15 Dec 1933 (citrus fruit growers), RG 69, Box 12.

furnish employment. Somehow it seems impossible for us to get it over to these unemployed the fact that we are specifically and definitely limited to a very small number of people as compared to the tremendous number out of employment.” Such contexts dissolved any chance of reasonable eligibility requirements while also limiting the liberating effects of government largesse. As CWA resources whittled away over the coming weeks and months (ending on March 31st), the anxieties of the unemployed only amplified and their activism increased, as noted by Fagg’s frustration over the many telegram and letter complaints poring into Washington.²³

Meanwhile, the DCUCL offered its support in pressing local businesses to back the NRA. The organization used community pressure as its main tactic in light of continued employer resistance to the blanket code agreements as well as the progressive potential of the NRA. In January 1934, members coordinated picketing of businesses that had their Blue Eagle removed and in March they helped organize a Blue Eagle parade. Restaurants and dry cleaning laundries, two important local employers, continued to violate blanket code agreements throughout the fall and winter. As a result of organized labor—the CLU, LCC, and the newly organized Hotel and Restaurant Workers Local 133—and the DCUCL, workers bombarded not only the local compliance board but also Washington with complaints. Arthur A. Ungar, chairman of the NRA compliance board and owner of the Ungar-Buick auto dealership, was forced to make charges against the Southern Cafeteria and Sunshine Cleaners as a result of this drive. The source of what “has caused 99% of all the troubles we have had in Miami with our restaurant operators and their employees,” according to Ungar, was the October 1933

²³ Fagg to Carmody, 8 January 1934 (extended quote), RG 69, Box 12.

publication of the relatively poor wage and hour conditions listed in the NRA blanket code for restaurant work. Apparently, once workers learned of the possibility of better wage and hour conditions, they were inspired to challenge the status quo. The only reasonable position for workers to take, from Ungar's perspective, was complete acquiescence to the will of the employer; hence, any effort to challenge managerial prerogative represented a problem.²⁴

The employers' labor problem and Ungar's headache represented an opportunity for the DCUCL to push for the larger agenda of spreading employment and improving conditions for workers. J. J. LeVelle, chairman of the DCUCL picket committee, and Perrine Palmer, chairman of the advisory committee, coordinated the picketing four days after the National Compliance Board ordered the removal of the Southern Cafeteria's Blue Eagle on January 9. Palmer and the DCUCL decided to mark their pickets with the Blue Eagle as a sign of their support of NRA's goals, at least as they interpreted them. The Southern Cafeteria, in an attempt to neutralize the patriotism and appearance of authority evoked by the Blue Eagle, complained to the National Compliance Board about this practice. The Compliance Board soon pressed Ungar to have Palmer and the DCUCL end the practice of using Blue Eagles on their picket signs. They were

²⁴ Ungar, of Jewish descent, was also a member of the University of Miami Athletic Association, later in 1937 he became a member of its Board of Trustees, a position he held until 1965, and he was also on the Orange Bowl Committee. University of Miami, "Named Buildings History, Coral Gables Campus," www6.miami.edu/advancement/NamedBuildingsGables.doc, p. 86 (last accessed 20 June 2009); Kenneth Ballinger, *Miami Millions: The Dance of the Dollars in the Great Florida Land Boom of 1925* (Miami, FL: The Franklin Press, 1936), 38; E. L. Allsworth (Vice Chairman Miami Compliance Board) to Walter N. Pearce (Florida District Compliance Director), November 17, 1933, RG 9, Box 6 Entry 109; William Farnsworth to Ungar, October 12, 1933 (contained copy of newspaper clipping, "Wage Scale Set for Restaurants"), Ibid. The NRA code listed: 54 hours a week for men, 48 for women; 24 cents minimum hourly wage for men and women; **gratuities were not to be considered as wages**; a charge of 25 cents per meal could be made if that had been the prior practice.

concerned that the wrong message be sent, namely, that the NRA supported such grassroots action, which it did not despite General Hugh Johnson's calls for mass support for the program. In the end, the state and local authorities ultimately limited the right to picket along safety, public welfare, and private property logic sans the Blue Eagle.

The NRA Compliance Board did its part, in any case, to douse popular support for the program—the very outcome that both Johnson and FDR hoped for, at least on some level—by disallowing the use of the Blue Eagle insignia by grassroots, mass organizers. Contesting the meaning of this patriotic symbol, Perrine Palmer and the DCUCL sought a larger movement that forced business to implement fairer working conditions and pay and thus allow for a more equitable distribution of wealth to occur. For the National Compliance Board, the Blue Eagle represented a neutral advertising scheme intended to foster “popular” support for top- down administration of controlling production. Economic recovery, the theory went, would be spurned by such manipulation of the production process, thus balancing the economy and preventing overproduction. Yet the role of workers and “the masses” in actually participating in what essentially was a power struggle never arrived at a comfortable status quo particularly in non-industrial work.

The DCUCL's attempts to shape a progressive meaning of the Blue Eagle thus challenged the top-down approach of power relations. As early as October, Palmer complained to Roosevelt that B. R. Kessler of the Chamber of Commerce (CC) was advising local businesses to support the CC's effort to get the NRA to exempt Miami businesses from general code provisions because of the city's seasonal tourist economy, as noted above. Placing the Blue Eagle on their pickets challenged such power grabs through mass mobilization, or at least the hope of greater grassroots activism. The

Southern Cafeteria's complaint of the picketers' use of the Blue Eagle revealed its owners inherent understanding of the need to undermine the DCUCL's and labor unions' attempt at legitimacy. Bureaucratic entanglements and conservative deference to local power structures hampered the possibility of progressive interpretations of the NRA. The issue of the Blue Eagle highlighted the complicated political web that defined local affairs and the relationship between local and national power.²⁵

A radical conception of harmony entailed challenging the paternalism implicit in the employer-employee relationship. Miami workers contended with poor conditions in restaurant work: low wages (less than 20 cents an hour, below the code minimum of 24 cents), employers charging workers for meals whether they consumed restaurant food or not, and the excessively long work hours (fifty-six or more weekly hours, going as high as seventy, for men and women), among other things.²⁶ These real world conditions made conservative and fallacious depictions of harmony that much more contemptible. The DCUCL and organized labor, for example, reacted to the Southern Cafeteria's

²⁵ "Miami's First Blue Eagle Withdrawn," and "Eagle Removal is Called Mere Beginning Here," *Miami News*, 11 Jan 1934; "Jobless Picket Cafeteria Here," *MDN*, 13 Jan 1934, p. 1; Whirligig, "Pickets," *MDN*, 19 Jan 1934, p. 1; "Minutes of the Meeting of the National Compliance Board Held January 9, 1934," RG 9, Box 2, Entry 125; Telegram from W.M. Galvin (Legal Assistant Compliance Division NRA) to A.A. Ungar, January 17, 1934, RG 9, Box 6, Entry 109 (regarding DCUCL and picketing with Blue Eagle Insignia); Loose Note, January 18, 1934, (Galvin relating telephone conversation with Ungar about the sign issue). Ungar asked Galvin to pay for their long distance conversation, a sign of either the poor financial conditions of the local compliance board or its niggardly predilections (the charges amounted to \$19.20). Perrine Palmer letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait," *Miami News*, 26 Oct 1933 (sent on October 8; references Kessler's efforts).

²⁶ Unnamed letter writer to Farmsworth, 22 October 1933, RG 9, Box 6, Entry 109 which stated the poor working conditions; other testimonies include, Mrs. A. T. Hodges to Hugh Johnson, 26 Dec 1933, *Ibid*; and Miss Effie Cheatwood to Hugh Johnson, 21 Sept 1933, *Ibid*, (letters were often written to FDR or heads of department but then answered by the relevant bureaucrat); W. M. Galvin Note on Restaurant Situation in Miami to National Compliance Board, January 1934, *Ibid*; "Says Cafeteria Employees Were Not Satisfied," and "Compliance Board Doing Good Work," *Miami News*, 18 Jan 1934; "Employees Association Opposes Exceptions," *MH*, 10 Jan 1934, p. 12.

pathetic attempt to represent itself as benevolent employers through a full-page newspaper advertisement placed in the *Miami Daily News* and *Miami Herald* on January 10. The Southern Cafeteria claimed that it kept workers on their payrolls during the economically depressed summer of 1933 at a loss of \$12,000. The most egregious deception was the claim that workers paid for the advertisement announcing: “WE ARE PERFECTLY SATISFIED WITH OUR WAGES AND TREATMENT BY THE EXECUTIVES OF THE SOUTHERN CAFETERIA AND RESTAURANT,” and, in parenthesis, it stated the listed employees names signatures (90 of them) were “in the files of the *Miami Herald*.” The local Compliance Board’s investigation, urged on by the national office that in turn was inundated by the local letter campaign, revealed how workers signed the ad because they feared losing their jobs; the Board did not find anyone who had contributed to the cost of it. Palmer promised the local papers that “Pickets will be placed about every concern from which the Blue Eagle is removed,” and this soon included the Sunshine Cleaners. Its owners attacked a picketer and were subsequently fined by the municipal court.²⁷

In addition to losing the right to use the Blue Eagle insignia on their picket sign, DCUCL picketers faced a recalcitrant court system committed to protecting individualism, private property, and local businesses against the will of its workers. They

²⁷ Galvin Note, Ibid. (Galvin found the *Miami Herald* “to be unsympathetic with the NRA); Southern Cafeteria Full Page Announcement published *MH*, 10 Jan 1934, p.7 and in the *MDN* p. 16; “Cafeteria in Miami Loses Blue Eagle,” *MH*, 10 Jan 1934, p 1; “Miami Loses Cafeteria Blue Eagle,” *MDN*, 10 Jan 1934, p. 17; “Employees Association Opposes Exceptions,” *MH*, 10 Jan 1934, p. 12; “NRA Board Examines Cafeteria Employees,” *MDN*, 11 Jan 1934; “Pickets Replaced Before Concern,” *MDN*, 17 Jan 1934, p. 1 (Palmer quote taken from this article); *Miami News*, 18 Jan 1934 (articles cited above); “Labor Will Picket Violators of Code,” *MDN*, 21 Jan 1934, p. 4; “Resume Picketing on Places Losing the Blue Eagle,” *Miami News*, 25 Jan 1934.

also confronted limited funds and ambivalent construction workers' unions (the strongest base of unionism in Miami), or at minimum a conservative trade union leadership reluctant to offer greater support of the nascent Restaurant Workers union and of their unemployed supporters. Both realities helped curtail greater activism through picketing or other forms of mass assembly. On January 29, the local circuit court placed an injunction on picketing the Sunshine Cleaners. This led to the pulling of pickets from other businesses and the temporary end of using such community pressure tactics.²⁸ The DCUCL, following the conservative logic of Roche and the construction trade dominated LCC, sought to preempt any further court actions as well as a reversal of the injunction; however, it is unclear the extent of this effort or whether they were successful in gaining the right to continue picketing at Sunshine Cleaners or whether they picketed other businesses.

So even when the DCUCL's strategy was simply to "call attention to those who violate" the "letter and the spirit" of the NRA through "peaceful and dignified means" and thus "encourage and reward, by patronage those complying," the organization's efforts did not gain wider support. On this front, it appeared that the more powerful construction unions (Roche, chair of the LCC, was a member of the electrical union) decided against further action or at least continued support while the weaker Hotel and

²⁸ As far as the extant historical record is concerned. Newspaper coverage, either mainstream or the AFL press, could be quite selective and incomplete of the messy social world. While I have found no evidence that the DCUCL continued to picket or engage in other community pressure tactics—such as letter writing to business owners, lobbying the local government, or continued letter writing to the National Compliance Board despite their insistence to contact the local Board—it is not unlikely that they persisted in alerting anyone they could about Code violations. Such disorganized and scattered communication was likely not going to enter the historical record. "Picketing of Dyers is Forbidden by Writ," *MDN*, 30 Jan 1934, p. 4; "Stops Blue Eagle Picketing Here," *Miami News*, 1 Feb 1934.

Restaurant Workers and the DCUCL dealt with financial limitations that discouraged resistance against the courts or a concerted legal challenge. This came despite the fact that the DCUCL adopted an old AFL consumer protest strategy of the *unfair list*: actively discouraging consumer patronage of businesses hiring non-union labor (an act that would get the violator on the list) while encouraging consumption of the union label and in businesses that hired primarily union workers (one need only replace union with NRA compliance).²⁹

The Blue Eagle Parade and Harmony

Such direct action was complimented by broader community efforts to garner support for the NRA, ones that evoked the problems of harmony discourse. The story of the organization of the Blue Eagle parades highlights this most clearly; their histories demonstrate the countervailing tendencies within harmony. The Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League sought to spark a groundswell of support for controlling production, raising wages, spreading work, and thus redistributing income for the greater good. This meant getting politicians to support their efforts and, more importantly, those of local businesses. Palmer's words and activism argued the need for a collective class effort to attain meaningful and lasting economic recovery as revealed by: his early 1930s activism and his Plan to end the depression; the technocracy vision; the organization of the DCUCL; and his letters to the community, Ickes and Roosevelt.. The parades were attempts at getting such broad support. Their histories reveal hopefulness of some about the NRA and the New Deal, on the one hand, and the ambivalence and resistance of

²⁹ "Stops Blue Eagle Picketing Here," *Miami News*, 1 Feb 1934; "Labor Will Picket Violators of Code," *MDN*, 21 Jan 1934, p. 4.

others on the other hand. All could agree with the dream of class harmony, but the reality of ongoing class struggle persisted behind the facades of parade costumes and floats.

The Blue Eagle Parade committee established in late November 1933 attempted to coordinate a cross section of classes to participate in the event, including business, civic, fraternal, and military organizations. Such plans embraced the essence of the class harmony ideal and thus embodied Palmer's earlier egalitarian vision in which class cooperation would work to attain greater equality. This strategy to pressure businesses into NRA compliance was not naïve about the nature of power. Instead, it revealed a sharp understanding of the role of advertising and boosterism in the city building project. Parades were an extension of these existing marketing approaches; the added twist was the well-worn grassroots tactic of using moral persuasion through community pressure tactics—i.e., strikes, picketing, parades, et cetera. The DCUCL introduced the parade idea in a LCC meeting, gaining it's and the Central Labor Union's support amid the fall labor struggles. Given the power of local unions, Frank Roche and Scott Rhoades (recording secretary of the LCC) headed the parade committee as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively; DCUCL members Perrine Palmer and William Wister held two of the other three posts (secretary and assistant secretary); George H. Doty, President of the Riverside Improvement Association, served as treasurer.³⁰

Class harmony as staged performance meant getting all the groups involved in the potential boosting event. Cecil Turner, county commissioner, agreed the county should cooperate with the parade effort but he believed it had "no right to appear in the parade"

³⁰ "N.R.A. Meeting at Glade View School," *Miami News*, 16 Nov 1933 (William Wister introduces parade idea in LCC meeting and offers DCUCL support); "NRA Meeting for Tuesday Night at Gladeview School," *Miami News*, 16 Nov 1933; "Parade Marks N.R.A. Support," *MDN*, 24 Nov 1933, p. 4, Food Section; "Parade Committee Elects Officers," *MDN*, 26 Nov 1933, p. 8.

because of the (alleged) NRA restrictions placed on the Dade County government to hire more employees or pay higher wages. Despite this public airing of an elected official's grievance against the NRA, the *Miami Daily News* reported that the parade idea gained support of "virtually every civic, fraternal and business organization in Greater Miami." In addition to organized labor and the Unemployed Citizens' League, several others agreed to participate in the parade, including a few improvement associations, the American Legion, World War I veterans, Shriners, the Greater Miami Auto Maintenance Association, and the City Ice and Fuel Company. Conspicuously missing as supporters of the parade were the Greater Miami Board of Trade, Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Miami Hotel Association, and the Greater Miami Restaurants Association. These business organizations had already made extensive efforts to exempt South Florida from NRA blanket code minimum requirements. The Greater Miami Retail Merchants Association and the Miami Avenue Merchants Association tepidly agreed to support the Bayfront meeting, but were silent about participating in a parade.³¹

The results of these organizing efforts were mixed. While the Blue Eagle Parade Committee succeeded in luring an NRA official to visit Miami to observe the proceedings and give a speech, they were unlucky in not being able to bring their first choice. The Committee wanted General Hugh Johnson, head of the NRA, but instead got a promise from Donald Richberg, the NRA general counsel who then sent the young rising attorney Blackwell Smith, assistant general counsel and head of the NRA's Legal

³¹ "Board Told of Plans for N.R.A. Parade," *MDN*, 28 Nov 1933, p. 1; "Blue Eagle Parade to Await Johnson," *MDN*, 30 Nov 1933, p. 17; "Four Firms Join N.R.A. Parade Plan," *MDN*, 1 Dec 1933, p. 1; "Café Owners, Workers Split Regarding Code," *MDN*, 12 Nov 1933, p. 1; "Hotel Men Protest Code for Industry," *MDN*, 27 Nov 1933; "Merchants Group Backs NRA Plans," *MDN*, 12 Dec 1933, p. 4.

