

FROM PICKET LINES TO PICKET FENCES: LATINAS AND THE REMAKING OF
THE JIM CROW SOUTH, 1930-1964

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ABSTRACT

Sarah McNamara: From Picket Lines to Picket Fences: Latinas and the Remaking of the Jim Crow South, 1930-1964.

(Under the direction of Zaragosa Vargas and Jacquelyn Hall)

“From Picket Lines to Picket Fences: Latinas and the Remaking of the Jim Crow South, 1930-1964,” traces the transformation of Latina/o politics and culture in Ybor City and Tampa, Florida. This case study examines and compares the actions of two generations of Latinas as they fought for economic equality, social dignity, and political representation in the early battles for labor, women’s, and civil rights in the United States and abroad. I argue that Latinas were effective as political strategists and public figures because their gender facilitated their activism and protected them from the threats of racial and nativist violence experienced by men of color. In turn, these women’s actions and choices became part of a series of changes that would redefine the meaning and power of *latinidad* in Florida’s political culture.

More than a story of regional activism, this project investigates the relationship between the nation and immigration. It considers the impact of global cultures on American identity to ask crucial questions about how race, ethnicity, and political affiliation influence who has access to American citizenship and why this matters. On the micro-level, this dissertation examines how Latinas and Latinos in Florida negotiated the racial and nativist political policies and social mores that governed their everyday lives. It is an untold story of Latina/os in the southeast—one that encourages scholars to consider Jim Crow’s reach as intersectional rather than black and white and highlights the interplay between different racial

and ethnic groups as each sought representation. The broader implications of this case study illustrate how these histories of local and regional conflict underline present-day political battles. Historic precedents define and drive national debates surrounding immigration reform and social justice. Understanding the politics of the past brings visibility to unacknowledged histories and challenges resistance to a diverse and inclusive American identity.

For my grandmother, Norma Blanco Alfonso.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe the existence of this project to my family. My dedication to Ybor City's Latino community is ingrained in my own sense-of-self. I wrote this dissertation because of my grandparents' memories and persevered through the project because of my family's encouragement. My parents Andi and Jim McNamara, my grandfather Gustavo Alfonso, my sister Katie McNamara, and her partner Dylan Rigsby provided undying support and constant encouragement as I trudged through documents, claimed home-office space, recruited additional translators, and mobilized their individual talents to reach the final page of this dissertation. A special thank you is owed to my partner and best friend, Stephen Badalyan Riegg, who loved me through this process and had the patience to read chapters a moment's notice. I cannot thank each member of my family enough for all they have done and given me throughout my life and during these six years.

In Chapel Hill I found an intellectual community that provided guidance, support, and kindness. As a graduate student, I was lucky enough to have two advisors and a group of committed mentors. Jacquelyn Hall pushed me to become the best writer I can be and taught me to trust myself as a women's and gender historian. She introduced me to the world of feminist history as both a discipline and a community, and for that I am forever thankful. Zaragosa Vargas accepted me into the Carolina program as the only Latino Studies student in the History Department, and dedicated himself to my work in a way few advisors would. His devotion to my project and professional success are unmatched. Likewise, I am forever thankful to Sarah Deutsch who had the power to see my project more clearly than I could and

offered holistic advice that not only helped build this dissertation, but will push me to write a stronger book. In many ways, she was a surrogate advisor who took me on despite the divide of Duke and UNC. Katherine Turk and Emily Burrill joined my committee as both experts and mentors, and provided essential direction to the future of this project. I am grateful I had the opportunity to work with both of them through my work and the Working Group in Feminism and History.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
Background: The Landscape of “Cigar City”	4
Historiography	11
Organization.....	18
CHAPTER 1: NO NOS MOVERÁN (WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED): COMMUNISM, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY	20
Introduction.....	20
Depression and Decline of the Cigar Industry	26
Latina Working-Class Activism and the New Deal.....	38
Demanding Workers’ Rights through Women’s Actions.....	51
In Search of Civil Rights and Citizenship.....	61
Conclusion	63
CHAPTER 2: NEGLECTFUL MOTHERS, DISGRACEFUL RADICALS, AND FOREIGN TRAMPS: LABOR ACTIVISM AND THE STIGMA OF <i>LATINIDAD</i>	65
Introduction.....	65
The Limits of Mutual Aid and the Need for Relief	70
Neglectful Mothers and Foreign Tramps	81
The Demand for a Living Wage	90
Conclusion	106

CHAPTER 3: “OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER:” COMMUNISTS, FOREIGNERS, AND PATRIOTS	109
Introduction.....	109
Defining “Of Good Moral Character”	111
A Sense of Belonging	126
Planning and Protesting Urban Removal.....	137
Conclusion	143
CHAPTER 4: AMERICAN VOTERS AND CUBAN REVOLUTIONARIES: PROGRESSIVISM AND RADICALISM IN THE SUNSHINE STATE	145
Introduction.....	145
“Amigos Mios”	147
Latino Americans and Cuban Revolutionaries	159
Conclusion	170
CONCLUSION.....	173
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	184

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Cigar label showing the proximity of Cuba to Tampa.	4
Figure 2. Tabaqueros working in Ybor City factory, 1927.....	9
Figure 3. Booklet describing the murder of Joseph Shoemaker.	45
Figure 4. Latinas marching down Avenida Septima on May 6, 1937.	53
Figure 5. Translated: “The people of Cuba lovingly aid the Spanish infant. Help us make 1938 more pleasant.”	94
Figure 6. Front page of the Tampa Morning Tribune on July 8, 1937.	99
Figure 7. Photograph courtesy of the Tampa Planning Commission Archive.	140
Figure 8. Plant Field in 1948.....	156
Figure 9. Fidel Castro delivering a speech to Ybor Latinas and Latinos at the Labor Temple in Ybor City.....	165
Figure 10. Fidel Castro at Labor Temple Fundraiser.....	166

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	American Federation of Labor
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
CMIU	Cigar Makers International Union
CP	Communist Party
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States
DOJ	Department of Justice
HOLC	Home Ownership Loan Corporation
HUAC	House un-American Activities Committee
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Services
PRC	Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Cuban Revolutionary Party)
WPA	Works Progress Administration

INTRODUCTION

On a hot, humid, Florida afternoon in June 1964, Blanca Vega Díaz stood on the corner of Tenth Avenue in Ybor City. She made the trip with her husband to watch cranes from the Urban Planning Commission demolish the home where she grew up. That day, 60 percent of the old Ybor City neighborhood was leveled to make way for the expansion of Interstate 4 and Interstate 275. As the half ton, silver, wrecking ball rose in the air, Blanca remembered her life in the city's Cuban enclave. She dreamed of how the sweet smell of the *cubano* tobacco once filled the air and how the leaves stained the hands of the *tabaqueros* (cigar workers), who stripped, stuffed, molded, and bound the delicate leaves into consumable works of art. Blanca's hands may have been thick and tough. If she had worked in the cigar factories and she would have been amongst the thousands who created Tampa's industrial economy. Women began as a *despaldillora* (stripper), laboring the factory basement, ripping stems from the wide, dry tobacco leaves. By her thirties, Blanca would have moved up to the main factory floor, where she could become a *bunchera* (buncher), preparing the filling for the internationally known, male *rolleros* (roller). During the 1930s, Blanca would have survived as a low-wage, cigar machine worker, who stood with her countrywomen as the hum of mass production replaced the shuffle of handiwork. But in the 1950s, she left the city in search of the life she had been unable to find in Tampa.¹

¹ Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their*

Like her parents, who championed the Cuban War for Independence, advocated for anarcho-syndacalism, and supported Latina feminist Luisa Capetillo, Blanca could have embraced radicalism as an international movement that could enact significant local change. She was amongst the hundreds of women who joined Unemployed Counsels, staged sit-ins at relief offices, created mass demonstrations for work relief, and connected their own struggles against the Anglo United States with the fight against Spanish fascism abroad.² When the wrecking ball released and her home fell to the ground in 1964, Blanca recalled feeling devastated. The place where she had lived, labored, and organized was gone, but Ybor City's Latino community, although displaced, lived on.

“From Picket Lines to Picket Fences: Latinas and the Remaking of the Jim Crow South, 1930-1964,” traces the transformation of Latino politics and culture in Ybor City and Tampa, Florida. This work examines the choices that immigrant Cuban and later American-born Latinas made to achieve political representation and social justice between the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement. During the 1930s, first-generation Latinas saw themselves as part of a cross-border, working-class community dedicated to an internationalist vision of Latina/o rights. These women joined the Popular Front, rallied with the Communist Party, organized strikes, marched against fascism, and criticized American foreign policy. Through such efforts, Latinas attacked Jim Crow laws and vigilante violence to expand the boundaries of what it meant to be Latino and American. After World War II,

² I will refer to the women and men of Ybor City as Latinos. Debate exists as to whether Latin or Latino is the more appropriate term for Ybor City's residents. While Nancy Hewitt and Gary Mormino and George E. Pozzetta argue that these women and men were “Latin,” I contend that the Cuban dominance of Ybor culture, the power of the Spanish language, and their shared experience in redefining cultural identity make them Latino. “Latin” is actually a term employed by the United States, not by immigrant women and men. The term Latino seeks to return the power of self-identification to the individual, not by the state or dominant political culture.

however, suppression of the labor movement by Cold War anti-communism curbed the overt pursuit of Latino progressivism. While immigrant women sustained their radicalism by supporting Fidel Castro and fundraising for the revolution, American-born, white Latinas and Latinos disavowed radical politics and interracial organizing to transform their image from foreign subversives to American citizens. This shift reflected larger changes in American culture, gender roles, and sexuality that coincided with a seismic cultural negotiation over racial difference.

In this project, I make two major contributions to the study of Latinos and the modern United States. First, my work challenges our limited understanding of women's leadership in the early movements for social and economic justice. As I investigate the evolution of Latino identities and community solidarities, I argue that Latinas developed and directed political strategy in Ybor City in order to achieve economic security and political representation for themselves and their community. Second, I explore the city as a space of transnational collisions. In Tampa, political networks and cultural identities connected the United States, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico, and women and men maintained family ties, cultural traditions, and organizing tactics that benefitted their ethnic community first and the union second.³ I argue that over two generations, these cross-border exchanges uniquely influenced the city's physical shape, as well as the political and social consciousness of the people within it. By exploring the Global South through the lens of gender, I illustrate how Latinas navigated both real and imagined borders.

³ Ybor City's women and men who organized within the CMIU or who belonged to the CPUSA frequently declared wildcat strikes without union consent. Furthermore, during negotiations, workers regularly ignored compromise between the local organizer and the Cigar Manufacturers Association. This trend applies to Latinos' involvement in politics as well.

Background: The Landscape of “Cigar City”

Well before Miami was “Little Havana,” Ybor City was the Latino capital of the American South. Located on the eastern edge of Tampa, Ybor was home to over 26,000 Cuban, Afro-Cuban, Spanish, Puerto Rican, and Italian immigrants. Drawn to the city by work in the cigar industry, these Latinas and Latinos built the Tampa economy and established Ybor as the cigar capital of the world by 1920. In the “Cigar City,” politics was both transnational and local. Radical ideologies connected Ybor immigrants to networks in Cuba, Italy, Spain, and Latin America. Women and men rallied with the International Workers of the World, supported Cuban Independence, and established grass-root trade unions. These cross-national relationships created and maintained migrant identities. Although Ybor City women and men worked in the United States, their homes, extended families, and memories stretched across borders.

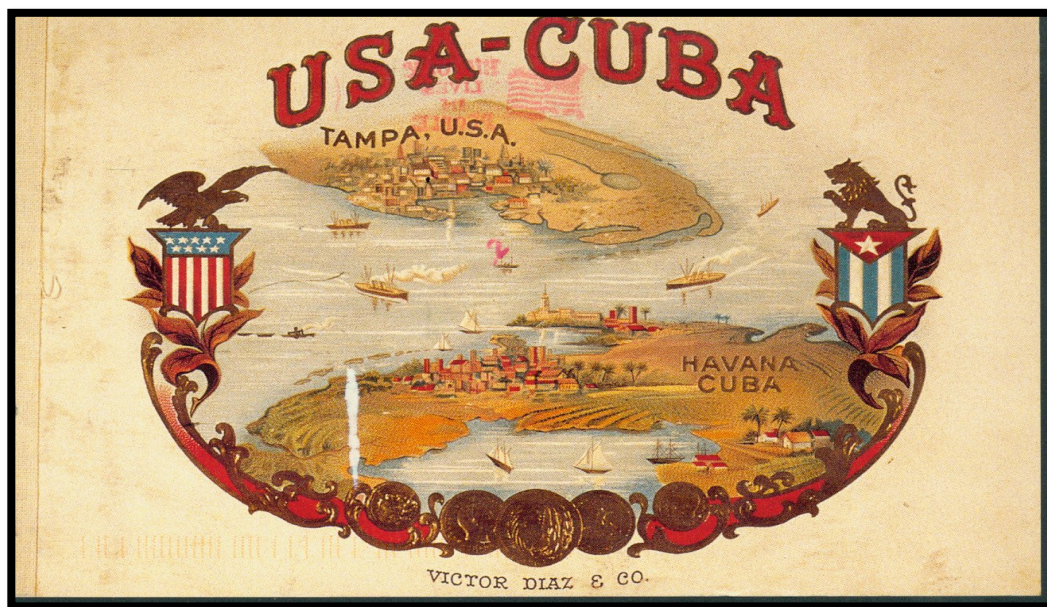


Figure 1. Cigar label showing the proximity of Cuba to Tampa. The geographical immediacy is exaggerated to highlight their cultural proximity. Courtesy of the Tampa Bay History Center Collection.

Labor activism defined Ybor City's cigar industry. In the 1870s, Key West served as the major cigar-manufacturing hub in the United States. The mere ninety-mile stretch between the Florida Keys and the northwestern coast of Cuba permitted convenient transport of Havana tobacco and transient, revolutionary *tabaqueros* (cigar makers).⁴ As the movement for Cuban independence peaked and nationalistic fervor swelled, labor strikes in Havana and Key West became frequent and increasingly violent. Key West cigar manufacturers believed that by increasing the physical distance between their workforce and the island of Cuba, they could control the movement of ideas and suppress the interference of Cuban trade unions with their workforce. In 1886, Vicente Martínez Ybor, the owner of El Príncipe de Gales factory, purchased a thirty-acre tract of land on the eastern edge of Tampa and relocated his cigar enterprise to Ybor City.⁵ Following violent, cigar worker strikes in Key West in 1889 and 1894, other companies followed Ybor's lead and relocated to Tampa. By 1894, this sleepy, southern town was home to a new Cuban émigré workforce whose labor would lead to its rise as the U.S. "Cigar City."

Despite relocating the Cuban cigar industry, strikes followed the manufacturers from Key West to Ybor City. "People date their lives from various strikes in Tampa," remembered novelist and Ybor native José Yglesias.⁶ From 1897 to 1931, five major strikes took place in

⁴ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 3rd ed. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press 2003), pp. 217.

⁵ "Ybor City, General Description, Latin Population," Manuscript, Federal Writers' Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, pp. 5.

⁶ Quoted in Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1970), pp. 109.

the Ybor City cigar industry, spurring a community to support collective activism.⁷ Local grocers, restaurants, and landlords frequently extended credit to clients and tenants to support unemployed or striking workers. The phrase *apúntamele* (take note) was all a worker needed to utter for a grocer to charge a client's tab.⁸ All six mutual aid societies – *Centro Español* (Spanish Center Club), *Centro Asturiano* (Asturian Club), *Círculo Cubano* (Cuban Club), *L'Unione Italiano* (Italian Club), *Unión Martí-Maceo* (Afro-Cuban Club), and *Deutscher-Americaner* (German-American Club) – provided members with benefits in the event of strike or termination.⁹ This informal system of worker and community self-help established a culture that minimized the power of the cigar companies and created constant tensions between community and industry. Strikes slowed production, and because the cigar industry was dependent on its artisan workforce, concessions and compromises were necessary. Between 1880 and 1900, Tampa's cigar industry grew from a single shop to 120 factories, spurring a population increase from 720 to 15,839.¹⁰ Although many Tampans viewed the militant workforce as dangerous and foreign, the city was inextricably dependent on the cigar industry.

Cigar factories employed racism and sexism as mechanisms for worker control.

Although men and women of Cuban, Spanish, Italian, and Afro-Cuban backgrounds worked

⁷ These six strikes occurred in 1899, 1901, 1910, 1911, 1919-1920, and 1931. See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Ybor City Remembered," *South Eastern Latin Americanist* 22, no. 1 (1978): 1.

⁸ Interview with Peter Parrado by Sarah McNamara, June 2008. Interview in possession of the author.

⁹ Louis A. Pérez, Jr. details the relationship between Cuban unions and mutual aid societies on the island and in Ybor City. See Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, pp. 217 and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Radicals, Workers, and Immigrants in Tampa: Research opportunities in Special Collections," *Ex Libris* 1, no.4 (1978): pp. 14.

¹⁰ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 50, 69.

side-by-side, differences in race and sex established a regime of labor inequality in the cigar industry. At the most basic level, men were considered skilled workers, while women were considered unskilled. Photographs of *tabaqueros* from the late nineteenth century through the 1920s show men of various skin tones occupying the prestigious *rollero* benches. Rarely did women have a seat at the artisan tables. The photographs reveal that some stood behind their male colleagues as *buncheras*, while the majority labored in the basements as *selectoras* (leaf selectors) and *despaldilladoras*.¹¹ The U.S. Women's Bureau reported that "the foreign born in Florida [were] the largest groups in the cigar factories," adding that as women workers they were paid less than their male counterparts.¹² To move up in the labor hierarchy, many women chose to work at *chinchales*. These small, independent, cigar enterprises were family-owned and offered women the opportunity to learn the refined trade of cigar rolling. In these small shops, more women advanced to the level of *rollera*. The *chinchales* also allowed women to combine wages with family and childcare responsibilities. Large cigar factories did not provide childcare for working-class women, but in the smaller, family-run shops, a woman could keep a watchful eye on her children while providing income for her family.

¹¹ Prior to 1929, nearly 75 percent of women employed in the Florida cigar industry worked as stemmers. See Ethel Lombard Best and Mary Viola Robinson, *Women in Florida Industries* (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930), pp. 40-45. Also, to compare with other states reference, see Caroline Manning and Harriet A. Byrne, *The Effects on Women of Changing Conditions in the Cigar and Cigarette Industries* (Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932).

¹² Best and Robinson, *Women in Florida Industries*, pp. 40-45.

Despite the disparity between gender and labor potential, women never wavered as prominent members of labor unions and activists on the picket lines.¹³

Race both divided and united Ybor City. Within the brick walls of cigar factories, historic tensions between Spaniards, Cubans, and Afro-Cubans created an ethno-racial hierarchy of labor. This old world system travelled to Ybor City from Cuba. Spaniards were typically factory owners and managers in cigar factories, and in the ranks of the *tabaqueros*, they were also the highest paid employees.¹⁴ Conversely, Cuban, Italian, and Afro-Cuban workers occupied different levels on the employment spectrum, and they rarely rose to the management levels dominated by Spaniards. This internal division sparked the first labor strike in Ybor City in 1897.¹⁵ Militant Cuban *tabaqueros* incited a *huelga* (strike) that reminded Spanish factory owners that the laborers would continue to demand equality and fight against the ideas of colonial domination in Cuba and the United States. While these internal, ethno-racial differences were prominent and U.S. racial hierarchies conflated the workers into one category—nonwhite.

Inside the cigar factories, *lectores* (readers) fostered the *tabaquero* activist spirit. *El lector* was typically a fellow worker, selected by the cigar workers, to read as they labored on

¹³ Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 5.; Nancy Hewitt, "Women in Ybor City: An Interview with a Woman Cigar Worker," *Tampa Bay History* 7, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1985): pp. 164.

¹⁴ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 262.

¹⁵ This first strike is referred to the *huelga de pesa* or the "weight strike." The 1897 strike began because Spanish manufacturers wanted to weigh the tobacco material given to cigar workers, while the *tabaqueros* saw this as a disregard for tradition and improper regard for their artisanship and positions. For more, see "Life History of José Román Sanfelíz," Manuscript, FWP, pp. 5.

the shop room floor.¹⁶ The *lectores* were actors famous for their booming and theatrical voices. The *lector* would read excerpts from local and international newspapers, as well as literary and political works such as *Das Kapital*.¹⁷ For this reason, Ybor City *tabaqueros* were the best-educated, illiterate population. While many of these men and women did not attend school past the eighth grade, they “earned” advanced degrees from the factory floor, gaining a political, economic, and social consciousness that challenged the Spanish cigar shop owners and the status quo of the Jim Crow South.¹⁸ Through the words of the *lectores*, cigar workers became labor allies that shared a collective identity.

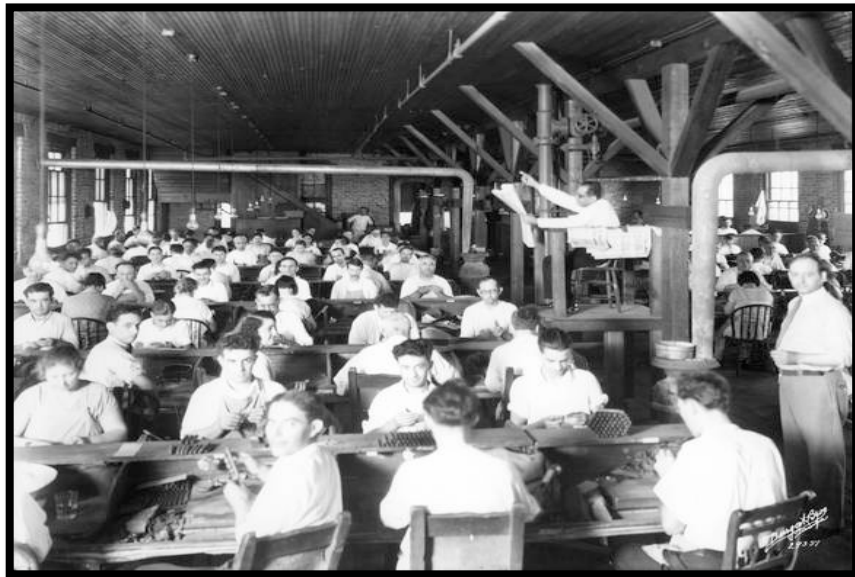


Figure 2. Tabaqueros working in Ybor City factory, 1927.

The lector, on the right, is sitting and reading to the workers from the daily newspaper.
Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collection.

¹⁶ The lector was typically a man’s position; few women reached this distinguished position. Nancy Hewitt outlines the role of the lector and presents an exception to the male rule in Luisa Capetillo, a *lectora puertorriqueña*. See Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 1-4; “Ybor City, General Description, Latin Population,” FWP, pp. 15-16.

¹⁷ Vicki L. Ruiz, Interview with Berthe Small, Asa Zatz, and Alba Zatz by Vicki L. Ruiz, September 28, 1996. Interview in possession of Vicki L. Ruiz; quoted in Terkel, *Hard Times*, pp. 109-110.

¹⁸ “Ybor City, General Description, Latin Population,” FWP, pp. 16, 27.

As cigar profits increased, neighboring Tampa took notice of the potential tax base and urged the Florida State Legislature to extend Tampa's city limits to incorporate Ybor City. The city of Tampa claimed doing so would allow it to protect Ybor City with sufficient police support.¹⁹ It is likely that the protection was intended primarily for the cigar factories, not the cigar workers. Each factory very soon became a tiny arsenal. Cigar factories were equipped with armed guards, trained dogs, grenades, and machine guns.²⁰ Vigilant against potential strikes, cigar factory owners took every precaution to protect their investments. Despite the protests of Ybor City's Latino residents, their fledging town was incorporated into Tampa in 1887. This forever changed Ybor City.

Ybor City's annexation cast the insular Latino enclave into the larger world of the Jim Crow South. Segregation did not previously exist in Ybor City. But following annexation, Jim Crow applied to many of these immigrants in new and dangerous ways, especially with the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and its call for white supremacy.²¹ Klan members were deputized and served in various citizen committees that patrolled Tampa's city streets, punishing anyone who challenged the local status quo. This racially-charged vigilantism soon was commonplace in both Ybor City and Tampa. Between 1934 and 1935, the Tampa Klan lynched thirty-three black men and Latinos.²² Labor unrest in Ybor City fed the Klan's ugly

¹⁹ Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), pp. 42.

²⁰ Ybor City 1911 Sanborn Map, Tony Pizzo Collection (hereafter TPC), box 104, folder Centro Asturiano, Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

²¹ Pérez, *Cuba and the United States*, pp. 214-215.

²² Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*, pp. 182.

penchant for hooded violence, as did progressive politics and the practice of *Latinidad* (Latino-ness).

During the Great Depression, cigar factory owners fired Latino (male) artisan rollers and hired Latina (female) cigar-machine operators in order to cut costs and ostensibly establish a docile labor force. Owners incorrectly believed that female respectability and political activity were mutually exclusive. In this way, what was once a man's domain became women's work. Denied employment and federal work relief in Ybor City, Latino men left their families and migrated north in search of work and government assistance. Until 1946, women outnumbered men in Ybor City.

Male migration changed gender relations in Ybor City; Latina women became *mujeres fuertes* (strong women), as they took on new political and social authority within the family and in the community. Latinas feminized cigar work and became heads of households, altering gender dynamics in the home and community as they became empowered and challenged economic and political inequality.

Historiography

Labor historian Elizabeth Faue observes that scholars have “failed to significantly alter the narrative of labor history.” My dissertation embraces Faue's criticism and finds its methodological approach in gender and oral history. Rather than a traditional study of labor unions and strike actions, my research privileges “kinship, education, work, community, leisure, and the state as the font of not only how class is formed, but how it is culturally and materially transmitted.”²³ I approach gender, race, and working-class identity as malleable

²³ Elizabeth Faue, “Retooling the Class Factory: United States Labour History after Marx, Montgomery, and Postmodernism,” *Labor History* 82 (May 2002): pp. 112.

experiences that incited resistance and change inside the working-class community of Ybor City and Tampa.

Ybor City's history is built by local studies that portray the Cigar City as a seemingly mythical community. In 1968, Anthony "Tony" Pizzo laid the foundation of Ybor City's classic narrative through a general history of the community's development.²⁴ Pizzo illustrated a working-class neighborhood where people created a pseudo, ethno-racial Utopia in the Jim Crow South. Pizzo's nostalgic narrative muted the echoes of radical activism and racial discord from Ybor City's history. In the wake of Ybor's physical destruction by urban renewal in the 1960s, Pizzo rebuilt a Latino community that Tampa was proud to acknowledge, but only by omitting the community's distinct "Latino accent."²⁵

In 1998, Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta published the most comprehensive study of the community, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*. Mormino and Pozzetta incorporated Ybor City into a larger historical debate about the complex relationships of "class, culture, and community."²⁶ This community study, however, continued the romantic depiction of Ybor as an enclave of ethnic equality rather than one of internal, intra-ethnic conflict and compromise. Only after Mormino and Pozzetta did historians begin to look beyond Ybor City's romantic Sevillian patios and lavish tile murals. By broadening their analysis, the cultural intricacies of began to appear from beneath Ybor City's accepted ordinary history.

²⁴ Anthony Pizzo, *Tampa Town, 1824-1886: The Cracker Village with a Latin Accent* (Tampa, FL: Trend House, 1968).

²⁵ Pizzo, *Tampa Town*.

²⁶ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 9.

Since the expansion of scholarship roughly twenty years ago, only a handful of historians have examined Ybor City and its multifaceted social relationships. Robert P. Ingalls investigated the violent relationship between Tampa Anglos and Ybor Latinos in *Urban Vigilantes in the Jim Crow South*.²⁷ This work reconsidered how the Ku Klux Klan suppressed radical activism in Ybor City and controlled Ybor Latinos through terror. Ingalls reincorporated Florida into a southern framework by reinvigorating the Klan, but *Urban Vigilantes* focused singularly on violent acts and ignored the resistance of the persecuted radicals whose ideologies threatened southern society.

Nancy A. Hewitt's *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, 1880-1920s* studied women's social and political involvement in Ybor City, painting the picture of an immigrant community where women redefined themselves as working-class activists. *Southern Discomfort* focused on racial and ethnic difference, arguing that gender was a cross-cultural unifier between Tampa and Ybor City. Hewitt's investigation of Ybor City broke from Mormino and Pozetta's idyllic model and Ingall's top-down perspective. It brought Tampa's women to life, stating that "sex and race, or class and ethnicity, or sex, class, and ethnicity" drove the women and men of Ybor City to identify with movements that benefitted their interests. While Hewitt pointed to the importance of diversity and difference, she also implied that a sense of sisterhood linked women of Ybor and Tampa despite their disparate lived experiences. However, recent scholarship on women of color and their resistance challenged this assertion. Anthropologist Susan Greenbaum complicated Hewitt's claim by deconstructing the myth of a José Martí-inspired colorblind *Cubanidad* (Cubaness)

²⁷ Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*.

that highlighted the blackening of Afro-Cubans in Tampa.²⁸ Just as Hewitt illustrated that difference and place mattered, Greenbaum explained how Afro-Latinos became black Americans in Tampa's Jim Crow matrix.

This dissertation speaks most closely to the works of Hewitt and Greenbaum, as it seeks to complicate categories of gender, race, ethnicity, and community. It does this in order to understand how and why individuals joined local, national, and international political and class movements. Hewitt, Greenbaum, and Ingalls reminded their readers that Ybor's unique population and militant activism emerged in the South. While this image of southern identity may be "uncomfortable and [deviate from] dominant conceptions," global connections and expressions of race, class, ethnicity, politics, and gender certainly characterized Ybor City and Tampa and "echo across the South and the nation as a whole."²⁹ To truly uncover the meaning of Ybor City's radical legacy and its eventual dissolution in the anti-communist social milieu of the postwar years, this project examines the years beyond Ybor City's heyday. It considers how the city's Spanish-speaking population reformed and adapted to changing ideas of politics, nation, and citizenship to expose a different kind of women's activism than Nancy Hewitt described. Finally, it explores the reaction of Ybor's women and men to southern restrictions as their international ties began to unravel post-WWII.

To place this community history onto the national and international stage, my dissertation addresses a broader historiography of women's activism, community formation, labor unionism, political radicalism, and urban development. Ybor can be viewed as a

²⁸ Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*; Susan D. Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

²⁹ Greenbaum, *More Than Black*, pp. 15.

southern exception, but the actions of female and male inhabitants speak to larger national and international trends that necessitate situating Ybor in a larger historical narrative. Framed through the actions of women, my study will connect closely with the works of Jennifer Guglielmo, Elizabeth Faue, and Vicki L. Ruiz on female activists across the United States. Their research has centered on gendered experiences as central to understanding the effects of activism, political movements, and social restrictions on families, work, and community.

In *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945*, Jennifer Guglielmo exposed a world where immigrant, Italian women were formidable forces in national politics. In her project, Guglielmo looked beyond the realm of white, middle-class activism and showed how working-class Italians mobilized New York's immigrant neighborhoods. Indeed, the Italian women she described were anarcho-syndicalists who became communists but were consistently feminists. While Guglielmo's *Living the Revolution* mentioned similar political trends in Chicago, San Francisco, and elsewhere, the work exclusively centered on immigrant women in the northeast and their interactions with international networks.

Studies like those by Elizabeth Faue and Vicki L. Ruiz have united women through labor but always left them isolated in their respective industries and communities.³⁰ In

Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945, Faue argued that "women workers, for the major part of twentieth-

³⁰ Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of Chapel Hill Press, 1991); Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Lives, Cannery Women: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Barbara Kingsolver, *Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983* (Ithaca, New York: ILR Press, 1996).

century history, were either ignored or alienated by a labor movement that failed to acknowledge the connections between productive and reproductive labor and the importance of women's work to the family economy."³¹ To remedy the disconnect between reality and the memory of women's place in the labor movement, Faue focused on how Minneapolis women supported, created, and participated in labor and political movements. Faue discovered that women's organized efforts been overlooked by both the historical narrative and their male counterparts.³²

In *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950*, Vicki L. Ruiz explored the connections between work, culture, and gender, explaining how these forces influenced women's networks, personal lives, and unionization.³³ Ruiz focused on the *Mexicanas* (Mexican women) who helped establish the newly-charted and very red United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA) in California. She traced their transition from labor union leaders in the late 1930s to victims of male, hegemonic leadership in 1951, when the United Brotherhood of Teamsters took control of the union. According to Ruiz, UCAPAWA gave *Mexicanas* the social space needed to assert their independence and power. While Ruiz's work challenged the stereotypical image of *Mexicanas* in a national context, she noted that difference due to language and culture limited their bargaining power

³¹ Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*.

³² For information on women and the development of the welfare state, see Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890s-1935* (New York: Maxwell MacMillian Press, 1994); Alice Kessler Harris, *In Pursuit of Equality: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³³ Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*.

and erased their successes from national memory. While the women of Ruiz's narrative were political radicals, Ruiz ignored the influence of the Communist Party and accusations of communist domination. Instead, her study was groundbreaking in that it illustrated the power of Latinas in the narrative of U.S. history, noting that women like Dolores Huerta were not unique in their existence, only in their success.