Division. But the parade was cancelled. All that remained was a short talk by Florida Congressman J. Mark Wilcox and a speech by Blackwell Smith, who apparently read his speech at Bayfront Park after being introduced by Mayor E. G Sewell. Approximately 15,000 attended, filling “every available seat” and extending “around the edges of the park seats.” The cancellation was reportedly the result of the “shortness of the time and the nearness of Christmas,” with downtown retail merchants apparently afraid that parade traffic would reduce sales. Ongoing class struggles over the implementation of the NRA likely undermined the initiative as well.³²

The hierarchal and corporatist strands of the NRA vision of class harmony, as referenced to by Blackwell Smith, appealed to the conservative *Miami Herald* but received a neutral reception from the *Miami Daily News* and earned a mixed reaction from the *Miami News*, the city’s labor paper. The *Herald* published the fullest text of Smith’s speech, and where undoubtedly satisfied with the hierarchal social framework implicit in it. The government’s increased role in the economy challenged laissez faire ideology, but workers’ continued subordinate position did not: (1) in a reference to Alice in Wonderland’s mad hatter’s tea party, Smith equated industry as the mad hatter and labor as the March hare (and consumers as the dormouse); (2) equating complaints to throwing cats, he had labor throw alley cats, industry throw fat angoras (consumers threw

³² “Johnson Coming Citizenship Body Told by Chairman,” *Miami News*, 30 Nov 1933. “Mammoth N.R.A. Parade Here to be Held Next Week,” *Miami News*, 7 Dec 1933; “NRA Parade Date to be Set Tonite,” *MDN*, 8 Dec 1933; “Parade to Include 100 Organizations,” *MDN*, 12 Dec 1933, p. 8 (the parade was to move from the courthouse down Flagler street to Bayfront Park); “Intelligence is Called Keynote of the N.R.A.,” *Miami News*, 14 Dec 1933; “Citizenship Body Hears Good Talks on N.R.A. Matters,” *Miami News*, 21 Dec 1933; “Date of Holding N.R.A. Parade Changed to Mar. 2,” *Miami News*, 15 Feb 1934. Roche apologetically explained Smith’s read speech by saying that “it had been prepared at Washington by the national recovery administration in order to make it authoritative.”

tabby cats). Smith argued that the NRA sought to eliminate strikes while remaining committed to improving pay and working conditions; however, the gist of his speech emphasized the leading role business would have in crafting a solution. Cooperation through group resolutions was a key expectation. Smith emphasized that the NRA did not want to resolve commercial disagreements and conflicts via courts but preferred “intelligence” and “administrative technique” to attain compliance. The *Miami News* agreed with the need “to bring about amicable adjustments... whenever possible.” They argued, however, that “after failure of such efforts within a reasonable length of time, *and it is clearly indicated that certain interests or concerns have no intention of complying with its provisions but are merely sparring for time*, then the law should be made to show its teeth for the benefit of those concerns which are honestly complying with its requirements” (italics added). The tension surrounding this first parade attempt lay in the background of the Blue Eagle picketing affair. Though the first parade attempt short-circuited, continued grassroots activism pressed for more vigilant compliance leading the DCUCL and organized labor to successfully coordinate a second parade in spring 1934.³³

The DCUCL’s quest to reframe class harmony so that workers would have a larger role in determining the outlines of equity and fairness, in specifically local circumstances, challenged employers’ power in the workplace. Employer resistance to more radical conceptions of class harmony ruined the chances of NRA success. Invigorated perhaps by the direct action tactic of picketing, the DCUCL pushed the LCC to organize a Blue Eagle Parade on President’s day, February 22, 1934. This represented a clear attempt to gain authority and legitimacy for the workers’ place in shaping the

³³ “Goal of the NRA is Explained,” *MH*, 14 Dec 1933, p. 1; “Smith Foresees Basic Rate for Miami Hotels,” *MDN*, 14 Dec 1933, p. 1; “Intelligence is Called Keynote of the N.R.A.”

political economy: the planned date of the parade demonstrated the DCUCL's patriotic intentions. That the DCUCL was central to the parade initiative was not surprising given they had already set a consistent precedent of advocating for the good of the masses, and this included workers and the unemployed. This apparently isolated movement, however, benefited from the Communist Unemployed Councils and Socialists hard work across the country for the down and out. The Communist and Socialist parties' coordination of rent strikes and other mass demonstrations fueled the public imagination as well as motivated politicians to seek reformist solutions to quell the potential of unrest. Indeed, Blackwell Smith stated as much in his Bayfront Park speech, when he highlighted how one of the main objectives (out of eleven) of the New Deal was to reduce and relieve unemployment so as to kill "the threat of violent revolution." Whether or not the times were ripe for revolution was not important; talk of revolution, hyperbolic as it may have been, floated in the air, plausible in light of labor strikes and other mass demonstrations, and could be used to bolster New Deal policies. Grassroots organizing threatened to reorder the nature of local power in concrete ways and, for a short moment, the national government teased the imagination that it would aid this effort. And like the Communist Party, the DCUCL's objective was broader than just dealing with the suffering and uncertainty of unemployment. It continuously operated as a coalition institution as it reached out to unions through the LCC and worked within a political framework conducive to such cooperative activism: a radical conception of class harmony.³⁴

³⁴ *Miami City Commission Minutes*, 7 February 1934; "Citizenship Told NRA Needs Labor's Support," *Miami News*, 8 Feb 1934; "Unemployed Plan NRA Parade Here," *MDN*, 28 Jan 1934, p. 2; "Goal of the NRA is Explained," p. 1. On the unemployment movement, see the following: Roy Rosenzweig, "Radicals and the Jobless: The Musteites and the Unemployed Leagues, 1932-1936," *Labor History* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 52-77; Idem., "Organizing the

The spring parade embodied the class harmony spirit. The committee was essentially the same as the December parade committee (Roche, Rhoades, Palmer, and Wister and Doty). They succeeded not only in conducting an actual parade—though not until March 12 because of various delays³⁵—but also included a large contingent of the working class even when the parade was moved from a Friday to a Monday evening; and again, they reached out to business interests to participate.³⁶ The mayors and city commissioners of Miami, Miami Beach, and Hialeah (a city adjacent to Miami), county officials, and others reviewed the parade from a stand erected on East Flagler Street and Third Ave. No photos of the parade or of the subsequent Bayfront Park speeches or the movies that were shown at the end of these speeches have survived. Thousands of workers marched, though the newspaper coverage did not state the number. The *Miami News* claimed that organized labor, consisting of around 10,000 unionists in the county who marched behind the banner of the Central Labor Union, had the best showing, but

Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929-1933,” *Radical America* 10, no. 4 (July 1976): 37-61; Idem., “‘Socialism In Our Time’: The Socialist Party and the Unemployed, 1929-1936,” *Labor History* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 485-509. Daniel J. Leab, “‘United We Eat’: The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930,” *Labor History* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1967): 300-315; Alex Baskin, “the Ford Hunger March—1932,” *Labor History* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1972): 331-360; Albert Prago, “The Organization of the Unemployed and the Role of the Radicals, 1929-1935,” (Ph.D. Union Graduate School, 1976); Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movement*, 41-95; Steve Valocchi, “The Unemployed Workers Movement of the 1930s: A Reexamination of the Piven and Cloward Thesis,” *Social Problems* 37, no. 2 (May 1990): 191-205; James J. Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1996) and his recent *The Unemployment People’s Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), the first general sustained study for the South (or at least Georgia); Robing Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), chapter one.

³⁵ The director of public safety requested changing the February date because of the heavy traffic of the current tourist season; the parade was delayed twice more because of rain (Friday, March 2) and a conflict of events at Bayfront park (Friday, March 9).

³⁶ “Groups to Decide Entries in the Parade,” *MDN*, 6 March 1934, p. 2 (Miami Retail Merchants Association voted to cooperate but decided against actually participating).

the paper did not give the number of participants; it also claimed that the parade attained a 100 percent showing of Dade teachers and CWA workers, the latter turning out some 2,000 to 6,000; the unemployed had a membership of 5,000 to 6,000, by far the largest worker organization, but again it is unclear how many participated. The number of workers, who were accompanied by 39 floats and five bands, possibly exceeded 15,000 and perhaps even more (see figure 1 for the parade alignment) in a county with a total population somewhere between 140,000 and 180,000. The local papers estimated that close to 50,000 spectators watched the parade march down East Flagler Street toward Bayfront Park.³⁷

³⁷ “NRA Paraders March Monday,” *MDN*, 11 March 1934, p. 5; “Thousands See Parade, Listen to Eagle Talks,” *MDN*, 13 March 1934, p. 20; “Blue Eagle Parade Details Completed,” *MH*, 12 March 1934, p. 1; “Recovery Program Support Requested,” *MH*, 13 March 1934, p. 1; “Urge Support of N.R.A. Program by All Citizens,” *Miami News*, 15 March 1934, p. 4. “Close is Marshall for NRA Parade,” *MDN*, 11 Feb 1934, p. 4 (E. J. Close, administrator of works for Dade County CWA projects, elected as a marshal; he promised 6,000 CWA workers would march); Palmer, “Flesh and Blood Can Not Wait,” (Oct 8, 1933) estimated 140,000 lived in the county, and the 1935 state census conducted in April 1935 listed 180,998 for the county, and Miami consisted of 127,600 of this total. Florida Department of Agriculture, *Sixth Census of the State of Florida*, 1935 (Winter Park, Fla.: The Orange Press, 1936), p. 13 & 87. An unclear percentage of these were individuals who had “a fixed or permanent abode in a place” and who resided in the city at least 6 months of the year. p. 134.

Table 5. March 12, 1934 NRA Parade Alignment

Division I: Organizations
Police Escort, National Guard Band, National Guard Troops, Veterans Organization, Military Academy
Division II: Civil Works Administration Workers
<i>Section 1:</i> American Legion Drum and Bugle Corp Projects 13-1 to 13-100 Workers
<i>Section 2:</i> Junior Chamber of Commerce Band Projects 13-101 to 13-200 Workers
<i>Section 3:</i> JCC Drum and Bugle Corp Projects 13-201 to 13-500
<i>Section 4:</i> Dade County Unemployed
Division III: Uniformed Bodies
Mahi Shrine Band & Mahi Shrine Patrol Miami High Band & Pep Girls Ida Fisher Pep Girls Miami Edison High Band and Pep Girls Dade County School Teachers N.R.A. Hotel Restaurant and Other Allied Employees Post Office Band & Federal Employees Civilian Conservation Corps Motor 1304
Division IV: Uniformed Bodies
Central Labor Union Organization (headed by the Miami Musicians Federation band) Building Trades Council
Division V: Uniformed Bodies
Decorated Floats
Division VI: Uniformed Bodies
The CWA String Band Commercial Organizations' Decorated Cars and Floats

The parade embraced an ebullient patriotism, and the designated speakers personified justice and class harmony. In addition to the representation of veterans groups, the local American Legion chapter, and the National Guard, the Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasters International Union marched with a large American flag. In light of the cutbacks and looming end of the civilian works program, the large contingent of

marching CWA and CCC workers added a powerful reminder of the positive role government played in lifting the unemployed and in economic recovery. At Bayfront Park, the speakers did not include any labor leader, though Frank Roche served as chairman of the proceedings. Mrs. E. L. Thayer, of the Consumers' Council, stressed the importance of consumers in cooperating with Roosevelt's plan, as the NRA was often described, though the papers did not quote her. All could agree on the importance and need for increased consumption given the hard times endured by so many as a result of the economic depression. We can only surmise that she argued consumers buy "only those products made under real N.R.A. conditions," a point she made in earlier LCC meetings. All the other speakers were religious leaders: J. C. Simms, pastor of the Riverside Baptist church; reverend P. J. Roche, pastor of St. Mary's Catholic Church, Little River; and Rabbi Jacob Kaplan of the Temple Israel. Only snippets remain of their speeches. All three argued against rugged individualism, greedy self-interest, and for the implementation of the Golden Rule and utilitarian principles in politics and government—while a humane perspective, it hardly represented a radical tone or a systematic analysis of the political economic context. Father Roche commented that "the worker has a right to live up to the dignity of a human being. Life was never intended to be a struggle against the wolf at the door." And Kaplan elaborated: "every human being has the right to have his needs considered by the government. This can be done and must be done... we want justice and won't lose sight of the end." Following the speeches, the Motion Picture Operators local showed films in support of the NRA.³⁸

³⁸ "H. H. Filer Tells Citizenship Committee of School Crisis," *Miami News*, 8 March 1934; "Thousands See Parade, Listen to Eagle Talks," *MDN*, 13 March 1934, p. 20; "Blue Eagle Parade Details Completed," *MH*, 12 March 1934, p. 1; "Recovery Program Support Requested,"

From the perspective of organized labor and the DCUCL, the parade offered an opportunity to increase support for the NRA and its progressive potential. The ongoing labor organizing both in skilled and unskilled work entailed an uphill battle with recalcitrant employers set on maintaining a low wage economy. The struggle among restaurant workers, cleaners, and other workers, for example, to gain recognition and for the unemployed to gain greater and more consistent relief revealed the need for expanding government involvement in the economy. They no doubt were also inspired by the recent pronouncements by the Roosevelt administration. President Roosevelt, in a recent NRA conference (March 5) in Washington that included industry heads, argued for employers to pay “purchasing wages” (an awkward version of the idea of a living wage). Hugh Johnson, speaking at the same conference, urged business leaders to allow workers to choose their own representation and thus follow section 7A of the NIRA. Indeed, he argued, “company unions 99 out 100 cases involved illegal ‘interposition’ by employers.”

The extent of company unions in Miami is unknown from the evidence. However, organized labor and the unemployed knew economic conditions were tough in Miami despite all the ballyhoo of an improved economy and great tourist season. Indeed, Frank Roche noted in an LCC meeting that many visitors to the city thought Miami “to be the most backward N.R.A. city in the country, but he expected a real showing [in the parade] on labor’s side of the question.” The appearance of harmonious class relations

MH, 13 March 1934, p. 1; “Urge Support of N.R.A. Program by All Citizens,” *Miami News*, 15 March 1934, p. 4.

only hid the enduring struggle even when the spirit of a progressive class harmony remained alive.³⁹

Some business interests chose to ignore the symbolic and progressive significance of the parade and interpret it in paternalistic, sympathetic terms. The *Miami Herald* celebrated South Florida's apparent class harmony in a post-parade editorial entitled "Labor Marches." The editorial's condescending tone and silence on the poor pay and working conditions offered only a partial picture of Miami's labor relations. Whereas "labor riots" and "bloodshed" characterized the conditions in other countries, and strikes in other states and cities, Miami's peaceful, docile workers marched in a parade. Some were wearing "their only suit of clothes, garments that showed the effects of long usage" and "in the faces of some were evidence of hunger, seriousness of purpose." The "gayety and the brilliance of the parade," the *Herald* reminded us, only hid their desperate desire to find steady work and satisfy that "American urge for self-support, for a chance to do and be." The editorial stated the obvious: many of Miami's permanent residents needed steady employment. It, however, lamely suggested that employment opportunities "should not wait upon Washington nor an NRA or CWA but upon ourselves, our own

³⁹ "Roosevelt Asks Labor Hour Slash," *MDN*, 5 March 1934, p. 1 (text of the Roosevelt's speech was printed on p. 10); "Johnson Warns of Drastic New Blue Eagle Rule," *MDN*, 8 March 1934, p.1; "Humanity Before Profits," *Miami News*, 15 March 1934 (front page editorial that quoted extensively from Roosevelt's speech); next to this editorial was the following article: "Green Charges N.R.A. Labor Sec. Is Violated," which protested anti-union employers and violation of section 7A. "Park Program, Follows Labor Body Told," *Miami News*, 1 March 1934 (Roche quote); on economic statistics, a quick perusal of the local papers will suffice, see for example "Mr. President Business is Good in Miami," *MH*, 1 Dec 1933, p. 1; "11 Months Building Beats '32," *MDN*, 3 Dec 1933, p. 2; "Miami Whirligig, Population," *MDN*, 7 March 1934, p. 1 (which claimed this was the best season since the boom); "1,500,000 Visitors in Florida During the Tourist Season," *Evening Independent* (St. Petersburg), 1 April 1934, p. 1

voluntary efforts toward co-operation, helping one another, providing work, patronizing the local interests, spending money at home.”

Such references to laissez-faire voluntarism, encased in a weak concoction of home labor ideology, could be proffered in the context of continued business resistance to comply with and adhere to NRA blanket code provisions. The condescension shown to workers made sense when employer-employee relations operated in a paternal framework. However, the *Herald* paid its highest compliment to American workers when they characterized them in classic exceptionalism rhetoric as ambitious, rising middle-class folk—in essence, they were aspiring employers and businessmen.

This excursion into the mind of the worker was indeed quite remarkable. Like any distant analysis of the *other*, assumptions abounded, distortions guided the social commentary, and paternalism defined a neat social order filled with generalities and playful caricatures. Take this passage as a succinct example of this confusion:

“American workers are patient; generally they are eager to serve. They seldom engage in riots, except as pushed by violent organizations, backed by agitators, radicals, Communists. Labor as a whole is sound and safe and willing to abide by reason. Real Americans have no use for the regimentation of the Soviet or Fascism. They are not slaves to be driven into certain ruts and kept there. Most of them are ambitious; most of them hope to climb up and out of their classification to win a fortunate turn of the cards and become somebody. This, they know, can only be accomplished through the old American system of democracy and freedom.”

The *Herald* spoke for workers here without reference to the long and ongoing struggles of restaurant employees, cleaners, and the Unemployed Citizens’ League. The

paper interpreted the absence of worker militancy in Miami and elsewhere as a sign of American workers' patience and desire to climb the ladder of success; where militancy did occur, one could follow the circular logic: violent organizations, agitators, radicals and Communists were clearly at fault. Yet this required ignoring the *Herald's* own indirect support of the Southern Cafeteria's manipulation of its workforce, for example, and how this strongly suggested that workers avoided militancy for fear of losing their livelihood. Indeed, their reference to slavery inadvertently revealed the logic of class hierarchy they embraced: it condemned the labor of the working class as a condition of a lower social order and thus justified the workers low wages and poor working conditions. Those who were unemployed, poor, or working in low-wage and difficult jobs had yet to become "somebody."

The condescension and passive aggressive attitude toward workers, their organizations, and their supporters, and the denigrating characterization of certain types of work, could hardly be contained in this editorial. Safe empty clichés celebrating the American spirit took the place of deeper, closer reporting and investigation of local conditions. Such legerdemain deceived the reader into believing workers to be essentially passive and their employers as innocent, hardworking "somebodies," something that workers should aspire to as well. The Committee of One Hundred's didactic lectures could not have expressed a hokier message in the exclusive confines of their Miami Beach clubhouse. The *Miami News'* response was silent on this specific editorial except for publishing side by side three articles on its front page in support of the NRA: "[William] Green Charges N.R.A. Labor Section is Violated: Predicts Labor War Unless Anti-Union Employees Are Compelled to Obey Law and Stop Illegal

Activities Against Workers Organizing”; “Humanity Before Profits” (quoting extensively Roosevelt’s March 5th NRA code conference speech); and “Labor’s 30-Hour Week Bill Before Congress” (discussing the Connery bill).⁴⁰

Stage Three

Class harmony discourse disabled more effective critiques of capitalism even in its most progressive renditions. In part, this was the result of a recalcitrant power structure that refused genuine or lasting experimentation with progressive cooperative economic initiatives. Contentment with the status quo prejudiced those in power, particularly conservatives, and made them reluctant to address the pressing problems of unemployment and dire economic need in creative or redistributive ways. The often less-than-swift resolutions angered those most in need and the leaders of their organizations; this led to desperate attempts by unemployed leaders to make coalitions with business and government leaders to help resolve immediate issues. At times, the threat or actual manifestation of mass protest helped gain quicker solutions, however inadequate they may have been. The surface revealed real attempts by workers and the unemployed to gain greater cooperation from government and business for their benefit and thus logically for the larger community. In this way, class harmony echoed moral economy, translating into a progressive and potentially “radical” challenge to paternalism and top-down approaches to governance and leadership.

The specter of communist influence haunted grassroots organizations, at least in the perception of outsiders. The insiders of the unemployment movement dealt with the

⁴⁰ “Labor Marches,” *MH*, 14 March 1934, p. 6; *Miami News*, 15 March 1934.

immediate problems of hunger, homelessness, and other hardships and were not deterred by “radical” ideas. Openness to critical ideas about capitalism and the political system, revealed in this and previous chapters, defined the DCUCL and other workers organizations. Their inspiration usually derived from progressive readings of the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence, aided by progressive politicians such as Vito Marcantonio, Huey Long, Hugo Black, William Connery, Robert Wagner, or Branson Cutting and leftist writers such as Norman Thomas, Stuart Chase, or local penmen like the Marxist Verner Townley and his many letters to the *Miami Daily News* and presentations to Labor’s Citizenship Committee. In January 1934 and again in June 1935, socialists Frank J. Manning of New Jersey and Covington Hall spoke before the LCC and the local Socialist chapter. They may have also presented before the DCUCL, especially given that Socialists such as Manning organized the unemployed throughout the country.⁴¹

Such civic lessons questioned the very economic order others passionately defended in free market liberal terms using the same documents as the Constitution and Declaration of Independence that the accused “radical” groups referenced. The remainder of the chapter will explore how the initial novelty of the DCUCL’s advocacy turned into a public nuisance for local officials concerned with the potential radicalization

⁴¹ “Citizenship Body Hears Good Talk on Organization,” LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, 18 Jan 1934 (Manning spoke for over an hour where “he urged the workers to take advantage of their right to organize”); on Manning see, <http://www.dvrbs.com/People/CamdenPeople-FrankJManning.htm>; LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, 27 June 1935 (Hall). David Roediger discusses Hall’s pre-1930 activism particularly in Louisiana and Texas pre-WWI but no study accounts for his 1930s activism. Covington Hall, *Labor’s Struggles in the Deep South & Other Writings*, edited & introduced by David R. Roediger (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1999); “Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity: Covington Hall and the Complexities of Race, Gender and Class,” *Toward the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994), 127-180.

of the unemployed and the continued optimistic boosting of local economic growth and opportunity. The conservative political context, improved economic conditions, a resurgent local labor movement, and the likely waning resources and coffers of the DCUCL contributed to its marginalization and disappearance.

Just about six weeks after the apparent display of class harmony shown in the NRA parade, the DCUCL sent a delegation to the first Florida State Federation of Workers' Leagues convention in the attempt to connect with a statewide effort to combat unemployment. Interest in expanding the workers unemployment movement, while facing several obstacles, evidently did not prevent these unemployed Floridians from widening their organizational networking. It is unclear, however, how these various groups remained in contact or coordinated with each other. Among the other nine cities that sent forty delegates to the two-day convention in Tampa were Clearwater, St. Petersburg, Lakeland, Orlando, and Jacksonville. Perrine Palmer, M. E. Fidler, Joe Shepard, Charles Laughinghouse, and Merrill C. Meade represented the DCUCL at the convention.

Showing how the booster spirit seldom discriminated against economic opportunities, the *Miami Daily News* reported how the delegates would seek to bring the convention to Miami in 1935. In addition, their brief report of the upcoming meeting noted that the "purpose of the state federation is to obtain more federal funds for federal emergency relief administration work and other government projects" as well as help from other sources. The local papers seldom lost the chance to spin potential opportunities for economic development. How the meeting unfolded and then was reported highlighted the political limitations that the DCUCL and any other worker

organization faced when organizing and advocating for greater distribution of wealth and greater human dignity in the United States, Florida, or individual cities such as Miami.⁴²

On April 30 1934, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* announced the formation of the Florida State Federation of Workers League, listing its elected officers and some of the conventions adopted resolutions. Eugene F. Poulnot, president of Hillsborough County Unemployed Brotherhood, was elected president; O. M. Alfonso of Tampa, first vice-president; G. B. Jackson of Orlando second vice president; and D. M. Benson of Tampa, secretary-treasurer. The resolutions passed included “opposing capitalistic wars and fascism and favoring a three-year moratorium on mortgage and tax foreclosures, proposed workers’ unemployed insurance already introduced in congress, and asked that relief administration funds be turned over to the unemployed for distribution...[and resolution calling for] free rent, water, lights, and clothing for the needy.” The resolutions reveal a dislike for means-testing, a concern for the livelihood and dignity of the unemployed, and an anxiety that current relief allocations were being misused because of local political squabbles and corruption. Socialist organizers were likely active participants in this meeting. Later in May, socialist Covington Hall gave a lecture in the St. Petersburg’s Workers League’s Industrial Hall. The *Miami Daily News* reported on May 2 that members of the DCUCL found the convention “too red for us—even the badges were red... so we, to the displeasure of the delegates of the convention, wore small American flags over them. After a half day’s listening, we decided the ideas were red, too, so we came home.” Perrine Palmer rejected the fact that any of the DCUCL delegates made such a comment. He responded to the *Daily News*’ brief story

⁴² “Dade Unemployed to Attend Meet,” *MDN*, 25 April 1934, p. 11; “Florida Unemployment Form State Federation,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 29 April 1934, p. 9.

(which only contained the quote above) by writing for the *Miami News* an amazing rare account of an unemployed workers meeting that countered the red-baiting attempt.⁴³

Palmer contested the *Miami Daily News*' claim of communistic radicalism by asserting a radical Americanism. He sarcastically pointed out that the flags worn by the Miami delegates were made in Japan and were "the same as those worn in the late N.R.A. parade in Miami." While the men and women attending the convention were nearly penniless and could not afford "red flags," they did collectively chip in to purchase three big American flags that were "draped behind the speaker's platform and a fourth which they proceeded to choke down to the throats of skeptics who doubted their knowledge of what that flag means." Palmer related an exchange between two officers of the convention that evoked the right to assembly and free speech. "A young man, evidently of Latin birth [likely Alfonso], bearing the unfurled American flag," he wrote, "stepped before him [the chair] and asked:

"Mr. Chairman, under what article of the United States Constitution does this convention open?

"Article one of the Bill of Rights," responded the chairman.

"What does the article say," asked the Latin. To which the chair replied:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or the press; or the right of the people to peaceably assemble, and petition the government for a redress of grievances."

"Does that apply to us," continued the interrogator.

"Yes."

"Then," concluded the flag-bearer, "we will continue to fight for those rights and for all other rights guaranteed to us by the Constitution, and, if need

⁴³ "Unemployed Meet Here and Organize State Association," *Tampa Daily Tribune*, 30 April 1934, p. 7; "Workers League Forms Two Units," *The Evening Independent*, 11 May 1934, p. 6 (Hall); Miami's Own Whirligig, "Red," *MDN*, 2 May 1934, p. 1; Palmer, "'The Scream of the Eagle': The Red Convention," *Miami News*, 17 May 1934. Elna Green, "Hidden in Plain View: Eugene Poulnot and the History of Southern Radicalism," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 84, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 349-382. Green offers a passing reference to the Florida State Federation without giving its name but she cites a military intelligence report as calling the "Workers Leagues, a radical organization" (358, note 41).

be, die for them.”

[Palmer added] There are some other passages in the Constitution, and in the American Declaration of Independence, that the “reds” might have included in their ritual, but I guess that they are too hot even for reds. You will find some of them in one of the resolutions offered by the “conservatives” from Dade.

Successfully contradicting the *Miami Daily News* in Americanist terms, Palmer also suggested that communism was not a bad option and certainly preferable to fascism. He worried that the country suffered from “a touch of fascism” and this made him “immensely sick.” “But why worry about names,” Palmer insisted. “Why not take our natural wealth, the genius and willingness of our own people and our own United States Constitution and have real DEMOCRACY?”

Leaders at the convention recognized the potential for social revolution but were against it. D. M. Benson, the secretary-treasurer, attended with his father and sister which, according to Palmer, was an inspiring site “to watch those three fight side by side for the things which they believe.” The DCUCL contributed to formulating at least one of the convention’s resolutions, though it is unclear which one. The “hand-painted signs” on display at the convention highlighted the cause of the gathering: “We can’t sell our Labor”; “We must have relief”; “We want our rent paid, or will forcibly resist evictions”; “We refuse to starve amid plenty”; “Give us Relief—while you have Peace”; “No cutting water”; and “To hell with PROSPERITY, we must have SECURITY.” The drive to organize, despite the dire conditions of the unemployed, revealed an idealistic and practical faith in grassroots democracy which even inspired Palmer to evoke the memories of Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington as examples of homegrown patriotic fighters for justice and freedom. The delegates at the convention believed in the idea of democracy and the practical necessity to assemble and petition the

government for relief during an economic crisis when more than one-fifth of U.S. workers were unemployed, many more underemployed, and plenty who were underpaid. Most importantly, the act of organizing and meeting to discuss their grievances and real concrete needs demonstrated a hope in non-violent action. Palmer repeatedly announced that the DCUCL and now the delegates to the State Federation of Workers Leagues wanted to avoid revolution and thus violence yet they were obligated as active, critical citizens to demonstrate their outrage for the existing unjust conditions and, if needed, to protect their right to live through more aggressive activism.⁴⁴

Palmer and members of the DCUCL argued that the government had an obligation to provide for the common welfare, not simply to help a few benefit at the cost of the many. In March, he recommended to the readers of the letter forum of the *Miami Daily News* to read Republican Senator Bronson Cutting's essay, "Is Private Banking Doomed?" Cutting supported the expansion of relief efforts as well as the nationalization of banks; he regretted that Roosevelt had not taken this action in the first hundred days of his presidency. As Palmer and many others had done since the early 1930s (see chapter 5), he charged technological unemployment as a major factor in the current crisis. As powerful was Cutting's connection to the plight of the unemployed: "Yet practically and morally these unemployed workers must be cared for. If purchasing power is to reach its ultimate high, they must have work and income to spend. Morally, they must have their

⁴⁴ "'The Scream of the Eagle'" *Miami News*, 17 May 1934. The final sentences were inspired by Stéphane Hessel, "Indignez Vous!" *The Nation*, vol. 292, no. 10 & 11 (March 7/14, 2011): 15-19. The old French Resistance fighter relates: "We must realize that violence turns its back on hope... The oppressors no less than the oppressed have to negotiate to remove the oppression... [This represents a] hope and faith in modern societies' ability to move beyond conflict with mutual understanding and vigilant patience. To reach that point, societies must be based on rights whose violation prompts outrage—no matter who has violated them. There can be no compromise on these rights" (18-19).

chance to live like human beings. And when industry cannot care for them, then it becomes government's duty."

On May 1, a day after the state convention, the DCUCL sent FDR a telegram complaining about the end of the CWA and "the humiliating and slow method of certification under [the] social service system." Palmer highlighted how the delegates at the state convention were "fast losing hope" in the current system and that the unemployed and "those subsisting on [NRA] minimum code wages" hoped that the president would live up to his words in the March 5 speech: shorten work hours, increase wages, and get people to work. If not, Palmer argued, workers' "only recourse will be to take by force the equal privileges and immunities guaranteed them by the constitution, the same as did those who made that sacred instrument." As threatening as this may have been, it was not nearly as radical a statement as another in the telegram, one Palmer had written and uttered before and that repeated the spirit of the Florida State Federation of Workers' League: "To deny men the right to live in peace and decency merely because someone else cannot make a profit on their labor is contrary to the basic law of our land, and of the God who created it." Palmer outlined here the boundary between moral economy and, in effect, immoral usury. The profit system should not be "paramount to human life," argued the DCUCL leader. And this idea struck at the heart of capitalism.⁴⁵

How then would the unemployed and their allies fight for their welfare?