Framed by larger political, social, and economic trends, my dissertation also builds on the work of historian Michael C. Denning who has traced and uncovered how movements are formed and the impact they have on individual lives. In *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, Denning investigated how the Popular Front maintained its strength through the language of labor and the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).³⁴ Denning's focus on culture, music, movies, photographs, language, and more illustrated the cultural impact of labor activism. While my work will also employ cultural analysis, it will show that a physical CIO presence was not necessary to generate Popular Front activism. In Ybor City, women and men aligned with the Popular Front and expressed their support through boycotts, actions, as well as culture. However, the CIO did not organize Latino cigar workers in Ybor City; these workers instead came to communism through their ideological dedication. Rather than adopting the strategies of the CPUSA, Latinos in Ybor City sought to embrace radicalism on their own terms.

³⁴ Language of labor is a phrase borrowed from Michael C. Denning. According to him, American language and culture became infused with a range of concerns that linked the CIO, the pan-ethnic cultures of its members, the international platforms of antifascism, and the demands of New Deal programs. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Verso 1997), pp. 3-21.

Organization

“From Picket Lines” traces the transformation of Latino politics, gender, and activism in Ybor City from the Great Depression to the Civil Rights Movement. It is organized into four chronological chapters. Beginning in 1930 and ending in 1964, this dissertation examines the relationship between national identity and immigration and considers how race, ethnicity, and political affiliation influence who has access to citizenship and why this matters.

Chapter one explores the rise of the Popular Front in Ybor City and questions how Latinas and Latinos used the movement to advocate against fascism abroad and protest inequality in the United States. It begins with an analysis of the community at the start of the Great Depression and traces the shift in labor from skilled, male-dominated, artisan work to unskilled women’s labor, highlighting the impact of this shift on the community’s population and culture. I argue that because of the culture of Latino radicalism and the threat of vigilante violence against Latino men, Latinas embraced the Popular Front and became the public advocates for their communities.

With chapter two, I investigate the relationship between Latino families, Latina mothers, and the development of the U.S. welfare state. I argue that the rise of Latina-led labor activism and political radicalism limited immigrant women’s access to federal assistance, economic opportunity, and political representation within the United States. Because the state saw Latinas as radical, foreign workers rather than caring, American mothers, Latinas were unable to obtain the relief they needed to support their families. This chapter follows Latinas’ struggle as they appealed to the state for relief and a sufficient family wage.

In chapter three, I turn to the years 1938 through 1946 to examine the meaning of “belonging” to women and men in Ybor City. I argue that for Latinas and Latinos, who were ardent communists, dedicated labor activists, and proponents of international human rights, the very actions that made them feel most American were the aspects of character that defined them as outsiders to the city, state, and nation. By following the community’s women and men through the Florida HUAC investigation, World War II, and the development of urban renewal plans, I explore the relationship between radicalism, race, gender, and the state.

The fourth chapter, which centers on the late 1940s through the 1950s, examines how Florida Latinos became active participants in the American electoral system. I argue that after the fall of the cigar industry and the end of WWII, Latinas and Latinos looked for representation through formal political engagement rather than radical organizing. To do so, I compare and contrast how Latinas and Latinos participated in the Henry A. Wallace campaign and the Progressive Party with their mobilization in defense of the Cuban Revolution.

CHAPTER 1: NO NOS MOVERÁN (WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED): COMMUNISM, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Introduction

In May of 1937 Latinas marched in Ybor City.³⁵ Called to action by the labor leader Luisa Moreno, rank-and-file Latinas linked arm-in-arm in protest of fascism, American neutrality, and Southern racial and labor inequality. The demonstration, in which women mobilized the entire community of Ybor City, lasted only three hours, but the event forced the exclusive Southern city to acknowledge the voice of the Latinos within its city limits.

This chapter investigates the Popular Front movement in the Latino community of Ybor City. It studies the Popular Front as a social movement and questions its rise in Ybor City and Tampa as a Popular Front movement culture. It also explores how Ybor Latinas and Latinos mobilized to advance their own platform of workers' rights and to become active and participatory citizens in southern society. Finally, this chapter considers the central role of Latinos in Popular Front leadership, highlighting women's activism and radicalism. Until recently women's roles as radical activist leaders in 1930s social movement historiography was peripheral; scholars instead dramatized men's antifascist activism in local and national organizations. This chapter documents how Ybor City's working class Latinas, like the men, were committed to the Popular Front agenda of labor and civil rights, antifascism,

³⁵ In this chapter I will use the term Latino/Latina and *cubano/cubana* interchangeably to indicate people of ethnic origin, both recent immigrants and Americans. Latino/Latina is a preferred term of self-reference of Spanish surname people of the United States. Likewise, *cubano/cubana* will function similarly, referring to both immigrant and American born individuals. The terms "Anglo" and "white" are used interchangeably and indicate persons who are not of Latino or Cuban descent.

internationalism, but also, women's equality. The rise of Latinas as protagonists in the Popular Front movement illustrates how gender and sexuality acted as political strategies in the Jim Crow South.

Ybor City was a community created by industry, sustained by immigration, and tested by periodic labor unrest. Located on the eastern edge of Tampa, this immigrant borough was home to Florida's most successful cigar-making enterprises. In Ybor, Latino laborers were revered for their artisanship and renowned for their labor militancy.³⁶ The neighborhood brought together men and women of Cuban, Afro-Cuban, Spanish, and Italian descent. This multi-racial and multi-ethnic community had a distinct Cuban presence, and a shared identity emerged through labor.³⁷ The cigar industry may have controlled the *tabaqueros'* (cigar workers) economic livelihood, but it could not overcome the highly-effective labor militancy, radical ideologies, and legacies of class struggle these immigrants brought from their homeland. Time and again, Latinos in Ybor City waged walkouts and strikes against the cigar industry, and in doing so, they confronted Jim Crow head on. Latino workers were met with violent Jim Crow repression from vigilantes and police. They could not openly protest Southern society or challenge the color-line without serious consequences from whites. Despite this looming threat, a tradition of labor organization and political radicalism that

³⁶ Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the Jim Crow South* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998).

³⁷ In his study Chad Alan Goldberg reconsiders a shared and created identity established by laborers during the Depression and New Deal. While the politics of identity is not the focus of this essay, understanding the connections between labor and community are necessary. See "Contesting the Status of Relief Workers during the New Deal: The Workers Alliance of America and the Works Progress Administration, 1935-1941," *Social Science History* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2005): pp. 337-342.

extended beyond national boundaries generated the perfect environment for Popular Front organization as Latinos dedicated themselves to championing personal freedom.

Historians have argued that Ybor City's multi-national population represented a "Latin," not a "Latino," community. For example, historian Elna C. Green states, "In Tampa, 'Latin' had a locally specific meaning," and was not "to be confused with 'Latino' a term that does not apply in this context."³⁸ Green overlooks the fact that for *cubanos* the term Latin had a racialized meaning. While the distinct mix of Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians created a specific regional culture, collectively workers spoke Spanish, not English; drank *cortaditos* (Cuban espresso), not coffee; and referred to themselves in bilingual newspapers as Latinos, not Latins. Much like the terms colored or Negro, Ybor residents did not create the term Latin. On the contrary, it was imposed upon them by the larger Anglo society. Using the term Latin limits the agency and cultural citizenship of Ybor residents. As historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. notes, "Whatever claim Tampa has to singularity lies in the success the residents of Ybor City and West Tampa enjoyed in preserving—not shedding—cultural traditions, social norms, and local institutions."³⁹ By embracing the term Latino, Ybor City's history becomes more than a locally specific Latin experience because it links it to other Latino movements unfolding concurrently in Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, and New York.

³⁸ Elna C. Green, "Relief from Relief: The Tampa Sewing-Room Strike of 1937 and Women's Right to Welfare," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (March 2009): 1012-1037; Nancy Hewitt also defends the exclusive use of Latin to describe Ybor City's population in "Economic Crisis and Political Mobilization: Reshaping Culture of Resistance in Tampa's Communities of Color, 1929-1939," in *Women's Labor in the Global Economy: Speaking in Multiple Voices*, eds. Sharon Harley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 64.

³⁹ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Radicals, Workers, and Immigrants in Tampa: Research opportunities in Special Collections," *Ex Libris* 1, no. 4 (1978): pp. 14.

Depression-era Ybor City was a Southern community with a second-generation Latino population, a workforce then dominated by women, and an active Popular Front. Exploring the Popular Front through Ybor City provides a case study rich with intersections of gender, race, and class. As one of the only bastions of a Latino population in the American Southeast, Ybor City connected Florida to national Latino networks and labor movements. Latino laborers and organizers moved through these Spanish-speaking cultural communities, exchanging ideas and supporting local strikes, all while trying to earn a living. By examining the Popular Front in Ybor City, Florida is freed from its isolation and incorporated into a larger national and transnational narrative. As a Latino enclave with an active radical culture, Ybor City was part of a Southern movement for social change, a national movement for economic stability, and an international movement that opposed fascism. Through this study, Ybor City provides the necessary space to “ask big questions in small places.”⁴⁰

Latinos in Ybor City embraced anarcho-syndicalism, Cuban nationalism, and Popular Front goals. In response to the growing military threat from Nazi Germany, the spread of fascism in Spain, and Mussolini’s intervention in Ethiopia, the international Popular Front functioned as an antifascist coalition that united anarchists, socialists, and communists in the defense of social democracy against fascist advances.⁴¹ Historians have uncovered a Popular Front movement that did not begin in 1935 and end in 1939. Instead, the impact of the Popular Front reaches beyond the timeline of a Soviet-dominated initiative and calls on

⁴⁰ During the 1930s sixty percent of the workforce was female, Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*. I borrow this phrase from historian Charles W. Joyer.

⁴¹ The formal concept of a Popular Front was born in Paris, not Moscow. Also this unity and protection by different political groups mainly refers to Spain and France where fascist and anti-labor movements threatened their republics. James R. Barrett, “Rethinking the Popular Front,” *Rethinking Marxism*, 21, no. 4 (2009): pp. 533.

historians to reconsider an independent American social, cultural, and political movement—an American Popular Front.

As a social and political movement in the United States, the Popular Front maintained its strength through the language of labor and the newly-formed Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The open policy of the Popular Front toward ethnic and racial minorities provided an avenue for demanding civil rights. In Ybor City, however, Popular Front culture grew from the combined power of international influence and a community consciousness of human rights. Unlike other Popular Front narratives, this story is not dominated by CIO action. Instead, grass-roots action inspired the principles of the Popular Front. Re-examining the 1930s and the Popular Front as a civil rights movement, from a “Latinization” of the United States, reveals the Popular Front at a moment when labor rights were civil rights, and racism was not as simple as black and white.⁴²

As the Great Depression worsened in Tampa, men lost their jobs while women remained employed. Despite this, women constituted the most exploited segment in this Latino community. Employers viewed women as equally capable but deserving of half the male wage. Just as employers did not respect women’s labor, women’s positions as family supporters were not appreciated by men or equally valued by the New Deal.⁴³ This new

⁴² Zaragosa Vargas discusses the relationship between ethnicity and race during the Popular Front and beyond by investigating the role of Mexican-Americans in labor struggles and as members of the Communist Party. See Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁴³ For information on women and the development of the welfare state, see Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890s-1935* (New York, NY: Maxwell Macmillian Press, 1994); Alice Kessler Harris, *In Pursuit of Equality: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

female workforce was perceived as stealing men's jobs and robbing men of their rights as the heads of households.⁴⁴

Although women may not have held prominent positions on Popular Front committees, women's roles as leaders within the movement can be uncovered through their public actions rather than by traditional definitions of leadership. Through a community focus on the workplace and national and international politics, Latinas raised their voices to call for equality as women workers and as American citizens. The connections between these three elements demonstrate the power of the Popular Front in breaking social and political barriers and giving a once-invisible minority a vibrant voice to assert their innate right to all benefits of American citizenship. This new sense of identity provoked greater political mobilization.

In May of 1937, Latinas in Ybor City challenged their place in Southern society and defied the region's tradition of exclusion by embracing a new sense of "ethnic Americanism." This chapter highlights how Latinas were central to this early fight for civil rights, as their sex granted them protection to publicly protest and push for change in the Jim Crow South. Ybor City's Latinas embraced the Popular Front to confront the political, social, and economic oppression of their community and demand equality as American Latinas in a local and national context.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Faue notes that many women eventually lost their roles in labor union leadership, in working-class culture, and on labor's political agenda. See *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of Chapel Hill Press, 1991).

Depression and Decline of the Cigar Industry

Universally what distinguished the cigar industry was its superb *tabaquero* (cigar-maker) craftsmanship. Yet, as the Great Depression worsened, it became clear that consumers of cigars could no longer afford the expensive, hand-rolled products. They instead turned to cheap, mass-produced cigars and cigarettes as factories converted the specialty industry to mechanized production. This doomed the *tabaqueros*. Every cigar-making machine introduced into cigar shops displaced twelve cigar workers.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the manufactures installed machines to replace *bunchera* or bunch work. The machines had an output of about “four to five thousand bunches daily, which by hand would take at least twenty cigar makers.”⁴⁶ Under the new mechanized system only ten workers were needed to produce the same number of bunches and cigars daily.⁴⁷ Employers targeted unskilled laborers, rather than experienced *tabaqueros*, to work the new equipment. This allowed manufacturers to cut production costs, lower cigar prices, and maximize profits in the depressed economy. Cigar prices plummeted from twenty cents to five cents for a premium cigar and twelve cents to two cents or less for an economy cigar.⁴⁸

By 1931, tensions escalated between Tampa and Ybor City as factory owners slashed wages and purged the worker rolls. Two years after the onslaught of the Great Depression, the cigar industry experienced a 17 percent decrease in production and a 30 percent drop in

⁴⁵ “The Círculo Cubano: Its Contribution to Society,” Manuscript, Federal Writers’ Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, pp. 143.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Amanda and Enrique,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 403.

pay rolls.⁴⁹ In November 1931, manufacturers slashed wages by an additional 10 percent, bringing the total to a 27 percent decrease in payroll for *tabaqueros* and *tabaqueras*. Workers became desperate as their livelihoods disappeared and additional family members went without work.⁵⁰ The *Tampa Morning Tribune*, the primary publication for Anglo Tampa, reported on the profits and losses of the cigar industry in the paper once a month. Success of the cigar industry was integral to the survival of the city of Tampa. Prior to the development of Ybor City and the growth of the cigar industry, Tampa was little more than *un campo* (a field). Between 1880 and 1900, Tampa's cigar industry grew from a single shop to 120 factories and spurred a population increase from 720 to 15,839, eventually growing to 153,519 by 1930, with Ybor cigar-makers composing 20 percent of that population.⁵¹ While Latinos depended on the cigar industry, the city of Tampa depended on the industry's revenue. As a result, skilled men lost their jobs to unskilled Latinas.

Impoverished Latinas were willing to work the cigar making machines, but they labored under an unfair, piecework wage system that greatly reduced their income earning potential while allowing factory owners to maximize their profits.⁵² Before the Depression, Latinos were paid for each cigar produced in a twelve-hour workday, and there was no limit to the number of cigars one could produce in a day. Skilled rollers with nimble and precise

⁴⁹ Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*, pp. 149.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Richard L. Forstall, ed., "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., <https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/vt190090.txt> (retrieved January 6, 2016); Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 50, 69.

⁵² Nancy Hewitt, "Women in Ybor City: An Interview with a Woman Cigarworker," *Tampa Bay History*, 7, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1985): 164; Ethel Lombard Best and Mary Viola Robinson, *Women in Florida Industries* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1930), pp.125.

technique earned fifty-five to sixty-five dollars a week. If a *tabaquero* had a working partner who labored as a *bunchera* or *despaldilladora*, the pair could earn over 100 dollars a week.⁵³ *Tabaquera* Dolores Patiño recalled that during the Depression, “everyone was making less. We were on a limit. We only work three days.” She added “But it’s better to earn less than to be in the streets.”⁵⁴ A 1930 U.S. Women’s Bureau report confirmed, “It [was] obvious that many [women were] subsisting on less than what [was] recognized ...as a reasonable American standard of health and decency.”⁵⁵ Women were now the primary family providers, but they earned draconian wages. In 1931, wages averaged sixteen dollars a week—the recognized minimum wage for an “adequate budget” in 1918, thirteen years prior.⁵⁶

To supplement their wives’ wages, Latinos searched desperately for work but rarely found it. In an interview conducted by Stetson Kennedy, *cubano* Pedro explained that he worked in a “prison,” producing cigar boxes in a local factory. In his new job he made only 12 dollars a week; however, the plant owner personally profited 18,000 dollars a year.⁵⁷ Another *tabaquero* explained: “Men are continually displaced by women who are more readily employed because of the lower wages for which they will work, and their

⁵³ “Amanda and Enrique,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 421.

⁵⁴ Hewitt, “Women in Ybor City,” pp.164.

⁵⁵ Best and Robinson, *Women in Florida Industries*, pp. 49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 48.

⁵⁷ “Pedro and Estrella,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 403.

submissiveness to the manufacturer's power."⁵⁸ Unemployed men, who longed for their seats at the cigar benches, resented women who accepted positions as unskilled workers. Working in box factories and as unskilled laborers seemed to be a waste of their talents. While men saw Latina acceptance of low-paid cigar work as "submissive," it was these women's strength kept their families fed, and their dedication to labor pushed them to advocate on behalf of their male comrades. As the Depression deepened, a rise in male unemployment caused an exodus of Latinos to the North, specifically to New York City and Philadelphia, to factory work, or to Cuba with their families.⁵⁹

Domenico Ginesta, an older community member, was among those who only half-heartedly believed that the Cuban government could provide the economic aid unavailable to Latinos in the United States. "We are now in contact with the Cuban government in an effort to have them take us back to Cuba," he explained to an interviewer from the Federal Writers Project. In Cuba, the government may "allow us a pension for the few remaining years of our life. However, I have little hope that anything will result from this. As the Cuban government has always been indifferent to us, although at one time, we were instrumental in bringing about the freedom of Cuba." Ginesta worked for the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (Cuban Revolutionary Party) in Ybor City during the Cuban War for Independence. Inspired by the 1871 visit of "the Cuban apostle," José Martí, to Ybor City, Ginesta joined the party as a fundraiser. At the end of each day at the Bustillo cigar factory, Ginesta collected a percentage of each *tabaquero's* earnings. This money supported over twenty-seven expeditions to Cuba,

⁵⁸ "A Study on the Typical Spanish Family in Ybor City," 1936, Ralph Steele Boggs Collection (RSBC), Box 1629, Folder 9, Florida Folklife Collection, State Library and Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.

⁵⁹ "The Círculo Cubano: Its Contribution to Society," Manuscript, FWP, pp. 143.

sending both arms and bodies to fight for independence from Spain.⁶⁰ Like many women and men in Ybor City, Ginesta remained connected to Cuba through labor, family, and memory. The independent Cuban government, however, was not the *Cuba libre* he fought to free from imperialist oppression—by the 1930s the country was under U.S. control through *de jure* and *de facto* action. Because Cuba was an unstable state without the social infrastructure to care for unemployed citizens, Ginesta’s dream of receiving a state pension and living out his days in Havana were a fantasy.

While the older generation looked to return to Cuba, more recent immigrants searched for security within the United States. “The younger generation, who finding themselves [in Ybor City] without work, migrate to New York where they find many opportunities,” Ginesta noted. He added that these men paid those with cars, who charged “\$10.00 to \$12.00 for the entire trip, and sometimes less.”⁶¹ In cities like New York and Philadelphia, Ybor Latinos believed they would find positions on the relief rolls from which they were excluded in the South. “Another inducement for this migration,” Ginesta recounted, “is the difference of the relief given in those Northern cities: they are given house, light, groceries and a certain amount weekly. In many cases also the churches contribute with something.”⁶² *La Gaceta* summed up the awful dilemma that had befallen Ybor city’s proud Latino *tabaqueros*:

“Thank you to our municipal authorities that allowed mechanization to ruin industry; thank you to the egotistical industrialists who have discredited our hands and our skill, and thank you to the Chamber of Commerce who failed to

⁶⁰ “Domenico Ginesta,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 487.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

see that the machine and industry would consume our market and lead to our complete demise, thus causing us to leave Tampa looking for work so we can eat.”⁶³

The stress of male unemployment was not a private matter in Ybor City, but a community concern. In an article titled “The Problem with Women in Tampa,” *La Gaceta* detailed the effects of Latino unemployment in Tampa.⁶⁴ “We see the problem with women in Tampa, and now we must think about how it can be remedied,” the article began. The female authors added, “In Tampa we have cigar factories that largely deny employment to men. From our point of view, we are mothers with children, this should not continue, we don’t want our families to be broken.” Latinas fully recognized that mechanization had changed the cigar industry, their Latino community, and their families. This awful predicament fed the flames of frustration among financially strapped Latinos and once more united their community through class struggle.

Tampa officials unsuccessfully sought to curtail *tabaquero* unrest through the Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU). Beginning in the 1910s, the CMIU, a conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliate, officially represented the Ybor cigar industry. But few *tabaqueros* joined or agreed to cooperate with the union.⁶⁵ The CMIU rationalized its inability to unite the cigar workers by characterizing them as “disorganized.”⁶⁶ In reality, the *tabaqueros* cross-national connections to Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Mexico linked them to an international network of labor organizing that seemed more effective to Latinos and

⁶³ Carmen Prida, “El Problema con las Mujeres en Tampa,” *La Gaceta*, October 29, 1937, pp. 3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 149-150.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 150.

Latinas than the pure and simple unionism of the AFL. Field reports from the CMIU further noted that “white men” were not welcome in the factories or in the Labor Temple. Indeed, labor relations in Ybor City were a chaotic “blend of wildcat strikes, work stoppages, and impassioned marches” in pursuit of securing equal rights for all cigar-workers.⁶⁷

Even without official union support and organization, Ybor City *huelgalistas* (strikers) maintained an unusual amount of control for three primary reasons. First, the reputation of the Ybor City cigar industry rested on its Cuban technique and Cuban tobacco; therefore, the laborers could not be replaced easily.⁶⁸ Manufacturers depended on the skill and prestige of the *tabaqueros* to maintain their brands, and the city depended on the industry for revenue. Second, community solidarity was unwavering. Mutual aid societies provided unemployment insurance, and local auxiliaries created community kitchens. Accustomed to collective organization, the residents who owned pharmacies, markets, and restaurants often extended a line of “credit” to their desperate patrons. Peter Parrado remembered that if a customer did not have enough money to pay their bill, they could simply say “*Apuntamelo*” or “take note.”⁶⁹ The owners kept a record of each family’s spending and expected eventual reimbursement. Finally, “Key West and Cuba would send help, sometimes up to five percent of [the workers’] wages.”⁷⁰ This network of labor solidarity maintained cross-national

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 114.

⁶⁸ Becoming a cigar-worker was an intensive process that usually involved ten years of apprenticeship. *Tabaqueros* primarily received training in Havana, Key West, and Tampa. For more, see Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*; Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*.

⁶⁹ Interview with Peter Parrado by Sarah McNamara, June 2008. Interview in possession of the author.

⁷⁰ “Amanda and Enrique,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 421; Key West was the first cigar city in Florida. Ideally positioned only 90 miles from Cuba, it was easy to receive shipments of raw materials from

relationships and helped sustain community members in need. Between Tampa's need for cigar work and the community's support network, Latinos found strength in home-grown unionism. This method of independent organization was so effective that cigar manufacturers fortified their factories by converting the buildings into arsenals. Ybor City's multi-story, red brick, cigar factories were armed with guards, guns, dogs, grenades, and machine guns to protect against potential property damage by cigar workers.⁷¹ The *tabaqueros* commitment to political radicalism and labor rights made them formidable opponents in the struggle to control the cigar industry. "We used to go on strike and everybody stick together good," one *tabaquero* remembered, "but since the union organized we ain't won a strike."⁷²

1931 marked a change in the balance of power between manufacturers and *tabaqueros*. As the Tampa cigar industry evolved into a modern business that targeted consumers who wanted an affordable product, rather than a luxury item, the cigar workers' skill became moot. "Ain't nobody smoking cigars like they used to," a *tabaquero* reported, "young people all smoking cigarettes. Cigars is going out of style."⁷³ Anyone could work a cigar machine, and the cheaper their labor the better. For male cigar workers, whose positions as rollers marked the pinnacle of their profession, the devaluation of their skill pushed them to look for union representation.

the island. Cuban immigrants looking for work originally found it in Key West where they were close to home but could earn more money as a *tabaquero* in Key West than as a factory worker in Havana or a farmhand in the countryside. Cigar owners moved the industry to Tampa with hope of creating a distance between Cuba and their workers to control labor activism. While most factories and workers migrated to Tampa in the 1890s, some stayed behind and continued to work in Key West.

⁷¹ Ybor City 1911 Sanborn Map, Tony Pizzo Collection (hereafter TPC), box 104, folder Centro Asturiano, Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ "Amanda and Enrique," (Manuscript, FWP, pp. 421.

The stress of Latino unemployment and the lack of relief also led to a shift in labor organizing. In 1931, although officially represented by the CMIU, many women and men joined the Tobacco Workers Industrial Union (TWIU), an organization with Communist Party ties. Although historically active in unions through auxiliaries and support, Latinas rose as labor leaders and contributed to the development of union strategy during the 1930s. Carolina Vasquez, a local TWIU activist and former cigar worker, helped organize a massive, three-day walk-out from November 27 to 30 after cigar factory owners demolished *lector* chairs and dismissed all *lectores* over the Thanksgiving holiday. Manufacturers believed the *lectores* had poisoned the minds of cigar workers with subversive theories and literature by encouraging their support of international radicalism (e.g. Cuban and Puerto Rican independence).⁷⁴ On December 14, factory owners agreed to reopen their doors “provided the factories [could] be operated upon a basis of true Americanism and loyalty to [the] city, state, and federal government.”⁷⁵ The Florida Supreme Court supported factory owners and ruled that the TWIU has no jurisdiction over the cigar industry. Furthermore, the court ordered that Spanish-language speeches, literature, and un-American propaganda be barred from shop floors. The CMIU renegotiated contracts for the workers allowed to re-enter the factories, inserting a clause prohibiting strikes for five years.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ For more on the power of the *lector*, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr. “Reminiscences of a Lector: Cuban Cigar Workers in Tampa,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (April 1975): pp. 443-448. Also Robert P. Ingalls explains how cigar workers’ concept of tradition fueled strikes in Ybor City, *Urban Vigilantes*, pp. 34-35.

⁷⁵ Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*, pp. 156.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

This agreement not only stripped workers of their right to protest, it also curbed their access to education. José Martí had previously dubbed *lector* stands the “admired pulpits of liberty.” Because workers independently paid for the services of the readers, the *lectores* read what the employees requested rather than the material the factory bosses desired. One *lector* named Gerado Cotrina believed “the working cigar-maker received great and advantageous teaching, which permitted them to increase their cultural knowledge.” Many *tabaqueros* were either illiterate or poorly educated, and the *lectores* provided them the opportunity to receive the education their class denied them. *Lectores* performed classic literary works like *Don Quijote* and read political texts like *Das Kapital*. From their wooden stages, *lectores* twice daily delivered the news from the United States and Cuba. The service provided by the *lectores* made Ybor City’s women and men part of a cultured, engaged, informed illiterate community. Indeed, Latinas and Latinos in Ybor City did not follow blindly; their beliefs were grounded in the knowledge they learned from their seats at the cigar-rolling station.⁷⁷ Although the power of the union shifted from community control to AFL representation and federal regulation, Latinas and Latinos communicated their frustrations by refashioning political and cultural action.⁷⁸

In the early 1930s, many Ybor City Latinas and Latinos joined the Communist Party or supported the movement as fellow travelers, but it was men’s public meetings and protests that made them targets of nativist oppression from Anglo Tampan. A legacy of violence and

⁷⁷ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, pp. 110-114; “Gerado Cortina Pinera,” Manuscript, FWP, pp. 479.

⁷⁸ According to Michael C. Denning, American language and culture became infused with a range of concerns that linked the CIO, the pan-ethnic cultures of its members, the international platforms of antifascism, and demands of New Deal programs. *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Verso 1997), pp. 3-21.

terror that included beatings, murder, imprisonment, disfranchisement, unemployment, and deportations nearly pushed Ybor Latinos into submission. The repression they experienced is illustrated by the November 1931 kidnapping of a local Communist Party (CP) leader and the police response to it. The local newspaper described the scene:

Five unmasked men posing as officers early this morning kidnaped Fred Crawford, an alleged communist, took him out near the municipal airport and after giving him a severe beating with a leather strap, left him to find his way home. He was lured from home where he had returned from a packed meeting of communists who protested against the arrest of three members of their party for starting a demonstration in Ybor City, Saturday afternoon.⁷⁹

As a visiting CP organizer, Fred Crawford was targeted due to his politics but not his race.

Following Crawford's report of his kidnapping, Tampa police interrupted a CP meeting at the local Labor Temple in Ybor City. The Anglo paper reported that "the crowd had been worked into a frenzy by red speeches, singing and yelling, the noise carried through an amplifier to the street."⁸⁰ As soon as officers entered the hall, Latinos and Latinas dashed for the exits to avoid arrest. Police officers trudged through the crowd clubbing Latinos who tried to escape and threatening to open fire. In the midst of the melee, one officer was allegedly shot in the back through the lung, and another was knocked unconscious. Police booked and held without bail the twenty-two Latinos unable to escape the Labor Temple. Of the men booked at Tampa central, three were deported—stripped from their families and unable to return to the United States.

⁷⁹ "Five Men Posing as Officers Flog Alleged Red Here," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 4, 1931, p. 1.

⁸⁰ "Officer Shot, Others Hurt in Clash with Communist Mob Here," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 8, 1931, pp. 1.

The AFL condemned Latinos meeting at the Labor Temple and made a public statement denouncing communist activities. The statement began, “unfortunately, some people have been impressed with the mistaken idea that organized labor is in sympathy with the communists and rioters. This is a mistake.” The AFL sought to distance the union from any sense of radical organizing by assuring the people of Tampa that, “organized labor in this country has always been a champion of the American constitution and American ideals.”⁸¹ United in the fight to “stamp underfoot these human vermin commonly known as communists,” the AFL blindly supported the city’s decision to deputize an additional fifty men to act as a police force against reds in Tampa.⁸² These new city protectors joined the Tampa police department and the local Ku Klux Klan in a march through the city to illustrate the true meaning of Americanism.⁸³

The power of the white Tampa elite and deputized Citizens Committee preserved the system of economic and political exploitation to convince Latinos that raising one’s voice or meeting at the union hall was potentially a death trap.⁸⁴ Consequently, during the 1930s Latinas rose as political actors and representatives. Just as in southern black communities, where women at times rose as public political figures at the height of Jim Crow, Ybor City’s

⁸¹ “Union Condemns Reds,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 9, 1931, pp. 1.

⁸² “American Legion Parade,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 12, 1931, pp. 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, a review of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* from November 9 through November 13, 1931, discusses the full plans and preparations for the parade. This includes more specific information about the KKK, citizens committee, and veteran organizations that planned the event.

⁸⁴ In November 1935, three labor organizers met at a local home in Ybor City to discuss and plan a political demonstration in Tampa. These men were found out, captured, tarred, feathered, and hanged. See Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantism*, pp. 183-184.

Latinas understood the political flexibility their gender afforded them.⁸⁵ Therefore, while gender was often a restriction, Ybor City's Latinas found a relative medium of power in sexist double standards.⁸⁶

Latina Working-Class Activism and the New Deal

In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched his New Deal, putting in place national assistance programs and swelling the presence of the federal government in American life. The deepening Great Depression forced Latinas to turn to the federal government for help.⁸⁷ In Florida, the source of federal assistance was the Works Progress Administration (WPA). However, as in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Antonio, Los Angeles, and other cities with sizable Latino populations, Ybor City's Latinos experienced discrimination because local Anglos administered the WPA relief program. While the WPA provided relief to many of Tampa's Anglo men and women, Latinos were discriminated against on the basis of race and citizenship.⁸⁸ Furthermore, Latinos employed by the WPA received less pay than whites

⁸⁵ For more on African American women and political/social movement, see Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Press, 1996); and Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁸⁶ Local labor leaders have cited gender as a motivation for using women as protesters and organizers in Florida during this time. Luisa Moreno explained in an interview that she believed the AFL saw her as dispensable, but believed her cultural background would allow her to gain trust of cigar workers. She also believed the local KKK and Citizens committee would think twice before attack a "picket line lady." For more see Vicki L. Ruiz, "Una Mujer Sin Fronteras: Luisa Moreno and Latina Activism," *Pacific Historical Review* 73, no. 1 (February 2004): pp. 7; Vicki L. Ruiz, Field Notes from Interview with Luisa Moreno, July 1978. Notes in possession of author and Vicki L. Ruiz.

⁸⁷ Lizabeth Cohen illustrates how immigrant workers turned to the federal government for economic protection and relief during the Great Depression. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago 1919-1939* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 252-253.

⁸⁸ Julia Blackwelder's study of San Antonio argues that black, Mexican, and Anglo women in depression-era Texas competed for limited resources. Tampa has many parallels to San Antonio as

for equal work. The combination of Jim Crow and Southern political cronyism dominated federal relief programs and excluded communities of color.

By 1934, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) had arrived in the City of Tampa to ostensibly curb the economic and social effects of unemployment throughout the community. The WPA, the largest aid agency of the New Deal, provided temporary employment to millions of Americans across the country. In Tampa, the WPA created a variety of programs to employ those who remained out of work. From constructing buildings and bridges, to working in government offices, to documenting the culture and folklore of Ybor City, WPA employees radically reshaped both Tampa's environment and the relationship between the city's disparate ethnic communities. Though wary of the federal government's interference in local affairs, Tampa's municipal government generally welcomed the WPA for its putting the unemployed back to work and removing a potential liability to society.

Cigar workers initially perceived accepting aid as emasculating and shameful. Latinos viewed independent factory work as linked to manhood, and these men saw WPA work as a badge of failure and shame. In 1935, one unemployed, Latino cigar worker explained to a WPA writer: "Though I still have my sight and sensitive fingers and quickness of movement for making cigars, I have been unable to find work in any factory. So I have had to fall where so many jobless men have fallen, forced to register to receive aid, which seems more like a beggars alms than like real aid to the needy."⁸⁹ In Ybor City, this man was not alone. By the

both cities were divided by ethnic enclaves, entrenched by political machines, and overwhelmed relief programs. *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-1939* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1984).

⁸⁹ "Youth of Ybor," 1936, RSBC, Box 1629, Folder 2.

end of 1935, the WPA reported that 23,129 Latinos applied for work with the government to support their families.⁹⁰ As Latinos begrudgingly submitted their applications for government aid, they continued to long for the days when their skilled hands provided them with economic security.

Due to the Depression, the Latino neighborhood of Ybor City experienced a sharp reduction in size between 1930 and 1940. The Afro-Cuban population fell from 631 residents to a mere 311, and Ybor's Cuban workforce shrunk by 35 percent. The Spanish followed suit by losing 26 percent of their foreign-born population, while the Italian immigrants trailed with a mere 18 percent resident decrease.⁹¹ The great migration outward from Ybor illustrated the economic limitations of the Cigar City. The small, southern city could not provide another industry to replace the failing cigar factories, thereby forcing the diligent workers to apply for aid or search for alternative employment outside of Ybor itself. By the end of the 1930s, women over the age of 20 outnumbered men 4 to 1 in Ybor City. In this milieu, Latinas accepted their place at the cigar machine or in the sewing room.

As Latinos continued to lose their jobs and joined the ranks of the unemployed, Latinas took on the main role of family breadwinners. Many of these women were raised in radical households by parents with anarchist, socialist, and communist allegiances. As workers, WPA relief employees, and members of the Worker's Alliance of America, Ybor City's Latinas supported labor equality and civil rights for themselves and their family members. They understood the connection between work and fairness, and knew the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 85.

Hillsborough County WPA board to be anything but egalitarian. Anglo men in power disproportionately approved positions for white workers, while Latinos and black men sat idle and unable to contribute to the family economy.

Historically, Ybor City Latino workers found strength and power in the union; however, *trabajadores* employed by New Deal work relief programs were prohibited from striking.⁹² Workers not on relief had little more power because the Wagner Act of 1935 stipulated that only a single labor organization could represent an industry, and manufacturers ultimately decided which union would negotiate in *their* best interest. Since 1931 the AFL had been the sole representative of the cigar workers, but union leadership was often more concerned with placating manufacturers and city officials than standing for worker's rights. The few organizers who tried to challenge the authority of the AFL were often driven out of town or murdered.

Tampa never established an official CIO presence, but the Popular Front and Communist Party thrived. Reports from local CP organizers illustrate that Ybor City and Tampa were two of the most active, party-organizing sites in the South between 1936 and 1938.⁹³ Regional organizers, however, struggled to convey their goals due to language and cultural barriers. In letters to national CP leadership, local organizers expressed extreme frustration over the actions of their "Spanish-speaking comrades."⁹⁴ Ybor City Latinas and

⁹² Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943): pp. 218-227; David Ziskind, *One Thousand Strikes of Government Employees* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1940), pp. 141-152.

⁹³ "District 25 Reports - 1930-1940," Records of the Communist Party of the United States of America (hereafter CPUSA), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁴ "Letter from Brown to J.S.," Monthly Reports 1936 CPUSA.

Latinos independently formed a Popular Committee (“El Retroguardia de Tampa”) to support their anti-fascist, pro-democratic politics at home and abroad. More than one thousand women joined the Anti-fascist Women’s Committee, and members like local school teacher Margarita Pita became strategic leaders who helped organize protests, food collections, donation drives, and boycotts.⁹⁵ Despite chronic unemployment, working-class women and men sent thirty tons of beans, twenty thousand pounds of clothing, one thousand cans of milk, twenty thousand cigars, and an ambulance to Spain in solidarity with the Republican cause.⁹⁶ Even as these women and championed the anti-fascist cause abroad and traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby for U.S. aid to the Spanish Republic, members of the Popular Committee launched a local campaign for economic equality and full political representation.

Under the banner of the Popular Front, Ybor City’s Latino community began to mobilize in new and creative ways. Although the power of the union had shifted from community control to AFL representation and federal regulation, Latinos communicated their frustrations with the hard times by refashioning political and cultural action. As the international threat of fascism intensified, Ybor Latinos came to the support of the Spanish Republic by sending volunteers abroad to fight with the Abraham Lincoln Brigades.⁹⁷ The rallying cry of “*¡No Pasarán!*” (They shall not pass!) rose in the streets of Ybor City and

⁹⁵ Hewitt, “Economic Crisis,” pp. 74.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ From the Abraham Lincoln Brigades, eight names of Cuban Ybor volunteers are available: Joaquín Martí, Basilio Cueria y Soto, Rodolfo de Armas y Soto, Eladio Paula Bolanas, Oscar Soler y Tarafa, Carlos Guijano, Víctor Domínguez Bienvenido, and Aurelio Paula Bolanos. More information is available at *Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive*, <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/> (accessed September 2010). For more on Ybor Latinos in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, Ana Varela-Lago, ““No Pasarán!”: The Spanish Civil War’s Impact of the Latin Community of Ybor City, 1936-1939,” *Tampa Bay History* 19, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1997): pp. 5-34.

echoed across the ocean as it became an international slogan in the fight to preserve democracy. In October of 1936, the Ybor City Latino troupe of the Federal Theater Project (FTP) premiered the Spanish-language version of Sinclair Lewis's play about the fascist takeover of a small American town, *It Can't Happen Here*.⁹⁸ This production was coordinated by the national FTP, under the direction of Hallie Flanagan. Flanagan stated that the FTP wanted to perform Lewis' play:

“...because it's about American life today, based on a passionate belief in American democracy. The play says that when a dictatorship comes to threaten such a democracy, it comes in an apparently harmless guise, with parades and promises; but that when such a dictatorship arrives, the promises are not kept and the parade ground become encampments.”⁹⁹

The Spanish-language production of this play—the only one in the United States—left standing-room only in the aisles of the *Centro Asturiano* Theater.¹⁰⁰ Flanagan underestimated the sophisticated political experience of Ybor City's Latinos. Fascism was a well-known concept for Latinos in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, which started in 1936 and coincided with the Tampa FTP.¹⁰¹ Unlike other national productions of the FTP, the Spanish-language version focused on the effects of a white dictatorship on ethno-racial minorities. All of Ybor City's Latinos recognized the dual meaning of *It Can't Happen Here*, specifically

⁹⁸ Kenya C. Dworkin y Menendez, “Cuban Theater, American Stage: Before Exile” in *The State of Latino Theater in the United States: Hybridity, Transculturation and Identity*, ed. Luis A. Ramos-García (New York, NY: Rutledge, 2002), pp. 115-116.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Susan Quinn, *Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* (New York, NY: Walker Publishing, 2008), pp. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Hewitt, “Economic Crisis,” pp. 73.

¹⁰¹ Dworkin y Menendez, “Cuban Theater, American Stage,” pp. 114-117.

how it applied to their desire to combat the threat of fascism abroad and it spoke to their oppression as Latinos in the South.

One month after the staging of Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here*, the American Federation of Labor held its annual convention in Tampa. This occurred despite the fact that the AFL threatened to move the conference site due to violence against union leaders and the flogging, castration, and tar and feathering of CPUSA organizer Joseph Shoemaker. The city assured the union that justice would be served, but this was yet another empty promise.¹⁰² Tampa officials had little interest in defending the rights of union members, but they were committed to the funds a national labor convention would generate. A weekend of booked hall spaces, reserved hotel rooms, and packed restaurants was enough incentive for Tampa police to pay more attention to the Shoemaker case as a murder, rather than a unifying anti-communist rally for Anglo Tampa. Especially considering that some law enforcement officials were likely connected to the man's torture and murder, the fact that local government officials opened a criminal case illustrates the potential power a boycott by the AFL could have caused.

¹⁰² Hewitt, "Economic Crisis," pp. 73.

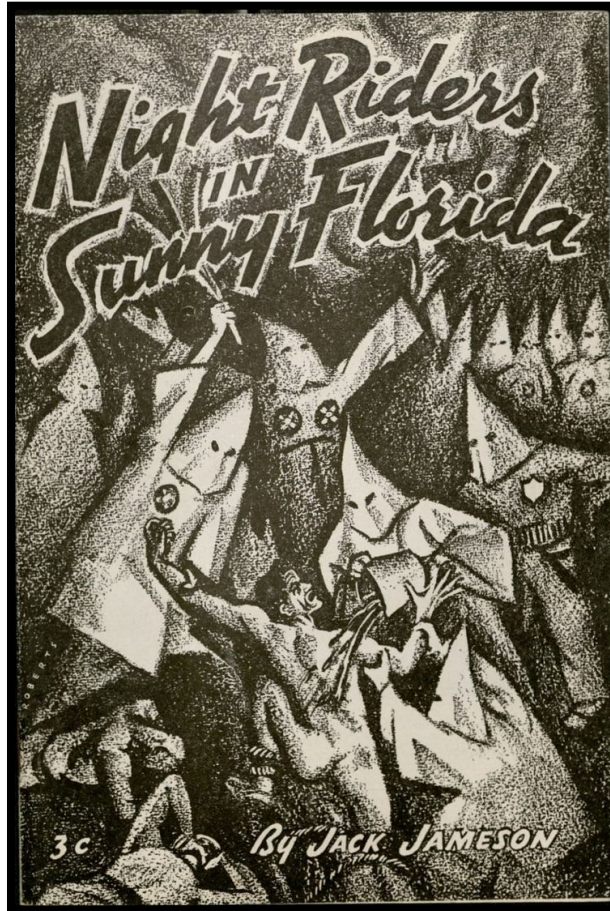


Figure 3. Booklet describing the murder of Joseph Shoemaker.
Courtesy of USF Special Collections.

The atmosphere on the convention floor was particularly contentious, as the AFL executive council had suspended the CIO unions in September. Because the AFL was publicly anti-communist and anti-interventionist, the political alliance between CIO unions and the Popular Front challenged the authority of AFL leadership. At the convention, the AFL voted to officially bar the CIO from its ranks and split the union.¹⁰³ With this action, the AFL lost a third of its membership, cutting away at the power of the national federation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "Green Pleas for Peace then Defies Lewis," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 17, 1936, pp. 1, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

The *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that when William Green, AFL president, denounced the CIO as “industrial rebels,” his “pink face turn[ed] a little pinker” as he “shout[ed] his indignant assaults on the A.F. of L’s solidarity.”¹⁰⁵ The *Tampa Morning Tribune* also painted CIO leader John L. Lewis as a “rebel” guilty of treason for defying the AFL. Controlled by cigar manufacturers and other business owners, this Tampa newspaper would likewise fan the flames of anti-communism to smear the CIO and the Latino-dominated Popular Front as un-American. In a sense, the report on the schism within the AFL reflected the politics between Anglo Tampan and Latinos who were divided by political affiliation and community solidarity. Like the CIO, Latinos supported the fight for the Spanish Republic and perceived anyone who opposed this ideology as anti-democratic.

Along with a strong sense of Cuban revolutionary nationalism, Ybor Latinos had long embraced internationalism and staunchly supported the anti-fascist resistance in Spain. Michael C. Denning refers to this sentiment as “ethnic Americanism.” The dual devotion to ethnic identity and American democracy proliferated throughout immigrant communities like Ybor City during the Popular Front.¹⁰⁶ In Ybor City, the Spanish Civil War became the primary political concern for Latino laborers. Because of its pro-Popular Front stance, *La Gaceta* complained harshly about the AFL’s position of neutrality with regard to the war in Spain. When the Latino community did not get support from William Green on this important issue, *La Gaceta* attacked the AFL president, charging he was a “dictator who

¹⁰⁵ “Green’s Pink Face Turns Pinker When He Raps ‘Rebels,’” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 17, 1936, pp. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Denning, *Cultural Front*, pp. 9.

wished to maintain a neutral position.”¹⁰⁷ Denouncing neutrality, Ybor City mobilized its Popular Front Committee to raise funds for the American Red Cross in Spain and stood behind the young *cubanos* who volunteered to fight in Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigades.¹⁰⁸ Ybor City joined other Latino communities across the United States and made the anti-fascist cause the axis of a *Frente Popular* (Popular Front).

A militant, anti-fascist Latina who defended the cause of Loyalist Spain was Luisa Moreno, who had already made a name for herself as an effective labor organizer and champion of the fight for Latino labor and civil rights in Ybor City. At the American Federation of Labor convention in Tampa, Luisa Moreno, recently arrived from New York City’s Spanish Harlem, was the Florida delegate to the CMIU. Like the militant, class-conscious, Latino workers whom she represented, Moreno was dedicated to the antifascist cause. She recognized the potential for further mobilization of the Latino community of Ybor City to the Popular Front cause. At the AFL convention, CMIU delegate Moreno delivered an impassioned address to the all-male delegates, personally disagreeing with changes to cigar workers’ contracts that she argued benefitted the cigar manufactures. No doubt taken aback by Moreno’s brashness and stern position, the AFL leadership concluded that she might prove detrimental to the CMIU in Florida and began making arrangements to transfer Moreno to Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁹ However, before she left Florida, Luisa Moreno assisted Ybor

¹⁰⁷ “Chungas y no Chungas,” *La Gaceta*, November 18, 1936, pp. 1.

¹⁰⁸ The Latino community raised over 22,000 dollars in support of the Spanish Republic and sent 24 representatives to fight the war against fascism. “Humanidad,” *La Gaceta*, May 6, 1937, pp. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Vicki L. Ruiz, Field Notes from Interview with Luisa Moreno, July 1978. Notes in possession of Vicki L. Ruiz.

City's Latino community in its struggle to gain rights as workers and American citizens who articulated a Latino identity in the Popular Front cause.¹¹⁰

Luisa Moreno was the master of self re-invention. Born Blanca Rosa Rodríguez López, she was the daughter of a Guatemalan socialite and a coffee plantation owner.¹¹¹ Her upbringing represented the epitome of privilege and the top of Latin America's social hierarchy. Her wealth and class background afforded her every advantage available to a woman of her social station, but Blanca felt emotionally crippled by the expectations of elite society. In 1928, Blanca traded her parents' Guatemala plantation for the streets of working-class Spanish Harlem and transformed herself from a daughter of privilege to a union organizer.¹¹² In New York, Blanca at first found herself toiling over a sewing machine as a garment factory worker struggling to support her family.

Blanca later became a member of the *Centro Obrero de Habla Española* (Spanish Speaking Workers' Center), a communist-front organization founded by Blanca's comrade and mentor, the Argentinean-born expatriate Alberto Moreau.¹¹³ Moreau's record of radical activism was extensive. He served on the central committee of the CPUSA and aided the communist struggle in Cuba and Puerto Rico's independence movement. Moreau was also

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ruiz, "Una Mujer Sin Fronteras," pp. 2.; Vicki L. Ruiz, "Of Poetics and Politics: The Border Journeys of Luisa Moreno," in *Women's Labor in the Global Economy: Speaking in Multiple Voices*, Sharon Harley, ed. Sharon Harley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press): pp. 29-32.

¹¹² Ruiz, "Una Mujer," pp. 2-3.

¹¹³ Kenneth Burt, "Alberto Moreau, Early Communist Party Candidate," December 16, 2011, <http://kennethburt.com/blog/?p=1195> (accessed January 2012). For information on Spanish Harlem Latino activism in the 1930s, see Lorin Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen: History and Political Identity in the Twentieth Century New York City* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010): pp. 92-132.

the Havana correspondent for the *New Masses* and a collaborator with the Communist International. Blanca's personal association with the Communist Party cannot be confirmed, but she did travel through party networks and learned tactics that she employed as an independent organizer. In 1930 Blanca's first assignment was to unite her fellow seamstresses into *La Liga de Costureras* (The League of Garment Workers), an all Latina workers union.¹¹⁴ As an organizer, Blanca had little financial assistance and no staff support. Nevertheless, she saw the value in women-centered grassroots organizing and the importance of union representation. "One person can't do anything," Blanca bluntly stated, "it's only with others that things are accomplished."¹¹⁵

Blanca's growing reputation as a Spanish-speaking organizer caught the attention of the American Federation of Labor in 1935. The established and conservative AFL offered Blanca the assignment of organizing *tabaqueras* in Florida. Without hesitation, Blanca quit her job and moved to the South. The AFL saw Blanca as a young Latina who could possibly gain the trust of southern Latinos in the CMIU but who was ultimately dispensable. While the national labor federation's strength in the South was in Florida, many avoided organizing in the state because the Ku Klux Klan, then thirty-three thousand strong, had a reputation of terrorizing labor organizers and anyone else who challenged the reign of white supremacy. The AFL's belief that the Klan would think twice about attacking a "picket line lady" was another reason for appointing Blanca to the state.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ruiz, "Of Poetics and Politics," pp. 32.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in, Ruiz, "Una Mujer Sin Fronteras," pp. 7.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Blanca did not conform to the stereotypical image of “Latino-ness”: brown skin, brown eyes, dark hair, and Spanish-speaking. Barely standing five-feet tall, Blanca had porcelain white skin, jet black hair, and unaccented English.¹¹⁷ In Florida, she could have passed for white but chose to identify as a Latina. Blanca’s time organizing in Florida marked the last stage of her transformation—there she became, and would forever remain, Luisa Moreno. The name Moreno, meaning dark, was the opposite of Luisa’s given name Blanca Rosa, which meant white rose. Changing her name from Blanca Rosa to Luisa Moreno was the final step in reinventing herself from her privileged pedigree and fully embracing the class-conscious Latina she had become.¹¹⁸ Historian Vicki L. Ruiz notes that the importance of Luisa Moreno’s awakening was that it took place in the Jim Crow South, a region where “segregation and white domination was a way of life.”¹¹⁹

While Luisa Moreno quickly proved her prowess by organizing 13,000 cigar workers and negotiating new labor contracts the AFL saw her as a threat to the CMIU and reassigned her to Pennsylvania. Before Moreno left the AFL to head the CIO’s Latino-dominated United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers (UCAPAWA) union, she ignored the AFL’s regulations, eschewing mass-based militant action and helping Latino workers in Ybor City organize two demonstrations. One was a mass Popular Front protest led by women, the other a strike by WPA women garment workers, which was supported by the

¹¹⁷ Ruiz, “Una Mujer Sin Fronteras,” pp. 8; for impressions of Moreno’s appearance see interview with Berthe Small, Asa Zatz, and Alba Zatz by Vicki L. Ruiz, September 28, 1996. Interview in Possession of Vicki L. Ruiz.

¹¹⁸ Vicki Ruiz contends that Luisa Moreno “conjugated her identity.” For more, see Ruiz, “Una Mujer Sin Fronteras,” 8. and Ruiz, “Of Poetics and Politics,” pp. 32.

¹¹⁹ Ruiz, “Of Poetics and Politics,” pp. 32.

Workers Alliance of America. The demonstration and strike championed the interests of the unemployed and embraced the international struggle against fascism as well as the struggles of Latino and Latina WPA relief workers against discrimination within this New Deal Program. More importantly, Ybor City's Latinas appropriated working-class Americanism and highlighted its importance in their call for labor and civil rights.

Demanding Workers' Rights through Women's Actions

At 3pm on May 6, 1937, Ybor City fell silent.¹²⁰ As women workers switched off the cigar and cigarette machines, a lull swept across the city. Rarely were the streets of Ybor this quiet, but on this warm Thursday afternoon, stillness signaled action.¹²¹ The tall, mahogany double doors of the García y Vega Factory swung open, and three hundred women emptied out onto the brick-paved streets. Quickly and calmly, these women walked one block to the Labor Temple located on Eighth Avenue. This building's Moorish architecture echoed Ybor City's Spanish roots, while inside its rich legacy of Cuban unionism once more came to life. Latinos from the fraternal delegation of the Popular Front met these *organizadoras* with picket signs. Because the protest was against Tampans and not Latino cigar factory owners, all signs were in English. The slogans were a mix of antifascist messages ranging from "Make Spain the Tomb of Fascism!", "Stop Hitler and Mussolini!", and "Peace and Democracy," to demands for workers' rights, such as "For State Wage Law!", "Equal Pay for Equal Work!", and "Workers Alliance: Jobs-Recovery-Security."¹²²

¹²⁰ "Más de 7,000 Mujeres, Niños, y Hombres Fueron desde Ybor hasta la Casa de Ayuntamiento," *La Gaceta*, May 7, 1937, pp. 1, 4.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

Each woman chose her picket sign and joined the seven thousand protesters waiting to march to City Hall.¹²³ In a show of interracial solidarity, an unknown number of Anglo and African American women from the WPA sewing rooms joined the Latinas to show their support. At 5pm, dressed all in white, the women lined-up in rows of six, linked arms, and began to march.¹²⁴ The demonstrator in the front row carried an American flag, and white police officers on motorcycles flanked each side of the marching women.¹²⁵ The rhythmic, almost synchronized, rapping of fourteen thousand *tacones* (high heel shoes) made it impossible to ignore the women marchers or their messages. With their heads held high, the proud demonstrators rounded the corner onto Seventh Avenue (Broadway), which was lined with hundreds of supporters from Ybor City's working-class Latino *barrio*. Some Latino-operated businesses along the main thoroughfare closed their doors in solidarity with the women marchers and to the Cuban volunteers from Ybor City who gave their lives to the antifascist cause in Spain.¹²⁶ As the women reached the end of Seventh Avenue, the loud cheers of their supporters faded; as they turned left onto Franklin Street and crossed into greater Tampa, they entered a potentially hostile and dangerous terrain.

By 5:30pm, the women marchers were in the heart of Tampa. The supportive Latino cheers were replaced by the sidelined glares of Anglos.¹²⁷ White policemen stood along Franklin Street's wooden planked sidewalks prepared to "guard" the Latina marchers from

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Photograph of the Marchers, Courtesy of the Ybor City Museum, May 1937.

¹²⁵ "Más de 7,000 Mujeres," *La Gaceta*, pp. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

any possible threat. In light of Tampa's long, ugly history of racial and ethnic violence, it is most likely that Tampa's finest were present to police and maintain the color-line separating the marchers and the contemptuous crowds. As the women reached downtown Tampa, the city's political and financial center, their ranks tightened as their pace slowed. Like a well-organized and disciplined brigade, the women marchers came to a halt at the steps of Tampa's City Hall. Here, Ybor City's Latina marchers patiently waited for their spokeswoman to step forward and address the mayor in English, to show that the marchers came as Latino Americans. In this way, the marchers attempted to refashion their racial identities to be compatible with the Anglos' notion of "American-ness."¹²⁸



Figure 4. Latinas marching down Avenida Septima on May 6, 1937.
Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

¹²⁸ "Study of Tampa Cubans," Manuscript, FWP, pp. 283-284. This sentiment is also reflected in racial terms "Mexican" and "Puerto Rican." See Nicolas De Genova, ed. *Racial Transformations: Latinos and Asians in the Remaking of the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006): pp. 11.

During the preceding five days of planning and collaboration with the male-led Popular Front Committee, the Latina march leaders voted to make all picket signs and banners in English, compose a bilingual women's manifesto, and draw the crowd's attention by wearing white dresses.¹²⁹ The decision to print all material in English guaranteed that the goals of the demonstration would not be lost in translation. The women's manifesto summarized the status of the Latinas and Latinos, and demanded that steps be taken to change the situation. The white dresses would symbolize loyalty, purity of purpose, and hope, while their yellow Worker Alliance of America badges signaled the demonstrators' working-class solidarity.¹³⁰

Although many of the Latina marchers allied with the Communist Party as members or fellow travelers, the march was not organized by the CPUSA. Recognizing the difference between the Popular Front and the CPUSA, the women sought to gain support for civil rights through collective action. The antifascist march was an occasion for Latinas to protest the repressive Jim Crow racial and labor policies imposed upon the Ybor City, Latino, blue-collar community by greater Anglo Tampa. On this day their demands would not be misunderstood, and the Latinas would not be dismissed as foreign immigrants.

When Tampa Mayor Robert E. Lee Chancey emerged from the City Hall building, an undulating sea of women greeted him. The huge crowd of Latinas who packed the streets stood poised at attention, ready to deliver their message to Tampa. It is unknown which

¹²⁹ "El Jueves la Gran Manifestación..." *La Gaceta*, May 4, 1937, pp. 1.

¹³⁰ Wearing white linked the *cubanas* with early-twentieth-century American and British suffragists and earlier counter revolutionary groups in Russia. See Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (London, England: Chatto and Windus Limited, 1987).

woman stepped forward and read the statement representing Ybor City's position on the matter of the war in Spain. A Latina representative stepped forward from the ranks of her fellow marchers and presented the workers' proclamation to the mayor.¹³¹

As citizens and residents of a peaceful and democratic nation, we feel morally obliged to give all possible aid to Spanish cities that defend their democratic government against fascist aggression, thus maintaining the standard of peace and democracy in the world.¹³²

Mayor Chancey came down the steps of City Hall, thanked the women marchers, and promised them he would send a letter to Florida's congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. During his speech, Mayor Chancey invoked the memory of President Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. He expressed his desire for the United States to act as a "good neighbor" to Spain rather than as a "passive enemy."¹³³ The mayor stated he hoped his letter would convey the public's concern for those suffering in Spain.¹³⁴ However, Mayor Chancey never opposed American neutrality or acknowledged the importance of the women's actions; he understood that taking a position on the war in Spain went against the United States' official stance on neutrality. To Chancey, like many white Tampan, antifascism in Spain was directly aligned with communism. The Mayor's personal prejudices barred him from acknowledging the most important aspect of the day's events—the demonstration was by

¹³¹ As a note, it is interesting that the identity of the women speaking is unknown. This omission from newspapers and Popular Front Committee correspondences could speak to the collaborative nature of the event. But it could also highlight how men, both journalists and Popular Front Committee members, did not find it noteworthy enough to comment on a woman's identity.

¹³² "El Alcalde Recibió a una Comisión y le Ofreció Escribir a los Legisladores," *La Gaceta*, May 7, 1937, pp. 4A.

¹³³ "El Alcalde Recibió a una Comisión y le Ofreció Escribir a los Legisladores," *La Gaceta*, May 7, 1937, pp. 4A.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

Latinas who explicitly identified as Americans citizens, and this epic march spoke to a greater American majority. As members of a racially and socially subjugated minority, the women took part in a protest against prejudice at a moment that promoted social and economic equality in an American context.

The Latinas purposely chose not to make their address on the steps of the *Círculo Cubano* or the *Centro Español* because they understood that their audience was much larger than Ybor City—their message was to the United States. These women broke from the tradition of men like José Martí who sought support for the Cuban Revolution inside the Labor Temple and the front porch of the Cuban Club. Tampa, to Ybor City’s Latinos, was their America. The city of Tampa was exclusively white, resting on a foundation of difference based on race, ethnicity, and, in the case of Latinos, U.S. citizenship. When the women of the García y Vega Factory joined the men of the Popular Front Committee and marched to City Hall, it was to address their *fellow* Americans. At this event, Ybor’s Latinas went against the dictates of Jim Crow’s color-line— they crossed it to make themselves heard as Latino Americans.¹³⁵

A legacy of violence and terror that included beatings, murder, imprisonment, and deportations had pushed Ybor Latino men into near submission. In the past, Anglo employers displayed their massive power to preserve the system of economic exploitation and emasculated many Latinos, convincing them that street protests were potential death traps. Latinas therefore volunteered as the public political actors because of the safety their sex

¹³⁵ The male leaders of the *Comite de Defensa del Frente Popular* (Popular Front Committee) were: José Martínez, Victoriano Manteiga, Aurélio Prado, Pedro Ramírez Moya, Gustavo Jiménez, Benjamín Blanco, and Pedro Ramírez. “El Jueves a las 1:45 de la Tarde Llegará Don Fernando de los Ríos,” *La Gaceta*, November 18, 1936, pp. 1.

afforded them. Just as the southern, African American communities mobilized women as public political figures during the height of Jim Crow, Ybor City's Latino community did the same.¹³⁶ Though the acts of women protesting and marching were deemed unruly and unfeminine, an act by "Amazons," they were not construed as threatening.¹³⁷ Ybor City's Latinos planned their demonstration to present Latinas as respectable and constrained *cubana* ladies, a decision that did not undermine the message of their march. Latinas could cross fixed social boundaries with less threat of police or vigilante violence.

Although Anglos believed Latinos were not African American, they identified the foreigners as non-white occupants of an ambiguous space within the South's understanding of race.¹³⁸ Because of Tampa Anglos' deep felt prejudices toward Latinos, the community encountered debilitating economic and social discrimination in addition to physical violence. The powerful racial binary of Jim Crow created two notions of American-ness. Anglos equated being Latino or Latina with being "not American" and thus not worthy of inclusion. This line of thinking caused the Anglo-run WPA to deny Latinos federal relief work. By racializing ethnicity, Anglos extended stereotypes of uncleanliness, ignorance, unworthiness, and poverty to Ybor Latinos. In order to speak openly and express their concerns about discrimination at home and fascism abroad, Ybor's Latinos had to walk the color-line ever so cautiously.

¹³⁶ For more on African American women and political/social movement, see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

¹³⁷ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*.

¹³⁸ Jennifer Guglielmo, "Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths," in *Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America*, eds. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2003): pp. 1-16.

The community feared backlash from the Citizens Committee and local KKK. As a community of color with openly radical politics, Ybor Latinas and Latinos sought to protect the community from violent repercussions. Painfully mindful of the murder of Shoemaker, the beating of Crawford, the deportation of radical Latinos, and the lynchings of black and Latino men, Ybor City activists opined that it was safest to have women lead the May 1937 march. They believed that Southern chivalry would leave the women unharmed. Luisa Moreno remembered that the Klan never threatened her in Florida.¹³⁹ However, a reactionary worker did attempt to take her life with an ice pick during a union meeting.¹⁴⁰ As the Ybor City Popular Front planned the upcoming march, these recent acts of violence against the Ybor City community were undoubtedly on their minds. By mobilizing women, the voices and concerns of the Latino community could be heard with a minimal risk of racial assault.

The bombing of Guernica, Spain further inspired women to protest as they responded to the reporting of this act of violence against innocent Spaniards. On April 27, 1937, the front-page headline of *La Gaceta* read “Fascist German Airplanes Annihilated Hundreds of Defenseless People in Guernica.”¹⁴¹ The story detailed the fascist offenses towards *los vulnerables*—the vulnerable women and children of the Spanish Republic as either survivors of enemy attacks, bombing victims, or refugees. For nine days before the women’s planned march, gendered rhetoric appeared in the pages of *La Gaceta*’s report of the war in Spain.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Vicki L. Ruiz, Field Notes from Interview with Luisa Moreno, July 1978. Notes in possession of Vicki L. Ruiz.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “Aeroplanos Alemanes de los Facciosos Aniquilaron a Centenares de Seres Indefensos en Guernica,” *La Gaceta*, April 27, 1937, pp. 1.

¹⁴² A survey of newspaper headlines from April 27-May 10 in *La Gaceta* clearly highlights this point.

The local Latino newspaper highlighted the sufferings of women and children and called for local aid from Latinas—for mothers, sisters, and daughters to rise up to defend Spain. This mass mobilization included rallies, radio speeches, meetings of *El Frente Popular* groups, and more. Using gendered language, *La Gaceta* depicted the Spanish Republic as a suffering damsel ravaged by a fascist regime. By contrasting the bloody, torn, Spanish motherland with American strength and stability, *La Gaceta* echoed the sentiments of Ybor City Cubans. The declaration of a *tabaquera* captured the sentiments of Ybor’s Latinas as they prepared for their demonstration: “our hearts bleed for all civilized women; fascism shreds our sentiments and we will protest with the vigor of our bodies as we call for justice.”¹⁴³

Ybor City community members openly opposed the United States’ policy of non-intervention and viewed the platform of neutrality to be ineffective and irresponsible.¹⁴⁴ On May 3 the following antifascist pledge was printed in *La Gaceta*:

We disagree with all fascists. We disagree with all “neutrals” regardless of ethnic group or mutual aid society. We have arrived at a moment where being neutral is being fascist.¹⁴⁵

After the bombing of Guernica, mass efforts to raise money and purchase medical supplies were well underway. Ybor Latinos joined other Latino communities in New York, Harlem, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Antonio to agitate local and national sentiments. Specifically, they sought to push the United States, as the international protector of justice and democracy, to defend the Spanish Republic.

¹⁴³ “Entusiasmo de la Mujer,” *La Gaceta*, May 4, 1937, pp. 1.