In addition to low relief payments, unemployed leaders feared welfare officials would

⁴⁵ Perrine Palmer, "Praises Cutting's Article," *MDN*, 23 March 1934, p. 6; Bronson Cutting, "Is Private Banking Doomed?" *Liberty*, 21 March 1934, pp. 7-10; "Self-Explanatory Telegram," *Miami News*, 10 May 1934 (I could not locate this telegram in the National Archives or the Roosevelt Library, see note 19 above); "Permanent Relief Planned for Dade," *Miami Herald*, 12 May 1934, p. 4; "Humanity Before Profits," *Miami News*; for text of Roosevelt's speech see <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=14821#axzz1JB1ctGzg>.

undercount the number in need by prejudiced means-testing or simply overlook cases. After the hit from CWA layoffs and eventual end of the program in March and early April, the total federal relief allotment (direct and work relief) to Miami's district fell from \$101,748 in April to \$78,119 in May right at the time when Miamians faced the regular seasonal unemployment and when federal relief spending started to be cutback more generally. Tampa's district also faced a reduction, as did all of Florida's eleven districts, but they continued to get \$201,740 in May (from \$444,760 in April). Palmer and the DCUCL spent a lot of energy in the rest of 1934 and 1935 to change perceptions that Miami in fact still had high numbers of down-and-out folks despite the ballyhoo that conditions were good. Their preference was to work with city and county business and government leaders to fix conditions. However, there were other approaches.⁴⁶

The last comment Palmer made in his "Scream of the Eagle" report of the state convention was to highlight the difference between Tampa's relief allotment and Miami's. He wrote, "Miami has had no demonstrations by the unemployed yet. Tampa has and Tampa got \$225,000 for relief this month [by May 17]. Miami got \$63,000." Palmer was referencing E. F. Poulnot's Unemployed Brotherhood's organized protests on May 9 and 10 against Tampa relief officials' suspension of free school lunches for low-income students. Poulnot had been a welfare activist since the early 1930s and had been marked as a radical and inaccurately a communist by local Tampa officials because of his advocacy for the poor. He did join the Socialist Party at some point during this time. His egalitarian views, nonetheless, likely contributed to this viewpoint. In this successful

⁴⁶ Department of Research and Statistics, Florida Emergency Relief Administration, *Review of Relief and Economic Statistics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1934): p. 11; vol. 1, no. 2 (September 1934): 5-6 & 13.

rally, which helped restore free lunch relief, Poulnot rallied parents and children to protest the sudden cut. Fewer than 500 of 1,100 students showed up to school and fewer than 100 showed up after lunch time. Poulnot spoke to at least 700 unemployed people when he stated, “If they don’t give us the relief we want let’s go open a warehouse and take what we need.” His efforts to gather an “organized mob” led to his arrest but authorities did act on the protest and expressions of moral outrage and call for immediate resolution of the hunger problem. The St. Petersburg *Evening Independent* also reported that Poulnot “denounced any discrimination between white or black, or married or single” relief recipients. Demonstrating cross county solidarity, the St. Petersburg Workers’ League collected funds to help with the legal fees incurred by Poulnot’s case. They reminded the public that their and the Florida State Federation Workers’ League’s primary objectives were to gain “direct control of all relief administration, convenient food distribution centers, [and] immediate increase of relief to adequately care for all unemployed.” Poulnot and Palmer were driven by the goal of relieving conditions for the poor and this necessitated cooperation from all sectors of society; neither wanted to turn to violence and the problems that could result from such action, whether it was injury or death.⁴⁷

To this end, Palmer and the DCUCL succeeded in organizing the Dade County Emergency Welfare Council in June 1934, a cooperative organization that included

⁴⁷ ““The Scream of the Eagle”” *Miami News*, 17 May 1934; “Tampa Jobless Threaten Riot to Get Relief,” *Evening Independent*, 11 May 1934, p. 1; “Tampa School Children Riot at Relief Cut,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 May 1934, p. 1; “Riddle Scans Hillsborough Relief Bills,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 May 1934, p. 1; “The Workers’ League,” *The Evening Independent*, 21 May 1934, p. 2A & 3A. Green, “Hidden in Plain View,” 357-359; Robert P. Ingalls, “The Tampa Flogging Case, Urban Vigilantism,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 56, no. 1 (July 1977): 13-27 (Poulnot quote on p. 20); Idem, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 180-181.

Labor's Citizenship Committee, the Central Labor Union, the Consumers' Council of Dade County, the Riverside Improvement Association, the county and city government, the Chamber of Commerce, and other leaders of greater Miami. The idea of the organization emanated from yet another DCUCL initiative and revealed a moment of progressive class harmony attempting to unfold in reality. The DCUCL gained support from the CLU, LCC, and Consumers Council to seek out local government assistance in increasing federal aid to the area. The *Miami Daily News* reported that the citizens of these groups approached Judge A. B. Small in his civil court office to help their effort for a larger community movement. They were concerned that "a successful winter season here and prosperous conditions in building and real estate activities seem to have made federal government officials believe Dade County does not need as much emergency relief funds as other sections." Lorena Hickok of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration reported as much in January 1934 when she wrote Harry Hopkins about the celebratory newspaper stories announcing Miami's successful season.

This pattern of boosting south Florida had a long tradition. The Welfare Council sought to correct these false perceptions, at least the Council's grassroots organizers did. According to Florida's Emergency Relief Administration statistics, a greater disparity did exist between Tampa's allocation and Miami's, to take just one example. Tampa suffered only a 11 percent gap between cases needing aid and those actually getting the paltry assistance in May and June but it decreased to 8.1 percent in July and 5.1 percent in August; the disparity in Miami was horrendous: 50 percent in May and 51.2 percent in June but improving slightly to 42 percent in July and 43 percent in August. The Welfare

Council attempted to gather support through voluntary efforts and financial contributions but it seems to have petered out by August despite the best hopes of the DCUCL.⁴⁸

The terrible living conditions endured by the unemployed and poor were insufficiently improved with the paltry payments received either from work or direct relief. Perrine Palmer pointed out in a July 1934 letter to the local papers how dire conditions were for those getting assistance. Two-hundred and sixty-three relief cases, consisting of 533 adults and 551 children, received an average of \$5 per month per person while having to pay an average monthly housing rental rate of \$8.50. “Judge for yourself,” Palmer wrote, “what those quarters must be [like] and how even that low figure leaves for food alone, to say nothing of eyes, teeth, illness, recreation, transportation, clothes, education—And death.” He highlighted a government report that revealed 105 eviction cases occurred in Miami during May. The Florida Emergency Relief Administration noted an increase in food prices for the state as well as an increase in unemployment, a decrease in economic activity, and an increase in those needing relief. These patterns especially marked the conditions for the major state counties: Pinellas (St. Petersburg), Hillsborough (Tampa), Duval (Jacksonville), and Dade (Miami). Before the disappearance of the Welfare Council, Palmer pleaded with the public to donate money to help fund the expenses for an office with a full-time stenographer (to be paid \$15 a week). He also reported how the Council—one imagines

⁴⁸ *MDN*, 11 June 1934, 15A; “Relief Meeting Slated Friday,” *MDN*, 12 June 1934, p. 2; “Welfare Group to be Formed in Dade County,” *Miami News*, 14 June 1935; “Relief Group Meets Monday,” 17 June 1934, p. 2; *MDN*, 6 July 1934, p. 10 (Welfare Council lobbies city commission for larger allotment for unemployment funds); Perrine Palmer, “The Emergency and Emergency Council,” *Miami News*, 26 July 1934 (also published in *MDN*, 22 July 1934, p. 7); Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, editors, *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 167-170; *Review of Relief and Economic Statistics*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Oct 1934): p. 17.

driven by the DCUCL—was attempting to set up committees on housing, electricity, water, medical, dental, vision care, and legislation on the local, state, and national level. The DCUCL sent another desperate telegram to Harry Hopkins, FERA head, and Governor Dave Sholtz as well as a letter to Julius Stone, the FERA state administrator, in August 1934 asking for increased appropriations for Dade and Broward Counties (District 10 of Florida's 11 total relief zones).⁴⁹

Conditions would get no better over the next year. The *Miami News* warned in September 1934 of the gross miscalculations of the local grocery bills the Federal Emergency Relief Administration estimated a family of four or five had to pay: \$283.24 annually or \$5.44 per week or \$1 per person of a five person family. Miami's food expenses were the highest in the state, and the FERA analysis under-estimated the true costs. Their insight paints a powerful picture:

Did you ever stop to think, or try to live on an expenditure for a family of four or five persons, an average of \$5.44 a week for YOUR family [?] Here might be a sample menu... Breakfast: toast and coffee; maybe a little mush or rolled oats for a change. Lunch, a couple of avocado pears... Supper... grits, grunts, coffee: possibly beef stew now and then. **Then they wonder why you see so many people out with fishing poles on the causeway** (emphasis added).

The labor paper took issue with the judgment that people were not living within their means. It echoed Palmer's long-standing argument and a growing national consensus that called for increasing the "purchasing power" of the masses a majority who represented "80 per cent" of the country's consumers. The paper argued that "skilled craftsmen and even common laborers" deserved a "living wage" and certainly more than

⁴⁹ Palmer, "The Emergency and Emergency Council"; *Review of Relief and Economic Statistics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Aug 1934): 6 & 8-10; Idem., vol. 1, no. 3 (Oct 1934): p. 13 & 16; "Dade Unemployed Ask More Relief," *MDN*, 12 Aug 1934, p.4.

what they were getting. “‘Don’t do as I do, but do as I say,’ seems to be the motto of that class” of employers and government officials criticizing workers and the unemployed for asking for higher wages and relief. Calling for increased federal intervention into the economy, while attacking critics of such economic policy, the *Miami News* stated, “the day had passed when the laborer can be regarded as a chattel who thankfully accept the morsels from his master’s table for his wage.” The *Miami Herald*, “the morning newspaper,” took issue with the *Miami News*’s calculations, but the labor paper shot back with a detailed account of the high grocery costs in the area and the low standard workers and the unemployed were expected to accept. Miami’s labor and unemployment movement, despite the *Herald*’s rosy “Labor Marches” outlook, resented the condescension and distortion of what they knew to be the true conditions for the city’s employed and unemployed workers. Walter Hoyt, president of the Central Labor Union, would later write a rebuttal of another *Herald* article that accused union picketers of the Seven Seas restaurant to be the work of labor racketeers. He assured the public that unionists sought “the betterment of our wonderful city” and found it unfortunate that the “morning paper” published misleading articles.⁵⁰

To the DCUCL’s chagrin, FDR and Congress continued to extend limited funds to the unemployed and remained biased against enlarging government any further to help workers and the unemployed any more than it already was. By the fall of 1934, Palmer

⁵⁰ *Review of Relief and Economic Statistics*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Aug 1934): 6 & 8-10; Idem, vol. 1, no. 3 (Oct 1934): p. 13 & 16; “Miami’s Grocery Bill Highest In State, FERA Survey Shows,” *MDN*, 7 Sept 1934, p. 1; “One Man’s Family—And Miami’s Grocery Budget,” *Miami News*, 13 Sept 1934; “Where the ‘Dieticians’ Disagree,” *Miami News*, 27 Sept 1934; Walter Hoyt, “Labor Explains Café Picketing and Settlement,” *MDN*, 23 Dec 1934, p. 7. I have not located the *Miami Herald* article: the *MDN* published in the afternoon while the *Herald* published in the morning.

started working for the Florida Emergency Relief Administration, where he conducted a housing survey of Miami and Dade County. I have only been able to uncover a short excerpt of the report. Palmer reported the horrendous conditions plaguing “Colored Town,” namely its overcrowded and congested nature, the shoddy conditions of many of the homes (defective roofs, windows, door screens, etc.), and poor sewage system. Most residents were renters, and the insufficient housing to accommodate the demand led to greater overcrowded conditions.

Through the fall and for the next two years, Palmer would campaign for better housing for the poor and unemployed giving presentations to the DCUCL as well as Labor’s Citizenship Committee on a regular basis. Palmer visited in November 1934 the office of John C. Gramling, a major coordinator of the PWA housing project in Liberty City, to find out what the Emergency Division of the Public Works could do to alleviate the housing problems of Miami. Gramling instructed Palmer that the PWA would only entertain housing projects “that were self-liquidating.” In other words, the poor and unemployed were out of luck if they could not pay enough rent to pay off the cost of construction (that is over time). Gramling added to his letter to Horatio B. Hackett, Director of the PWA Housing Division that “the condition is really appalling” and that the city, county and state failed to build any new homes for the needy. “The unemployed have nowhere to go,” relaying Palmer’s field work, “and rents have soared to such an extent that those working for a salary cannot pay the rents demanded. I do not know what to do about it.” Palmer later returned to Gramling’s office to highlight the need for housing for “about 3,500 families in Miami.” Gramling suggested seeking government support to tap into unused land in the county so as to set up 3,500 army tents. These

discussions, no doubt, highlighted the need for housing assistance, both for blacks and whites, and likely were the first conversations that would eventually lead to the “white” Edison Housing projects erected in 1939.⁵¹

The League, with Palmer’s assistance, continued to lobby the federal government meanwhile embracing more self-help solutions to the housing and food problems. In December 1934, Palmer, in behalf of the LCC, DCUCL, and United Floridians (a home labor advocacy group), sent yet another telegram to President Franklin Roosevelt, saying:

We appeal to you to end immediately the wholesale eviction, imprisonment and threats of imprisonment of destitute families here. More than 1,700 white families on federal relief roles alone facing eviction or jail, or both, because of inability to pay rent, which Florida law permits. **Situation among negroes even worse.** Six hundred families without running water. Over 100 with no water at all. Nine hundred families living under leaky roofs. We have repeatedly appealed to our city, county and state governments, but in vain.... They acknowledge this condition but admit inability to deal adequately with it. **Is there nothing left for these people but to take the law into their own hands and protect themselves as best they can?**⁵² (Emphasis added.)

If residents of sunny tourist Miami managed to craft such a telegram, one must wonder how many more of these kinds of messages were reaching Roosevelt and his administration from the rest of the country. Palmer pressed the Miami City Commission in late November and December 1934 to secure housing for the poor and unemployed. The examples of eviction victims told of the harrowing poverty the poor faced: one

⁵¹ “Extracts from Perrine Palmer’s Housing Report,” September 1934, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196, National Archives, Washington D.C. (hereafter PHA, RG 196), Box 302; Letter from John C. Gramling to Horatio Hackett of the Emergency Housing Division, November 8, 1934, PHA, RG 196, Box 297; Letter from Gramling to A. B. Clas, Housing Director, November 20, 1934, PHA, RG 196, Box 297. For evidence of Palmer’s advocacy see, LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, October 4, 11, and 18, 1934; Jan 3, Feb 7 & 14, Aug 8, 15, 22, and Sept 26, 1935; Feb 13 & 20, 1936; June 8, 24, & 30, 1937 (where he asked the LCC to support Wagner-Steagall low rent-housing bill).

⁵² “Roosevelt Asked to Help Homeless,” *MDN*, 14 Dec 1934, p. 9. (This telegram was not located in the Roosevelt Library or National Archives; see note 19 above.)

widow with three children was living on \$14 per week; a man in another family earned \$25.20 per month while his wife suffered from tuberculosis, had a ten-days old baby, and two other children ages 3 and 4; another family of seven earned only \$33.60 per month. Urged by Palmer, the Commission called a special meeting to discuss the issues, but plans to obtain lumber to build houses in in Opa Locka (N.W. Dade County) fell apart. The immediate and urgent needs of the homeless led Palmer to follow Gramling's advice of getting tents to alleviate the housing needs.

The DCUCL moved forward in February 1935 to purchase its own tents after the City Commission failed again to assist its efforts to obtain them. Tents to shelter the destitute and unemployed -- a reflection of hard economic times and the lack of political will. The DCUCL was able to purchase six army tents after raising money through donations. The tents were erected at Viney's Tourist Camps, 807 S.W. 32 Avenue. The League pointed to how fifty-seven families faced eviction in January 1935 and they called for further help "to all who can assist in meeting the emergency." This included donations of house space, more tents, building materials, plumbing, furniture or the use of land.⁵³

Years of economic crisis led to mounting frustration. Again in March 1935, Palmer warned the City Commission that only \$2,100 remained of federal funds to assist 10,000 individuals on the relief rolls. He notified the commissioners that the DCUCL had sent a delegate to Washington "to tell federal officials there is still great need in

⁵³ *Miami City Commission Minutes*, Nov 28 and Dec 6 & 19, 1934; March 6, 1935 (the building of housing in Opa Locka was still being discussed); "City to Build Jobless Homes," MDN, 7 Dec 1934; Perrine Palmer, "Communication," *Miami News*, 13 Dec 1934 (shorten version of this article was published in MDN as "Eviction Case Plea Explained," 9 Dec 1934, p.7); Idem, "Poor Arrested Like Cripples," MDN, 16 Dec 1934; Idem, "Unemployed League Appeals for Aid in Housing Emergency," *Miami News*, 14 Feb 1935.

Miami in spite of the unprecedented tourist season.” Several Miami citizens collected signatures to nominate Palmer as a candidate for city commission but he rejected the request in a letter to the *Miami Daily News*, mainly because of FERA rules prohibited its employees to run for office. Palmer insisted that citizens, including business men and labor leaders, were not doing enough to change things. (Interestingly, he self-identified as a labor leader.) A larger concern for the interconnectedness of society and the general welfare was needed. His radical egalitarianism and consumerist perspective revealed his hopes for social harmony. Palmer’s words, nonetheless, expressed deep outrage for existing conditions: “Street cleaners and farm hands are more vital to democracy than millionaires. Which could you get along without? ... [The] very numbers [of the] wage-earning masses make them the only possible adequate customers for business.... [However] we are still turning pregnant mothers and children into the streets or herding them into tents, tool houses, old bus bodies, condemned shacks and other unsanitary conditions (I can give you instances, if you desire).” The opportunity was certainly ripe for more “radical” action.⁵⁴

Fever pitch tension arrived by the spring of 1935. The increasing number of evictions, some resulting from the high winter rental rates of the 1935 tourist season, set the context of the purchase of the army tents. The looming summer promised the usual high rates of unemployment as well. In response, the local and state unemployment movement sought to lobby the state legislature for greater relief.

⁵⁴ *MDN*, 13 March 1935, p. 1 & 12 (federal funding); *MDN*, 10 March 1935 p. 1 and 24 March 1935, p. 5 (petitions circulating for Palmer commission candidacy); Perrine Palmer, “Palmer Denies He’s a Candidate,” *MDN*, 31 March 1935, p. 7.