¹⁴⁴ “La Obra de la Retaguardia de Tampa,” *La Gaceta*, April 30, 1937, pp.1. While this article provides a keen example of antifascist rhetoric, a survey of any day from April 29-May 8, will support this claim.

¹⁴⁵ “La Obra de la Retaguardia de Tampa,” *La Gaceta*, May 3, 1937, pp. 1.

The women's march of May 6, 1937 expressed issues of civil liberties, international solidarity, and U.S. citizenship. No strangers to protest, Ybor City's working-class men and women used a language of labor to articulate their concerns. The bombing of Guernica further rallied Ybor Latinas and exemplified the power of community mobilization. Finally, as women, Latinas demonstrated their cause to the larger Anglo Tampa community, highlighting their identity as Americans who embraced the cause of the Popular Front. Their demonstration was the capstone of the largest mobilization of Latinos prior to the postwar labor and civil rights movement of the United Farm Workers and of the immigrants' rights movement of today. Labor and community activists who called for massive participation and organized the grassroots demonstrations found fertile ground in Ybor City. The general mood was one of broad Latino unity with a clear class context, reflecting the working-class outlook of the overwhelmingly blue-collar composition of the Latino community of the United States.

The potential promise of the women's march seemed great, yet its resonance soon faded in the Tampa Anglo community. The Ybor City Latinas who stood united in downtown Tampa represented a new generation of working-class women within the context of Popular Front movement culture. The Popular Front in Latino Ybor City was a "movement of movements," a challenge to southern restrictions, a call for a new concept of ethnic Americanism, and a demand for international solidarity against fascism.¹⁴⁶ The presence of Latinas as protesters and organizers changed the conversation of who could demand power

¹⁴⁶ I borrow the phrase "movement of movements" from Van Gosse. For more on historiography of the new left, see "Movement of Movements: The Definition and Periodization of the New Left," in *A Companion to Post 1945 America*, eds. Roy Rozenweig and Jean-Christophe Agnew (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002): pp. 277-302.

through unity. These women of color would use the momentum from 1937 to find ways to demand visibility from Tampa officials on behalf of the entire community.

In Search of Civil Rights and Citizenship

Historians have characterized the Tampa demonstration of 1937 as an aberration.¹⁴⁷ In light of the event's broader context and further protests, I argue the opposite. What makes the women's demonstration relevant is not its unusualness, but its commonness. Like New York City, Chicago, San Antonio, and Los Angeles, Tampa was a labor town with an active union culture. Throughout Tampa's history, strikes were frequent and workers were militant. Women were an important part of this militant working-class solidarity. They marched with their fellow workers and demanded equal labor rights for themselves and their families. Tampa's diverse population was atypical in the American South, but it was not a national exception. During the 1930s, Latino communities were integral to and organized some of the era's most vocal strike actions as they fought for their rights as American workers and U.S. citizens. On May 6, 1937, the Latinas of Ybor City reminded Tampa and the United States that all Latinos demanded social justice and economic equality, for they had constructed a new political identity to add potency to their demands.

The demonstration of 1937 had different meanings to different constituents. For Anglo Tampa, the march threatened the balance of power in the cigar factories. Through ugly, racial piracy, Tampa's ruling elite maintained its control of the cigar factories and silenced Latinos through repression and exclusion. The *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that the march was simply a protest against the bombing of Guernica. While the bombing in Spain sparked the march, it was not the full cause. Ybor's Latinos united through their local

¹⁴⁷ Green, "Relief from Relief," pp. 1012-1013.

Frente Popular to demand social and economic justice as American citizens. Knowing the full meaning of the importance of their demonstration, Latinos planned every detail of the march from dress attire to parade route. Ybor's Latinas contested the policy of American neutrality and demanded their voices be heard and their bodies be seen in protest to economic injustice. Tampa's mayor may have overlooked the march's significance, but it would be impossible to ignore its coming repercussions.

Like the black freedom struggle, the Latino struggle for equality transcended place and time, and Latinas figured permanently in this struggle. Vicki Ruiz writes that celebrated Latina labor and civil rights leaders like Dolores Huerta are deemed exceptional only because "their specialness lies in their success, not their activism."¹⁴⁸ Long before Dolores Huerta, Latinas like those of Ybor City rallied their communities and showed that they too were entitled to the benefits of labor equality and U.S. citizenship. However, by the end of the 1940s, the American left moved away from its Popular Front stance and toward a more defensive approach. At this time, Latina activists like Luisa Moreno had to survive their greatest challenges: the blacklist, congressional hearings, and deportations.¹⁴⁹ In the wake of the repression of the Cold War, Latina labor activist Luisa Moreno was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee in San Diego, California and was deported in 1948. Luisa Moreno's last remarks spoke to the activities of Ybor City's Latinas on behalf of their community:

¹⁴⁸ Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Lives, Cannery Women: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1987): pp. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Zaragosa Vargas, *In the Cause of Freedom: Early Mexican American Political and Intellectual Activism and Transnational Struggle, 1946-1963* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), pp. 58-64.

They can talk about deporting me, but they can never deport the people I've worked with and with whom things were accomplished for the benefit of hundreds of thousands of workers— [those] things...can never be destroyed.¹⁵⁰

The Ybor Latinas Moreno helped unite in the summer of 1937 were the vanguard in this Spanish-speaking community's fight for labor and civil rights.

Conclusion

After World War II, political debate in the United States became skewed and distorted by Cold War repression. The American left was effectively marginalized. Progressives who still clung to “subversive values” were ostracized or, more seriously, prosecuted. Efforts to eliminate de facto discrimination and resulting social and economic inequality met with massive resistance, and the changing position of women challenged their roles in American society. Racism maintained white women at the top of a hierarchy of physical *beauty* and appeal, as exemplified by the proliferation of middle class images and values on television that endlessly portrayed and fictionalized contemporary American culture. Indeed, white features trumped both professional status and higher education.

Drawing from the conclusions of Glenda Gilmore and Tera Hunter, the following chapter shows how in a postwar society that defined citizenship by skin color, Latinas found ways to navigate political, economic, and social channels that were closed to their male counterparts. By analyzing the places women worked and the images they became, I also show the slow, subtle shift toward Latino entrance into Tampa society.

¹⁵⁰ Steve Murdoch, *Our Times*, Sept. 9, 1949, file 53, Kenny Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. For more information on Luisa Moreno and her deportation, see Ruiz, “Una Mujer Sin Fronteras,” pp. 19.

However, Latinas once again had to fight for use of public facilities, better schools, equal voting rights, and fair wages. Change came through a handful of strong-willed Latina civil rights workers, some of whom would question the limits of traditional white feminism.

CHAPTER 2: NEGLECTFUL MOTHERS, DISGRACEFUL RADICALS, AND FOREIGN TRAMPS: LABOR ACTIVISM AND THE STIGMA OF *LATINIDAD*

Introduction

In 1938 the Federal Writer's Project (FWP) published its report on the state of Florida. An impressive work of nearly eight thousand pages, the final product detailed the state from the Panhandle to the Keys. Intended for public consumption, the comprehensive study was broken into regional reports, distributed throughout Florida, and sold for two cents per booklet. Available at street-side stands and local drug stores, the cover-art featured a glowing sunset behind seafoam green waves that invited readers to open its pages. Inside, writers detailed the state's history, ecology, and culture in hope of promoting tourism to generate state funds. Within the Tampa booklet, however, the cultural study did not match the calming scene painted on the cover. Describing a city in turmoil, the report focused on Tampa's Latino population and specifically fretted about its women. FWP writers described Latinas as inadequate mothers, disloyal wives, and amoral daughters, concluding that Latinas, both black and white, were destined to "land in a house of prostitution."¹⁵¹

Painting Latinas as "prostitutes" in a public report, supported by state and federal funds, carried significant political power.¹⁵² Attacking Latina womanhood discredited the voices, requests, and demands of these women. It cast them as unworthy outsiders and

¹⁵¹ "Visit Tampa," Manuscript, Federal Writers' Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, pp. 273-274.

¹⁵² Ibid.

foreign deviants who did not uphold the supposed moral standards that undergirded white American society. In the late 1930s this was particularly influential because women's access to relief depended on their reputations. Regardless of Latinas' actual participation in sex work, the perception of power-holding Anglos that Ybor women were morally inferior seemingly legitimized the women's status as second-class citizens.¹⁵³

This chapter examines how the rise of Latina-led labor activism and political radicalism limited immigrant women's access to federal assistance, economic opportunity, and political representation within the United States. Like women of color throughout the nation, Latinas traditionally "lobbied to obtain services *for* their husbands, brothers, and sons."¹⁵⁴ By appealing to city officials as mothers in need of protection, Latinas employed gendered expectations to request support for economic equality and international solidarity.¹⁵⁵ By the late 1930s, however, Ybor women changed their strategies and chose to fight for themselves. Latinas confronted social stereotypes that valued men as providers and women as homemakers, illustrating the need for assistance to support single mothers, unwed women, and working women. Together, these Latina *feministas* organized for women's right to economic justice and a living wage—a principle that crossed borders.

¹⁵³ Linda Gordon, *Pittied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Sharon Hays, *Flat Broke with Children: Women in the Age of Welfare Reform* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁵⁴ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 149.

¹⁵⁵ By international solidarity, I am referring to Popular Front activism and international worker movement, with which Ybor women and men identified. For more, see Michael C. Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Verso 1997), pp. 3-21; Donna Gabaccia and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *American Dreaming, Global Realities: Rethinking US Immigration History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

Ybor Latinas would have never called themselves feminists, but they made choices based on their positions as working-women. Like other women of color, Latinas' forms of feminist expression have been misunderstood because their lives were inherently connected to the dictates of machismo culture. Feminism, however, is diverse, multi-faceted, and ever evolving. It makes space for competing ideologies that form alliances and networks and understand new paths to equality. In the case of Ybor Latinas, these women's transnational world-view empowered their labor activism and supported their collective actions, which we might view as a form of feminism.

Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry offer the term “social justice feminism” to understand women who “focused their energies particularly on working-women, mothers, low-income women, and children.”¹⁵⁶ These activists “believed women faced disadvantages as a sex,” but “needed more than sex equality.”¹⁵⁷ In the United States, social justice feminists united the struggle for women's rights with the call for racial and economic justice. Cobble argues that laboring-women activists saw the social movements of their day, mainly the labor and civil rights movements, as “the best vehicles to achieve their vision of women's rights in a more inclusive and egalitarian society.”¹⁵⁸ They became members of the Democratic Party and allies of the New Deal, which together changed “public opinion, workplace institutions, law, and public policy in profound and lasting

¹⁵⁶ Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry, “What ‘Lean In’ Leaves Out,” *Chronicle Review*, September 22, 2014, pp. B4-B5. For more, see Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, Astrid Henry, *Feminism Unfinished: A Short Surprising History of American Women's Movements* (New York, NY: Norton, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Cobble, Gordon, and Henry, *Feminism Unfinished*, pp. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

ways.” This perspective on women’s activism and pursuit of economic justice highlights the actions of U.S. women who sought representation through U.S. based movements. As Eileen Boris illustrates, examining feminism through a dichotomy where “equal rights is tied to a gender-first ideology” reaffirms the importance of the labor movement to the development of U.S. feminism.¹⁵⁹

Ybor women dedicated themselves to labor, but their expression of feminism reached beyond the confines of any U.S.-defined movement. Empowered by labor activism and supported by collective action, Latinas in Ybor City belonged to a transnational network of women across the Americas. Together they demanded not only equal civil and political rights, but also equal social and economic welfare. Like women’s activists throughout Latin America, Ybor *feministas* believed social and political mobilization, even for women’s rights, centered more on the family and community than the individual. Katherine Marino terms this movement “Pan-American Feminism,” an international feminism that “combined social democratic labor concerns with ‘equal rights’ demands in the context of an anti-fascist inter-American solidarity” during the 1930s and early 1940s.¹⁶⁰ This approach diverges from the western-centered, gender-first ideology and examines women across borders as feminist

¹⁵⁹ Eileen Boris, “‘No Right to Laying or Nursing Time’: Maternity Leave and the Question of US Exceptionalism,” in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History*, ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 174. This dichotomy precluded Popular Front alliances between the NWP and US labor reformers or the Communist Party; Katherine M. Marino, “Marta Vergara, Popular-Front, Pan-American, Feminism and the International Struggle for Women’s Rights in the 1930s,” *Gender & History* 26, no. 3 (November 2014): pp. 643; Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women’s Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

¹⁶⁰ Marino, “Marta Vergara, Popular-Front,” pp. 642-644.

actors who interpreted their American lives and, in the case of Ybor City Latinas, uniquely Southern experiences as elements of a broader global struggle.¹⁶¹

In Ybor City, women combined “Pan-American feminism” with a “differential consciousness,” which allowed Latinas to construct and reconstruct their identities in the midst of struggle.¹⁶² Unlike their Anglo-American neighbors who expected protective legislation from the U.S. government, immigrant Latinas in Tampa from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and elsewhere never experienced this support.¹⁶³ Latinas’ understanding of relief and welfare was connected to their feminist actions and their sense of belonging. As women living in the Jim Crow South who supported the Communist Party and aligned with the Popular Front, Latinas became increasingly unable to navigate their position between black and white. The public persona of Latinos and Latinas as radical foreigners who threatened the color-line and the political status-quo of Jim Crow Florida made Ybor women subject to red-baiting and moral judgments that questioned their integrity. While Ybor Latinas saw themselves as members of a community who deserved equal access to relief and aid, Anglo Tampa officials were the ones who determined belonging and rightful access to these entitlements.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” *Genders* 10 (Spring 1991): 1-24. See also Ednie Kaeh Garrison, “U.S. Feminism—Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave,” *Feminist Studies* 26 (Winter 2000): pp. 141-70. For feminism in the multi-ethnic and multi-racial South, see Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 7.

¹⁶³ Marino, “Marta Vegara, Popular-Front,” pp. 644-645.

¹⁶⁴ Lorrin Thomas, “How They Ignore Our Rights as American Citizens’: Puerto Rican Migrants and the Politics of Citizenship in the New Deal Era,” in *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging*, ed. Suzanne Oboler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 33-58; Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 1-15.

Latina feminist expression is a means to understand political strategies used by women to combat socioeconomic institutions that subordinated and suppressed their actions. Latinas lobbied for mother's aid and federal relief, protested the unequal treatment of women by the emerging welfare state, and endured the stigma and stereotype of the unruly, radical, un-American immigrant. Much like Italian women in New Jersey and New York City, Latinas' form of feminism was both transnational and radical. Latinas' political experience and place in American society were intrinsically connected to a sense of self that stretched across borders. While American feminist women workers may have idealized figures like Elizabeth Gurly Flynn and Emma Goldman, Latinas embraced the sisterhood of Luisa Capetillo.¹⁶⁵ Latinas' dedication to community and women's well-being motivated their actions. The path these women walked challenged the social and political structure of Anglo Tampa and altered the shape of its urban landscape. Ultimately, this struggle illustrates how Ybor Latinas' actions redefined the meaning of race and space as they applied their internationalist sense of activism to U.S. politics and labor concerns in Tampa, Florida.

The Limits of Mutual Aid and the Need for Relief

Before the Great Depression, mutual aid societies were the pillars of Ybor City. These organizations provided a space for ethno-centric social support in a city that relied on law and vigilantism to exclude people of color from channels of formal political and social

¹⁶⁵ Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of Chapel Hill Press, 2010); Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 7. Luisa Capetillo was an androgynous Afro-Puertorriqueña anarchist intellectual who wrote the first feminist treatise from a Latin American perspective while living in Ybor City in 1913. Capetillo's framework is based on a humanistic ideology that promotes the destruction of economic and social structures to free workers and women from subordination and exploitation. For more, see Luisa Capetillo, *Mi opinion sobre las libertades, derechos, y deberes de la mujer*. (Tampa, FL: Mujer, 1913).

power. Like their African American neighbors, Latinas and Latinos found strength through self-help, community organizations that united them through a common cultural experience and working-class consciousness. Locally termed “*centros*” (centers) or “*sociedades*” (societies), mutual aid created a collective space that celebrated Latino cultures, while providing health care, unemployment aid, old age support, and entertainment to the community. In the face of rampant electoral corruption, anti-radical terrorism, and Jim Crow barriers, Latinas and Latinos found strength through collective culture and looked to each other, rather than the local or federal government, to advocate for themselves.¹⁶⁶

Finding a strong mutual aid culture in Ybor City is hardly surprising. Ethnic associations stood at the center of cultural and political life in immigrant communities throughout the United States and the world. New York City, Hoboken, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Los Angeles boasted an impressive web of mutual aid in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.¹⁶⁷ Migrants from Spain, Italy, Sicily, Germany, and elsewhere used these unions to maintain cultural ties, organize labor, and provide health insurance and unemployment aid to members. While Ybor City’s *centros* performed similar functions, they also had unusual cross-national connections. Locally based and community-organized, the city’s Latino *sociedades* were part of a mutual aid network founded in Havana. Because the women and men who worked in the Ybor factories were the same who cut sugar cane, picked tobacco, herded cattle, and, of course, rolled cigars in Cuba, they created their own tradition of community-based self-help on the island and brought their

¹⁶⁶ Robert Kerstein, *Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa* (Gainesville, Fl. University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 48.

¹⁶⁷ Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, pp. 140.

established organizations to Florida. In Cuba, mutual-aid became so popular that wealthy Cubans created clubs to provide similar benefits to members and maintain a class divide. The *Círculo Cubano*, *Centro Español*, and *Centro Asturiano* were all local charters of Cuban mutual aid societies, which maintained an intimate connection to culture, politics, and labor at home.¹⁶⁸ Ybor Latinos used these societies as hubs of local civic support and cultural extensions of their families and communities.

Ybor City's *centros* defined the physical landscape of the immigrant neighborhood. These buildings were massive structures that stood proudly on La Avenida Séptima (Seventh Avenue) and Eighth Avenue, the city's central thoroughfares. Following the architectural traditions of Cuba and Spain, the exteriors of the buildings featured Moorish arches, alabaster columns, and ornately tangled wrought iron. The interiors of the *sociedades* rivaled the grandeur of their facades. Elaborate dance floors, marble staircases, and hand-carved moldings illustrated the pride and importance of these structures to Ybor Latinas and Latinos. After the completion of the *Centro Asturiano*, the *Tampa Times* noted that it was the "most beautiful building in the South," a high compliment for an Anglo newspaper to pay a Latino landmark.¹⁶⁹ This building featured a 1,200-seat theater, cantina and ballroom, library stocked with works from authors like Miguel Cervantes and José Martí, and state-of-the-art hospital. The other *centros* were no less impressive; for example, the palazzo exterior of the *Centro Espanol* welcomed members to a mosaic foyer and mahogany salon. A grand double staircase led to the second floor ballroom and meeting space where the *sociedad* provided

¹⁶⁸ Tampa Report, Manuscript, Federal Writers' Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, pp. 106-139, 313-337, 342-344.

¹⁶⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 15 and 17, 1914, pp. 2, quoted in Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 201. Photographs courtesy of the Ybor City Museum Society, Ybor City, FL.

cultural and language classes, as well as a weekly dance and social.¹⁷⁰ Much like the Centro Asturiano, the Centro Espanol owned and operated a hospital for members. The Círculo Cubano was a “cathedral for workers,” decorated with intricate tile work and vibrant stained glass windows. Here members paid weekly dues for access to benefits like the cantina and pharmacy as well as the library and lavishly painted 70,000 square foot dance hall.¹⁷¹ For Latino immigrants who were working-class at best, the desire to dedicate a portion of their meager earnings to support these beautiful and expensive buildings highlights their importance. These structures gave immigrants a sense of place in a seemingly foreign environment. Walking through the streets of Ybor, surrounded by red-brick Cuban cigar factories and massive *centros*, someone could forget they were in the United States.

The only Latino *centro* that deviated from this international framework was the Unión Martí-Maceo, the Afro-Cuban club.¹⁷² In 1902, after Tampa instituted de jure segregation, city officials feared Cubans’ perspective on race. Because Latino immigrants understood race in broader terms than Anglos, Cuban women and men did not abide by segregationist policies or ban Afro-Cubans from public spaces.¹⁷³ According to anthropologist Susan

¹⁷⁰ Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*.

¹⁷¹ Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida 1998), pp. 180-181.

¹⁷² The Unión Martí-Maceo was named after the Cuban writer and martyr José Martí and the Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo. Both men fought in the Cuban War for Independence. Their names together emphasized racial equality and reminded community members that the struggle for *la raza* had not ended.

¹⁷³ The term “la raza” is based on the idea of the “cosmic race” idealized by Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos. This ideology proposes a fifth race that is the combination of all races across the Americas. To gain support and rally poor Cubans during the Wars for Independence from Spain, supporters used this terminology to perpetuate the idea of a “Cuba for Cubans” free from Spanish control and imperial influence. See José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica* (Madrid: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925); Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*

Greenbaum, Tampa's "rigid patterns of segregation" were not "replicated in Ybor City." From the community's development there was "no provision for a Negro section, and [in theory] cigar makers' wages depended on skills rather than color."¹⁷⁴ Many Afro-Cuban cigar-workers found it difficult to advance to the level of a full *tabaquero* (one of the highest paying and most respected jobs in the factory); however, the position was determined by the Spanish or Anglo owner, not fellow cubanos. This sense of cultural oneness was particularly strong among working-class Cubans fleeing the Spanish government and U.S. military occupation in pursuit of a sustained "Cuba for Cubans" through the dedication to *Cuba libre*. In this political atmosphere, Afro-Cubans were considered Cubans first and Africans second; therefore, the Círculo Cubano initially accepted all *cubanos*, both black and white. To say, however, that Ybor Latinos ignored racial difference is a myth. On the island, the legacy of Afro-Cuban enslavement endured, and racial prejudice persisted. From the classrooms to the tobacco fields, the seats of congress to the shop room floors, the dancehalls to the hospitals, Afro-Cubans lived as second-class citizens. The philosophy of anti-racism empowered women and men but did little to improve access to education, equal employment, or political representation for women and men of color. But it did allow white Cubans to dismiss racial inequality through hollow ideology. Just like "in Cuba, racial discrimination in Ybor City was subtle, consisting of behaviors and attitudes that likely would have escaped the notice of white southerners in Tampa."¹⁷⁵

(Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 3rd ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

¹⁷⁴ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 63.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 63; 121-122; 179-223.

In Ybor the perception of race deviated from the U.S. one-drop rule, but racism lingered under the surface of daily social life. Blackness carried socio-economic limits that influenced the Afro-Latinos' access to power within the community. As previously mentioned, Afro-Cubans rarely rose to the ranks of *tabaquero* or *selector* inside a cigar factory—these positions were reserved for white, Spanish men first and white, Cuban men second. Despite the relative progressivism of their Cuban neighbors, Spanish bosses saw Afro-Cubans as inferior workers and paid them accordingly. In addition to professional limitations, Afro-Cubans were never incorporated into the initial leadership of the *Círculo Cubano* and had no official representation inside the cross-national labor union, *La Resistencia*. The cohesive Cuban Club that embraced “all Cubans” existed for little more than a year. In 1900, white Cubans decided that black and white Cubans should not belong to the same organizations. Ybor Cubans segregated their cultural centers in accordance with the demands of Tampa politicians, southern law, and American racial culture. By establishing the *Sociedad Martí-Maceo*, Afro-Cubans sought to preserve the dignity that respectability segregation stripped away.

This process of segregation says as much about who Cubans wanted to be in Ybor City as it does about who Cubans thought they could be in the United States. While the promises of the Cuban War for Independence were not realized on the island, there was a chance that Ybor City women and men of the working-class could bond together and rise above a culture of racism and difference developed by centuries of colonialism and imperialism. Florida as a southern state, however, was not a place where interracialism thrived; instead it was a place where anti-radicalism and nativism flourished. In Tampa, the racial politics of the *Círculo Cubano*, combined with the radicalism of *tabaqueros*, made the

community vulnerable. White Cubans abandoned their idealism in exchange for the hope of safety and acceptance. While neither was found, this choice relinquished the promise of a lasting *sociedad*, and by extension, community for all.¹⁷⁶

Beyond the organization of each mutual aid society, all *centros* provided valuable services to members. Women, men, and families chose which *centro* to join based on the benefits available, price of membership, cultural affiliation and sometimes race. All *sociedades* acted as social clubs where men could play dominoes, sip *café con leche*, debate politics, and organize labor. Although predominately men's social spaces, women created *comités de damas* (women's committee) that planned community picnics, coordinated May Day celebrations, and arranged cultural activities.¹⁷⁷ Anglo writers for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) were generally skeptical of Ybor City's collectivism, and they reported that "the institutions which have been the greatest agencies in giving help...in the community are the social clubs."¹⁷⁸ *Centros* offered loans, death benefits, health insurance, medical services, and unemployment insurance to dues-paying members, making them one of the most reliable forms of aid to working-class women and men of color.¹⁷⁹ "The only detrimental effect of these clubs on its members," wrote one WPA employee, "is the tendency to keep them together so that the probabilities of learning the English language and

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 126-127.

¹⁷⁷ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 106-139, 313-337, 342-344; Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*, pp. 202.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 56.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 106-139, 313-337, 342-344; Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, pp. 140-143.

acquiring habits proper for the complex environment outside the club is lowered.”¹⁸⁰ While the WPA lauded the clubs’ services, it dually denigrated Latinos’ independence and lack of cultural assimilation.

Unemployment insurance became a particularly important benefit after the collapse of the cigar industry. As women rose as the primary or exclusive breadwinners, unemployment insurance through the *centros* was integral to their families’ survival. In exchange for dues payments of \$1.50 per week, a woman or man with dependents was guaranteed access to unemployment insurance of \$55 per month. Likewise, with the exception of Union Martí-Maceo, single persons without dependents could receive \$24 per month.¹⁸¹ This benefit came with free medical care and prescriptions and, until the Depression, was available to persons who were unemployed, regardless of gender or marital status. The problem with unemployment insurance and mutual aid societies, however, was that these institutions could not afford to pay members if members did not pay dues. Latinos and Latinas could miss three months of due payments before their membership was suspended.¹⁸² Furthermore, due to the rise in elderly people in need and cost of care, *sociedades* required that new members be under fifty years of age upon application. If *viejos* (elderly people) lost their membership, they would be unable to rejoin the association.¹⁸³ Mr. Garcia, an elderly resident of Ybor, explained to the WPA that his greatest fear was losing membership at the Centro Asturiano. As a man over fifty, he and his wife would have been unable to rejoin the *sociedad* if their

¹⁸⁰ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 56.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 358.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 355-358, 385-387.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 385-387.

membership were discontinued.¹⁸⁴ Senora Garcia, who was likely the only gainfully employed member of the household in the late 1930s, would have felt particularly responsible to provide for her family and may have feared losing unemployment support for her partner. While most *centros* boasted an average of five thousand members prior to the Depression, extreme economic distress caused a 50 percent drop in membership by 1940.¹⁸⁵ Of the remaining members, nearly 20 percent were supported by old age insurance; years earlier, an average of 3 percent of members were supported by old age and unemployment aid combined.

As the Depression deepened and membership rolls thinned and the need for aid increased, Ybor City's mutual aid societies cut benefits that were crucial to community survival. Because the unemployment benefits originally sustained working women and men through illnesses, strikes, and gaps in employment, it ensured economic safety in the absence of labor. When the role of wage earning head-of-household shifted from men to women, the *sociedades* cut unemployment insurance and restricted aid to the elderly and those gravely ill. While Latinos bounced between WPA rolls and menial labor, Latinas found consistent, although low-paying, work in cigar factories. Due to the cuts in wages and the limited hours, some women worked a triple day between the factory, the WPA sewing room or the *chinchal*, and the home.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 385.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.; The standard of dismissal from the *sociedad* varied between organizations. While the Centro Asturiano and Círculo Cubano permitted three months of delinquent payments, the Centro Espanol allowed only two. For more, see Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 357.

¹⁸⁶ A *chinchal* is a small, cigar-making shop. These small businesses were often in the home of a community member. None were connected to any major cigar manufacturer. Profits were small.

Reasons for these cuts to benefits were twofold. On the one hand, *sociedades* were overextended; the immense number of unemployed and under-employed men made it impossible for *centros* to pay unemployment insurance to each Latino in need. On the other hand, however, cutting benefits was a gendered decision. Despite the financial strain on the *sociedades*, expenses for men's social activities remained robust, and leaders of the clubs sought to uphold Latino manhood, at the expense of economic aid. As gendered spaces, *sociedades* did not welcome women in leadership circles or even cantinas. They did not sip Havana Club with their husbands, brothers, and sons and were not welcome in the smoking lounge for political discussions. With the exception of community events, Latinas stayed home, missing out on events such as the nightly performances by international bands. The Union Martí-Maceo charter declared the *centro*'s purpose was for members "to meet outside the house in a way acceptable to men of dignity," reflecting how *sociedades* of the 1930s chose to protect social infrastructures for the few rather than aid for all.¹⁸⁷

With the absence of unemployment aid, neither married nor single women could afford personal illness, pregnancy, or the loss of employment. Women carried the burden of supporting their immediate, and at times extended, families without the possibility of aid to supplement unemployed family members. Dolores Patino remembered being a young, pregnant, working-class woman with a household full of dependent family members during the Depression: "I worked until six, seven months before I had Sylvia [(her first child)]. And then I left because [the cigar factory] fired me.... With Gloria [(second child)], I worked until

¹⁸⁷ Martí-Maceo Minutes, October 29, 1900, Unión Sociedad Martí-Maceo Records, Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, quoted in Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 189.

the last day.”¹⁸⁸ Like most working-class Latinas in Ybor City, Patino could not afford to be without work, and the unemployment insurance and maternity support once provided by the mutual aid societies had vanished. Because Patinos’s labor cared for her husband, mother, grandmother, two cousins, and two children, all of whom lived under one roof in a rented, two-bedroom shotgun house, she could not afford to refuse work. “As soon as they gave me the chance...I was back [at the factory] again,” Patino recounted. “They call me, I say I cannot lose the chance. I got to work. I need the money,” she added.¹⁸⁹ Patino’s mother and elderly cousins cared for her children and those of her neighbors while they worked to support their families, and her husband continuously hopped between *chinchales* and WPA work. The only consistent paycheck for her household, however, was from Patino’s work at the large cigar factories. The legacy of community-centered self-help began to fracture under the pressure of the crumbling national economy. By the late 1930s, both the success and failure of Latinas’ households rested solely on their shoulders.

For decades, self-help through the *centros* guaranteed security for working Latinas and Latinos in Ybor City; but in the late 1930s, this system required drastic cultural change that never came. Aid through the *sociedades*, while available to some women, was intended to benefit men. One community member recalled that women members paid their dues but “the only time they [got] benefits [was] when they die[d].” Even if the women worked, aid payments were largely “just for the men.”¹⁹⁰ The system of mutual aid rested on dignity and

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Hewitt, “Women in Ybor City: An Interview with a Woman Cigarworker,” *Tampa Bay History*, 7, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 1985): pp. 164-165.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Interview with José by Susan Greenbaum. Quoted in Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 178.

male employment, not women's needs. Community members thought that male idleness threatened the internal power structures of the family and the community. While dedicating the majority of available funds to men's social spaces hindered women's personal security as independent earners or family providers, *sociedades* still provided diversions, education, and social acceptance that Latinos could not find beyond the confines of the community. Women, like men, supported the *sociedad* as a space for cultural consistency and never challenged the *centros* on aid. Latinas did not seek to take benefits from their male-counterparts; they sought to maintain a certain way of life for all.¹⁹¹ As the community system of mutual aid began to falter, the development of a stronger welfare state started to emerge. Outside the ethnic enclave, women and men could possibly find solutions to poverty and unemployment, but they would come at the cost of leaving the community and negotiating a space inside Tampa society. Rather than find internal solutions to this growing problem, Latinas looked to the federal government for security and much needed support.

Neglectful Mothers and Foreign Tramps

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's promise to aid citizens through sweeping, New Deal reforms provided hope to Latina mothers in need. Latinas and Latinos who once relied on community organizations to provide social support wearily turned to the federal government in search of relief. Directors of the U.S. Children's Bureau in the Department of Labor, Grace Abbott and Katherine Lenroot, advocated for single mothers and lobbied to add Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) to the Social Security Act of 1935. Originally, the drafters intended ADC to assist all children cared for by women without a male breadwinner. They asked that cash aid be coupled with social work services to remove the stigma of public

¹⁹¹ For more, see Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, pp. 149.

assistance. As the bill moved through Congress, however, key aspects of the legislation were removed and reformed. First, politicians removed stipulations for federal oversight intended to ensure equal treatment of all women applicants, regardless of race, ethnicity, and marital status. Second, control of ADC was shuffled from the U.S. Children's Bureau to the Social Security Administration, and the program's budget was cut from \$120 to \$25 million, thereby eliminating the hope to supply single mothers with funds that equaled a living wage. Finally, Congress mandated supervision rather than approving casework. This provision allowed ADC to reduce the number of children eligible by restricting illegitimate children and children of color for the dispersal of funds now came at the discretion of the official who interviewed women and those who consented to consistent supervision as a condition for receiving aid.¹⁹² In communities like Ybor City, these changes to the bill had tangible effects.