With an average of 10 weekly evictions and more than 1,800 Miami families facing possible eviction in May 1935, Dade unemployment movement representatives attending the session of the state legislature warned that revolution would result if the dire economic conditions did not receive immediate attention by the legislature. The local papers claimed they were delegates of the Florida Council of Unemployed Leagues (FCUL) who had just formed in Jacksonville in May and quickly sent a lobbying group to the state's capital. Miami's Tallahassee delegates—whether or not they were indeed connected to the FCUL—including M. E. Fidler and Sam Stodel and DCUCL officers, John Gaveleck, John Burke, and George Maurer.⁵⁵ The delegates, according to the *Miami Daily News* and the *Herald*, supported a legislative platform that included the abolition of the poll tax, the placing of minority parties on the ballot, adequate old age pensions, workmen's compensation and its criticism of the amendment on the pending social welfare bill that, according to the *Miami Herald*, "makes subject to arrest anyone unemployed who refuse to accept work at prevailing rates of wages." *The Daily Worker* labeled it the "forced labor bill" but the "vagrancy clause" was eventually stricken from the bill.

The DCUCL, in any case, telegraphed Governor Sholtz that it had not authorized this delegation to represent it; this action represented a keen political move to create

⁵⁵ M. E. Fidler was a member of the DCUCL and a delegate to the state convention in April 1935 (he was a former president of the League in 1933 as well as former president of building trades council in the WWI period); Sam Stodel was described as a New York economist by the *Miami News* (LCC Minutes, June 6, 1935) and as a dentist by the *MDN* (15 May 1935, p. 10) had been a former International Workers of the World activist and organizer of unemployed workers in the early twentieth century. See, *Putnam County Courier*, 20 March 1908 and 10 April 1908; the *Oswego Daily Palladine*, 3 Feb 1915, p. 6. "Unemployed League Elects Officers," 11 April 1935 (Gaveleck was the treasurer, Maurer the trustee, and Burke served as a trustee). Burke would later help organize white and black hod-carriers in Miami.

distance from itself and the red tinge surrounding the Tallahassee delegation. Fidler's and the DCUCL officers' presence, Palmer's earlier advocacy of ending the poll tax in 1932 and 1933, and the Labor Citizenship Committee and State Federation of Labor's support of the workmen's compensation bill then in the legislature, suggests that the DCUCL supported the delegation's proposals. Fidler's quoted statements also echoed much of what Palmer had been writing about for the past few years: the warning of revolution, the lack of sufficient relief in Florida and Dade County, and the poor inadequate pay workers got. He highlighted how employers reduced the wages of unskilled workers from 40 cents to 20 cents because of the glutted labor market consisting of "men clamoring for jobs." "You'll either give us relief or you will have to feed us in jail or shoot us," Fidler warned. Much of the DCUCL's NRA activism between 1933 and 1934 focused on similar issues of pay and over-supplied labor markets (calls for shorter hours, spreading work, etc.).

However, the DCUCL's rushed telegram revealed how they feared the *Daily News*' and *Herald's* insinuations that the delegation had Communist Party ties and the implication that the League was connected with it. The articles appeared on May 15 and the telegraph was sent the very next day at 7:01 am. Its timing highlighted the panic among DCUCL leadership back at home. Later in the summer, a second unemployment organization appeared calling itself the Unemployed Relief Association but it appears to have represented a front given that its leaders had been part of the DCUCL leadership and they held their weekly meetings in the same place and time as the League.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ "Group Sees War Unless Florida Jobless Get Aid," *MDN* 15 May 1935, p. 10; *MDN*, 15 May 1935, p. 15; "Dade Jobless Group Denies Capital Plea," *MDN* 16 May 1935, p. 1; "Miami Unemployed Demand Legislation," *MH* 15 May 1935, p. 10a; *Evening Independent*, 15

The emergence of the FCUL and the DCUCL's telegram reveals a history of grassroots division amid a hostile political environment. It is unclear what ever happened to the State Federation of Workers' Leagues formed in April 1934, but it did seem connected with the Council of Unemployed Leagues. The Workers' Leagues appears to have been led by socialists and later evolved into a branch of the socialist Workers Alliance, but the histories of each locale that sent delegates to Tampa in April 1934 is not clear. As suggested by Palmer's account of the 1934 convention, various groups likely took part including the DCUCL.

The FCUL, while including communist party members, also likely had passing travelers or others who simply wanted to align with a movement pushing for needed and immediate action. Communist organizers in Florida claimed only to have a "fraction" in the FCUL so they were far from dominating this group despite their high hopes. Neither the Workers' Leagues' nor the FCUL could claim a monopoly over employed and unemployed workers or the poor. Perrine Palmer had a point when he wrote pragmatically "why worry about names" when the means existed to resolve the existing problem of workers overworked, underpaid, and unemployed or near complete destitution.

May 1935, p. 1; The Dade County Unemployed Citizens League Inc. to Governor Dave Sholtz, Florida, 16, May 1935 (sent at 7:02 am), Correspondence Governor Sholtz, 1933-1937, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Series 278, Box 28, folder 6; "Jobless Fight Forced Labor Bill in Florida," *The Daily Worker* 16 May 1935, p. 3; Letter from District Buro to all Sections and Units, 10 June 1935, Records of the Communist Party of the United States America, from the Russian State Archive of Soci-Political History, Library of Congress, Reel 298, Delo 3900 (hereafter RGASPI). Perrine Palmer, "Disfranchised," *MDN*, 1 May 1932, p. 6; Idem, "A Sorry Spectacle," *MDN*, 1 Nov 1933, p. 4 (on poll tax); the *MDN* seems to have also advocated the end of the poll tax, see for example this editorial, "Jobless--And Voteless," 20 Oct 1933, p. 4.

These various grassroots groups agreed to act on the horrible conditions plaguing their members, allies, and the general poor. While the FCUL had communist members, its membership was likely politically diverse. The Tallahassee delegation, allegedly representing the FCUL, embraced a platform widely supported by organizations like the DCUCL, the socialist led Tampa Unemployed Brotherhood, St. Petersburg Workers Leagues, and state Workers Alliance as well as Communists. Grassroots movements in Florida required the formation of coalitions, like that of the DCUCL and AFL unions; the activism and intellectual climate of such settings gave them a popular front feel even before organizations like the Communist Party formally embraced such a strategy.

The historian Michael Denning argued a “powerful social democratic movement,” a “popular front,” emerged in the 1930s and lasted for three decades. Calling this period the age of the CIO, Denning highlighted the importance of the progressive and egalitarian strands within the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the larger culture. He too made a point to decenter the importance of the Communist party in encouraging such a “radical social-democratic movement.” We can see how this occurred in south Florida. However, the context predated the CIO and existed outside of the Communist and even Socialist parties. The fluidity of ideas, the commonness of living in degraded conditions, and existence of abundant wealth stirred many to question the logic and morality of existing institutions.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Letter dated 25 Feb 1935 (states plans for April conference and representative of National Unemployed Council traveling the state); Letter dated 10 June 1935 letter; Letter dated 28 Oct 1935 letter; Letter dated 17 Dec 1935, RGASPI, Reel 298, Delo 3900; Palmer, ““The Scream of the Eagle.”” Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), xvii-xviii.

Grassroots progressive movements had reason to fear being marginalized out of existence. Red scare tactics, as proven after WWI throughout the nation, served as a useful tactic to disempower them. Persistent advocacy for the employed and unemployed workers between 1933 and 1934 by groups such as Tampa's Unemployed Brotherhood and Miami's Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League raised suspicions given they stood outside traditional, conservative charity and philanthropic approaches to poverty. The DCUCL already confronted a subtle stab at them in the *Miami Daily News* in the May 1934 story. The minimum influence of Florida's Communist Party, District 25, only offered an assist to conservative forces in the state. Despite its trenchant and sharp analysis of Florida's exploitative economy, their presence helped to undermine the already tenuous situation faced by the state's many grassroots progressive organizations.⁵⁸ This is not meant as a criticism of the Communist Party but rather as a critical comment about Florida's restrictive political landscape.

Communism-obsessed Governor Dave Sholtz began beating the drum for a more conservative patriotism in 1934-1935. In July 1934, the national American Legion commander, addressing the National Education Association in Washington D.C., had warned of creeping communism in U.S. schools, universities, churches, and even among peace advocates. Building on this speech in an October 1934 speech to the national American Legion convention held in Miami, Sholtz highlighted how the nation under Roosevelt was "engaged in a peaceful rebellion against communism and anarchy" through his administration's efforts to improve economic conditions in the country.

⁵⁸ "Florida Drafts Forced Labor Vagrancy Law," *The Daily Worker*, 3 May 1935, p. 3. This article highlighted how Florida's agricultural interests are "probably the most conservative in the country" and cities such as Miami, Tampa, and Jacksonville "are controlled by land barons, the bond holders and commercial pirates."

By January he was able to identify the presence of District 25 in Florida and, though unsure of their goals (“I do not believe they know themselves what they want”), he warned of how all they care to do is “destroy” the U.S. government. After confronting the FCUL delegates, including communist members, in May 1935, Sholtz told American Legionnaires they had a “‘job to do’ in stamping out organized communism in the state.” These delegates, he claimed, “demanded action” and threatened to use force to get what they wanted. Wearing the Legion uniform as he spoke before the 17th convention of the state American Legion in June, the Governor warned that thousands of Communists were in the South “plotting the overthrow of the government,” including at least 3,000 members in one unnamed Florida county alone. Sholtz did not explain how he arrived at this number but he did find it necessary to mention that “white and negro men and women attended” one recent Jacksonville Communist meeting. He referenced communist atheism and ordered Legionnaires to fight communism in the school and homes and to “combat ‘street-corner critics’ of government officials.”

Fred J. Manning of Miami Harvey Seeds post of the American Legion gave a presentation at Labor’s Citizenship Committee in early July on the “ravages of communism,” and later wrote in the *Miami Daily News* about how “the movement against American traditions is widespread.” Repeating much of what the national American Legion and Dave Sholtz espoused over the past year, he added,

We hear the demand for a “new social order,” for the “redistribution of wealth,” for the “production for use and not for profit,” and for numberless other radically inspired sentiments, all old, tired, and found wanting, but which have been shouted so loudly and so continuously as almost to submerge the mighty truths that our Constitution still lives, still holds power to correct our errors, and to right any injustices which may have crept into the national life.

One imagines that the members of the DCUCL and Palmer would have had heated discussions with Manning and the Legion's mystified perspective about the meaning of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Evidence soon began to appear that Sholtz may have been on to something. A civic club in St. Petersburg uncovered "four paid workers of the Third Internationale of the Russian Soviet government" were working in Florida. The Communist Party issued the leaflet "An Open Letter to Unemployed Workers of Florida" that denounced Sholtz's claims, highlighted the coalition nature of the FCUL, and that restated its goals for "real relief" such as its support of the social security bill in the U.S. Congress. The Building Trades Council minutes records Frank Roche giving a talk on communistic activities in Miami where he read a "circular given out by Communists"—likely this leaflet.⁵⁹

Federal funds for direct relief were scheduled to end on July 1 amid this red scare. The Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League lobbied both the county and governments yet again for the need for assistance in late June; for the first time the Unemployed Relief Association (URA) appeared in the historical record lobbying the city government in early July for more relief. The DCUCL announced to a joint meeting of city, county, and federal officials on July 12 that "it was with the 'greatest difficulty'

⁵⁹ "Teachers Hear Legion Officer Score Radicals," *MDN*, 6 July 1934, p. 9; "Governor Urges Legion to Help War on Anarchy," *MDN*, 22 October 1934, p. 18; "Condition of State Given by Governor," *Palm Beach Post-Times*, 5 Jan 1935, p. 9; "Minimizing the Menace," *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, 6 Jan 1935, p. 6; "Jobless Fight Forced Labor Bill in Florida," *The Daily Worker* 16 May 1935, p. 3 (Sholtz initially complained about the "communism invasion of the capital"); "Sholtz Pleads Legion War on Communism," *MDN*, 7 June 1935, p. 14; "Communism Alive in Florida, Legion Told by Governor," *Miami Herald*, p. 1; "Communistic 'Plot' Described by Sholtz," *Palm Beach Post*, 7 Jun 1935, p. 9; LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, 4 July 1935; Fred J. Manning, "Need of Vigorous Americanism Cited," *MDN*, 28 July 1935, p. 6; "Civic Clubmen Find Reds at Work in City," *The Evening Independent*, 11 July 1935, p. 1; "Secret Group to Watch Reds Recommended," *St. Petersburg Times*, 12 July 1935, p. 6; *MDN*, 14 July 1935, p. 6. RGASPI, Reel 298, Delo 3900; *Miami News*, 1 August 1935.

they were restraining their members from rioting and raiding stores dispensing foodstuffs.” City Manager L. L. Lee warned that dependent relief recipients faced the possibility of “actual starvation” and that the small emergency city allotment of \$7,500 issued the previous week for the rest of the month of July would be exhausted within four days. W. H. Green, federal relief administrator for the district, pointed out that the government allotted \$40,000 for the area which translated to “only about one day of work a week for men on relief.” He reminded the officials at the meeting that the new federal work-reliefs program, in any case, would only help those who could actually contribute to government projects. This meant that workers without the appropriate skills, aged persons, and “ill persons” would be left unassisted. In fact, the burden for direct relief now fell on the shoulders of city, county, and state governments. Bobo Dean of the national employment service office stated that while there was plenty of work for skilled mechanics none could be found for “common labor, white collar workers, and those in similar brackets”: 3,500 Blacks and 10,000 “white persons” had filed applications with him. Exploring this issue of the difficulty of finding work, the *Miami Daily News* ran a special investigative report the following week where two of its journalists uncovered that it was indeed hard to find a job in Miami.

Three days later, after the government meeting, the Unemployed Relief Association invited the public and the affected to attend their upcoming weekly Monday meeting in Miami’s Lummus Park. There is little evidence to suggest that the URA was indeed a separate organization, especially given that their weekly meeting occurred on the same day and place the DCUCL held its meetings. In any case, the URA, in a letter to the *Miami Daily News* announcing its invitation, highlighted how its battle with local

authorities was amounting to little success: “The failure of the FERA to fill the need and the slowness of our local officials to take time to study and visualize for themselves the terrific need of adequate aid has forced our hands to the wheel... The time for action has come... Rise to your feet prepared for definite decision and action! We have starved and underfed our children too long now. Be a man! Act!” The planning for the biggest class demonstration in Miami’s history likely occurred during this and subsequent meetings.⁶⁰

On July 31, 1,500 unemployed men, women, and children gathered at the City Commission meeting to protest conditions and demand immediate relief. The local papers did not comment on the racial makeup of the unemployed; evidently the vast majority were white. However, according to communist observers on the ground, the “Negro unemployed” participated, and from their perspective, they represented potential recruits for the Communist Party. Demonstrators filled the council chamber and overflowed into the courthouse lobby and the steps to Flagler Street.

By all accounts, the demonstration was orderly and disciplined; the only tense moment occurred when commissioner and ex-mayor E.G. Sewell shouted “Don’t you scalawags start anything here,” in alleged response to two men telling him to sit down when he rose to speak during the commission meeting. John F. Gavelek, described by

⁶⁰ “Direct Relief in this State to Stop July 1,” *Miami News*, 27 June 1935 (the term “unemployables” begins to appear in the discourse); *MDN*, 28 June 1935, p. 5 (DCUCL and County Commission); *MDN*, 3 July 1935, p. 2 (Unemployed Relief Association’s first appearance); “City Manager Says Welfare Need Critical,” *MDN*, 12 July 1935, p. 1 & 13 (only DCUCL is mentioned in the article); “Miami Facing Riot Threats Over Relief,” *Sarasota Herald*, 12 July 1935, p. 1; K. H. Brown (Legislative Committee of URA), “Unemployed Plead for Relief Action, 14 July 1935, p. 7; Dave Harris, “Reporter Finds Work Scarce in Miami,” *MDN*, 16 July 1935, p. 1 & 8; Helen Hansl, “Reporter Learns Little Work Available for Girls in Miami,” *MDN*, 17 July 1935, p. 1 & 2; “College Graduate Tells of Job Hunt,” *MDN*, 28 July 1935, p. 7. This woman college graduate in sociology signed her letter with the name “Disillusioned.” It tells of her hardship in finding steady and well-remunerated work in the “past two years” and the conditions of the few jobs she obtained: the work was arduous, the pay low and the hours long (working as a maid, office clerk, cook, laundry worker, among other jobs).

the local papers as the treasurer of the URA, spoke sympathetically of the small local government coffers, but insisted that something needed to be done. Recent government cutbacks left many individuals and families in tough times. Gavelek pointed out that “Thousands of men, women, and children in Miami are starving and we look to the city to feed them.” Furthermore, he argued, the charges made by the government that the “men will not work when work is available . . . is a lie. Men in our league have wallowed in mud and water up to their waists for the pitiful sum of \$2 a day.” He continued, “the government has seen fit in recent months, while it still gave direct relief, to consider \$1.87 a week sufficient to feed a family of four. Our people do not ask for charity. We want work, work which will permit us to support our wives and children in a decent manner.” Gavelek spoke with passion demanding justice as “dozens of people in rags, shoeless and hungry” stood behind him.⁶¹

The speech flowed with a focused class perspective that questioned the way power organized itself in the city. Gavelek highlighted how the newspapers reported that no poverty existed in Miami, “consequently thousands have flocked here to look for work and eventually to take their place in the bread lines. The Chamber of Commerce, through its Secretary Kessler, has broadcast stories that Miami has no bread lines. I’ll show him plenty of breadlines in Miami.” Continuing in this vein, Gavelek went for the juggler of the power structure. “The merchants are responsible for the conditions that now exist.