As women of color living in Florida, Latinas' racial status and cultural difference often barred them from access to aid. This blockade, however, was a byproduct of segregationist and nativist principles, not necessary the law itself. The adjustment difference between ADC's original framework and its final version in the Society Security Act permitted discrimination since aid was decided at the discretion of the state and local social worker. Social work requirements and the federal government funneled ADC monies to the states, and in turn, funds were disbursed to mothers in need. At the state level, local social workers decided who received aid by judging who was "motherly." Just as elite activists who advocated for the creation of ADC in Washington were "influenced by their own values," state-level social workers in Jim Crow Florida had distinct visions of who was worthy of

¹⁹² Gordon, *Pittied but Not Entitled*.

support.¹⁹³

In Tampa, Latinas were known to be politically radical, anticlerical workers. These women were leery of religion, specifically Catholicism. “The Cubans of Ybor City are not a religious people,” the WPA wrote.¹⁹⁴ It added, “The fact that the church took part with the oppressors of the island and the conduct of the clergy were the two main reasons for the Cubans having lost respect and devotion to faith.”¹⁹⁵ Women and men associated religion with the Spanish government and disavowed any connection to church institutions. José Vega Díaz, a *tabaquero* and community member, saw the church as a space of repression: “Victor Hugo say[s], in every town they had one light, a school teacher. And the preachers, they put out that light.”¹⁹⁶ To keep watch on these institutions associated with imperialism (and vigilantism in the South), Ybor City created a community watch, which spied on the city’s Catholic churches until the 1950s. For Latinas and Latinos who devoted themselves to politics and labor, the church’s disavowal of unionism, abuse of working-class people, and refusal to support the Spanish Civil War made religious institutions spaces of suspicion rather than centers of moral guidance. “When I remember [attending church as a child in Cuba] I laugh because of all the lies, so big,” noted another community member. He continued, “I have arrived at the firm conviction that religion as Karl Marx said is the opium of the people. I do not believe there is any God, and neither do I believe in any superstition.

¹⁹³ Ibid., pp. 152.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in Ibid.

Whosoever believes in God is a true fool.”¹⁹⁷ This rejection of religion did little to curry favor with local Anglo aid officials and social workers. As a result, Latinas in Ybor were not perceived as high-priority recipients of the meager monies provided to Florida for mothers in need. From the perspective of Anglos, Latinas challenged the Christian standards of American morality, thereby reinforcing stereotypes of Latinas as unwomanly and therefore unmotherly.

Religious differences between Latinas and ADC officials contributed to assumptions about the quality of these women as mothers, and Latinas’ dedication to labor and work only exacerbated this issue. Since the underlying philosophy of ADC was to provide enough aid to keep women in the home as full-time mothers and homemakers, recipients could not work. Women were to uphold the place of educator, caretaker, and wife, as imagined by the Christian men who approved the law, rather than the women reformers who imagined mothers’ pensions. Ybor Latinas always worked, and by the late 1930s, they were among the 20 percent of urban households with predominantly female wage earners and heads of households.¹⁹⁸ While in theory mothers’ aid freed labor and relief positions for men, Ybor City Latinas were even less likely than their female counterparts to get these positions. Losing one’s job or relief employment would likely result in the hire of an unemployed Anglo rather than a desperate Latino. For Latina mothers, their positions as workers came with a stigma of dishonor from the perspective of Tampa Anglos. According to them, a Latina who spent her day at the factory “was too tired to give her child the necessary attention needed.” Therefore, “from the start, [Latina and Latino] children were handicapped

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Gerardo Cantina, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 526-527.

¹⁹⁸ Gordon, *Pittied but Not Entitled*.

in their education and their upbringing.”¹⁹⁹ ADC officials expected women to work in the home and be the moral compasses of families who reared their children as good Christians and lawful citizens.

While Latinas had no choice but to work and ensure the survival of their families, WPA officials linked women’s dedication to work with unruly children. One WPA official recorded: “Home education of children was very meager after school. What [young Latinas and Latinos] kn[e]w, they merely learn[ed] from school and the gang.”²⁰⁰ Administrators detailed in public reports that the absence of parents from the home “most of the day and the night” resulted in “evil effects” and “vulgar habits” for both young men and young women. A young Latino, observers claimed, “would go out to the corner grocery store, café, etc., where the neighborhood gang met and there indulge in plays, conversation, and other things with boys of his age and older men.” Without the vigilant eye of a mother, “the young boys learned from other ones, all about the sexes, and their mysteries.”²⁰¹ Tampa WPA officials understood this kind of education as the responsibility of the parents and assumed the absence of mother resulted in “delinquent” boys and “fallen” girls.²⁰² In Ybor City, “instead of [parents] explaining to the child the difference in sexes and their habits together and the evil of such habits,” administrators argued that Latina mothers and Latino fathers, “merely kept the [young boy] guessing at such an important subject.”²⁰³ Likewise, officials stated that

¹⁹⁹ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 40.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 274.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 244-247, 273.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-247; 273.

despite the advancements in education and public health, “young girls [were] not told anything about sex and their consequences” by their mothers and therefore, “many of the girls’ delinquencies started from grammar school.” They added, “What girls learned [was] through hearsay in which the evils following [were] not known to them,” and young Latinas and Latinos “without the vigilance of their parents formed plans and finally carried them out in some secluded place.”²⁰⁴ As a result of unplanned pregnancies, young Latinas were trapped by “unsatisfactory matchings,” and young men were “treated daily for venereal disease.”²⁰⁵

Anglo government officials viewed the Latina and Latino laborers as parents who did not have the cultural capacity to raise productive, law-abiding, virtuous children. Administrators who wrote and published these reports understood immigrant Cubans as both laborers and radicals and saw their children as extensions of the parents’ corrupt values. This characterization confirmed the exclusion of Tampa Cubans from relief rolls and encouraged the inclusion of ADC officials, whom the city considered the most deserving. By using supposedly unbiased government reports to explore the community, officials painted young Latinos and Latinas as hopeless. Aid and relief could not supersede the failures of their home-lives, for the absence of mothers and the natural sexuality of young Cubans ostensibly created a circuitous cycle that could not be overcome by the state. This justification confirmed the support of white families over those in the city’s most destitute communities of color.

The believed failure of Latinas as mothers dually legitimized Anglos’ perception of

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Latinas as distrustful wives and sexual objects. WPA officials used their position to illustrate that these working mothers not only morally failed their children, but also disrupted their homes with insincere marital commitments and inherent desires for extramarital sex. In the published WPA study on the state of Florida, the commission explained that the “Depression has caused many married men to lose their jobs,” and as a result, “these unemployed men not having anything to give their wives, their marriages usually ended in separation, each going back to their families respectively to live as best as possible.” A Latina who “being free, considered [herself her] own keeper and went so far as to go out with any man that please her without her father’s consent.” The report continued to explain that as a result of this seemingly independent and unconscionable behavior, Latino fathers allegedly refused to endorse such “disgrace” and ordered the young women “to obey or move out of the house.” As a result, “the young girls usually became mistresses or went to a house of prostitution. Those that became mistresses end in the same place sooner or later.”²⁰⁶

Latino husbands, fathers, and single men fared little better in the WPA. Characterized as members of the “poor miserable class” and men who were not “given the means of developing their energies, abilities, and intellect,” Tampa officials saw Latinos as “instruments to political machinations” who solely sought “an easy way to predominance.”²⁰⁷ According to the WPA, while Latinos “were received, [upon arrival], with affection and sympathy, they never thought of the future,” because “Cuba was near at hand.” Therefore, “the actual condition to which the Cubans in Tampa have reached cannot be blamed on anyone. [The Cuban] is the only one that is responsible. All errors must be made answerable

²⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 245.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 287.

to the one who commits them.” Furthermore, these Latinos were described as irresponsible heads of households who, despite their unending dedication to Cuban idealism, brought with them the “defects” of “indifference.” The WPA likewise believed that the “virtue of thrift was something completely strange” to Latinos, for “whatever they earned they would spend.... They lacked the will power of retaining and knowing the full value of a dollar earned.”

As a result, officials opined that these men without work, savings, or the ability to contribute to the family, solely dreamed of a better life through reorganization of the political system. According to the WPA, Ybor Latinos, with little education, “believe that they have a right to live from the national budget, and entirely disregard their own means of livelihood. Without the necessary preparation, they believe they have the right to govern and command others, without knowing how to govern themselves.”²⁰⁸ These dependent, unemployed men were cast as unfaithful husbands who “have temptations; possibly due to climate.” Regardless of the reason, continued the official, “it is a fact that [the Cuban] is never satisfied with his wife, and is always desirous of having a mistress: that is, another one that is not united to him by the indissoluble bonds of matrimony.”²⁰⁹

Latinas defied, in body and action, what Anglo officials considered womanly, just as Latinos challenged what was responsible and manly. The state officials condemned Latinas as irresponsible mothers because of cultural differences and dedication to labor outside the home. As neglectful parents, the moral corruption of Latina daughters and Latino sons was believed to be inevitable—if the mother and the father lacked any sense of morality, how

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 290.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 297.

could the children be any different? Latina sexuality became a key component of WPA reporting in Florida. As women of color living in the South, Latina exoticism sparked interest and fear. Just as white Southerners lusted over African American women, the Anglos of Tampa viewed Latinas similarly. While it is possible that some Latinas looked to sex work to support their families during the Depression, most were able to find work in the cigar factories, WPA sewing rooms, and *chinchales*. Sex work would have been a viable choice for some women in need, but it was not the inevitable path for all. By attacking Latinas' roles as workers and mothers, these foreign women became hypersexualized by the Anglo men who observed them. The women's ethnic and racial differences, compounded with their dedication to paid labor, tested Anglo American southern sensibilities. Latinos, conversely, were the antithesis of what Anglo officials considered American and masculine, as they were often out of work due to the mechanization of factories and the difficulty of joining the WPA as men of color. They were viewed as foreign radicals, disloyal husbands, and irresponsible fathers. But as unemployed men, their idleness made them seem most dangerous to society. At a time when Latinas and Latinos desperately needed to leave the confines of their community in search of economic stability, Anglos were resistant to including these women and men on the aid and relief rolls.

Much like ADC employees, WPA administration allocated relief based on perceived need. Women who did not find work in large cigar factories or have male support applied for relief positions with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and oftentimes found it. While men found it difficult to cross the line from Ybor City to Tampa, women did so with relative ease. Despite the WPA's portrayal of Latinas as sexualized workers and bad mothers, it never mentioned the women's political affiliation or their dedication to politics. Perhaps it

was the assumption that Ybor women were not as radical as their husbands that allowed them to find spaces on the WPA relief rolls. But they did not qualify for all positions. Coveted, albeit low-paying jobs like sewing-room positions were more likely to go to Anglo women than Latinas. Like the ADC's desire to police acceptable womanly behavior and standards of mothering, the WPA in Tampa saw Anglo women in need as higher priority to the working Latinas.

The challenges of the Great Depression had a tremendous impact on Latinas' relationship with the U.S. government and altered the fabric of Ybor City's community networks. Because the *centros* could not support the needs of the growing unemployed membership, Latinas and Latinos turned to the federal government for survival. The passage of the Economic Security Act of 1935 "fundamentally redefine[d]" what men and women "could expect from the state in terms of a 'safety net' but also in terms of a minimum basis of equality."²¹⁰

The Demand for a Living Wage

In 1937 the Flor de Cuba cigar factory represented Tampa's urban evolution. Once a three-story, redbrick building full of male, artisan cigar workers, the building had become the site of the Ybor City sewing room, where four hundred desperate women found relief through unskilled labor. The Great Depression not only changed Tampa's industrial identity; it also challenged the city's traditional understanding of space and power and transformed the physical shape of its urban centers.

The sewing room, located on Twentieth Avenue and Twelfth Street, stood in the heart

²¹⁰ Thomas, "How They Ignore Our Rights," pp. 35.

of Ybor City.²¹¹ By the 1930s Anglos regularly traveled to the Latino *barrio* to work in WPA projects. For the first time in Tampa history, Anglos shared space, labor, and struggle with their Latino neighbors. Although some historians point to this convergence as a moment that facilitated interracial and interethnic collaboration, I argue the contrary.²¹² The movement of Tampa Anglos into Ybor City for relief work did not encourage a sense of common solidarity, but made a spectacle of difference. For example, in Latino-dominated Ybor City, Anglo men and Anglo women held more positions on relief rolls than their Latino and Latina peers. Moreover, projects with Anglo and Latino workers were segregated—Latinas and Latinos did not work beside Anglos but apart from them. The segregation of relief work reminded Latinos of their own place in Tampa society and their lack of power within the American political system. This likewise emphasized the ethnic enclave as a center of Depression-induced poverty.

The recession of 1937 caused drastic cuts to relief programs throughout the country and incited mass lay-offs nationwide. The effect of the 250,000-dollar cut to the Florida budget meant local relief projects had to reduce their numbers, despite the growing demand for public assistance.²¹³ Because the state's constitution prohibited levying taxes for welfare programs, Florida relied on meager property taxes to support public assistance. With a 58 percent decrease in federal funds, Florida's WPA officials had to decide which programs to

²¹¹ "Chungas y No Chungas," *La Gaceta*, July 8, 1937, pp. 1. Image courtesy of University of South Florida, Special Collections.

²¹² Elna C. Green, "Relief from Relief: The Tampa Sewing-Room Strike of 1937 and Women's Right to Welfare," *Journal of American History* (March 2009): pp. 1012-1037.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

cut.²¹⁴ They elected to trim the number of relief workers in women's sewing rooms.

A central goal of the Social Security Act was to give idle men purpose and the ability to maintain their place as providers. This motivation was similar to that of other federal welfare policies, which were dominated by the belief that men without occupations were unruly and dangerous. Government officials on the state and federal level considered women's need for relief less dire. "Mother's Aid" operated under the assumption that women had male caretakers, and if they did not, it assumed the state would step in as both caretaker and supervisor.²¹⁵ The state did not conceive of women as potential workers, but rather as dependents, and the consequences were grim for women who wanted to work. In Florida, the WPA board employed 300 Anglos and 100 Latinas in the Ybor City sewing room. To meet the demands of the budgetary cuts, WPA administrators decided to reduce the workforce by 22 percent. After all, officials believed women could find alternate support from male family members. More importantly, however, the state's WPA board hoped to avoid a public-relations fiasco and believed women were less likely than men to protest their loss of employment.²¹⁶

On July 1, 1937 the Tampa Relief Board officially dismissed eighty-eight Anglo women from their jobs at the Ybor City sewing room. Other county administrators, who also laid off workers, reported minimal discontent but assured Tallahassee officials that their "keen foresight" had limited the power of the workers and the possible rise of a strike.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Gordon, *Pittied but Not Entitled*.

²¹⁶ Chungas y No Chungas," *La Gaceta*, July 9, 1937, pp. 1.

²¹⁷ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 2.

Perhaps Tampa WPA officials approached the layoffs from a similar perspective. Well aware of Latinas' legacy of labor organizing, they may have sought to avoid a potential protest by releasing Anglo women from their posts rather than Latinas. Because the WPA factory was located in Ybor City where the windows of businesses openly displayed signs pledging support for the Popular Front and Worker's Alliance officials hoped to maintain control and peace in the relief project. Despite Tampa WPA officials' hopes, women in Hillsborough County reacted much differently than those in the surrounding regions. One administrator reported, "The drastic reduction in the quota of women workers in the Florida centers has resulted in considerable unrest among the workers."²¹⁸ For the first time in Tampa's history, Ybor Latinas and Anglo women staged a protest and struck together for equal access to relief and a living wage.

²¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 1.



Figure 5. Translated: “The people of Cuba lovingly aid the Spanish infant. Help us make 1938 more pleasant.”

Image courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Planning began at the *Centro Obrero* (Labor Temple), located next door to the *Círculo Cubano* in Ybor City. Latina strike coordinators Adela Santiesteban and Mabel Hagan planned a meeting with leaders of the Worker’s Alliance to request assistance and support. Pablo Piniella, a Latino labor organizer, and Eugene Poulnot, a well-known communist and political organizer, met the women and agreed to support the strike, despite laws banning strikes on WPA projects.²¹⁹ Because WPA positions were considered public welfare and not full-time employment, state and federal law prohibited strikes and reserved

²¹⁹ Green, “Relief from Relief,” pp. 1019-1021.

the right to fire any and all laborers who disrupted a relief project through labor protest.²²⁰

Pinella and Poulnot promised to stand in solidary with the women, mobilize male unions and WPA projects, and support the women with food and provisions throughout the duration of the strike. In essence, male organizers and workers agreed to form a men's auxiliary to assist the women during the strike. This agreement represented a distinct and significant shift in gender roles. In this way, the Worker's Alliance recognized the shared struggle of women's unemployment.

On the morning of July 8, 1937, 312 women workers reported to the WPA sewing room. The 212 Anglo workers climbed the stairs to the third floor and took their seats, as the 100 Latina relief workers filtered into their second floor workspace. At 9:00 am, Anglo and Latina women stopped their spinning wheels. Silence replaced the roar of the machines. Mabel Hagan and Adela Santiesteban stood to address their fellow women workers and administrative staff. Hagan addressed Anglo women in English from the third-floor sewing room, while Santiesteban spoke in Spanish to Latina workers on the second floor.

Standing at the front of their respective sewing rooms, Hagan and Santiesteban read their demands and grievances. First, the striking women called for the reinstatement of all 88 laid-off women. Second, the women described their poverty and need for an adequate living wage, demanding a 20 percent increase in wages to accommodate the rising cost of food and clothing.²²¹ Invoking a sense of national solidary and shared struggle, Hagan exclaimed to the Anglo women, "Let's stand together like they do in the north... that's the way to get your

²²⁰ Ibid.; Donald S. Howard, *The WPA and Federal Relief Policy* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1943).

²²¹ Chungas y No Chungas," *La Gaceta*, July 9, 1937, pp. 1; Green, "Relief from Relief.

rights!” Hagan was likely inspired by the solidarity of the General Motors strike in Flint, Michigan during December 1936, and she incorrectly saw striking as anathema to Ybor City.²²² In her attempt to inspire a room full of women looking to secure their space on the relief roll, Hagan overlooked the legacy of labor organizing in the South, particularly Tampa. The Latinas striking with Hagan had a long relationship with labor organizing and understood how to navigate the tumultuous waters of Tampa politics. As Latina and Anglo women began the first sit-down strike against the WPA in the state of Florida, they saw the strike from different perspectives.

Reactions to the women’s strike evoked excitement from Latinos. Ybor City’s Latino newspaper, *La Gaceta*, proudly announced the strike and endorsed the women’s actions and demands. One Latino writer offered the paternalistic blessing: “With the strength of heart that comes with being a man, it is justice to recognize that the petitions and demands of the women workers are reasonable.” He continued, playing on fears that women without relief would be forced to become prostitutes, “We do not wish that these eighty-eight women and their sisters become fallen women due to hunger and desperation. Will you consider what they are asking Uncle Sam?”²²³ While Anglo state officials cautioned the white public about Latina sexuality, characterizing sex work as a natural progression in the women’s lives, Ybor Latinos used the supposed fragility of women’s honor to protect the protest and women’s jobs. Working-class Latinos and Latinas saw a connection between the struggle of poverty

²²² Green, “Relief from Relief,” pp. 1028; “WPA Sit-Down Called, Women Hold Building,” *Tampa Tribune*, July 9, 1937, pp. 1; James Frances Tidd, Jr. “Stitching and Striking: WPA Sewing Rooms and the 1937 Relief Strike in Ybor City,” *Tampa Bay History* 11, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1989): pp. 5-21.

²²³ Chungas y No Chungas,” *La Gaceta*, July 9, 1937, pp. 1.

and the need for organizing, yet state officials (who themselves were relief workers) never understood that the link between activism and economics transcended race. Indeed, racialized stereotypes permeated WPA reports on their Latina and Latino neighbors.

Engaged with labor organizations throughout the United States and abroad, Ybor Latinas and Latinos were not strangers to strikes and political organizations. Striking women stood strong with their sisters in struggles from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and South Bend, Indiana, where sewing-room workers also challenged cuts to WPA programs and demanded an increase in wages. Latinos accused congressional officials of being blind to the plight of the more than “nine million human beings living in this country who do not have access to jobs other than the money provided to them through the WPA.” Believing that legislators were satisfied that “they had jobs and [were] living well” made them forget the repercussions of the 1.5 million dollar budget cut. To Ybor City’s Latino community, the strike was necessary to continue the national and international struggle for labor rights and worker representation.²²⁴

From the perspective of Tampa Anglos and WPA administrators, the strike incited fear and uneasiness. Worried that the women’s sit-down strike would escalate to a general strike of all WPA projects, district director W.E. Robinson came to the Ybor City factory to address the strikers. Calling all women to the main floor, Robinson stood between the Anglo and Latina workers to explain his position. He agreed to rehire the eighty-eight dismissed women and planned to find the money for their salaries by laying off other women with income outside WPA relief. Second, Robinson insisted that he could not raise the women’s

²²⁴ The sentiments of this idea were reflected in the reports of the strike as well as the general alliance of Popular Front ideologies. The fight for equality at home and abroad resonated with Latina/os vision of a just and fair society. Chungas y No Chungas,” *La Gaceta*, July 9, 1937, pp. 1.

pay because compensation was set by Washington and standardized across the nation. To appeal their pay, the women would have to petition their local senators.²²⁵ During W.E. Robinson's speech, Sheriff J.R. McLeod lingered in the back of the room, observing the scene. Once Robinson ended his address, McLeod stepped forward to inform the women that anyone who wished to leave the building could do so without the threat of violence from the other women, meaning nobody would be harassed for breaking the strike. He would escort the women out and remain as a peaceful watchman in the days to come. Following the wishes of WPA administration, Sheriff McLeod insisted that if any women wished to come to work the following day, he would guarantee their safety.

While Latinas were veterans of the labor movement, Anglo women were new to such struggles and easily intimidated by the possibility that the strike could have negative repercussions on their daily lives and economic positions. Robinson's promise to reinstate the eighty-eight dismissed employees by firing women with additional income was a particularly strong threat. Because WPA support was less than an adequate living wage for one adult, it was nearly impossible to support an entire family on relief. Many single workers relied on relief for the bulk of their income, supplementing wages through boarding, domestic work, and other temporary positions.²²⁶ If Robinson chose to follow through on his promise, the women knew they would lose their jobs and their only consistent source of income.

²²⁵ Green, "Relief from Relief," pp. 1029.

²²⁶ Interview with Dolores Patiño by Nancy Hewitt, 1986. Interview with Aurora and Maria Fernández by Nancy Hewitt, 1981. Interviews in possession of Nancy Hewitt. Image courtesy of the University of South Florida Special Collections, Tampa, FL.

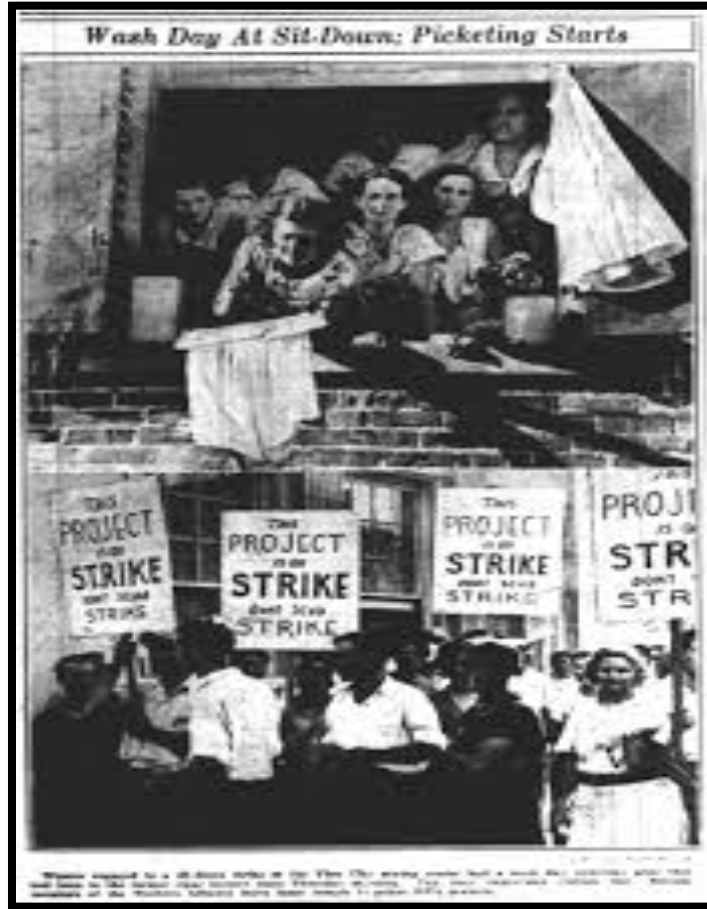


Figure 6. Front page of the Tampa Morning Tribune on July 8, 1937.
 Courtesy of USF Special Collections.

When Anglo and Latina women initially refused to end their strike, rumors began to circulate throughout Ybor City that police intended to clear the building by 6:00 pm. At this time, 500 Latinas and Latinos arrived at the Flor de Cuba building and surrounded it to prevent police from entering. Latinos in Ybor suggested that they “suppose[d] that Mr. W.E. Robinson [was] smart enough to resolve the problem without pride and without resorting to violence.”²²⁷ But the presence of police, the tension between women, and the sounds of foreign Latina and Latino allies pushed many Anglo women to question their support of the

²²⁷ “Chungas y No Chungas,” *La Gaceta*, July 8, 1937, pp. 1; Green, “Relief from Relief.”

strike. By the end of the day on July 8, approximately 191 Anglo women left the WPA strike.

As of July 10, two days after the start of the sit-down, only Latina workers were still on strike. Work for Anglo women at the WPA project continued as before. Segregated from the Latina strikers, the Anglos climbed the stairs to the third floor, sat at their sewing machines, and continued work as usual. A reporter from *La Gaceta* captured the scene: “Yesterday afternoon it was a sad sight that while the Latina workers maintained the strike, the strike of all women workers of this project, the American workers continued sewing upstairs like nothing was happening.”²²⁸

Although “left in the lurch” by their Anglo sisters, Latinas were supported by the Tampa Worker’s Alliance and their local community.²²⁹ Latinos from the Civil Conservation Core’s road development project staged a sympathy strike and protested outside the Flor de Cuba building to show support. Likewise, the bread makers union displayed its solidarity by providing food and supplies to the women workers. It also made a public announcement in both the *Tampa Times* and *La Gaceta* that it watched over the well-being of the striking women and was prepared to supply them with food for up to a month.²³⁰ These Latinos walked up and down the sidewalk of Twentieth Avenue waving picket signs stating, “This project is on strike!” and “We Demand a Living Wage!” Family members, friends, and children joined the men’s auxiliary to support the actions of their mothers and daughters.²³¹

²²⁸ “La Huelga Sentada Continua,” *La Gaceta*, July 10, 1937, pp. 4.

²²⁹ “La Actividad en el Centro Obrero,” *La Gaceta*, July 10, 1937, pp. 4.

²³⁰ José González, “El Pan a Las Huelguistas,” *La Gaceta*, July 10, 1937, pp. 4.

²³¹ “La Actividad en el Centro Obrero,” *La Gaceta*, July 10, 1937, pp. 4; Green, “Relief From Relief,” pp. 1034.

On July 12, the fifth day of the strike, the rhetoric surrounding the women strikers changed drastically. Mr. Bombin, a Tampa journalist and Federal Writers' Project employee, wrote a scathing article about the actions of striking Latinas.²³² The article questioned the women's virtue, condemned them as foreign communist agitators, and dismissed their calls for a living wage, citing the Latinas as fallen women and lost causes.²³³ Unlike the law-abiding, Anglo women who "responsibly" returned to their sewing benches, Bombin opined, Latinas obstinately rebuked the authority of Tampa police and lawmakers. By attacking Latina respectability, the writer tried to discredit the women's actions and their steadfast unity by depicting them as nothing more than amoral opportunists who did not deserve an increase in wages. As a relief employee in a skilled position, Bombin's position may have been informed by his personal struggles and prejudices. The stigma surrounding unskilled relief painted women as recipients of handouts rather than workers providing a service. Whatever his motivations, Bombin perpetuated the stereotype of Latinas as unworthy and ungrateful female foreigners. By publicly criticizing the women and their actions, the Tampa press deepened the division between Latinos and Anglos, dually legitimizing Latinas' inferior status as persons of color under the law.

The implication that the striking Latinas were unruly gave WPA officials the justification to send in the Department of Sanitation, hoping to shut down the strike due to health violations. They expected to find vandalism and filth. Instead the strike room was clean and orderly. Sanitation officials reported that despite the lack of sufficient toilets and showers, there was no health code violation or imminent danger. While the presence of the

²³² Bombin, "Women's Strikers," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 13, 1937, pp. 1.

²³³ "Una Carta del joven líder Pablo Piniella," *La Gaceta*, July 13, 1937, pp. 1.

Sanitation Department in the strike room was not an overt act of violence, the women viewed these officials as a state authority sent to police, judge, and oversee their actions.

Incensed by the public assault on *Latinidad*, labor organizer Pablo Piniella hired a local *lector* (reader) to stand in front of the Flor de Cuba building and read the printed accusations to the striking women. The words from Bombin's statement enlivened striking Latinas. In response to hearing the details of the sanitation report, Latinas requested additional mattresses and pillows to illustrate their dedication to the strike. Piniella supported the women by penning a statement refuting Bombin's bombastic claims and defending Latina strikers. Piniella condemned Bombin for attempting to "poison and divide the workers" by ignoring the real issues and injustices of WPA employment. He stated, "Know that the women protesters have stood strong with the virility, vigor, and the determination of men. You know we are not the revolutionaries you want us to be seen as. We protest not for foreigners or revolutionaries, or for *la raza* or nationality, but as American brothers and sisters."²³⁴

Piniella's response to Bombin concentrated on the strength and sincerity of the women's actions, as well as opposing claims of "un-Americanness." In the Latino community, describing Latinas as "*femininas masculinas*" (masculine women) highlighted the women's individual power and position of respect among fellow Latinos. In post-Depression Ybor City, women's newfound economic authority gave them space not only to make political and economic choices but also to stand independently as representatives of their community. By insisting on the women's position as Americans, Piniella sought to invalidate any charge against Latinas' claim to relief. Although many of these women and

²³⁴ Ibid.

men had lived in the United States for the majority of their lives and had become naturalized citizens, their foreign birth and internationalist approach to politics distinguished them from their Tampa neighbors. Anglo Tampan, who believed that Latinas and Latinos “dream[ed] that they could return to [Cuba] whenever they desired,” questioned Ybor Latinos’ loyalty to the United States and their claims to American citizenship.²³⁵ By insisting that Latinas struck as Americans but not in support of *la raza*, Piniella sought to illustrate the workers’ dedication to American life as they “sacrificed their blood to the democracy that governs [this] country.”²³⁶

After a week of futile negotiations, Latinas decided to end the strike on July 14, 1937. The Workers’ Alliance leadership insisted that they ended in order to avoid bloodshed and tension; but in fact, the decision of Anglo women to abandon the Latinas had undercut the strike’s original intentions. Although Latinas remained united in their sentiments, the absence of support from all women workers diminished their power. An interethnic strike would have shielded them from the perception that they were a radical, foreign, un-American minority. Instead, the absence of sustained Anglo support perpetuated this stereotype and reinforced the belief that Ybor Latinas had no legitimate claim to protest relief, for they were ostensibly neither true Americans nor worthy women.

At 10:00 pm, Latinas gathered their pillows and mattresses and paraded their tired bodies down Twentieth Avenue to the Centro Obrero. As the women filtered through the

²³⁵ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 298.

²³⁶ “Una Carta del joven líder Pablo Piniella,” *La Gaceta*, July 13, 1937, pp. 1.; “La raza” refers to Latinas and Latinos as an independent ethnic group separate from that Anglos. In this sense, Piniella (and I) are calling attention to the strike as a collaborative effort between working class people, at least initially.

grand double doors, their fellow community members stood in solidarity and applauded their efforts. Adela Santiesteban, one of the original strike organizers, addressed the crowd at the front of the room with her comrade Señora Fernandez. The women reiterated their demands and insisted that their calls for economic justice highlighted the importance of women's labor and the need for women's wages to stabilize the family economy.²³⁷ In the back of the room, Sherriff McLeod and his deputies surveyed the room before leaving the workers to conclude their ceremony and celebration.²³⁸

The WPA sewing-room strike provides a window to examine the relationship between gender, race, labor, and activism. As a rare attempt at interracial and interethnic organizing in Florida, women's willingness to unite despite their differences illustrated the importance of the cause. Latina workers and Anglo workers were not seen as equal by the WPA board or the state of Florida. They labored on separate floors, socialized in distinct spaces, and understood activism from different perspectives. Latinas were born into a culture of labor radicalism and union activism. Organized labor not only dominated their workplaces but also defined relationships in the community and their connection to national- and international-organizing networks. Anglo women did not understand this political paradigm and could not relate to Latinas' activist mentalities. They saw themselves as Americans and did not embrace an identity that reached beyond their immediate communities. While these differences did not prevent the women from organizing together, they had a clear impact on the outcome of the strike.