⁶¹ “Civic Leaders Asked to Aid Unemployed,” *MDN* 31 July 1935, p. 1; “Sewell Explains ‘Scalawags,’” *MDN* 5 Aug 1935, p. 1; “City Promises Action to Aid Unemployed,” *MH*, 1 Aug 1935, p. 1; “‘Sit Down!’ Yell Hungry Unemployed at Sewell,” *Daily Tribune* (hereafter *DT*) 1 Aug 1935, p. 1; “Beware, Mr. Sewell,” *DT*, 1 Aug 1935; “Unemployed Promised Aid by Commission,” *Miami News*, 1 Aug 1935; Letter from District Buro to Comrade Brown, 30 Sept 1935, RGASPI, Reel 298, Delo 3900. The story was reported nationally, see “Food Demanded by Miami Jobless,” *Baltimore Sun*, 1 Aug 1935, p. 10.

They are the ones who blocked the plans of the city to levy new taxes that would have provided food for our families. It's all right with the merchants when the city spends thousands of dollars to bring tourists here [referencing the city's publicity funds]. They benefit from that."

Mayor A. D. H. Fossey and the other city commissioners agreed to form an advisory committee.⁶² The committee contained thirty-five representatives, including eight city newspaper owners, three members of the URA (John Burke, John Gavelek, and Joseph Shepard), one representative of labor (Herbert Edgecombe chair of the LCC), and 26 business and civic leaders; absent from the group were any African American leaders. The size of the committee made it unwieldy but the mayor shrunk it down to nine members five days later, keeping Gavelek and Edgecombe as two of the nine. Mayor Fossey was not against establishing a sales tax to raise city revenue but he was adamant that "they'll only increase the real estate tax over my dead body." The ethic of protecting private property, in this case, overrode the interest of the unemployed. Perrine Palmer, however, argued that "unless you meet the situation and meet it quickly you will find all law breaking down." He recommended that an emergency be declared and a one-percent sale tax be imposed to meet the needs of the unemployed. Gavelek added to Palmer's insight that a larger mass of unemployed would march to city hall if something was not done soon, but he added that this remark was not meant as a threat.⁶³

What unfolded in the next several weeks highlighted the uphill battle the unemployed had faced for years ever since Perrine Palmer and others began to advocate

⁶² "Civic Leaders Asked to Aid Unemployed," *MDN* 31 July 1935, p. 1

⁶³ "Mayor Names Members for Relief Board," *MDN* 2 August 1935, p. 1; "Unemployment Aid Committee Named," *MH* 6 Aug 1935, p. 1 & 5.

for the poor and unemployed in 1931. None of the newspapers writing on the events of the July 31, 1935, mass demonstration and subsequent discussions over what to do with the “deserving unemployables” referenced the history of Miami’s unemployment movement.⁶⁴ Even the recent advocacy of the unemployed in June and early July 1935 fell below the journalistic radar of local coverage. The press failed to highlight S. Bobo Dean’s comment on how skilled construction workers were the only ones able to find work or W. H. Green’s parallel warning that only workers with the necessary skills (mostly in the construction trades) would be able to find jobs.

The *Miami Daily News*’ own July investigative reports revealing the lack of work (thereby further supporting Dean’s employment office findings) went unmentioned. The most egregious omission, of course, was the silence about the history of the local unemployment movement. Unemployed leaders repeated over and over to local, state, and national government and business officials the facts of the inadequate living conditions endured by the poor. The failed community effort of the summer of 1934 (Dade County Emergency Welfare Council), for example, had led to yet another uncovering of the impoverished conditions of the unemployed and poor, as the *Miami News*’ account of the grossly inadequate food budgets so vividly revealed. The steady rate of evictions told a powerful tale of impoverishment punctuated by such events as the erection of tents to house the evicted. Silence about this longer history marked the discussions in the press for August and the subsequent months. In addition to the historical amnesia and well-worn practice of just ignoring their demands, the poor and

⁶⁴ See discussions in chapter 5 through this chapter for evidence of Palmer and unemployment movement. “Enough Hysteria,” *MDN*, 20 Aug 1935, p. 4;

unemployed now earned the right to continued marginalization of their class interests though charges of corruption and communist accusations.

The efforts of local officials were disappointing and minimalist at best. *The Miami Daily News* and retail businesses protested any talk of raising sales or excise taxes. Real estate interests swore against raising property taxes. Talk of balanced budgets, cutting unnecessary spending, and promotion of volunteer and charity-led fund raising initiatives dominated the discussions about relief funding. The city arranged an opportunity for the over 6,000 unemployed heads of household to work in the city's Opa Locka farm: single unemployed men would work one day a week, men with families with less than two children would work two days a week, those with more would work three and all would earn \$2 for a day's worth of work; Blacks would work only during "bean-picking time" and "would receive vegetables instead of cash." In the effort to feed the children, officials arranged for milk donations to provide free milk to needy families. Mayor Fossey's special subcommittee sought to attain maximum efficiency and accountability. The president of the First National Bank and former Miami mayor, E.C. Romfh, recommended and then succeeded to make policy a requirement that applicants for aid "swear to the true circumstances of their condition" so as to risk perjury charges if shown to have lied at a later time. The committee wanted to insure they weeded out "chislers" so for good measure they required applicants to be photographed.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ "Hunger Comes First," *MDN*, 1 Aug 1935, p. 4 was an initial *MDN* editorial that warned against any rash tax raises, a platform it had advocated for some time (see the last two weeks of July for the most recent example). "\$200,000 Seen as City Relief for Year," *MDN*, 5 Aug 1935, p. 1; "City Will Grow Food to Supply Miami Jobless," *MDN*, 6 Aug 1935, p. 1 "Miami's Own Whirligig: VOLUNTARY TAX," *MDN*, 18 Aug 1935, p. 1 (mention of potential payroll tax of city employees); "\$63,000 Savings Are Expected Through City's

Finally, the spirit of class harmony flourished when 120 employers signed the Home Employment pledge of the recently formed Home Improvement League. It represented a goodwill promise to hire permanent residents whenever possible. The idea emerged as a result of the subcommittee meetings and was pushed forward by the Democratic Party leadership though the idea of hiring “home labor” had long been a local grassroots demand. Added to this home labor twist were calls to remove “negro aliens” from Miami, referencing the Bahamian migrant workers living in the city. As easy as targeting radical class arguments, the case against immigrant laborers revealed a lazy and uncreative approach to the scarcity of jobs. It is unclear whether Bahamian immigrant workers were ever deported despite the rhetoric.⁶⁶

The unemployed movement leadership remained frustrated with these minimalist approaches. While the step toward hiring home labor certainly was a sound moral one, the safeguarding of the degrading welfare apparatus was not. Gavelek protested the requirement for sworn affidavits and photographs. He asked that unemployed leaders have power over the distribution of relief and thereby avoid the humiliating experience of being evaluated by social workers. William Wister of the DCUCL declared that the

Farming Plan,” *MDN*, 7 Aug 1935, p. 1; “Miami’s Own Whirligig: FREE MILK AND JOBS,” *MDN*, 17 Aug 1935, p. 1; “Dairymen Asked to Help Need,” *MDN*, 17 Aug 1935, p. 2

⁶⁶ “Unemployment Aid Committee Named,” *MH* 6 Aug 1935, p. 5; “Jobs for Miamians Plan is Endorsed,” 20 Aug 1935, p. 5; “Business Men Will Promote Miami Labor,” *DT*, 29 Aug 1935, p. 16; “Home Employment Pledge Widely Accepted,” and “Many Signing Pledge to Hire Local Citizens,” *Miami News*, 10 Oct 1935; “Urges Action to be Initiated About Aliens,” LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, 15 Aug 1935; “Drive Against Negro Aliens to be Started,” *MDN*, 21 Aug 1935, p. 1. The historian Raymond Mohl suggests that the number of Bahamians in Miami decreased during the 1930s because of their movement to agricultural fields of Palm Beach County. However, it is unclear what happened to temporary migrating workers. I suspect that the nativist mentality, unemployment problem, congested nature of Colored Town and other Black segregated areas, and the search for steadier work led to their movement further north. Mohl, “Black Immigrants: Bahamians in Early Twentieth-Century Miami,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 65, np. 3 (Jan 1987): 292-293. I did not uncover any evidence of deportation.

\$200,000 estimate made by Mayor Fossey and others was insufficient for the over 14,000 unemployed in the city (as of early August).

Perrine Palmer's recommendations to increase welfare revenues were coupled with his call for employers to pay living wages. He also continued to advocate for the homeless and those on the verge of being evicted, insisting on the need for "immediate" action. The problem of low wages, leaving workers to pay up to 40 to 60 percent of their income on rent, led to these evictions; the more than 18,800 unemployed as of September 1935 were even in worse condition. In addition, the average wage earner could not afford to "pay the two, three, and sometimes four month advance rent" landlords often required. None of this advocacy or efforts to educate the public was new or communist led. All the authorities agreed that the July 31 demonstration was orderly. However, local officials did become nervous when Gavelek warned that 20,000 people may descend on City Hall for relief of their grievances. The unemployment movement may have finally reached its ultimate limits with this threat for greater protest.⁶⁷

Accusations of local political corruption and communist radical politics helped silence the URA and DCUCL. A movement began to recall several city commissioners that were indicted for questionable city purchases of park lands (none were removed from office). This led to a precarious political context. The rabble rousing *Miami Daily Tribune* was prominent in this recall effort and they sought to get the URA to join them

⁶⁷ "Miami Jobless Declare 20,000 to Join March," *MDN*, 14 Aug 1935, p. 1; *DT*, 15 Aug 1935, p. 20; "City Commission Meets Tomorrow to Discuss Relief," *DT*, 18 Aug 1935, p. 3; "Unemployment Aid Committee Named," *MH* 6 Aug 1935, p. 5; "\$200,000 Seen as City Relief for Year," *MDN*, 5 Aug 1935, p. 1; "Miami Jobless Thank City for Food, Shelter," *DT*, 6 Aug 1935, p. 1 & 15 (Palmer makes the tax recommendation); LCC Minutes, *Miami News*, 15 Aug 1935 (Palmer calls for living wage); Perrine Palmer, "Landlord's Protective Club," *Miami News*, 26 Sept 1935 (also published in *MDN*, 29 Sept 1935, p. 5).

in this campaign. However, the URA rebuked them and paid a price for this. The URA's activism, building on the DCUCL (and likely representing the same organization), unfortunately occurred at the same time that the Communist Party was making a membership push in Florida. Communists did have a very small presence in Miami but their papers indicate it was insignificant. Their organizers on the ground revealed a lack of understanding of the local conditions and history of Miami's unemployment movement.

Newspaper stories emerged in August reporting Communist activity including one report that found in circulation copies of the June leaflet criticizing Dave Sholtz and of the Communist newspaper, *The Daily Worker*. On August 14, Jacksonville experienced its own unemployed movement demonstration.⁶⁸ Finally, the fluid nature of intellectual discourse experienced for years among workers and the unemployed now became a potential liability. Dave Sholtz's and the American Legion's anticommunist activism indicated which direction the political winds were blowing. All these developments combined together to give the *Daily Tribune* enough fodder to accuse the URA and its leaders to be racketeers and communists. URA leaders declared they were not communists and, while getting paid for relief work, were working hard in the interests of the unemployed. They also proudly asserted how their organization was nonpartisan and did not discriminate against any party. Such declarations did not phase the red

⁶⁸ "Miami's Own Whirligig: REDS," *MDN*, 2 Aug 1935, p. 1; "Communist Paper Distributed Here," *MDN*, 6 Aug 1935, p. 2; *MDN*, 5 Aug 1935, 4; "Miami's Own Whirligig: COMMUNISM," *MDN*, 15 Aug 1935, p. 1 (which announced that federal agents were in Miami investigating potential communism activity); "Miami's Own Whirligig: POMPAO REDS," *MDN*, 1 Sept 1935, p. 1; Letter from District Buro to Comrade Brown, 30 Sept 1935, RGASPI, Reel 298, Delo 3900, "Florida Demonstrations Causes Speeding of Jobs," *Baltimore Sun*, 2 Aug 1935 (protest outside of Jacksonville relief headquarters); "Jacksonville Has Protest of Idle," *MDN*, 15 Aug 1935, p.1.

baiting *Daily Tribune*. The lackluster local relief initiatives continued the practices of half-hearted welfare policies; the suggestion that the often ignored unemployment movement might have turned slightly red only encouraged further marginalization of the underclass and service and unskilled workers. The URA disappeared from the historical record after this heated month and the DCUCL continued through the rest of 1930s but only as a shadow of its former self.⁶⁹

Conclusion

This history of Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League demonstrates that a lively grassroots unemployment movement existed in Miami, even though it was limited by, among other things, red scares, small city coffers, and business and civic leaders who pressed for economic growth and believed in the possibility of an undeserving poor. The movement was not only local; it also encompassed other major cities in Florida such as Jacksonville, Orlando, St. Petersburg, Tampa, and West Palm Beach, while garnering support from the poor farm laborers across the state. The New Deal helped to inspire this nascent movement in south Florida by highlighting the poor conditions workers endured.

Initial hopes for success of the National Recovery Administration and Civil Works Administration may have faded quickly, but workers' desire for change, improved working conditions, and pay set the groundwork for continued grassroots organizing. Organized labor supported the unemployed, among their own ranks as well as among

⁶⁹ "Daily Tribune Turned About Face on League," *Miami News*, 29 Aug 1935; *DT*, 15 Aug 1935, p. 20 (the *Daily Tribune* falsely claimed that the URA supported the recall effort) "G-Men and Police Hunt Reds, Aliens," *DT*, 22 Aug 1935, p. 1 (the first article where the paper turned on the unemployment movement); "'Jobless' Leaders on City Payrolls," *DT*, 23 Aug 1935, p. 1; "City Officials Admit to 'Payoff to Radicals,'" and "Unemployment Rackets," *DT*, 24 Aug 1935; "Jobless to Drive Out Red Leaders," *DT*, 25 Aug 1935, p. 1 & 17; "Lowest Racketeers," *DT*, 25 Aug 1935, p. 6; "Reds Threaten Tribune as G-Men Press Probe," 27 Aug 1935, p. 1 & 9.

white collar and unskilled workers. And as demonstrated by the picketing of the Southern Cafeteria and Sunshine Cleaners in January 1934, the Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League aided workers as the Lucas County Unemployed League in Toledo, Ohio, would do in a much more dramatic fashion in April of the same year. Mass picketing of the Electric Auto-Life Company by the AFL Federal Local #18384 and the Unemployed League eventually led to a bloody confrontation but a successful contract negotiation for workers.⁷⁰ Miami's picketing did not result in such open conflict, but nevertheless issued an impassioned statement for improved conditions.

The grassroots unemployment movement and the populism of the New Deal helped create a vibrant context that challenged the status quo of power. Calls to end the poll tax resonated among African Americans long denied the vote as well as among poor white workers and the unemployed.⁷¹ Activism among the least privileged would later help encourage the local labor movement to organize unskilled common laborers. While organized labor pulled back in the summer of 1935 from more active support of the unemployed, perhaps because jobs became more abundant in the skilled construction trades, Labor's Citizenship Committee continued to sponsor engaged talks including Perrine Palmer's several presentations between 1935-1937 on the city and county housing problems. In addition, the LCC, the Central Labor Union, and the Building Trades Council ended up supporting the organizing drives of laundry workers, longshoremen, construction laborers, and other "unskilled" workers in the next several

⁷⁰ Rosenzweig, "Radicals and the Unemployed," 66-68; Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: The History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 218-227.

⁷¹ Frederic D. Ogden, *The Poll Tax in the South* (Birmingham, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1958), 182-185; "Poll Tax Ends on January 1," *Miami News* 3 June 1937, p. 1; "Special Session of Legislature Called Unlikely," *Miami News* 10 June 1935, p. 1.

years. The construction trade unions also mounted their own renewed organizing drives as when they reconstituted their Building Trades Council in the summer of 1935 and geared for a push to raise work standards and working conditions as well as pay.

The precipitous fall of the unemployment movement mirrored the apparent disappearance of Palmer. Few of his letters appeared in *Miami Daily News* or *Miami News* after 1935. A typed March 1937 letter to Franklin Roosevelt entitled, “Is the Money-Saving Habit Destroying the Profit System?” had a circled handwritten note on top stating “From one of your former relief workers out of a job again.” Palmer was around 53 years old at this point, college educated, and evidently still struggling to find steady employment. He made similar consumerist arguments in this letter as he had done many times over the years: “each man, woman and child in America willing to do their part, whatever that part may be” deserved “sufficient purchasing power to meet their needs EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR.” One of the last entries in the labor paper, the *Miami News*, that listed Palmer occurred in September 1937 when he lectured Labor’s Citizenship Committee that wages should be based on need and not production; he warned that “democracy is doomed to destruction” if such an economic system did not emerge.⁷² Mass impoverishment jeopardized a smoothly running democracy by making too many dependent on a powerful few. This represented a long-standing criticism that would have continued relevance throughout the twentieth century.

⁷² Perrine Palmer to Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, 13 April 1937; LCC Minutes, 22 Sept 1937.

EPILOGUE

Labor Rights, Civil Rights, and the “Right to Work”

On April 24, 1932, from the white section of Miami, Florida, Perrine Palmer, Sr., penned a letter-essay entitled “Disfranchised” to the *Miami Daily News* in which he criticized the existence of the poll tax. This was not an unusual thing for Palmer. He had gotten into the habit of urging his fellow citizens to question things as they were, to recognize the class inequalities permeating society, and to offer solutions to the things helping to perpetuate these injustices. The letter appeared on May 1 in the reader forum section of the paper and argued, citing the Fourteenth Amendment, that the U.S. Constitution gave no municipality, state, or the federal government the authority to restrict the vote via a tax. “The framers of the Constitution shed their blood in order that through use of the ballot American blood might never have to be shed internally. We illegally disfranchised voters,” Palmer continued, “now claim that right and, in the name of the Constitution, demand that those in control of the election machinery protect us in the exercises of it.”¹

In Colored Town on May 2, 1932, Alonzo P. Holly, Haitian immigrant and prominent citizen, wrote Chas S. Thompson, African American leader, real estate man, to commend him on his recent “stirring appeal to your fellow citizens to exercise their rights by registering and paying their poll tax.” Thompson had given this speech at the Saint John’s Baptist Church during the Baptist Young People’s Union exercises, and Holly wondered what black voters were to do in light of the state’s Attorney General’s recent

¹ Perrine Palmer, “Disfranchised,” *Miami Daily News* 1 May 1932, in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, Library of Congress, Part I, Box C-284 (hereafter, NAACP Papers).

reversal on the white primary. Both Holly and Thompson had read that qualified black democratic voters (that is, those who paid the poll tax) were eligible to vote in the primary and thus “did not limit the participants to white voters.”

However, the Attorney apparently reversed his position by arguing that “... the Executive Committee of any political party may confine its members to the white race if it wishes to do so, and in such case only white electors could participate in the primary of each party.” Thompson’s response demonstrated confusion and dumbfounded exasperation, both because he had read differently on the matter (but apparently had not learned of the Attorney General’s reversal) and because recent Supreme Court decisions that ruled “Negroes could vote in Democratic primaries” defied this news. Holly responded, perhaps with Thompson’s approval and/or advice, by contacting the NAACP with a set of newspaper clippings alerting them of these Florida Civil Rights developments. Included in this set of clippings was Palmer’s letter.²

Marked out by a thick black chalk line to highlight that he or she wanted this particular note read and not the other four letters, someone had given this clipping to Holly with a scribbled note on the margins stating, “A. P., this is a white man.” Was it a surprise that a white man would have this opinion or hope that poorer whites would push to end the tax or simply offer further confirmation and argument that the poll tax violated

² Alonzo P. Holly to Chas S. Thompson, 2 May 1932, NAACP Papers, Part I, Box C-284; Thompson to Holly, 5 May 1932, Ibid; “Negroes May Vote In Primaries Says State Attorney,” *Miami Times*, 16 April 1932, Ibid; “Florida Negroes Cannot Vote in Democratic Primary,” *The Tampa Bulletin* 30 April 1932, Ibid; Palmer, Ibid. The Supreme Court had ruled in 1927 and 1932 that the Texas white primary law was unconstitutional. However, in 1935 the Court accepted the argument that parties were private associations and could restrict membership and thus exclude blacks (*Grove v. Townsend*). The Supreme Court would outlaw the white primary in 1944 in the ruling *Smith v. Allwright*. See Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 247-249.

their constitutional right to vote? In such a small gesture, a fainting glimpse into the past, the intersection of class and race appear in fleeting but stark terms.

Several insights emerge from these sets of documents. Holly was an alert and self-aware citizen. He kept abreast of the news, reading the local papers that included the black press, the *Miami Times* and *Tampa Bulletin News*. He desired the right to vote and thus sought remedy through a national organization established for racial and social justice. Chas Thompson also actively preached the uplift of black citizens. His lecture at Saint John Baptist's Church challenged the status quo of white Miami that dictated black political and class subordination as well as social segregation.

Perrine Palmer, who was a citizen gadfly in his many letters to the local papers, had already made a mark in his analysis of the Great Depression in several written pieces in late 1931 and 1932. Those articles along with his criticism of the poll tax hinted at his later contribution to the unemployment movement—including his efforts to expose the city's housing crisis and assistance to the many victims of evictions. Holly's reference to Palmer's patriotic and passionate call to end the poll tax suggested the possibility of an interracial alliance. As in the rest of the highly segregated South, such an alliance would prove daunting if not impossible. No evidence, however, appears that one was attempted—that is, between Palmer, Holly or Thompson.

Despite the scarcity of evidence of interracial cooperation and in spite of the social limitations embedded in the racial customs of Jim Crow society, the 1930s were a significant moment in Miami's Civil Rights history. The economic depression that affected so many created a historical context in which some poor whites and poor blacks aligned in their common plight. Miami's unemployment movement supported by labor

union efforts helped force issues of economic and social justice to move to the forefront. Talk of eliminating the poll tax as a social justice measure in the name of democracy occurred throughout the early 1930s. Palmer's insistence on ending the undemocratic measure in May 1932 reflected a broader class sentiment: a movement to wave the poll tax in spring 1933 failed; the *Miami Daily News* editorialized in the fall of 1933 on the unfairness of the tax and Palmer agreed; and by the spring of 1935 the Florida Council of Unemployed Leagues also supported its elimination.³ In such a setting, the elimination of the poll tax in 1937 became possible.

While seen as enlightened legislation in retrospect, the poll tax law was secured only through keen political maneuvering by New Deal advocates seeking support from poorer whites and unionists both frustrated at corrupted state and local elections and hopeful in Roosevelt's campaign against the economic depression. The clamoring against the tax from the unemployed helped make the option even more politically viable.⁴ In 1936, Earnest Graham (father of Bob Graham) ran for state senator from Dade County with a political platform that included an anti-poll tax plank. While organized labor supported an apparent favorite and "long-time friend of labor" in Henry Filer, respected educator, Graham won the election and made good on his promise of abolishing the tax in 1937. One suspects the groundswell from below supported his pro-New Deal politics and the progressive anti-poll tax idea. In a brilliant move in the 1937

³ Palmer, "Disfranchised," *MDN*, 1 May 1932, p. 6; Idem, "A Sorry Spectacle," *MDN*, 1 Nov 1933, p. 4 (on poll tax); the *MDN* seems to have also advocated the end of the poll tax, see for example this editorial, "Jobless--And Voteless," 20 Oct 1933, p. 4.

⁴ Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 228-229; Frederic D. Ogden, *The Poll Tax in the South* (Birmingham, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1958), 183-184 & 198-199; James William Dunn, "The New Deal and Florida Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1971), 268-271.

state legislature, Graham and John R. Beacham of West Palm Beach added a pet bill abolishing the poll tax which immediately passed, in part, because of the grassroots activism and the continuation of a \$1 head tax for support of county schools.⁵

The Great Depression and increased national government interventions into the economy moved some middle class whites to lobby for alleviation of the unsanitary living conditions and housing congestion in the black section of Miami, however driven it may have been by self-interest.⁶ The economic upturn of post-1935 Miami helped stir a larger increase in population in the city and county. Emboldened by greater support from Washington and the example of zeal and activism of the unemployment movement, labor unions recruited more members. It was in this overall immediate historical context that many African-Americans chose to challenge the status quo by getting out the vote in the 1939 nonpartisan city elections—an event that received national news coverage.⁷ Of course, the longer traditions of the fight for the franchise shaped the social mettle defining African American perseverance.⁸

⁵ Ogden, *The Poll Tax in the South*, 182-185; “Poll Tax Ends on January 1,” *Miami News* 3 June 1937, p. 1; “Special Session of Legislature Called Unlikely,” *Miami News* 10 June 1935, p. 1.

⁶ Raymond Mohl, “Trouble in Paradise: Race and Housing in Miami During the New Deal Era,” *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives*, 19 (spring 1987): 7-21; Paul S. George and Thomas K. Petersen, “Liberty Square: 1933-1987,” *Tequesta*, 48 (1988): 53-68; John A. Stuart, “Liberty Square: Florida’s First Public Housing Project,” in John A. Stuart and John F. Stack Jr., eds., *The New Deal in South Florida: Design, Policy, and Community Building, 1933-1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008): 186-222.

⁷ “Miami Negroes Vote, Defying Klan Threat,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1939, p. 7; “Ku Klux Threats Inspired Us, Say Florida Voters,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 May 1939; “Miami Voters Pack Polls Despite Threats of Klan,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 6 May 1939; “Who’s Afraid of the KKK?” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 13 May 1939; *Life* 6, no. 20 (May 15, 1939): 27; Raymond Mohl, “The Pattern of Race Relations in Miami since the 1920s,” in David R. Colburn and Jan L. Landers, eds., *The African American Heritage in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995): 346-347.

⁸ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Paul

The active push for organization did not translate into outright success, although the threat of continued unionization drives did challenge the nature of power. Workers faced many obstacles in organizing, the biggest being the absolute fear of losing economic security. Along with this, and not developed in the previous chapters, was the presence of a robust welfare capitalist environment. Department stores like Burdines, Sears, and Marks Store offered desperate workers jobs that integrated a benevolent paternalism.

Burdines, for example, published an internal store magazine for workers but also held yearly employee dinners, picnics, and other events to boost worker morale. Burdines' sponsored outings for its workers to the beach or local pools throughout the year. As noted in Chapter One, sports leagues, often sponsored by employers, worked in this vein as well. Despite these efforts, workers reacted to the low-wage economy when they could. Burdines support of the open shop after WWI revealed its desire to keep labor costs down and to maintain its power over its workforce. Carl Fisher was an adamant anti-unionist who helped lead this charge against organized labor, specifically the skilled construction workers. Building trades workers regarded Miami Beach as notoriously anti-union but they continued to have a presence in this location throughout the interwar period.

So New Deal Miami opened up an opportunity for workers to organize, but the struggle and the difficulty of succeeding remained. Organized labor, like the unemployment movement, experienced a herky-jerky ride in organizing. Many

Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of the Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005).

organizing efforts were initiated and several died after a few months and others were stillborn. However, despite this mixed success record unions continued to add members and negotiate contracts with employers. From around 6,500 unionists affiliated with the Central Labor Union in January 1937, the number jumped to nearly 10,000 in December. The significance of these numbers is hard to gauge. Without a doubt, the building trades had the largest percentage of unionists. While Dade County had a population of over 180,000 in 1935, it is unclear what percent unionized workers made of this whole. Excluding children, the elderly, businessmen, professionals such as doctors and lawyers, women not seeking work (housewives), the rough percentage of unionists in the city could have been as high as 13.1 percent or as low as 8.5 but certainly much higher among construction workers.⁹ It remains difficult to offer an accurate picture.

Still, the influence of organized labor and grassroots movements resonated much further than these apparent low numbers. Local and state politicians appeared before Labor's Citizenship Committee, especially before elections. The Chamber of Commerce also reached out to organized labor as well. The concrete benefits resulting from successful unionizing drives tended to raise standards or at least represent a threat to employers maintaining poor working conditions.

African American workers and professionals built on the unemployed movement and organized labor's grassroots activism as well as on the infusion of federal economic support to the area. Longshoremen, an occupation long dominated by blacks, organized a local in 1936 and soon went on strike that summer. They would remain an active local

⁹ Florida Department of Agriculture, *The Sixth Census of the State of Florida, 1935* (Tallahassee, 1936), p. 67, 70, 71, & 123; "Organized Labor Sees Good Year Ahead," *Miami Citizen*, 30 Dec 1937 (the labor paper changed its name beginning with the November 11, 1937 issue).

through the next several years. Reacting to the Committee for Industrial Organizations insurgency, the AFL sought to hold ground and thus encouraged state federations of labor and local central labor unions to actively organize workers of all skilled types. Miami's Central Labor Union benefited from years of grassroots activism and the popularity of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal state.

Several service workers made concerted organizing pushes: restaurant workers, laundry workers, dry cleaning workers, tile setter helpers, glaziers, bakery and confectionary workers, and automobile painters (among others). White and black laborers organized a biracial union (two separate locals) in April 1937 as a result of this new commitment. The Building Trades Council, the confederation of building trades unions, supported the laborers efforts. This predominately white organization backed the laborers efforts for union recognition in the fall of 1937. In an unprecedented moment of class and racial solidarity in Miami's history, skilled white workers refused to cross picket lines while the laborers struck a construction worksite. After a few days, the construction company gave in and recognized the union. Just seventeen years earlier, white Miami unionists nearly boycotted the State Federation of Labor's annual conference because of the sitting of African American delegates.¹⁰

African Americans' push for change also sometimes ran parallel to white unionism and the unemployment movement. Throughout the 1930s, several African Americans made efforts in establishing NAACP chapters. Each time the chapters faded

¹⁰ A short sample of some these unionization efforts: "Longshoremen to Call Strike," *MDN*, 25 June 1936, p. 1; "Port Labor Here Joins in Strike," *Miami Tribune*, 16 Oct 1937; "General Building Walkout Feared in Kress Strike," *Miami Tribune*, 13 Oct 1937. For a short historical overview of labor organizing efforts of African Americans see Judge Henderson, "Negro Labor in Miami," *The Crisis*, (March 1942), 95. See Chapter 2 regarding the 1920 Florida State Federation of Workers Convention.

out of existence despite the hope apparent in the correspondence with the NAACP. After protesting to the Chief of Police for being turned away from the polls, Sam Solomon, undertaker and vice-president of the Colored Chamber of Commerce, and William B. Sawyer, prominent physician, voted in the 1931 city election with police escort. Dr. F. D. Mazon and Dr. T. L. Lowrie, however, were stopped and turned away by the police. Chas Thompson reported that “this time they were told that it would be better for them not to attempt to vote because those “crackers” were bent on giving trouble. [So] they did not vote.”

Inquiries the subsequent year by Alonzo P. Holly and Thompson indicated that the right to vote would continue to be limited with blacks excluded in the case of the white primary and the poll tax, thus potentially keeping poor voters away. The difficult racial conditions in Miami were highlighted by Holly’s instructions to the NAACP to send their correspondence using “PLAIN UNOFFICIAL ENVELOPES, AND UNDER COVER OF BISHOP EARNEST.” Nonetheless, prominent African Americans decided to create the Citizen’s Protective Club (CPC) in 1931 for the purpose to “awaken interest of people in qualifying for better citizenship and a more extensive use of the ballot.” It protested segregation as having no “legal status in the United States”; however, their criticism focused on how “white folks don’t” keep their end of the “gentlemen’s agreement” that segregation represented.¹¹

¹¹ Thompson to William Andrews, 5 Oct 1931; NAACP Papers, Part I, Box C-284; Holly to Andrews, 8 June 1931 and 19 June 1931, *Ibid.*; “Protective League Adopts a Resolution In 4th of July Celebration,” newspaper clipping from R. E. S. Toomey to FDR (forwarded to the Housing Authority), 8 July 1935, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196, National Archives, Washington D.C., (hereafter PHA, RG 196), Box 299; Caroline S. Emmons, “The Flame of Resistance: The NAACP in Florida, 1910-1960,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1998), 80-85.

The NAACP's failure to establish a local presence did not prevent African American residents from having, in addition to the CPC, other forms of homegrown activism. The day-to-day work and endurance of tough economic conditions defined the lives of most African American workers and citizens. Churches played essential roles in coping with hardship and finding existential meaning. As indicated by Thompson's speech to the Baptist Young People's Union at St. Agnes Church, religious spaces served many functions. In addition to these vital centers, African Americans were keen to work paternalism to their favor while also milking white fears of a black health menace. The Miami Colored Chamber of Commerce (MCCC) and the Greater Miami Negro Civic League (GMNCL), for example, served the African American community's interests when they supported local efforts to build public housing in what became the Liberty City Housing Project. While not always in agreement, as in the disagreement over naming the public housing project, they nonetheless found consensus to support housing expansion.