Black women and men did not actively participate in the strike. While both Latinos

²³⁷ "Finaliza la Huelga Sentada," *La Gaceta*, July 15, 1937, pp. 1.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

and African Americans were subject to the same system of legalized segregation in the South, they did not see a likeness in their experiences. Tampa blacks saw Latinos as foreign radicals, while Latinos made a conscious effort to disassociate themselves from interactions with African Americans. Of all WPA positions, only 1,224 women labored at 16 individual sites. Black women occupied a mere eighty spaces at a separate facility, whereas white Latinas occupied twice that number at three different facilities countywide. Although the FERA classified Latinas and Latinos as “colored,” Cuban whiteness was more acceptable to Tampa officials than their neighbors’ blackness.²³⁹ While all women faced criticism for participation in WPA projects, which many men believed should be reserved for them, black women faced the greatest backlash. Both state and federal officials consistently received complaints that “colored women were refusing jobs in private industry as cooks and maids.”²⁴⁰ Indeed, Tampa’s Anglo citizens upheld that black women on the relief rolls threatened the “solid south” and were a danger to “white citizens [because African Americans] believ[ed] that they have the backing of our government.”²⁴¹ It is unlikely that local Anglos, whose vision of Florida revolved around white male dominance, had a different perspective on Cuban workers, but the number of Latinas in relief was notably higher. Black women who worked in separate spaces were perhaps unwilling to risk their jobs for a cause that supported white (including Latina) women. While Anglo protestors at the Flor de Cuba

²³⁹ Tampa Report, Manuscript, FWP, pp. 34.

²⁴⁰ December 1936 Report, Compiled by Frances A. Ewell, FWP. Quoted in Tidd, Jr. “Stitching and Striking,” pp. 5-21.

²⁴¹ W.M. Rowlett to Claude Pepper, November 2, 1938, Tony Pizzo Collection (hereafter TPC), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida. Quoted in Tidd, Jr. “Stitching and Striking,” pp. 5-21.

sewing-room project could have gained much from the strike, black women would have simply lost their jobs.

Ybor City Latinas organized the strike, and Latinos joined because their own concept of Latinos' place and authority in American society changed drastically during the 1930s. No longer completely detached from American politics, Latinas and Latinos invoked their rights as citizens in order to survive. The Great Depression destroyed any dream of returning to Cuba, for the Depression's effect on the island's economy was even more devastating than in the United States. Without the support of the cigar industry and mutual aid, Latinas and Latinos saw in the emerging U.S. welfare system a chance to provide for their families. The only question that remained was how these families could access it.

Conclusion

Ybor City's relationship with the nascent welfare state marks a shift from independent self-help to gendered and racialized, state-funded aid. As the community's social infrastructure crumbled, Latinas' and Latinos' understanding of themselves within the matrix of the United States changed. Because community members were unable to find stability within the community, they looked outside the Latino enclave for economic safety. Beyond the confines of Ybor City, however, relief and aid came at the discretion of local officials who determined applicants' worthiness and neediness. Latinos, defined as non-white men, rarely found positions on WPA relief rolls. From the perspective of Anglo administrators, these men were unpredictable and irresponsible immigrants who wasted their money and ignored their families. Latinas, on the other hand, often obtained employment in cigar factories or small *chinchales*. To employers, Latinas were cheap, as they labored for a fraction of the price of a male artisan roller. Indeed, women unable to find employment in the

community often found seats in the WPA sewing rooms.

As the Depression continued and state and federal resources dwindled, public resistance grew against Latinas in the workplace and on relief rolls. Women's work in the cigar factory and the sewing room seemed unfair to the growing number of unemployed and underemployed men. Both Anglo men and Latinos routinely wrote to state officials, Congress members, and the President, urging them to reserve aid and government employment for men. Not only were men without employment, but their destitution also left them without a purpose. Women, they argued, were supposed to be wives and mothers, not workers and providers. While the local Latino newspaper, *La Gaceta*, reported only solidarity and workers equality—its readership proposed male-only relief as a means to end the Depression and help “all families.”

This sense of what women “should be” conflicted with the public image of who Latinas were. Unlike the middle-class women sitting in the WPA sewing room at the Flor de Cuba project, Latinas had always worked. From the moment they migrated across the Caribbean, Latinas searched for employment in the factories, homes, and streets. As crucial contributors to family livelihoods, Ybor Latinas fought for access to labor when their husbands could not, and they assumed the role as the heads-of-household when Latinos were powerless. This shift in economic authority conflicted with both Latino culture and the ideology of the American welfare state. While Latinos engaged in a letter-writing campaign to shift the balance of WPA aid, Anglo officials condemned Latinas' dedication to work by characterizing these women as neglectful mothers, disgraceful wives, and foreign tramps. The damage done to Latinas' public image justified their absence from mothers' aid and validated their expulsion from the WPA rolls. As national, nativist, anti-immigrant rhetoric

began to determine the individuals whom officials considered worthy of state support or perceived as exploiting the nation, Latinas' precarious position in the southern social strata was confirmed. On the eve of World War II, not a single Latina or Latino from Ybor City occupied a space on the WPA or received aid from ADC.

CHAPTER 3: “OF GOOD MORAL CHARACTER:” COMMUNISTS, FOREIGNERS, AND PATRIOTS

Introduction

Pedro and Estella rushed out the front door a few seconds before midnight on December 31, 1938. Together they stood on their decaying wooden porch with their niece Liz and her husband, Stetson Kennedy. All were anxious and ready to welcome the New Year. As *El Reloj* (the Regensburg Cigar Factory) struck midnight, Ybor City erupted in celebration. A policeman who stood on the balcony of L’Unione Italiana raised his arm toward the sky and fired his revolver five times. The shots accentuated the percussion in the Cuban dance music that spilled from the *Círculo Cubano*. Children raced through the streets, setting off fireworks and ten-cent Roman candles. But as the flares dimmed and the smell of gunpowder faded, Pedro turned to Stetson and said: “Hell, I guess that’s all. It’s 1939, and it don’t feel no different to me.”²⁴²

That night Pedro could have known that the coming years would be the first of many to transform Ybor City and its Latino residents. As World War II approached, Ybor City’s women and men began to question their sense of self within the nation they called home. The neighborhoods’ unwavering dedication to radicalism made them easy targets for anti-communist probes and un-American accusations. In previous years, questions of worthiness determined if Latinas and Latinos could receive aid from the state and New Deal programs,

²⁴² Pedro and Estella, Tampa Report, Manuscript, Federal Writers’ Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, pp. 396.

but in the coming decade, worthiness would determine citizenship. Although the majority of Ybor Latinos were rightful American citizens by 1940, perceptions of them as “foreign” left Latinos vulnerable to anti-immigrant legislation that sought to regulate belonging.

Mae Ngai and Suzanne Oboler have debated the concept of citizenship and asked what it means to belong. For immigrants, and more specifically Latinos, this question is multifaceted. In theory, nations define citizenship according to law, and in the United States that includes a complex immigration code that welcomes fewer immigrants than it rejects. These laws allow the state to define citizenship and assess an immigrant’s ability to adhere to such expectations. This rigid interpretation of citizenship, however, does not address self-perception or belonging. In Ybor City, women and men felt like they “belonged” in the United States *and* their homelands. The proximity of Cuba to the city of Tampa made it easy for women and men to stay connected to family and, if they chose, to live a life between borders. Steven Castles and Alastair Davison have stated: “Porous boundaries and multiple identities undermine ideas of cultural belonging as a necessary accompaniment to political membership.”²⁴³ Indeed, Ybor City’s women and men never abandoned their connection to their motherlands, but they also identified as political members of the United States. On issues such as labor rights, welfare benefits, and foreign policy, Ybor City’s women and men fought to have their voices heard by a local government that terrorized them and a federal state that shunned them.

This chapter investigates the years 1938 through 1946 to examine the meaning of “belonging” to women and men in Ybor City. It argues that the very behavior that made

²⁴³ Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Suzanne Oboler, *Latinos and Citizenship: The Dilemma of Belonging* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Latinas and Latinos feel most American were the actions that most defined them as outsiders to the city, state and nation. As ardent communists, dedicated labor activists, and proponents of international human rights, Latinos saw the ability to stand, protest and advocate on behalf of themselves and others as an innately American right. By following Ybor City's women and men through the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) investigations in Florida, World War II, and the development of urban renewal plans, this chapter reveals the tension between state and community definitions of American belonging.

Defining “Of Good Moral Character”

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the HUAC pursued communists, radicals, and “aliens” who allegedly threatened the security of the American people.²⁴⁴ Driven by fear and emboldened by the leadership of Texas congressman Martin Dies, HUAC members believed they were fighting to unite the country. Because the committee terrorized progressives and vilified difference, labor organizers and social reformers found themselves under HUAC's microscope. As activists and ethnic outsiders, Latinas and Latinos in Ybor City found their jobs and families in danger.

On March 8, 1940, the front-page of the *Tampa Morning Tribune* declared, “Dies Will Quiz Tampans in His Probe of Reds.”²⁴⁵ The headline's oversized script made the letters jump off the page as if to caution readers of the coming threat. The article explained that Dies, “the lanky, drawling Texan,” refused to indicate “the nature of the information he

²⁴⁴ I employ “alien” as a historic term that describes all immigrants of foreign birth without citizenship. During the 1940s, an “alien” was not necessarily “undocumented.” Instead, it was a broad term used to identify difference based on origin of birth. The only way an immigrant would no longer be considered an “alien” was if the person were naturalized. “Dies Will Quiz Tampans in His Probe of Reds,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 8, 1940, pp. 1.

²⁴⁵ “Dies Will Quiz Tampans in His Probe of Reds,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 8, 1940, pp. 1.

expected to receive,” but it made clear that his presence “was connected with an inquiry into Communists in Florida and the entry of foreign agents from Latin American countries.”²⁴⁶

Ybor City’s Latinas and Latinos, whose radical politics challenged the Southern racial order and whose internationalist sensibilities criticized U.S. foreign policy, were clearly the subjects of Dies’ investigation. The recent incorporation of the community’s women and men into Tampa’s workforce, relief programs, and state politics had made their labor activism public. Latinas and Latinos’ dedication to the *Frente Popular* had captured Washington’s attention. As known radicals to city, state, and subsequently national officials, Ybor community members were vulnerable to investigation by the HUAC.

Before the Great Depression, Ybor City’s women and men lived on the outskirts of Tampa, where their politics and activism centered exclusively on community labor rights, not southern law for all. Because Tampa relied on the cigar industry for survival, city officials viewed the presence of Latinos as an undesirable but inevitable consequence to industrial development. Latinos were active members of the labor movement, but they protested cigar factory owners, not Anglo bosses. Likewise, Latino politics engaged internationalism, not regional policies. The women and men of Ybor City were part of the complex matrix of Jim Crowism in the state, but the social and racial organization of Ybor City mirrored that of Cuba more than the South. By 1940, however, Anglos and Latinos worked next to each other in WPA projects, phosphate plants, cigar factories, and shipping docks. The need to find employment outside of Ybor City put Latinos and Anglos in direct competition for jobs and resources. As national outcries condemned non-citizens on WPA work rolls and cities blamed migrants for work shortages, *cubanos* in Tampa became unwelcome outsiders whose

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

radical politics seemed to amplify their accents.²⁴⁷ Resistance to *cubanos* in 1940 followed the national, anti-immigrant, specifically anti-Mexican, campaigns of the 1930s. Across the United States, the Depression, anti-radicalism, and rampant nativism drove Latinos from their homes. As the unemployment rate rose and employers were encouraged to “hire American,” unemployed, white Americans began to perceive Latino immigrants as “undeserving” of work or relief.²⁴⁸ From Los Angeles to Chicago to Houston, Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants were forcibly deported or given the option to leave the U.S. “voluntarily.”²⁴⁹ From 1930 to 1935, 345,839 Mexicans faced deportation to or repatriation in Mexico. Between 1931 and 1932 alone, the U.S. government sent 138,519 Mexicans south of the border.²⁵⁰ *Mexicanos* who had done the “hard, low-wage labor the majority of American workers shunned,” faced blame for stealing American jobs.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Cybelle Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief: Race, Immigration, and the American Welfare State from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917–1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁴⁸ Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*, pp. 178.

²⁴⁹ Repatriation came in three forms: “forced, coerced, and voluntary.” “Forced” indicates that a person or group was forcibly put on a train and formally deported to Mexico; “coerced” signals that a *mexicano* may have been fired, harassed, or denied benefits and aid for which she or he was eligible, returning to Mexico because of economic need; “voluntary” indicates that a Mexican or Mexican-American “took advantage of free or discounted transportation and incentives to return to Mexico” and “repatriated because they decided subsistence life in Mexico was better than an impoverished life in the United States.” Michael Innis-Jimenez, *Steel Barrio: The Great Mexican Migration to South Chicago, 1915-1950* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), pp. 138; For more on the development of repatriation and the involvement of the U.S. Labor Department and U.S. Immigration Bureau, see Zaragosa Vargas, “Causes and Consequences of Mexican Repatriation and Deportation,” in *Labor Rights are Civil Rights: Mexican American Workers in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 55-61.

²⁵⁰ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 61.

²⁵¹ Vargas, *Proletarians of the North*, pp. 79.

Zaragoza Vargas has noted, “Officials in cities gripped by the fiscal crisis demanded that the federal government not feed the immigrants but promptly deport them to Mexico.”²⁵² In California, 80 percent of the repatriates were American-born, but in the nativist, anti-labor, anti-radical climate of the 1930s, it did not matter if a Latino were born or made an American, all were “foreigners.”²⁵³ As the U.S. Immigration Bureau pushed *mexicanos* out of the country by the thousands, the tension between the federal government and “foreign” residents grew.²⁵⁴ In this climate, *cubanos* in Florida understood the instability of their status as workers, residents, and citizens.

When Martin Dies arrived in Tampa, roughly 30 percent of the city’s population was Latino. After nearly fifty years of immigration and migration to the city, 11,723 *tampeños* were foreign born, and 17,512 were “native born of foreign or mixed parentage.”²⁵⁵ These figures do not include the migrant or undocumented Latinas and Latinos who lived their lives between borders. In the pre-1940 industry boom, Tampa needed the labor of *cubanos* for cigar factories; but by the 1940s, Anglo men saw these individuals as “un-American.” They looked with resentment upon *cubanas* working in cigar factories and unemployed *cubanos* begging for work from the WPA or Anglo business. Tampa’s Anglos viewed these individuals as illustrations of the stereotype of the lazy Latino and the labor-stealing Latina.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 61. Vargas notes that “foreigners” was a “blanket label indicating a the mass of immigrants.” This term not only pointed to Latinos but also illustrated the vast difference between Americans who believed themselves to be more deserving of jobs and aid in the United States than Latinos who toiled in the nations physically demanding occupations, Vargas, *Proletarians of the North*, pp. 79.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ “Ybor City and Tampa Population Data,” Simmon’s Plans, 1941, Urban Planning Archive (hereafter UPA), Tampa Planning Commission, Tampa, Florida.

But it was the Latinos' dedication to radicalism and international democracy that most worried officials in Washington. Ybor Latinas and Latinos were active in the local and international labor movements and routinely corresponded with the ambassadors from Cuba and Spain, even traveling to D.C. to voice concerns about U.S. foreign policy.²⁵⁶ As tensions mounted in Europe with Germany and the Soviet Union entering into a non-aggression pact, Dies decided it was imperative to find the communist sympathizers who threatened U.S. security.²⁵⁷ The congressman saw the Port of Tampa as a porous border through which "enemies" could easily enter, and he suspected that the city's sizable population of Latino communists could potentially become spies.

The mayor of Tampa and other local government officials who routinely rallied against Latino radicals had a surprising reaction to the HUAC investigation. In public reports, Mayor Chancey insisted that "if Representative Martin Dies, chairman of the house un-American activities, is looking for alien smuggling, he probably will find more on the Canadian border than Florida."²⁵⁸ Citing reports by local immigration officials, the mayor continued, "It is true that Havana and other Caribbean cities are thronged with war refugees eager to get to the United States." But the mayor assured the public that Tampa officials had contacted Jewish organizations in Cuba and "warned them not to try to smuggle their way

²⁵⁶ "Carta de Fermin Soto a Embajada de Espana Washington, D.C.," June 2, 1937, Tony Pizzo Collection (hereafter TPC), Box 6, Folder Centro Espanol Correspondence. Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida. This folder details four years of correspondence between Tampa Latinos and the ambassadors of Spain and Cuba.

²⁵⁷ In addition to federal authority, anti-radical and nativist groups throughout the South targeted supposedly Communist communities of color. Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1900-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2008), pp. 350-352.

²⁵⁸ "Dies Won't Find Alien Running in Tampa Area" *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 8, 1940, pp. 1.

in.”²⁵⁹ Chancey ignored the issue of Communist radicalism by emphasizing Jewish refugees rather than Latino immigrants thereby shifting the focus to immigrants at the border rather than residents of the city. When pushed by a reporter to comment on radicalism in Tampa, the mayor replied, “Communism is something else... [and] it is generally accepted there are Communists in Florida and not but a few in Tampa.”²⁶⁰ Of course, Chancey was well aware of the city’s history with radicalism. But, as the mayor of the largest city in Florida, a state with corrupt politics, an active mafia, and state-sponsored, illegal gambling, Chancy did not want the federal government overseeing Tampa’s affairs.²⁶¹

In truth, there were more than “a few” communists living among the palms. In 1935, Communist Party USA (CPUSA) District 25, which included Tampa, Orlando, Jacksonville, and Miami, had the highest proportion of card-carrying members in the South. In one report, a local CPUSA field organizer noted that the most dedicated members were their Spanish-speaking comrades in Tampa. Organizers continuously reported between 1931 and 1937 that one of the biggest issues with these women and men was the tendency to fall behind in their dues. For this reason, it is likely that the number of fellow travelers and Party allies far exceeded the figures reported by field organizers.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Tampa’s corruption was infamous and under constant investigation by the American Civil Liberties Union until 1960. The city-sponsored gambling ring was known as “bolita.” Originally a game played by Ybor *cubanos*, the game became so popular that wealthy Anglos helped establish an underground gambling network. This network was intimately connected to Tampa’s political machine and helped fund numerous campaigns while using laundered money to destroy those of others. See Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988).

Throughout the 1930s, the mayor, police force, citizens committee, and KKK did their best to repress the power and presence of communists in the city.²⁶² Anglo officials passed an anti-communist city ordinance in 1935, while the Tampa sheriff consistently arrested Latinas and Latinos for unlawful protest. Like the anti-radical and anti-labor raids that targeted Latinos in Texas and California, vigilante violence by deputized community members left a legacy of anti-radical terror.²⁶³ One of the largest raids against party members occurred during a wildcat strike in June of 1935. Members of the local citizens committee broke into the home of organizer Arnesto Soto and confiscated “all the important documents of the Party, including dues, stamps and Party book.”²⁶⁴ Local police officers arrested all members that they could identify and jailed them for a month. Party leadership publicly applauded the incarcerated Tampa members and noted that they “set a wonderful example of Bolshevik discipline when questioned by police who threatened the arrested and the workers living nearby the homes raided.” In a memo to national leadership, the Florida directors commended their Latina and Latino “comrades and sympathizers [who] behaved bravely and [were] an example for every communist in the State.” It also reminded other members that not “answer[ing] [the questions was] the healthiest policy when under arrest.”²⁶⁵

²⁶² A cursory read of any Anglo newspaper from 1930 to 1942 reveals the active recruitment of KKK and Citizens Committee members. Their meetings were often described as “secret committees” of “patriotic volunteers. See *Tampa Morning Tribune*, *St. Petersburg Times*, *Tampa Times*.

²⁶³ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 168-169.

²⁶⁴ Letter from JS to Brown, October 28, 1935, Microfilm Reel 298, Folder 3990 Records of the Communist Party of the United States of America (hereafter CPUSA Records, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., pp. 1.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Privately, however, the correspondence between local organizers and District 25 leadership tells a different story. Because Party representatives were unable to communicate with the arrested women and men, they feared that their comrades who were “questioned or terrorized by the police [would] weaken and begin to speak in order to be released.”²⁶⁶ District 25 leadership told the Tampa organizer, “Comrades who became scared and open[ed] their mouths [were] not communists and should not be [in] our midst.”²⁶⁷ As the police searched for “pictures and other clues” that would lead them to additional members and sympathizers, Soto sat in jail with over two hundred of his fellow comrades waiting for bail that would never come. Communist Party (CP) officials insisted, “We do not pay fines because we are not guilty and because we have not enough money to pay fines for all arrested in the course of the fight.”²⁶⁸ It was decided that the arrested members of the Tampa section would serve their full jail term.

In the years following this incident, Latinas and Latinos continued to align themselves with the communist cause, but their relationship with the CPUSA was tenuous at best. To reinvigorate support for the Party and gain enthusiasm for the local agenda, local CP organizers started a campaign to oust the Cigar Makers’ International Union (CMIU), an American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliate, and replace the union with Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) representation. Representation from the pro-communist CIO was active in most regions with an active Communist Party. But Florida remained the outlier, represented only by the anti-communist CMIU. The decision to change unions reflected the

²⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.1.

will of the *tabaqueras*, at the same time as the CP saw it as a way to recruit more Anglo women into the party. While Latinas and Latinos were dedicated members of the radical cause, they were not committed to outreach, and CP leadership believed these comrades “underestimated the importance of utilizing the union for contacting the American workers in the same and other industries.”²⁶⁹ As the sewing-room strike illustrated, Anglo women had little experience with labor organization and perhaps even less interaction with political radicalism. The CP believed that by replacing the anti-communist CMIU with the pro-communist CIO, more Anglo women would align themselves with the party.

In January 1938, an opportunity emerged to swing union representation and solidify a strong Party presence in Tampa. Until this time, the CMIU had largely ignored Latinas as an organizing force and continued to spend most of its energy on the few skilled workers who lingered in factories. But when industry owners announced that they planned to convert to full mechanization, Ybor City erupted. To completely abandon all aspects of handwork meant that skilled men and unskilled women would lose their jobs in large numbers.

Buncheras and *selectoras* would no longer be necessary, and the number of *despaldilladoras* would be drastically reduced. Because the CMIU never negotiated a pay-scale for mechanized workers in the cigar industry, this shift left many women and men wondering what would happen and how they would survive this industrial revolution.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Officials from the Department of Labor traveled to Tampa to mediate negotiation between the CMIU and the Tampa cigar manufacturers.²⁷¹ The conference lasted two weeks, and at the end, no agreement was reached. As a result, the three Latino members of the Local 500 advisory board pushed for CIO representation. They viewed the CMIU as unable to negotiate on behalf of the *tabaqueras*. Geroge Salazar, Saturino Aleman, and Gerardo Sanchez announced to union members:

It is clear that Van Horn does not intend to consult the membership, and has not sought and obtained the aid of the courts. This battle against corruption and racketeering in our union and dictatorial methods will be fought to a finish. We are taking immediate legal action.²⁷²

While attempting to separate from the CMIU and join the pro-communist CIO, advisory board members found themselves targets of anti-communist action. Albert Lopez, the local secretary of the Communist Party and a CMIU member, was suspended from the union for “interfering with the authority of R.E. Van Horn and interfering with the activities of the organization.” Furthermore, all men who sat on the advisory board were “charged with the customary reactionary gag of ‘Communism’ and attempting to switch the union to CIO” and arrested by local authorities.²⁷³ The inability of the Party to protect the members had a profound influence on negotiations.

In the midst of this power struggle between union representatives, the Manufacturers Association, and Tampa city officials, Latinas sought help in Washington, D.C. One hundred

²⁷¹ “In the Matter of Cigar Manufacturers Association of Tampa, Florida and Cigarmakers International Union of America,” U.S. Department of Labor Report, February 1, 1938, Cigar Makers International Union of America Collection, Box 16. Special Collections, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

²⁷² “Tampa Cigarmakers to Fight Ousting Maneuver,” *Daily Worker*, October 13, 1938, pp. 1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

fourteen women collectively wrote a petition, appealing to Labor Secretary Francis Perkins to intervene in the situation in Tampa. They also sent a copy to Eleanor Roosevelt. It read:

As citizens of this great nation, as admirers of the mottoes of the Government of Franklin D. Roosevelt; as mothers that wish with our honest work bring up our children under decent conditions and other that have to work to support their parents and minor brothers and sisters; we beg of you not to allow that this dishonest conditions be established in Tampa; nor to reduce our wages... the change would destroy our homes, as in reducing the prices and increasing the unemployed; our conditions would become at once of misery and desolation.²⁷⁴

Although Latinas represented the majority of workers in the cigar industry, they had little to no power within the Local 500. Following in the footsteps of the AFL, the CMIU had a stronger relationship with Tampa officials and factory manufacturers than it did with its members. Little effort had been made to organize these women since Luisa Moreno's brief tenure in the Sunshine State. *Tabaqueras*, therefore, hoped they could appeal to Francis Perkins as women. Latinas made clear that their responsibilities as mothers, daughters, wives, and caregivers were intrinsically connected to their ability to provide financially for their families.

Latinas' plea to Francis Perkins and Eleanor Roosevelt illustrated their commitment to progressivism, as well as their recognition that *tabaqueros* and *tabaqueras* had to look beyond the CMIU if they hoped to support themselves and their families. Indeed, many Latinos in Ybor City turned to federal officials for the hope and progressivism they could not find in their own communities. Some of Ybor City's women and men saw President Roosevelt as a creator and supporter of the CIO and believed that because "he put good men

²⁷⁴ "Letter to Francis Perkins from Ybor City Cigar Workers," February 11, 1938 and "Letter to Eleanor Roosevelt from Ybor City Cigar Workers," February 11, 1938, Cigar Makers International Union Papers, General Records of the Department of Labor, National Archives Microfilm Publication, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

on the Labor Board and the Supreme Court . . . he prove[d] he like[d] the CIO.”²⁷⁵ While the local Communist Party representative hoped to sway the union from CMIU to CIO during this dispute, the *tabaqueros* knew that “the factory owners, sheriff, police, judge, and everybody like that [was] for the AF of L union.” This control went beyond the negotiating table and spilled into the community. In the midst of these negotiations, the KKK paraded through Ybor City to show that they did not want “talk of communism going on.” Although cigar workers and Party members dreamed of a union that represented the people, it was impossible for anyone but CMIU members to get jobs in Tampa’s factories.²⁷⁶ Ultimately, the call to overthrow AFL union control failed, and Latina machine workers were forced to accept the pay-scale terms of manufacturers. Women rollers would receive \$9.25 per thousand cigars rolled, and those in non-specialized and machine positions would receive 30 cents per hour.²⁷⁷ This agreement was a boon for the manufacturers. Latinas and Latinos, although ideologically dedicated to radicalism, never again attempted to overcome the AFL in favor in the CIO.

The failure to obtain CIO representation in 1940 paralleled Ybor Latinos’ slow disengagement from the CPUSA. What initially brought these women and men to the Communist Party was their commitment to class-conscious unity and the battle against fascism abroad. Florida’s Latinas and Latinos focused on food drives for the Spanish Civil

²⁷⁵ “Amanda and Enrique,” Manuscript, Federal Writers’ Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida), pp. 422.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ “Cigar Makers Arbitration, Resolution,” December 1, 1938, Cigar Makers International Union Papers, General Records of the Department of Labor, National Archives Microfilm Publication, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

War, protested the absence of city aid to Latinas, and confronted local officials who refused to provide WPA jobs to Latinos. But much to the dismay of local Party organizers, Latinos created their own ethnic organizations rather than joining broader Party coalitions. While the Party supported the Latinos' endeavors, its ultimate goal was to unite all District 25 workers, including African American laborers. Latino workers and party members did not share this goal of interracial coalition, seeing outreach beyond the community as futile. Although Latinos were committed to the communist cause, by 1940 the strategic priorities of the CPUSA no longer aligned with the needs of Latinos in Tampa. Latinas and Latinos remained dedicated radicals and fellow travelers, but some in Ybor City began to look for ways to achieve their goals without the CPUSA. For this reason, they sought to reinvigorate the local Popular Front and liberal progressivism.

The Dies committee's relentless pursuit of communists and "aliens" in the city overlooked the tenuous relationship between Tampa officials, the CMIU, and the city's politically radical "Latin American population."²⁷⁸ While Mayor Chancey had fought for years to repress the workers' communist alliances, he also understood the cigar industry's lingering importance to the community. The local economy had diversified by the early 1940s, but not enough to divorce itself from the cigar industry. As long as Tampa needed cigars, the city would need the labor of Latinos and Latinas, many of whom were communists. The CMIU, which rarely received independent coverage in the local Anglo newspaper, wrote an article and made a public statement about HUAC's presence in Tampa and its pursuit of Latino workers. The union representative claimed, "The Cigar Makers' International Union publicly opposed further appropriation for the Dies committee and now

²⁷⁸ "Dies Will Quiz Tampan in His Probe of Reds," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 8, 1940, pp. 1.

comes the political revenge. Mr. Dies with his customary anti-labor bias has chosen to smear us with the worst name he knows—communism.”²⁷⁹ Furthermore, “in a short, but bristling statement,” the CMIU regarded the Dies investigation as “a synthetic red-hunt as a pretext for coming down to enjoy Florida on government money.”²⁸⁰

Despite the CMIU’s half-hearted defense of its members, Latinas and Latinos found their names and faces on the front pages of national newspapers. Their personal security and their families’ safety became a community-wide concern. Much of the power of the Dies Committee was grounded in its ability to mobilize nativist sentiment. Just as *mexicanos* had experienced in Texas and California, *cubanos* in Florida were the targets of a national, anti-immigrant organization that criminalized opponents and emboldened local forces through hateful rhetoric and promotion of intolerance.²⁸¹ By making a spectacle of the nation’s immigrant populations, the HUAC exacerbated local divisions more than encouraged national unity.

The Department of Justice followed HUAC and passed the Alien Registration Act in 1940. This mandate called for “all aliens 14 years of age or older . . . to register,” adding that “alien children under 14 years must be registered by their parent or guardians.”²⁸² The language of the law defined “aliens” as “foreign-born persons who have not become citizens of the United States,” which included “persons with first citizenship papers and work

²⁷⁹ “Cigar Unions Crack at Dies’ Florida Probe,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 12, 1940, pp. 1.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, pp. 169.

²⁸² “The National Registration of Aliens: Instructions for Registration and Specimen Form,” August 27, 1940, TPC, Box 31, Folder Immigration Administration.

permits.”²⁸³ To register, a man or woman had to complete an extensive form that detailed their personal, professional, and political lives. They also had to agree to be fingerprinted and photographed. The law required that all non-citizens repeat this process annually in order to maintain current records of all immigrants living and working in the nation. Failure to comply with the act could result in “a fine of 1,000k or 6 months imprisonment.”²⁸⁴ In four short months, the Department of Justice sought to register and locate all 3,600,000 “aliens” living in the United States.

Immigration officials made sure Latinas and Latino were aware of the law and its requirements. Federal officials and local liaisons reserved the Centro Asturiano theater to capture the attention of the Ybor community and inform the women and men of their duty to register as “aliens” living in the United States. On November 6, 1940, nearly one thousand Latinas and Latinos filed into the *teatro* and sat on the red velvet seats to listen to the local immigration official explain how the U.S. government would legally exploit their privacy. The Alien Registration Act of 1940 confirmed that the U.S. government perceived Latinos and Latinas in Ybor City as ethnic others requiring suspicion.²⁸⁵

Much like the HUAC, the Department of Justice’s Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) decided who was worthy of citizenship. It asked that women and men provide a list of all arrests and criminal activity. In Ybor City, a local INS agent insisted that nobody would “fail to register because of something in their previous record or because of their

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ “Department of Justice Statement,” October 25, 1940, TPC, Box 31, Folder Immigration Administration.

method of entering the country” and added, “failure to comply with this law will only complicate their present situation.” According to the law, noncitizens were not judged based on their criminal background or method of immigration but by an analysis of whether or not a person had “good moral character.” Women and men who had spent the majority of their lives in the United States were supposedly safe, unless they were categorized as undesirable. The undesirables or “immoral classes” included radicals, prostitutes, drug dealers, and the mentally ill.²⁸⁶ Of course, this was particularly problematic for the women and men in Ybor, as many were dedicated and known radicals and women were suspected sex-workers. Consequently, this law quietly endangered the safety of Ybor City’s Latino families as much as the public trials of HUAC.

On the eve of WWII, Ybor City Latinos and Latinas seemed to be enemies of the city, state, and nation. The country that benefitted from their labor had invaded their privacy, charged them with “un-Americanism,” and fingerprinted them like criminals. As women and men in need of work and in search of economic stability, the coming of war not only signaled new opportunities for labor but also the chance to redefine how they and Anglos would interact.

A Sense of Belonging

World War II was a time of hope and confusion for Latinas and Latinos living in Florida. As targets of nativist violence who also faced accusations of un-Americanism from the federal government, Latinos delicately sought to determine their place in the matrix of American wartime mobilization. For young, white *cubanos*, the war offered opportunity. Many joined the armed forces and were accepted by their fellow soldiers. Afro-Cubans had a

²⁸⁶ Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, pp. 84-90.

distinctly different experience. Although understood as fellow Latinos in Ybor City, these men were inescapably black in the U.S. military. Latinas at home labored in the cigar factories and wartime industries and earned higher salaries than they had in a decade. But young Latinas experienced new discrimination, as a statewide campaign to combat venereal disease targeted them and their sexuality as a threat to public health. Many of these women and men were citizens by law or among the millions who had lived the majority of their lives on American soil. As the above examples illustrate, the war offered the opportunity to be accepted or rejected by the United States.