The MCCC and GMNCL, white lawyer John Gramling, white land owner Floyd Davis, and the white and black press argued for the need to relieve the congestion in Colored Town by tapping the general fear of the spread of disease. As the *Miami Times*, quoting another local paper *Friday Night*, noted in January 1934, "the people who hire Negroes in their homes should come forth with their protest. A protest against allowing the maid that cares for their children, the cook that prepares their food, and the wash woman that does their clothes, from bringing into their homes the disease germs that flourish in the present Negro district." Such calls for reform built on the longer traditions handed down from the turn of the century, as in the tenement reforms in New York and

other places in the country. While men like John Gramling helped initiate the housing project, in part, for personal gain, it also represented an opportunity to see real change in an otherwise oppressive segregation environment. The CPC emphasized the importance for their participation when they modeled their demand on the Declaration of

Independence:

When, in the Course of Human Events, it becomes, or is assumed expedient for one part of American Citizens to discuss or promulgate measures, designed to limit or enlarge the activities, growth of development of any other portion of American Citizens, we feel that the parties discussed or sought to be regulated, ought to have a part, at least, in such discussion, in order that they might aid in determining results, which are or might become vital to their future welfare.

The CPC demanded an active role in the decision-making process, and they put their demand in terms evoking the ideas of liberty emanating from the American Revolution. They took this opportunity to be dignified citizens with great seriousness and stressed its significance in patriotic terms.¹²

On the heels of this decade-long upsurge and recent political victory of the end of the poll tax, the young Sam B. Solomon -- the son of the Sam Solomon who voted in 1931 -- formed the Negro Service League to push for African American voter registration and vote in the 1939 election. Solomon succeeded in getting out the vote despite threats made during KKK demonstrations where crosses were burned, effigies were lynched, and nooses hung over car doors passing through the Miami streets. With the police protection of Leslie Quigg, the notorious police chief, voters were unmolested as they went to the

¹² "Miami Colored Chamber of Commerce, Inc. to Clarence Coe," 5 Oct 1936 (asking for more leaders to be included among the black members of the housing committee) and "Citizen to PWA," (protest over naming of Liberty City Project) 3 Nov 1935, PHA, RG 196, Box 297; "Blacken the Whites," *Miami Times* clipping sent by "John C. Gramling to Eugene Haber," 27 Jan 1934, PHA, RG 299; "Protective League Adopts a Resolution In 4th of July Celebration," PHA, RG 196, Box 299. Raymond Mohl, "Trouble in Paradise," pp., 7-21; Henderson, "Negro Labor in Miami."

polls. Even though local legislators moved to safeguard the white primary, it represented more a gesture than a significant act because of the non-partisan structure of the city and county elections.

African Americans started a process that – although in many ways anti-climactic because no real political gains were made and the national publicity of the election soon faded and was forgotten -- nonetheless began to make themselves relevant citizens. It would be a few years later that a permanent NAACP chapter appeared. African American workers continued to struggle and remained active in the Longshoremen's union, Laborers Unions, and Tile Helpers, while also making inroads into other trades as well.¹³

Workers' efforts to organize unions occurred in the context of insuring a moral economy. Organized labor consistently argued for cooperation and against radical action, such as the turn to violence. On a few rare occasions some enthusiastic unionists resorted to the destruction of property but without the sanction of their unions. The building trades and other unions pressed for the workers' right to competency usually in class harmony terms that highlighted the need to maintain a decent standard of living and the need to hire home labor. This was revealed in countless struggles: against the open shop in the post war period; during the period of the NRA codes; in the unemployment

¹³ The 1930 U.S. Census showed the Solomon household as having a father and son named Sam. "Funeral Director Passes on After Brief Illness," *Atlanta Daily World*, 9 July 1937, p. 2. "Miami Negroes Vote, Defying Klan Threat," *New York Times*, 3 May 1939, p. 7; "Ku Klux Threats Inspired Us, Say Florida Voters," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 13 May 1939; "Miami Voters Pack Polls Despite Threats of Klan," *The Washington Afro-American*, 6 May 1939; "Who's Afraid of the KKK?" *The Washington Afro-American*, 13 May 1939; *Life* 6, no 20 (May 15, 1939): 27; Raymond Mohl, "The Pattern of Race Relations in Miami since the 1920s," in David R. Colburn and Jan L. Landers, eds., *The African American Heritage in Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995): 346-347.

movement; in 1935-1936 when the building trades instituted the universal working card for all jobs sites; likewise when the construction trades pushed for the ouster of E. A. Pynchon, the WPA's Florida administrator, for failure to pay prevailing wages; in the same period the LCC came out for universal health care recognizing the inadequacy of insurance coverage and other insufficient health care methods; and several more examples.¹⁴

When the *Miami News* changed its name to the *Miami Citizen* it sought to end any confusion between its name and the *Miami Daily News* but more importantly it reflected its broader objectives of standing up for citizens' fundamental right to competency. It explained the purpose of its existence and the role of organized labor in terms of moral economy:

[The labor paper] has stood for clean things, both in the labor movement and the general life of the city, for the upbuilding of Miami into a better place in which to live and work. Believing that the worker is worthy of his hire and is a most vital force in community character and development, it has consistently advocated the payment of living wages to all classes of labor, whether members of a union or not, and has fought for the highest standards possible. At the same time it has urged that these things be obtained not by radical methods but by recognition of the rights of all parties concerned.¹⁵

Workers felt a deep connection to the significance of their work and how it contributed to local and state development. Their work signified a sincere effort to live dignified lives for the larger purpose of individual human happiness and the health and well-being of the larger community.

¹⁴ The labor paper contains many of these examples as does the body of the dissertation. For the universal card, see "Building Crafts Hold Record Meet in City," *Miami News*, 20 June 1935.

¹⁵ "Old Policies to Continue Under New Name," *Miami News*, 11 Nov 1937; the first issue with the name *Miami Citizen* had its front cover with the following headline: "LAUNDRY HELP NEED BOOST, TOO: Labor Believes Underpaid Workers Entitled to Same Consideration as Dry Cleaners and Laundry Bosses," *Miami Citizen*, 18 Nov 1937.

Continued organizing efforts in the city and by the State Federation of Labor throughout the state engendered an employer backlash against labor rights. The anti-labor Associated Industries, Inc. -- a Florida state organization of manufacturers, businessmen and industrialists affiliated with the National Association of Manufacturers - organized in 1939 and quickly sponsored anti-union legislation that failed to pass. The measures would have required unions to have their financial records filed in the state treasury, prohibited unions from making political contributions or donate money for foreign charities or causes, and prohibited picketing, boycotting or the creation of a defense fund during a strike.¹⁶ Beginning in 1941 Tom Watson, Florida's Attorney General, advocated against the closed shop and started crafting a "right to work" amendment to Florida's state constitution. Watson's argument lined up with the typical national complaints of industry against unions: charges of racketeering, unions as obstacles to free enterprise, and the like.

In 1940 Miami's taxi cab workers came under attack for having a former "criminal" as their business agent during a strike. The fall scandal, along with anti-union columnist's Westbrook Pegler's persistent reminders to the public, no doubt helped pushed along the idea of "right to work." The amendment was passed in 1944 when many workers were enlisted during the war.¹⁷ The term "right to work," as it evolved

¹⁶ "Anti-Labor Bills Killed in Legislature," *Miami Citizen*, 18 May 1939; "Associated Industries, Inc. Runs to True Form," *Miami Citizen*, 1 June 1939. The prohibition against donations to foreign charities was an attack on Tampa's cigar workers making contributions to the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, an interesting international attempt for conservative causes.

¹⁷ John G. Shott, *How "Right to Work" Laws are Passed: Florida Sets the Pattern* (Washington D.C.: The Public Affairs Institute, 1956), 18-20; Charles F. Hesser, "Watson Gives Support to Ban on Open Shop," *MDN*, 20 May 1949, 4A (one state legislator argued to vote for the measure again to "give the 254,000 people who served in the armed forces a chance to vote

during the World War II period and after, transformed the depression decade's desperate call of the unemployed for work into a paternalistic response of employers to use government to protect the individual against the collective. It was indeed an interesting turn of events.

A combination of political economy and political subterfuge explain the passage of the "right to work" law. The passage of the right to work law in 1944 was no coincidence. Florida still had a fairly close ratio between rural and urban dwellers. Organized labor had experienced much success in the state, particularly in urban areas. Employers reacted to New Deal pro-labor legislation and to what they had learned about how workers reacted to national sanction for collective action such as during the NRA codes period in 1933-1935 and the Wagner act after 1935.

World War II offered an opportunity for business (as represented by the National Association of Manufacturers) to make a frontal and rear assault on labor power. In having an anti-union shop movement, business sought to undermine unions through a divide and conquer strategy. The frontal assault involved disempowering the federal mandate for workers' collective bargaining rights at the state level. A state-by-state approach aimed at undermining the Wagner Act promised improved chances of changing the national law. Such experiments or case studies demonstrated businesses' commitment to fight organized labor and their allies in government.

The rear assault was linked to the legal and political component, but entailed a marketing of individualistic cultural ideals and the caricaturing of collective ideals and

for it.""). The taxi cab strike will be discussed in my future work. This strike and one by the laborers' union led to a Miami grand jury investigation. No one has written on these incidents, including Shott. For Pegler, see the indispensable work of David Witwer, *Shadow of the Racketeer: Scandal in Organized Labor* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

union institutionalism. Business defined the ideal of free enterprise as quintessentially American. The individual, the hero, the self-starter, differentiated white Americans from the victims (the poor, immigrants, Blacks, etc.), the conformist and ideologue (communists, socialists, etc.), and the defeated (European western democracies). These simplistic dichotomies helped define a world torn by economic depression, war, and corruption. Individual accountability as a discursive theme ridiculed collectivism and institutionalism, both of which lost the individual in a labyrinth of either conformist or alienated social relations. Either result threatened the sanctity of the individual.

Ironically, business values promised to defend the individual while strengthening its own very conformist structures of social relations and ideology: consumerism. Amid the context of unprecedented economic abundance, progressive conceptions of class harmony remained for the rest of the century in struggle with the conservative, paternalistic calls for social order.¹⁸

¹⁸ For discussion about the larger business efforts to roll back on the New Deal labor policies and other legislation, see Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

CONCLUSION

Scholar Andy Dawson argued several years ago that Selig Perlman of the influential Wisconsin school of thought proffered a psychological model to explain worker behavior that was inaccurate and overly simplistic. Perlman insisted on marginalizing the role of intellectuals, while defining workers as primarily “job conscious” (or wage conscious) as opposed to class conscious. More than that, Perlman argued that workers chose not to be risk-takers like their entrepreneur counterparts but instead remained driven by a “scarcity consciousness.” American workers were thus guided by pragmatism rather than idealism or abstractness. Such a framework allowed scholars to understand workers as ultimately reactionaries and conservative. Dawson’s important contribution was to elevate the discussion of Perlman’s ideas to ideology.

The embrace of the Wisconsin school perspective, including renewed interest in Perlman’s 1920s thesis, came after World War II, when the successful growth of unionization presented a real threat to employers. The dismissal of radical intellectuals, which initially occurred in the roaring ‘twenties, found a new life in the Cold War world. By this point, according to Dawson, “paid union advisers, writers of official and unofficial union histories, industrial relations consultants, and... teachers on courses for trade unionists in colleges and universities, all gave Perlman’s disciples the necessary vehicles for broadcasting the ‘job consciousness’ approach...” thus giving the ideas of these Wisconsin school intellectuals enormous influence to shape reality, a power Perlman found detrimental when it came from anti-capitalist intellectuals.¹

¹ Andy Dawson, “History and Ideology: Fifty Years of ‘Job Consciousness,” *Literature and History*, 8 (Autumn 1978): 223-241.

While labor historiography has largely moved past Perlman's framework, it is useful to revisit its significance in the context of the class harmony perspective put forward in "Laboring in the Magic City." This dissertation has sought to reframe the notion of social harmony to not only slay Perlman's simplistic model but also to argue for the importance of historical context, to suggest that a wide spectrum of class consciousness existed in U.S. history, and to include other sectors and geographic locations into the purview of historical and class analysis. The memory of pre-World War II Miami occurred in the context of the Wisconsin school dominance. As industrial unionism and collective bargaining became normal operating practice in the balancing of countervailing powers, industrial relation experts' and other labor scholars' analytical lens focused on the factory and maintained the practice of not studying places like Miami. Miami business interests and boosters certainly did not mind ignoring the class politics of South Florida's economy; this was standard custom when it came to attracting investors. Miami as a winter playground was built for escape. Its dependence on a service economy anticipated a post-industrial world.

Social harmony as a term and idea had contested meanings. However, it is important to distinguish between harmony as appearance and performance and harmony as societal outcome and balance of power. The harmony of appearance and performance unfolded on the level of boosterism and how workers operated both in tourist-service oriented work and in tough conditions where one needed to accommodate a difficult job situation in order to survive. Of course, tourist workers had to perform acts of hospitality and good service in order to maintain a smoothly running industry and insure the return of tourists. Indeed, their jobs depended on providing such service. Unionists also used

the language of social harmony in their attempts to get community support for their strikes, for fair label consumer efforts, and for unionization drives. Union meant community and moral economy even if it also translated into limiting the opportunities of African Americans or hopeful migrants to the city. The politics of home labor pressed for consistent work for residents and thus resolution of seasonal unemployment and the problem of underemployment. Employers used the language of harmony as a means to frame themselves as the leaders of the community. As advocates of growth and development, they basked in their cultural roles as responsible citizens and entrepreneurs. E. G. Sewell represented the quintessential example of a person living this identity.

African-Americans also worked on the level of appearance and performance. Many accommodated segregation yet worked to reshape its boundaries. Freddie Andrews and Colored Town's Black leaders pushed for the basic right to drive. And while new restrictions emerged in the form of curfews and beach restrictions, the performance of racial harmony was predicated on the ability of Black workers to reach their jobs. Separation, nonetheless, could result in the independence from the harshness of racist degradation.

Harmony as societal outcome and balance of power and distribution of wealth represented a stickier and more complicated possibility. Perrine Palmer embodied the hope and the frustration of progressive ideals; he undoubtedly found paternalistic framings of social harmony to be aberrant and detrimental to democracy. While Palmer did not advocate the overthrow of capitalism per se, he did make a call for its reorganization. Although this contained outrage merits praise, it also warrants a sharper critical stance. The forcefulness of a Marxist argument would have held stronger ground,

especially when tentative calls for social harmony unfolded amid resistance. E. F.

Poulnot, the Tampa socialist and unemployed activist, however, was flogged in 1935 for his sharper stance against social and economic injustice and his open and formal political challenges.² Yet in spite of this potentially suffocating cultural and political framework, spaces remained for critical voices like Palmer and the Dade County Unemployment Citizens' League.

That this activism helped fuel the local labor movement and embraced and tried to define a progressive political economic potential of the New Deal in Miami suggests that even service-oriented economies could be inspired by class-conscious ideas. Palmer's self-identification as a labor leader was hardly peculiar. He worked in low-paid relief work for several years including as a gas station attendant, farm worker, and other hard labor. He advocated for those most in need, educating Miami's unionists about the county's housing crisis, the poor living conditions endured by the poor, and the general hypocrisy that often defined the game of politics. Palmer lobbied the local government to increase its assistance to the poor as both an activist in the Dade County Unemployed Citizens' League and as a relief worker in the state's Federal Relief Administration. And he was not alone, nor were his ideas driven solely by a job consciousness. Palmer embraced the productive capacity of modern society while remaining frustrated by how such a technologically advanced society could not imagine and build a better world. He and others envisioned a better standard of living, a more equitable distribution of wealth, a redefinition of the meaning and significance of work, and the creation of a community amid disruptive economic downturns and rapidly changing landscapes. Palmer's support

² Robert Ingalls, "The Tampa Flogging Case, Urban Vigilantism," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 56, no. 1 (July 1977): 13-27.

of the NRA and his lead role in organizing picketers who were protesting unfair wages and work hours represented a merging of a radical idea about the distribution of power between employer and employee and the potential of a democratic and morally driven community.

As workers strived to organize to attain a moral economy, the struggle continued. The language of right to work, and its moral economic connotations, would transform during the WWII period and after from the unemployed calls for competency to an attack on unions as obstacles to economic growth and free enterprise. Employers, especially the advocates for the 1944 right to work amendment, focused on exploiting the divisions among workers. The inability of Florida's AFL to mount a successful organizing drive across more service jobs and thus unionize the unorganized helped bolster the advocates of right to work amendments. Of course, this entailed both white and black unorganized workers. Social harmony in the context of moral economy remained a hope for many. But the struggle of power meant a continued contestation over its meaning.

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