Tampa was an important World War II military site and hosted nearly one hundred thousand airmen over the course of four years. Built as the last major WPA project in the state, Mac Dill Air Force Base was located on the southernmost inlet in Tampa Bay, where vacant property proved perfect for a modern military outpost. It took 1,600 men two years to clear the brush, build the barracks, and pave the runways; but in 1941 they completed the project, and the city welcomed 15,000 airmen in training.²⁸⁷ Tampa's location was integral to its popularity as a site for military training. The warm, steady weather (with the exception of the occasional hurricane) created the ideal environment for takeoff and landing, and the proximity to the Caribbean allowed easy travel. The War Department also chose the site because of the city itself. Tampa had roughly one hundred thousand residents in 1941, 30 percent of whom were Latino and 25 percent of whom were black.²⁸⁸ The city's racial and

²⁸⁷ Abraham Scherr, "Tampa's MacDill Field during World War II," *Tampa Bay History* 17, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995): pp. 10.

²⁸⁸ "Ybor City and Tampa Population Data," Simmon's Plans, 1941, UPA.

ethnic landscape seemed unique for the South, and planners hoped it would offer entertainment for all men who came to train at Mac Dill.

Young Latinos who had grown up in Ybor City saw WWII as a duty, adventure, and opportunity to prove themselves as Americans. Filled with “patriotism, machismo, and invincibility,” Latinos joined the armed services in large numbers.²⁸⁹ As these men marched off to Europe, they channeled the patriotic masculinity of their fathers and uncles who had fought in the Cuban War for Independence and long romanticized warfare. These young men had lived their lives in an insular community that had international ties. Their first language was Spanish, and their knowledge of English depended on their level of American education, for they certainly did not speak English at home. The young recruits were uniquely conscious of foreign policy and international politics, since their mothers and fathers dedicated their work and meager earnings to fighting fascism abroad, even when the U.S. government deemed this a traitorous act. Young men raised to battle the fascist oppressors who denied equality to their kin welcomed the opportunity to do the same in the name of democracy. Jose Yglesias, a Latino author and Ybor resident, wrote in his memoir, *One German Dead*, that he “believed in the war, in the popular front against fascism, in the New Deal, in socialism, and in the brotherhood of man.” But in his unit, this sense of conviction made him “unique to the entire cruiser.”²⁹⁰ While these men sought to prove themselves as citizens, their motivations differed from those of their Anglo comrades.

²⁸⁹ Gary Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War: The Evolution and Transformation of a Latin Community in Florida, 1886-1950,” in *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, Ideology*, eds. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguin (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), pp. 28.

²⁹⁰ Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War,” pp. 28.

Latinos were ideologically motivated to support the U.S. in the Second World War, as well as illustrate their American-ness. Gary Mormino writes, these young Latinos “marched off to war with a collective chip on their shoulders.”²⁹¹ They had grown up in a city that welcomed their work but reviled their culture. In American schools, teachers whipped, beat, and locked these young boys in closets for failing to speak English in class.²⁹² Outside their community, businesses hung signs reading “No Dogs or Latinos Allowed,” while Anglos called them “Cuban niggers” and “spics.”²⁹³ The racism, hatred, and nativism that fueled this rhetoric had a distinct impact on how Latinos saw themselves and understood their place in American society. Having learned from the city of Tampa and the U.S. government the importance of assimilation and Americanization, young Latinos saw WWII and the armed forces as opportunities to prove themselves, combat difference, and create a brotherhood beyond *latinidad*.

For many white *cubanos*, the war allowed them to create a close relationship with broader American society. No longer outsiders, but critical soldiers in defense of the nation, these Latinos recalled their experiences with a sense of nostalgia. Braulio Alonso, who received a medal of honor and purple heart in WWII, understood the Americanization process he underwent during the war. The 85th Infantry Division, to which he belonged, trekked through North Africa and Italy from 1941 to 1944. He remembered that his unit was

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² “Latin Pupils Who Speak Own Language Won’t Be Whipped,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 27, 1944, pp. 4.

²⁹³ Jose Yglesias, *A Wake in Ybor City* (Houston, TX: Arte Público Press, 1963), pp. 54; Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War,” pp. 28; Interview with Peter Parrado by Sarah McNamara, June 2008. Interview in possession of the author.

“composed of men of many walks of life, of education of different nationality backgrounds,” and he quickly learned “that the place of origin or the ethnicity of an individual made little difference.”²⁹⁴ To Alonso, the brotherhood he formed during war allowed him to look beyond the discrimination and prejudice that defined Tampa. Like him many of Ybor City’s young, white sons, Alonso began to feel a part of the United States. Jose Yglesias reminisced about his own Americanization process in *The Goodbye Land*, recounting what he gained and lost. “Assimilation does not mean abandoning our pasts,” Yglesias penned, “but enriching an already rich mix. To me, assimilation has meant that in all my work as a writer I had tried to make American readers aware of the existence of Ybor City and its Latin cigarmakers.”²⁹⁵ For men like Alonso and Yglesias, WWII brought the acceptance they longed for, even if it was conditional.

Unlike white *cubanos*, who came of age during WWII and found belonging in their military units, *afrocubanos* experienced racial segregation in new ways. As a soldier in a segregated military unit, Evelio Grillo recalled that he “did not feel Germany and Japan as palpably as [he] felt the United States Army.”²⁹⁶ While Europeans felt threatened by fascism, Grillo and other Afro-Cubans experienced “direct, immediate, constant” oppression by the

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War,” pp. 28.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 37; Jose Yglesias, *The Goodbye Land* (Pantheon Books, 1967), pp. 28.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Susan Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), pp. 260.

U.S. Army.²⁹⁷ Unlike the privilege of whiteness that both Alonso and Yglesias carried, Grillo was inescapably Latino, African, American, “foreign,” and forever a second-class citizen.²⁹⁸

But just as white *cubanos* found a connection with Anglos in their units, Afro-Cubans formed relationships with African Americans who fought beside them. Norberto Gonzalez, a Cuban-born, recent immigrant, joined the army during WWII to solidify a better future for his family. When he arrived at the army office to register, however, he was placed in a white regiment. “Since I was Cuban,” he remembered, “they considered me a white person.”²⁹⁹ While perhaps true that Cuban heritage marked Gonzalez as white, his unit placement was likely a result of his light skin and language skills. But skin color and language ability did not protect Gonzalez from racial prejudice, and he quickly sought reassignment to a black unit. According to him, “[my] background is more or less similar to that of Afro-Americans.”³⁰⁰ While dually Latino and African, Afro-Cuban men came to understand segregation and blackness through war, and they returned to Tampa as black first and Cuban second.

While their sons experienced new notions of identity and belonging, Latina mothers and Latino fathers supported the home front through labor. Indeed, Ybor City’s Latinas and Latinos were active in the war effort and the resurging economy. Men who had not volunteered or been called to service and women who stayed home found work at the Tampa shipyards, restaurants, local businesses, and even cigar factories. Over the course of the war,

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War,” pp. 48.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 43.

³⁰⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

Tampa's "industrial heart shifted from Ybor City to Ybor Channel."³⁰¹ Latinos who had long suffered from workplace discrimination and unemployment inside cigar factories were filled with excitement when headlines like "2,000 Workers Sought for Shipyards Here" appeared in the local paper.³⁰² Men were excited by the opportunity to work, at the chance to earn a true living wage. Many had worked in cigar factories during the Depression, making only 30 cents per hour and working less than 40 hours a week. They were thrilled to find jobs at Tampa's port, earning 57 cents an hour to start and \$1.40 per hour if promoted to engineer or mechanic.³⁰³ Inspired by the increase in wages and the return of the masculine provider, Latinos from Ybor worked with Anglos from Tampa to build over 76 ships for the navy and repair 500. Families that had long lived without economic security used this new money to hoard rations and prepare for future scarcity.³⁰⁴

While some Latinas found work as welders and riveters at the shipyards, the lack of union representation in the new industry deterred the migration of labor from the factory to the shipping docks.³⁰⁵ Latinas, who had a history making cigars and had fought to keep their jobs during the Depression, stayed in Ybor City and worked the machines. Indeed, over six

³⁰¹ Charles Fuss, "The S.S. American Victory in War and Peace," *Cigar City Magazine* (November/December 2007): pp. 1.

³⁰² Mormino, "Ybor City Goes to War," pp. 26.

³⁰³ Fuss, "The S.S. American Victory in War and Peace," pp. 2.

³⁰⁴ Ferdie Pacheco, *Ybor City Chronicles: A Memoir* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1994), pp. 252; Mormino, "Ybor City Goes to War," pp. 26.

³⁰⁵ Stacey Lynn Tanner, "Progress and Sacrifice: Tampa Shipyard Workers in World War II." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 4 (Spring 2007): pp. 433.

thousand women worked at the cigar benches during the war.³⁰⁶ *Tabaqueras* who no longer needed to battle the Manufacturers Association and the CMIU for men's employment negotiated for higher wages and better working hours. Sixteen cigar factories held contracts with the Departments of War and Navy, which gave all women working in the factories an additional forty-eight hours of paid labor and take-home pay every week. Their wages rose to 40 cents an hour plus overtime and Saturday pay.³⁰⁷ When manufacturers tried to withhold wages and the CMIU again refused to negotiate according to women's needs, Latinas walked out of the factories. They left employers to pay fines to the War Department for lack of cigar production due to breach of employment contracts. For the duration of the war, *tabaqueras'* wages were paid in full and on time.³⁰⁸ Tampa had finally overcome the Depression and was able to provide work for all residents. Additionally, Latinas again were able to exercise collective power independent of the union.

While Latinas were able to exercise control over their jobs, they were less able to control discourse about their decency. During WWII, Tampa officials situated Latinas at the center of the city's venereal disease (VD) epidemic. Just as the WPA workers judged the morality of Latina mothers who labored outside the home, the city of Tampa accused all independent and "unescorted" Latinas of being prostitutes, "patriotic girls," and "victory

³⁰⁶ "US Department of Labor Conciliation Report," July 28, 1943 and "Letter to John R. Steelman, Department of Labor, D.C. from R.R. Espina," July 25, 1943, Roll 191, Record Group 55, National Archives Microfilm Publication, Roll 191, General Records of the Department of Labor, Record Group 55, National Archives Annex, College Park, Maryland).

³⁰⁷ Mormino, "Ybor City Goes to War," pp. 25.

³⁰⁸ "Secretary of Labor from Ray C. Brown, Attorney for Cigar Manufacturers Association," August 10, 1943, (National Archives Microfilm Publication, Roll 191, General Records of the Department of Labor, Record Group 55, National Archives Annex, College Park, Maryland.

women.” In an attempt to control the spread of diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea, Tampa identified “illicit zones,” areas of the city off-limits to soldiers. This list included Ybor City and most of its neighboring businesses. The *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported, “Military police enforce[d] the order by patrolling all places” and “warned soldiers against going in, [for] they immediately bring out any who stepped through a forbidden door.”³⁰⁹

Tampa officials, like those elsewhere, associated VD with depravity, disorder, and immorality – the same characteristics that city officials, HUAC, and the INS had spent years linking with Latinas and Latinos in Ybor. As radicals whose political activities and dedication to labor WAS conflated with their sexual sensibilities, Latinas were the scapegoats for Tampa’s public health fiasco.

During WWII, Tampa’s VD rate was far above the national average. Between 1941 and 1942, local military bases saw the rate of infection rise from 50 to 88 cases per 1,000 soldiers.³¹⁰ The most pressing concern was the transmission of syphilis, a debilitating illness prior to the 1943 advent of penicillin.³¹¹ Nationally, the military found 45 cases per every 1,000 examined; however, Florida military bases reported 157 cases per 1,000 men tested. Military doctors found that African American men ostensibly had an even higher rate of syphilis, 415 cases per 1,000. Of course, black soldiers also faced additional scrutiny for VD, about which the men understandably complained. For this reason, documentation of higher

³⁰⁹ “Army Puts 32 Tampa Places Out of Bounds,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 12, 1942, pp. 1.

³¹⁰ Nick Wynne and Richard Moorhead, “Prostitutes, Victory Girls, and Venereal Diseases: Social Problems,” in *Florida in World War II: Floating Fortress* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2010), pp. 176.

³¹¹ Harry M. Marks, *The Progress of Experiment: Science and Therapeutic Reform in the United States, 1900-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 108.

levels of VD among African-American soldiers did not reveal that they were at higher risk for VD, but rather that they were under greater surveillance than Anglo soldiers.³¹² Because men often had no symptoms, many instances of STI went unreported; therefore, the true numbers were likely higher in all categories, particularly among Anglos. The Florida air corps claimed that VD led to the loss of 15,000 workdays in 1941 alone, and it demanded that the presumably promiscuous city of Tampa find a solution to the growing problem.³¹³

Unsurprisingly, the city and state's first action to stop the spread of disease was to police women's sexuality. In this way, they followed in the footsteps of government officials around the world who had long identified women, specifically women of color, as the sole source of VD.³¹⁴ The state of Florida first sought to redefine prostitution, passing "a broad anti-prostitution law in April of 1943 that incorporated any sexual act outside marriage as a form of prostitution." This legislation also gave local police the authority to close businesses that "aided and abetted prostitution, lewdness, or assignation."³¹⁵ Women found guilty of spreading disease or displaying "lewd" behavior faced arrest and confinement at educational camps in Ocala and elsewhere, where they learned the dangers of promiscuity and the power

³¹² Ibid, pp. 175-177; Vice and Venereal Reports to Mayor Cutis Hixon, June 1944 – December 1945, Box 57, File 562, Tampa City Archives, Tampa, FL.

³¹³ Troy Thompson, "'A Black Spot': Florida's Crusade against Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and Female Sexuality During World War II," *Florida Public Health Review* 2 (2005): pp. 115-120.

³¹⁴ See for example: Rebecca Lord, "Quarantine in the Fort Ozama Dungeon: The Control of Prostitution and Venereal Disease in the Dominican Republic," *Caribbean Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (December 2003): pp. 12-29; Laura Briggs, "Sex and Citizenship: The Politics of Prostitution in Puerto Rico, 1898-1918," in *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): pp. 46-73; Paul A. Kramer, "The Darkness that Enters the Home: The Politics of Prostitution during the Philippine-American War," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Empire in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): pp. 366-404.

³¹⁵ Wynne and Moorhead, "Prostitutes, Victory Girls, and Venereal Diseases," pp. 176.

of abstinence. The law was grounded in monitoring women's sexual behavior and originally ignored male sexual activity. Due to the location of the city's "illicit zones," Anglo women likewise faced less scrutiny than Latinas and African-American women.

Women of color were the faces of the VD campaign in Tampa. The *Tampa Morning Tribune* warned readers in June of 1942 to "guard" oneself from the "dark, lustful" eyes of Tampa's Latin women.³¹⁶ Mayor Chancey also saw the black, female partners of black soldiers as sources of VD, purporting: "If we had no Negro soldiers here, our record for social protection for military personnel would be one of the highest in the United States." Echoing the mayor, the editor of *Tampa Morning Tribune* asserted, "Negro town has become a den in iniquity."³¹⁷ In reality, the African-American and Latino neighborhoods had low levels of both prostitution and VD.³¹⁸ According to a study conducted by the Health Department, soldiers who claimed to have contracted VD in the city's "illicit zones" noted that their regular sexual partners, not prostitutes, were the source of infection.³¹⁹ The multiple unsubstantiated claims of this study reveal how military officials collected VD data during WWII. Not only were women consistently assumed to be the source of VD, but so too were men trusted to identify the woman that passed along the disease. In this particular study, male soldiers were more likely to eschew references to prostitutes, as this fact would have resulted in the women's arrests. Never mentioned was the possibility of VD transmission between

³¹⁶ "Army Puts 32 Tampa Places Out of Bounds," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, September 12, 1942, pp. 1, 6A.

³¹⁷ Quoted in Wynne and Moorhead, "Prostitutes, Victory Girls, and Venereal Diseases," pp. 178.

³¹⁸ Vice and Venereal Reports to Mayor Cutis Hixon. June 1944 – December 1945. Box 57, File 562, Tampa City Archives.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

two male sexual partners. Just as the WPA had once attacked Latinas' sexuality and accused the women of not deserving aid and relief, the WWII-era media and military identified Latinas and other women of color as detrimental to the war effort and therefore unpatriotic.

During World War II, Latinas and Latinos sought to overcome the limitations of their ethnicity through service and labor. White Latinos found that, despite their Spanish accents and brown skin, combat could convert them into valued Americans. Conversely, Afro-Cubans learned that the color of their skin was more important to Anglos than their dedication to the nation. Latinas found autonomy and respect through their labor in the cigar factories; however, younger Latinas struggled against conceptions of them as transmitters of VD.

Planning and Protesting Urban Removal

Tabaqueros Amanda and Enrique Pollato lived on a "narrow dirt alley" in Ybor City. Their shotgun house was one of many "unpainted frame shacks" in the neighborhood that were in need of desperate repair.³²⁰ "They're planning to tear down a lot of these old 'shotgun' shacks," Amanda told Stetson Kennedy as he sat on their front porch. Stetson must have looked puzzled because Amanda explained, "You know, these old houses are called one- or two-barreled, shotgun shacks depending on how many apartments they have."³²¹ Built by the original cigar manufacturers in the 1890s, the wooden houses had started to fall apart after sixty years of heat and humidity. Amanda apologized as she welcomed Stetson into their house, "You'll have to forgive our humble home. I only pay three dollars a week

³²⁰ "Amanda and Enrique," Manuscript, FWP, pp. 412-413.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

for it but its near Enrique's job."³²² The couple rented their home from an Anglo who lived in central Tampa and who refused to paint the house or fix the plumbing. Despite the influx of WPA projects and War Department funds that paved streets and installed electricity in central Tampa during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the city's communities of color, and the homes of Tampa's blue-collar workforce, were overlooked in the name of progress.

In 1941, the possibility for improvement existed in the form of Tampa's Urban Planning Commission, which hired George Simmons to assess the city's streets and to prepare for growth. City planners and legislators knew that the end of World War II would cause the population of Tampa to soar. Single-lane roads, dirt paths, and dead-end streets already led to extreme congestion and pile-ups in the city's center. "Most Tampa highways were built for horse and buggies," Simmons explained, "but now must be adapted to the uses of the motor."³²³ Between 1930 and 1940, the number of vehicles on Tampa roads increased from 38,932 passenger cars to 48,323, and the number of passengers per vehicle increased from 4.5 to 3.7.³²⁴ Therefore, taking into account the population in 1940, "there was the equivalent of a passenger car to every family in Hillsborough County."³²⁵ In an effort to convert Tampa from a Depression-era, industrial town to a modern, post-war city, Tampa needed space. Of course, expansion also signaled destruction.

Tampa's first wave of urban renewal came in 1936, when the Home Ownership Loan Corporation (HOLC) assessed the city's neighborhoods. Unlike the subsequent Urban

³²² Ibid.

³²³ "Vehicles and Roads," Simmon's Plans, 1941, UPA, pp. 41-42.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

Planning Commission, the HOLC sought to determine which areas of Tampa were at the highest risk for “blight.” Pending the outcome of their survey, the city would receive New Deal funds to help restore areas that were most in need. This was a fantastic opportunity for Tampa, as its industrial tax base had plummeted due to the decline of cigars and the absence of construction. At its heart, however, the HOLC was a loan corporation, and a factor of “blight” was the “risk” of default on mortgages and loans. Because the city depended on the evaluation by the HOLC rather than a holistic assessment of Tampa, the majority of the funds from the 1930s flooded to areas of the city that were white and wealthy for unlike their working-class neighbors, Tampa’s wealthy owned a considerable amount on money on their mortgages, while the properties Latinas and Latinos rented in Ybor were either paid-off or low risk. Because of this, both Ybor City and the Scrub (the affectionate name for Tampa’s black neighborhood) received no city funds from the HOLC blight assessment.

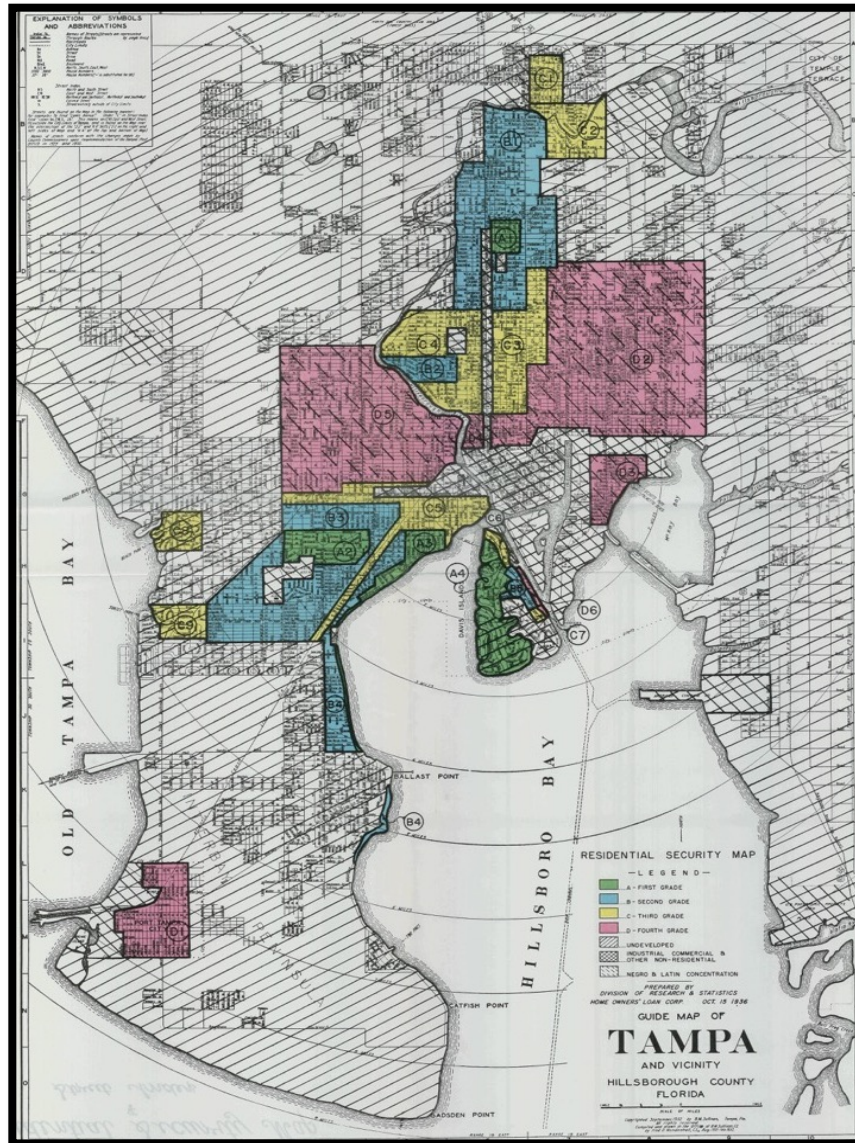


Figure 7. Photograph courtesy of the Tampa Planning Commission Archive.³²⁶

Latinos quickly learned that the 1940s Simmon’s Plan would prove no different than the prior HOLC evaluation. When the Simmon’s Plan became public in 1947, public outcry ensued. Anglos living in central Tampa were set to benefit from the expansion of roads and

³²⁶ A 1936 map that details the assessment of the HOLC. Areas in pink, which include Ybor City (Latino), “the Scrub” (African American), and the Port of Tampa City (African American) are identified as at the lowest risk for blight. The areas in green and blue are the city’s wealthiest neighborhoods: Bayshore, Hyde Park, and Davis Islands. They are categorized as the highest risk and therefore in need of funding.

investment in their neighborhoods' infrastructures. Latinos and African Americans living on the city's outskirts would face foreclosure and relocation. Indeed, the plan sought to demolish properties in order to widen roads and create a comprehensive interstate system. In 1947, the city took its first steps toward "renewal" when it razed the Scrub. At this time, Amanda Pollato heard that the city planned "to build big new apartments for Negroes, and make all move into one section and not be scattered like they are now." When Amanda speculated as to whether these women and men would want to move, she concluded, "I guess the city will condemn their property even if they don't."³²⁷ Amanda was right, as the city planned to relocate African American women and men from the Scrub. But budget cuts and lack of plan approval simply resulted in the demolition of African-American homes; the residents were forced to find a solution to their housing problems. As a result, African Americans started to move into Ybor City in search of affordable housing.³²⁸

Although Latinos in Ybor were working-class and union-conscious, their dedication to interracial coalitions and civil rights was nominal at best. When the city's black women and men began to move into the neighborhood, *La Gaceta* started a campaign to raise awareness about plans for renewal:

Gentlemen: The undersigned citizens, residents, and taxpayers of that portion of the city, which bounds on 14th Street between 9th Avenue and Columbus Drive do most sincerely petition your honorable body that some act or Resolution be adopted eliminating Negroes living in this boundary. We respectfully solicit the aid of the authorities to stop the intermingling of Negroes with the white population avoiding thus that our children, wives and immediate families be embarrassed with such a condition.³²⁹

³²⁷ "Amanda and Enrique," Manuscript, FWP, pp. 412.

³²⁸ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 288.

³²⁹ "Latin Petition to Tampa Authority," October 1940, TPC, Box100, Folder "Urban Renewal."

This petition was sent to the board of city representatives and published by the Anglo press in the *Tampa Morning Tribune*. Both white Latinas and Latinos signed the petition in support of segregation within the Ybor City community, and they insisted on making this request publicly known. For immigrant members of the Communist Party and supporters of the International Popular Front, this action was exceptional. One of the most significant aspects of the letter is its use of racialized language by immigrant Latinos. This was the first time Ybor City residents described themselves as “white” in print. The power of whiteness was not a Latino concept, but immigrant women and men understood its importance in the United States. Routinely refused service at restaurants and in public spaces beyond Ybor City, Latinos were well aware of the power of color. Although the barrier between Latinos and Anglos was stronger than skin, invoking a sense of race-based unity was a powerful claim. Ybor City Latinas and Latinos traditionally saw themselves as part of an international (and interracial) working-class community that sought representation through labor organization. While this tactic had not helped Latinos secure economic stability during the Depression, dedication to labor politics was historically integral to Latino, specifically Cuban, identity. Rejecting this principle, even insincerely, marked a shift in Latinos’ politics. They introduced a desire to be seen as “white” American citizens, rather than immigrant foreigners.³³⁰

³³⁰ For more constructing whiteness, see Jennifer Guglielmo, “Introduction: White Lies, Dark Truths,” in *Are Italians White?: How Race is Made in America*, eds. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 2003), pp. 1-16; Thomas A. Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights: Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and the Transnational Struggle for Civil Rights in World War II Texas,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (March 2006): pp. 1212-1237; David Roedigger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2005); Clara E. Rodríguez, “Puerto Ricans: Between Black and White,” in *Historical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Survival in the United States*, eds. Clara E. Rodríguez and Virginia Sánchez-Korrol (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 1996), pp. 23-36.

Latino petition writers also used paternalistic language to gain the attention of Tampa officials. By describing the “intermingling of Negroes with the white population” as an action worthy of social embarrassment and from which Latinos sought to shelter their children and families, the men of Ybor City used the same racial language that Tampa Anglos employed to justify Jim Crow and discriminate against Latinas and Latinos. In an effort to escape the constant cycle of poverty within the Ybor community, white Latinas and Latinos sought to create an acceptable non-threatening, white, identity.

The public response from the community pushed the city of Tampa to delay some of the plans for renewal until the late 1950s. However, Tampa continued to demolish the city’s black communities and displace thousands of residents. Ybor City remained intact until 1962, when the city dissected the neighborhood to create major thoroughfares for the city’s booming population. In anticipation of this destruction of Ybor City, the younger generation fled to the suburbs in search of a new kind of life.

Conclusion

Between 1938 and 1946, Ybor City’s Latinas and Latinos found themselves at a crossroads. The older and younger generations each questioned who they wanted to be as members of a changing nation. Immigrant women and men maintained strength in persistent radicalism and were unwilling to abandon the radical ideologies that had sustained them through the hardship of the Depression. Members of this first generation knew of a life beyond U.S. borders, and not even the persecution by HUAC was strong enough to break their politics. By the end of the 1940s, these Latinas and Latinos would reinvigorate the community’s Popular Front and continue the fight for true progressivism at home and abroad.

However, for Ybor City's young women and men who came of age during World War II, their connection to radicalism wavered. Unlike their parents, who lived migrant, cross-border lives, these Latinas and Latinos had grown up in relative isolation. They lived in Ybor City but were intrigued by Tampa; during the 1940s, WWII offered young Latinos the chance to negotiate their identities and search for belonging beyond the confines of the community. As they labored next to Anglos at the shipyards and fought next to Anglos in Europe, white Latinos found a sense of camaraderie and acceptance that they hoped would bring economic stability that their parents' activism never accomplished. This sense of belong, however, was conditional. While white Latinos found in wartime recognition of their Americanization, Afro-Cubans and young Latinas experienced the power of racism, sexism, and nativism.

As Latinos negotiated belonging and sought to understand how their radical roots would adapt to their new American lives, the city of Tampa began to make that choice for them. To Latinos living in Ybor City, space was synonymous with safety. The start of city planning and the coming of urban renewal illustrated which spaces the city deemed important. Planners saw Ybor City as space that could improve Tampa's infrastructure, while likewise clearing one of the city's "slums." Although some Latinos sought to rebrand themselves and align themselves with Anglos, the history of tension between Tampa and Ybor, as well as the unwavering influence of nativism and racism, pushed politicians to approve Simmon's plans and eventually dissect the Latino community.

CHAPTER 4: AMERICAN VOTERS AND CUBAN REVOLUTIONARIES: PROGRESSIVISM AND RADICALISM IN THE SUNSHINE STATE

Introduction

At the end of World War II, George Gallup boldly asked the American public: “Taking into account all the qualities possessed by the different people or races of the world, how would you rate the people listed below in comparison with the people of the United States?” The results of the report were designated “confidential,” but they told a story of public opinion and state power. Americans ranked Canadians, the English, and Scandinavians as the groups “most like them,” and Germans were seemingly excused for WWII, as they received a high ranking in the poll as well. Of the ethnicities huddled at the bottom of the list, Spaniards and Mexicans were ranked only slightly higher than the Japanese.³³¹ The anti-communist and anti-immigrant campaigns of the 1940s had a profound impact upon who was thought to be “American.” Americans categorized the undesirables in Gallup’s poll with political radicalism or dismissed them due to nativism. By 1948, however, the very qualities that caused Americans to see “Spaniards and Mexicans” as different were

³³¹ “An Analysis of American Public Opinion Regarding the War,” Presidential Personal Files, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY. In personal collection of Gary Mormino; In reports prior to the civil rights movements and rise of social justice activism, “Spanish” often signals “Hispanic” or “Latino,” as there were not collective terms to describe these groups at that time; Gary Mormino, “Ybor City Goes to War: The Evolution and Transformation of a Latin Community in Florida, 1886-1950,” in *Latina/os and World War II: Mobility, Agency, Ideology*, eds. Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez and B.V. Olguin (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014), pp. 28.

the factors that brought Latinos as participants into the American political system, altering the way they saw themselves in relation to the nation and the international community.³³²

In Ybor City, Latinas and Latinos had long combatted ethno-racial discrimination, which until 1948 set them apart from the typical American. Their public radicalism and commitment to international democracy made these women and men seem un-American to their Anglo neighbors. In 1948, however, when Henry A. Wallace announced his candidacy for president on the Progressive ticket, he rejected racism, embraced labor unionism, and advocated for international unity. In the process, he welcomed Latinos, African Americans, and working-class women and men into the party. For Ybor City's women and men who had long struggle for access to American politics, the Wallace campaign offered inclusion.

Six years after Wallace campaigned for progressivism, Fidel Castro visited Tampa to establish a network of support to wage his revolution. Ybor Latinos felt a sense of oneness with the island of Cuba. Many women and men had family who lived across borders, and for decades, labor activism in one place meant a sympathy strike in another. When Castro claimed, "The Cuban Republic is the daughter of Ybor City cigar makers," he did not take into account the drastic changes that WWII had wrecked on the community. The skilled labor that made Ybor the "Cigar City" had all but disappeared by 1955, and the company town was in disarray. American-born Latinos often shared more in common with their Anglo neighbors, and the radical, racial unity that connected Ybor City and the island had begun to fade.

This chapter investigates the Florida Latinos' first foray into the American political system. From the late 1940 through the 1950s, Latinas and Latinos negotiated difference,

³³² Ibid.

finding representation through formal political, rather than radical, organizing. The demise of the cigar industry and the diversification of postwar labor introduced these women and men to lives beyond their ethnic enclaves and pushed them to embrace their positions as Cuban-American citizens. The transition occurred rapidly, finding momentum in Wallace's 1948 campaign, and assuming visibility during Castro's 1955 visit to Ybor City, where he found a Latino population closely tied to the United States.

“Amigos Mios”

In December of 1947, Henry A. Wallace announced his decision to run for president of the United States on the Progressive Party ticket. Wallace was a dedicated liberal and champion of the New Deal, but he was exhausted by President Harry S. Truman failure to embrace Franklin Roosevelt's legacy. “The people have the right to be heard through a new party,” Wallace stated in a national radio address.³³³ Frustrated by political rhetoric and duplicitous foreign policies, the Iowa-born, former Vice President sought to dismantle systematic racism and anti-labor forces at home, while promoting peace through diplomacy abroad. As his voice moved through the airwaves, bringing hope to communities of color throughout the nation, Wallace declared, “A vote for a new party in 1948 will be the most valuable vote you have ever cast or will ever cast.”³³⁴ Many Latinos, African Americans, and working-class women and men embraced Wallace's call and rallied for a new type of U.S. politician and the promise of an inclusive democracy.

³³³ Jared G. Toney, “‘Viva Wallace!’ Tampa Latins, the Politics of Americanization, and the Progressive Campaign of 1948,” M.A. Thesis, University of South Florida, 2002, pp. 41; Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 261.

³³⁴ Quoted in John C. Culver and John Hyde, *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 457.

Latinos throughout the nation were inspired by Wallace's platform. Never before had these women and men seen a candidate who "spoke out against racism, called for integrated housing and education," and also "supported the Good Neighbor policy" and organized labor.³³⁵ For Latinos in Ybor City, these qualities were particularly important. Latinas and Latinos in Tampa were veterans of the labor movement and longtime champions of democracy abroad. They organized when employers exploited them and fundraised for comrades abroad when U.S. government refused to come to their aid. Wallace, however, endorsed peace and anti-discrimination. He also shared an inclusive vision of American politics. For the Ybor Latinos and Latinas who had watched their community drastically change over the course of a decade, the Wallace campaign presented the opportunity for them to engage in national politics as voters and citizens for the first time.

During the Depression and wartime years, Latinos in Florida were defined by their foreignness. Anglos in the South viewed their Ybor neighbors as dangerous radicals who spoke Spanish and threatened the "American" way of life. Their women worked, and their men were idle. Their boys were delinquent, and their daughters were prostitutes. Tampa's Anglos imagined the worst of Latinas and Latinos, not understanding that from the perspective of the Latino community, the very actions that deemed them "different," were the same qualities that made them "Cuban-American." From the perspective of Southern Anglos, however, there existed a singular definition of Americanism that was determined by white supremacy—challenges to this order were never welcome.

³³⁵ Zaragosa Vargas, *In the Cause of Freedom: Early Mexican American Political and Intellectual Activism and Transnational Struggle, 1946-1963* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), pp. 13; Thomas Devine, *Henry Wallace's 1948 Presidential Campaign and the Future of Postwar Liberalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

While greeted with cordiality by voters in the rest of the United States, Henry Wallace faced much resistance from Southerners on the campaign trail. He began his campaign for president in 1948, trekking from California to New York and Pennsylvania to Florida. Wallace sought to win votes and inspire Americans who searched for a better standard of U.S. politics; and in the process, he inspired the rise of a new American voter. On the West Coast, Wallace walked the agricultural fields with Mexican-American farmworkers, listening to their stories and acknowledging the injustice of their treatment and the ingratitude for their work.³³⁶ He spoke to a crowd of 100,000 supporters at Lincoln Center in East Los Angeles and met with the grass-roots organizers who made the campaign possible.³³⁷ In Philadelphia, he joined men and women from across the country to mark the founding of the Progressive Party. Wallace addressed 3,200 party delegates and alternates, as well as 8,000 visitors, at the Philadelphia Convention Hall in order to invigorate new party members.³³⁸ In the South, however, as Wallace moved between the southern states, he was met with vitriol and violence. At his campaign stops, Southerners “booed, stoned” and threatened to end his life.³³⁹ Traveling with him and campaigning independently on his behalf was fellow progressive and African American singer Paul Robeson. This did little to ingratiate Wallace to the Anglos of the South.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Vargas, *In the Cause of Freedom*, pp. 16.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21

³⁴⁰ “500 Hear Robeson, Negro Singer, at 3rd Party Rally,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 5, 1948, pp. 1.

Like its southern neighbors, Florida did not welcome the Progressive Party or Henry Wallace. Opposition to the campaign was vocal and visible; and inside local communities, those who opposed Wallace threatened those who supported him. Throughout Central and South Florida, the popularity of the Wallace campaign coincided with the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). *The Lakeland Ledger* consistently advertised meetings between “men of good will” and “defenders of the south” who looked to increase their numbers in order to combat communism and “all south-haters.”³⁴¹ Anti-communist rhetoric also resurged in response to Wallace’s presidential campaign, and Tampa residents encouraged others “to urge friends to oust Reds.” In Tampa, many of these red-baiting campaigns centered on the Italian-American community, where women and men sometimes acted as police inside immigrant communities and urged Tampa’s women and men to stand against their common enemy, Josef Stalin.³⁴²

In some areas of South Florida, the residents’ long history of radicalism and labor unionism created a hospitable environment for a controversial candidate like Wallace. These women and men were dedicated to economic equality, civil rights, and international peace, and they welcomed the rhetoric of change. To Ybor Latinos, the promise to change the direction of U.S. foreign policy was a particularly powerful platform. Immigrant *cubanos* in Tampa continued to travel between the city and the island, and, the power of radicalism endured amongst the older generation. “We have an obligation to see that this nation never recognizes Franco,” Paul Robeson said on a campaign stop in Tampa. Wallace’s commitment

³⁴¹ See the *Lakeland Ledger*, February through October 1948. Such advertisements are plentiful and frequent.

³⁴² “Tampa Italians Urge Friends to Oust Reds,” *Tampa Times*, April 1, 1948, pp. 1.

to anti-fascism also resonated with Ybor supporters who believed Truman's hunt for communists overlooked true oppression abroad.³⁴³

Wallace's grassroots efforts to mobilize in the South were careful and calculated. In Florida, the campaign centered on Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Miami, targeting black and Latino communities. Ybor resident, Mariano Rodriguez served as the district vice chairman of the Progressive Party in Tampa and worked to organize the city in support of Wallace. As a Latino and former *tabaquero*, Rodriguez looked to organized labor for support. In Tampa, Rodriguez labored closely with the CMIU and the Maritime Union to find new registrants for the Progressive Party. Between these two unions, 5,000 members pledged to register as part of this new party.³⁴⁴ For the Latinas who dominated CMIU membership in 1948, this could have been the first time many chose to register or cared to participate in a major election.

Latinas and Latinos, who had long lived on the periphery of American society, saw the Wallace campaign as an opportunity to be included. Since the fall of the cigar industry in Tampa, Ybor City's women and men had been looking for acknowledgment by state and local politics. Unable to find acceptance within Tampa, many Latinas and Latinos organized on the margins through protest. Ybor City's women and men were exhausted from generations of political exclusion. Lack of access to state and federal resources was not a problem when employment existed and the mutual aid system thrived. But in the postwar era, the city's makeshift immigrant infrastructure was virtually nonexistent. Latinas and Latinos eager to find solutions and representation looked to the Wallace campaign to "challenge U.S.

³⁴³ Joe Maldonado, "As Tribune Readers See It," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, October 14, 1948, pp. 3.

³⁴⁴ Toney, "Viva Wallace," pp. 64.

conservatism not as outsiders, but as confident citizens with vested interests in a system perceived partly as their own.”³⁴⁵

The Amigos de Wallace (Friends of Wallace) campaign aimed to capture the excitement and readiness of Latinos ready to participate in the American electoral system. This organization focused on Latinos and their interests; more importantly, it produced propaganda in Spanish. The campaign knew that on-the-ground, pavement-pounding outreach was only effective if organizers could sustain excitement throughout all Latino communities with Progressive Party support. At the Amigos de Wallace headquarters in New York City, campaign strategists published a manifesto from Henry A. Wallace that called for “Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, and Latin Americans” to join him in the “fight for civil rights.”³⁴⁶ Embracing the internationalist platform that invigorated many Latino voters, it urged, “We cannot allow this nation to become an imperialist power that exploits us and wrecks us for the benefits of the banks.” The manifesto warned that if American citizens allowed the United States to continue down its current path the nation would extend its “oppressive tentacles” and “provoke another world war.”³⁴⁷ Looking to excite Latinos, the proclamation continued:

“Spanish speaking citizens and Hispanic Descendants: In the electoral fight of 1948 there is nothing more than two parties: that of Truman with his republican allies, Hoover and the like; and the **NEW PEOPLES PARTY LED BY APOSTLE HENRY A. WALLACE**. We, the people of Hispanic origin, cannot be on the side of Truman and his devilish political scheme whose triumph would be the ruin and

³⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 3.

³⁴⁶ Quoted in "Manifesto," Reies López Tijerina Collection, 1888-1978, MSS 654BC, Box 54, Folder 1, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

³⁴⁷ Quoted in Ibid.

enslavement of the American people and the entire world. As progressives, we must support Henry Wallace and his New Party with all our soul, heart, and life, whose program contains positive plans to solve the serious and pressing problems that confront the American people, and in particular our ethnic group.”³⁴⁸

The Wallace campaign’s effort to bring Latinos into the Progressive Party was successful. Working-class Latinas and Latinos scattered throughout the United States saw their personal struggles in Wallace’s words. His dedication to labor and commitment to peace resonated with communities who had lived through revolution and poverty, and ostracization. The Wallace campaign engaged Latinos as worthy citizens rather than dissident outsiders. Rampant nativist and racism in the American immigration process had kept these women and men at arm’s length, restricting them from full actualization of their rights as citizens. But Wallace not only embraced Latinos, he empowered them and welcomed them. “Forward then fellow citizens and AMIGOS DE WALLACE, join the New Party,” stated the manifesto in its final sentence. It concluded added, “We will fight valiantly in the army of Peace that HENRY A. WALLACE so gallantly leads.”³⁴⁹

Latinos, African Americans, and working-class Anglos created the majority of the candidate’s base; all were dedicated to the Progressive Party, but each group came with its own motivations. African Americans had long been disfranchised as residents in the segregated South, and Florida, like its neighboring Confederate states, had stripped black community members of their dignity, terrorizing these women and men when they attempted to balk Jim Crow’s authority. Wallace’s anti-segregationist platform and dedication to civil rights attracted Tampa’s black voters. They hoped to register for the Progressive Party and

³⁴⁸ Quoted in Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Quoted in Ibid.

cast their ballots, assuming the city's vigilante powers did not block their November attempts. Latinos in Tampa embraced the Wallace campaign because it welcomed them. Community outreach was key to Latino support, and the pro-labor platform united the radical, union-minded women and men in Ybor City. The fact that Wallace addressed these women and men personally won him their votes, as these immigrants had long experienced oversight and discrimination.³⁵⁰ Indeed, Tampa's communities of color, while both advocates for progressivism, had different motivations and hopes that a Wallace presidency would bring positive change for their communities.

Henry Wallace arrived in Tampa at 6:30 a.m. on February 18, 1948, during his campaign's first visit to the city. Greeted at the Tampa International Airport by Mariano Rodriguez and other leaders of the grass-roots campaign, Wallace prepared for a full day of meetings and speeches. *La Gaceta*, which had followed the Henry Wallace campaign closely since the candidate's announcement in December, shared with its readership, "Wallace is going to be in the tobacco factory 'El Paraiso' and other places. ... It is rumored that he will make a tour around the Latin neighborhoods ... with the intention of speaking with whites and blacks."³⁵¹ Aware of the division between the neighborhood's Afro-Cuban and white Cuban populations, editor Victoriano Manteiga perhaps sought to include all Latinos in Wallace's visit. At the *Paraiso* factory, where hundreds of Latinas and some Latinos worked the cigar machines, Wallace received praise and admiration. As he walked through the factory, some *tabaqueras* showed him the cigars they rolled and invited him to sit at their table. Undoubtedly, Wallace spoke to the Latinos and Latinas in the factory about labor

³⁵⁰ Toney, "Viva Wallace," pp. 60-61.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 70; "Henry Wallace Visits Ybor City," *La Gaceta*, February 18, 1948, pp. 1.

rights and the need for equal access to government aid. As a key member of the New Deal coalition, he understood the importance of government benefits to Ybor's working-class women and men. The *tabaqueras* and *tabaqueros* stood at their workstations and gave Wallace a standing ovation before he left the factory. *La Gaceta* recounted that Wallace was moved by the spontaneous show of gratitude and support from the workers.³⁵²

The local Progressive Party planned and organized a rally for the presidential candidate where over two thousand supporters gathered to hear Wallace speak. Although campaigning in the South, Wallace stayed true to his anti-segregationist platform and refused to speak at any facility where whites and blacks could not sit side-by-side. Despite grumbling from local Tampa Anglos, the city of Tampa approved the permit and allowed Wallace to speak in downtown Tampa to an integrated audience. Ten police officers patrolled the event in the case that "rowdyism" erupted.³⁵³ Some of Tampa's Anglo community members were so outraged by the interracial display and the city's seeming support of communism that they boycotted the event.³⁵⁴ However, while the city expected an attendance of 500 people, 2,500 supporters came to see Wallace, braving the chilly February weather.

³⁵² "Henry Wallace Visits Ybor City," *La Gaceta*, February 18, 1948, pp. 1.

³⁵³ "Crowd Shouts 'Viva Wallace' As He Strolls Into Park," *Tampa Tribune*, February 18, 1948, pp. 1.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 8. Plant Field in 1948.
Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Later that night, Wallace arrived at Plant Field for the main event of the Tampa visit. As he took the stage, the crowd erupted into a collective chant, yelling “VI-VA WAL-LACE! VI-VA WAL-LACE!”³⁵⁵ Perhaps surprised by the only warm welcome he received in the South, Wallace looked out to the crowd and greeted his supporters as “amigos mios!” (my friends).³⁵⁶ During his speech, Wallace focused on international policy and the importance of creating unity through peace. Furthermore, he defended himself and his campaign against accusations of a communist agenda. Invoking Victor Hugo, Wallace asserted: “I charge them

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

with the larceny of the fundamental civil rights of American citizens; I charge them with the larceny of the people's savings; I charge them with larceny of the workers wages and the farmers income; I charge them with larceny of the peoples hard-won victory in the war against foreign fascism!"³⁵⁷ Indeed, Wallace's determination to pursue a progressive platform had been met with resistance, as supporters experienced redbaiting and attacks by HUAC. At the Tampa event, Wallace implored the city's working-class women and men to look beyond national political parties and vote for the platforms that were truly in their interests.

Despite calls for boycotts and the citywide warning of riots, the Wallace visit was calm and surprisingly uneventful. One Tampa resident reported, "The main reason that everything passed off so quietly at the Wallace rally was the fact that everyone there, except the reporters and the police, were brothers and sisters under the skin."³⁵⁸ Embracing Wallace's platform of interracial equality, the Tampa citizen continued, "The solid class of citizenry both native born and emigrants that have labored since reconstruction days make the South what it is today." Progressives in Tampa "will not be interested in crackpot politicians whose ambitions lead them to all kinds of foolish extremes in leading the foolish ignorant to a belief in false and fanatic ideologies."³⁵⁹

Despite the ardent support for Henry Wallace during his visit to Tampa the turnout on election day for the Progressive Party candidate was limited. Even in Florida, where Wallace had expected 400,000 votes, he earned only 10,023, with the majority of his support coming

³⁵⁷ "Bipartisan policy Hit by Wallace," *Tampa Tribune*, February 18, 1948, pp. 1.

³⁵⁸ "Brothers Under the Skin," *Tampa Tribune*, February 25, 1948, pp. 3.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

from voters in Tampa and Miami.³⁶⁰ According to Hillsborough County voting records, the majority of support in Tampa came from Ybor City and West Tampa, the county's Latino neighborhoods.³⁶¹ But the turnout should not minimize the significance of southern, Latino support for Wallace. In all states south of the Mason-Dixon line, only seven precincts voted for the former Vice President. These were located in Ybor City and West Tampa³⁶² *La Gaceta* praised the campaign and reminded readers of Wallace's visit to the *Paraiso* factory.³⁶³ Grasping at the final threads of progressive unity, Ybor remembered its radical past with hope for an inclusive future.

Latinas and Latinos in Ybor City did not formally engage with American electoral politics until 1948. For decades, Tampa Anglos either ignored or retaliated against the city's *cubanos* because of their radical politics and ethnic differences. Within the matrix of Florida's local, political machine and the broader network of Southern, racial politics, Latinos were outsiders and unwelcome participants in the electoral system. The end of World War II, however, changed how Latinas and Latinos conceived of themselves in relation to the nation. Their identities were no longer singular, but plural. They were Cuban-Americans, and with their hyphenated sense of selves, these women and men publicly embraced American progressivism on their own terms.

³⁶⁰ Toney, "Viva Wallace," pp. 81; "40,000 Expected to Vote in Hillsborough County Today," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 2, 1948, pp. 1.

³⁶¹ "Mayoría a Favor de H. Wallace en Ybor City y West Tampa," *La Gaceta*, November 3, 1948, pp. 1.

³⁶² Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 322 n. 27; Gary R. Mormino, "Origins of the Sun Belt: Florida and the Truman Years, 1945-1953," in *Immigration and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Roger Daniels (Kirkville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2010), pp. 198.

³⁶³ Toney, "Viva Wallace," pp. 70.

Although the platform of Henry Wallace closely mirrored the political ideologies of Ybor Latinos, many still voted for Truman. In fact, Wallace's did not receive more than 65 percent of the vote in Ybor City. This was an impressive statistical majority in terms of electoral politics, but 45 percent of working-class Latinos still voted for another candidate. While those who supported Truman may not have been as active in his campaign, their vote for a traditional party candidate illustrated their approval of establishment politics. In the course of the election, the immigrant women and men of Ybor City asserted themselves as independent voters and American citizens. The Wallace campaign empowered these individuals because it embraced them as citizens, not immigrants. I would suggest that the most important legacy of the Henry Wallace campaign in Florida was that it encouraged Latinos to participate in electoral politics, even though many still voted for Truman. Perhaps the Progressive Party was responsible for making loyal Democrats out of the state's most visible, populous, and powerful minority.

Latino Americans and Cuban Revolutionaries

In 1955, Henry Wallace and Fidel Castro were not so different. Both were anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and pro-labor. The two men denied any connection to or sympathies with the Communist Party, but both traveled with radicals in rebellious circles. While Wallace waged his political revolution at the polling station, Castro inspired Cuba with the "spectacular failure" of his 1953 attack on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago, Cuba.³⁶⁴ Ybor Latinos drawn to Wallace were the same people who empathized with the plight of the Cuban people. Tampa *cubanos*, however, had undergone their own revolution

³⁶⁴ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 3rd ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press), pp. 221.

during the 1940s. The Cuban women and men who once lived between borders had evolved to identity as ethnically Cuban but nationally American. While immigrant men and women were eager to support the revolution, their younger daughters and sons felt little connection to the island. To these young Latinas and Latinos, Cuba was their parent's memory.

Fidel Castro arrived in Tampa in November 1955. The young, hopeful revolutionary was touring the United States to build support and raise money for his revolutionary group, the 26th of July Movement. Before reaching Tampa, Castro delivered speeches in Philadelphia, Union City, Bridgeport, New York, and Miami, all locations with notable Cuban exile populations.³⁶⁵ Castro hoped to appeal to his countrymen and countrywomen for funds, as he knew that a war against U.S.-supported dictator Fulgencio Batista would be costly. The U.S. military supplied the Cuban with the majority of its arms and had a penchant for intervening in conflicts on the island. Determined to realize the promise of "*Cuba libre* (free Cuba)," Castro flew to Tampa to fulfill the independence hopes of Cuban nationalist José Martí, or so he claimed. In Ybor City, Castro found allies with the immigrant generation and devoted radicals, but he was met with skepticism from American-born *cubanos* and progressive Democrats.

When José Martí traveled to Tampa sixty-five years earlier, he triumphantly mobilized the *tabaqueros*, created revolutionary clubs that produced propaganda, and raised money and arms to ship to the Cuban independence fighters. The mere 250-mile stretch between Tampa and Havana made the community an ideal point for collaboration. Although this method of fundraising worked during the Cuban War for Independence (also known as

³⁶⁵ Robert Ingalls, "26 of July Movement Clubs," Unpublished Article Manuscript, pp. 3. In the personal archive of Robert Ingalls.

the Spanish American War), many Ybor Latinos of the 1950s were less committed than their grandparents to the resistance of foreign radicals and more cautious about personal consequences of such involvement.

Ybor Latinos had good reasons to feel nervous about collaborating with Fidel Castro. In 1950, shortly after the end of the Wallace campaign, the House un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) returned to Florida, but this time with a definitive list and an agenda. The Committee called over seventy-five men and women from Tampa's Cuban enclave to testify in Miami. Congressional representatives interrogated Ybor's *cubanas* and *cubanos* about their potential involvement with communism, sometimes forcing them expose their comrades. While most Latinos invoked the Fifth Amendment and declined to answer potentially incriminating questions, the prosecuting attorney sometimes scared them by referencing their naturalized citizenship. Although membership to the Party was difficult to prove, the biggest power held by HUAC was its ability to intimidate, embarrass, and scare its defendants. For women and men whose lives were grounded in Florida, the thought of potentially losing their citizenship and being deported to Cuba would have caused extreme stress. In an effort to protect themselves and their families, members of the Ybor community were understandably careful about their connections to Castro. Before agreeing to work with Castro, *cubanos* and *cubanas* had to ask themselves if they were willing to give up their lives in the United States for an ideological cause in a country where they no longer or never lived.³⁶⁶

Many of Ybor City's Latinos were both nervous and excited about the Cuban

³⁶⁶ "Hearing Before the House Un-American Activities," House of Representatives, Eighty-Third Congress, 2nd ed. (December 1, 1954). Tony Pizzo Collection (hereafter TPC), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL.

Revolution. During his visit to Tampa, Castro brought with him a several fellow rebels and key collaborators. These men stayed at the Pedroso boarding house, located two blocks from the Labor Temple, and welcomed interested parties to join them on the porch for *Ronrico con Coca Cola* (rum and coke) to discuss plans for the revolution and determine Ybor City's potential contributions.³⁶⁷ After much debate and negotiation, leaders of the Ybor City social clubs agreed to support the revolution through the development of a *Club Patriótico 26 de Julio Tampa* (The 26 of July Patriotic Club of Tampa). By solidifying this union, Tampa became part of a national network of support organizations that helped fund the revolution from the United States. Other active clubs were located in New York, New Jersey, and Miami.

The process of creating a revolutionary network was a masculine exercise in Tampa. Much like the tradition of meeting at the *sociedades* to debate current events in the salon and drink rum in the bar, planning a revolution excluded women. Raquel was a Tampa teenager when Castro visited. She remembered that she used to accompany her grandmother to the Pedroso house frequently, as “that was the place where the revolutionists would come.”³⁶⁸ Like many men in Ybor City, her father would meet revolutionary supporters at the inn. When Raquel expressed interest in politics, her father stated, “This is not for you women... you know, what they kept the women... women's didn't get involved in all of that [sic].” As a young woman in Ybor City, Raquel “cooked and entertained, but [women] didn't get too

³⁶⁷ The Pedroso boarding house had a long history of revolutionary support. When José Martí visited Tampa he stayed at the same location. The inns' namesake comes from the Afro-Cuban woman who ran the business, Paulina Pedroso. Although she is locally praised as being a strategic member of the Cuban War for Independence, evidence does not substantiate this claim.

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Susan Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 272.

much involved in the revolution.”³⁶⁹ Raquel recalled a brief “relationship” with one of Castro’s comrades: “I dated a revolutionist, a guy that was here from Cuba in exile,” Raquel recalled. He traveled to Tampa, “because Batista was going to kill him.”³⁷⁰ Although not allowed in male spaces to discuss policy, at least one revolutionary made space for her to visit. Indeed, Visiting revolutionaries and their stateside supporters welcomed women as distraction and entertainment, but they had little tolerance for women when creating a plan for the war.

During Castro’s month-long stay in Ybor City, he met with many local residents. A local community member named Tomas remembered that before Castro’s green fatigue-clad days in the Sierra Maestra mountains, “he would go around the street; he would stand on the corners and talk, and people would listen to him.”³⁷¹ But not everyone felt comfortable with Castro’s message. In order to spread word of the revolution and conduct fundraising, Castro planned to give a speech in Tampa; however, finding a venue willing to host the event proved difficult.

Originally, *L’Unione Italiana* (Italian Club) agreed to host the event, but it canceled just twenty-four hours before the speech. Joe Maniscalco, a member of the club’s board of directors, commented, “After we learned the true purpose of the meeting, the board of directors met. We think we should stay away from anything that embarrasses the government of the United States.”³⁷² Victoriano Manteiga, editor of *La Gaceta* and dedicated radical,

³⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 271.

³⁷² Tim O’ Connor, “Italian Club Bars,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 27, 1955, pp 4.

instantly contacted the president of the *Círculo Cubano* (Cuban Club) to request that they support the event and host Castro's speech at their facility. In an effort to "keep harmony among members" her denied her request, and the hunt continued. A desperate Castro approached Juan Casellas, president of the *Sociedad Martí-Maceo*, and requested a second time to use their hall for the event. But according to the club's by-laws, members "recognized the government of Cuba, whatever government it was."³⁷³ And since Castro sought a place to "speak against Batista," Casellas denied Castro's request.³⁷⁴ Finally, Manteiga secured the Labor Temple as the venue for the speech. A space brimming with the spirit revolutionary radicalism and labor activism, the final location seemed appropriate.

These cancelations seem quite peculiar given the nature of the clubs themselves. Never known as apolitical spaces, it is possible that the leaders of the organizations were under pressure from U.S. officials or representatives from the Batista regime to decline Castro's request. Both the *Círculo Cubano* and the *Sociedad Martí Maceo* received annual checks from the Cuban government to support the mutual aid network. Depending on the year, the contribution ranged from 40,000 to 5,000 dollars.³⁷⁵ These funds were essential to the upkeep of the buildings and economic sustainability of the organizations. It is likely that this money was contingent on the Clubs' support for Batista or at least neutrality. Rumors circulated that "the dictator's money is here" and that he was doing all he could from abroad to "destroy this meeting."³⁷⁶ At the same time, U.S. federal agents could have threatened or

³⁷³ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 271-272.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 273.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 271.

³⁷⁶ Tim O'Connor, "Cubans here Give," *Tampa Tribune*, November 28, 1955, pp. 1.

pressured the *centros* to cancel the event and thereby censure Castro's politics. Whatever the reason, Castro would not be silenced.



Figure 9. Fidel Castro delivering a speech to Ybor Latinas and Latinos at the Labor Temple in Ybor City.

Photograph courtesy of the *Tampa Tribune*.

On November 27, 1955, Fidel Castro addressed the city of Tampa in a speech about tyranny. The small meeting space at the Labor Temple was packed with 300 attendees, including two FBI agents who tailed Castro during his visit. At the event, Castro announced, “My movement will end only when tyranny is dead or when we are dead. If Batista does not resign, there will be revolution—if he does, there will be no bloodshed.”³⁷⁷ As Castro spoke, a straw hat circled the room to collect cash. Much like a church coffer, attendees dropped one, five, and ten dollar bills into the hat and collected a total of seven hundred dollars that night.³⁷⁸ Throughout the speech, Castro invoked the memory of José Martí to remind Ybor

³⁷⁷ Tim O’ Connor, “Cubans Here to Aid Revolt Against Batista,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 28, 1955, pp. 1.

³⁷⁸ Tim O’ Connor, “Cubans Give,” pp. 1.

City Latinos and Latinas of their revolutionary roots. As the speech came to an end, Castro looked at the crowd and said: “The Republic of Cuba is the daughter of the cigar makers of Tampa.”³⁷⁹ A skilled orator, Castro also sought to demonstrate the shared origins of the residents of Tampa and Cuba.



Figure 10. Fidel Castro at Labor Temple Fundraiser.
Photograph courtesy of the Tampa Tribune.

But unlike the broad support garnered by José Martí in the 1890s, Castro only found a small contingent of Ybor residents dedicated to the revolution. Robert Ingalls suggests that “the obstacles Castro encountered while in the U.S. indicated that his movement had far to go in establishing the necessary infrastructure that he would need to defeat Batista.”³⁸⁰ Indeed, as the children and grandchildren of radical activists, the women and men of Ybor City embodied a generational shift that prioritized U.S. citizenship over

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ingalls, “26 of July Movement Clubs,” pp. 10.

international solidarity. Some community members, like José Yglesias, were vehement supporters of Castro's revolution. Indeed, residents of Ybor City donated nearly 9,000 dollars to the 26th of July Movement. However, this group of supporters was small, and few of these women and men aided the revolution in the manner expected by *La Gaceta* editor Manteiga. Castro could expect funds and moral support, but only a dedicated minority of supporters would illustrate their commitment through action, in the form of protests, propaganda, or smuggling.

In 1957, the 26th of July clubs became integral to the success of the revolution. Approximately three hundred Latinas and Latinos formed part of these clubs, less than three percent of the Ybor City population.³⁸¹ Castro and Manteiga believed that local cubanos should dedicate a portion of their wages to the revolution. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), women and men gave as much as they could afford to support the fights for the Spanish Republic; and during the final years of the Cuban War for Independence (1895-1898), Latinos did the same. *La Gaceta* established a daily column that explained the progress of the revolution and listed the contributions of Ybor citizens.³⁸² Manteiga's coverage of the Revolution was so powerful, poignant, and persistent that national news outlets highlighted his coverage.³⁸³ The local chapter of the Organization of American States decorated a truck with signs that read, "Stop the Slaughter of Cuban Youths" and "Return Democracy to Cuba," and drove through the streets of Tampa in an attempt to rally popular

³⁸¹ This figure is based on reports from *La Gaceta* and meeting minutes from different 26th of July movement clubs. Membership height came in 1958. See TPC, box 110, folder Castro, Fidel Part 1 and 2.

³⁸² "Meetings in" articles, *La Gaceta*, 1957-1959; Ingalls, "26 of July Movement Clubs," pp. 14-15.

³⁸³ Ingalls, "26 of July Movement Clubs," pp. 16.

support. When not intercepted by U.S. federal agents in Key West, both money and arms shuffled between Ybor and island.³⁸⁴

In 1958, the Department of Justice reported a surge in known violations of American neutrality laws and cited “supporters of Fidel Castro’s Cuban rebels” as the source of the problem.³⁸⁵ Indeed, revolutionary allies purchased and smuggled across international waters an astounding number of military-grade arms. The *Tampa Tribune* reported that “mortars, hand grenades, antitank guns, machine guns and ammunition,” were amongst the items confiscated items during a December 1958.³⁸⁶ It was estimated that these confiscated items valued 50,000 dollars. In the same month, a Tampa police officer stopped a group of men who were later found to have “a 20-MM anti-tank cannon in the trunk, complete with a supply of shells.”³⁸⁷ When the revolution came to an end in January 1959, the 26th of July Movement boasted that it had outsmarted the FBI by recruiting “pretty Cuban and American girls” to move firearms from Florida to Cuba. The *Tampa Tribune* reported, “People would see pretty [women] carrying hand luggage and they’d smile. They did not know that maybe machine guns or .45 caliber pistols were in those bags.”³⁸⁸ While the revolution rejected Latinas like Racquel, who wished to be involved in revolutionary strategy meetings; some young women found ways to participate by mobilizing their bodies and the power of their

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 13.

³⁸⁵ Castro Backers Step Up Neutrality Law Violations, *Tampa Tribune*, December 30 1958, pp. 1.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ “Ocala Police Find No Law Against Carrying Cannon...,” *Tampa Tribune*, December 27, 1958, pp. 1.

³⁸⁸ “Girls Used by Cubans to Smuggle Arms from U.S.,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 4, 1959, pp.1; Ingalls, “26 of July Movement Clubs,” pp. 14.

sexuality. Of course, anecdotal evidence about Latinas and Latinos who labored in support of the revolution should not obscure the limited involvement of the Ybor community.

When the 26th of July Movement triumphed over Batista on January 1, 1959, throngs of Cuban-Americans drove through Tampa's streets, honking their horns to celebrate the liberation of Cuba from American imperialism. Manteiga likely saw some of this celebration as disingenuous, as individuals whom he had previously charged with indifference to the revolution celebrated alongside long-time supporters. But Latinos like Manteiga were few in 1959. The women and men of Ybor who had moved to the suburbs or gotten white-collar jobs were not dedicated to the principles of working-class politics like their parents. These Latinas and Latinos embraced a sense of ethnic-Americanism that distanced them from the island and restricted their participation in acts of international solidarity.

For some Latinas and Latinos, the distance between Tampa and Havana became more evident once increasing numbers of Cuban émigrés began to arrive to central Florida. Following the revolutionary takeover by the 26th of July Movement, thousands of Cubans fled to Florida. The majority of these women and men went to Miami, but nearly 10,000 arrived in Tampa between 1959 and 1961.³⁸⁹ This first wave of Cuban arrivals were “disproportionately white and middle class” and had a difficult time relating to their Ybor neighbors.³⁹⁰ One exile recalled, “the tobacco workers were very active, very liberal, very strong-willed people.”³⁹¹ In *El Pasaje* Hotel, the newly arrived exile saw that Ybor *cubanos*

³⁸⁹ Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 272.

³⁹⁰ Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. xi.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

“had an image of revolutionaries as Robin Hoods,” but “when we arrived here we were the dregs of society, *Batistianos*.”³⁹² These new *cubanos* considered themselves exiles, not immigrants, and maintained hope that the Castro government would crumble so they could return home.³⁹³ Although Ybor Cubans had begun to venture into the middle class, their politics ranged from liberal to radical, and they had little in common with the revolution’s early, affluent exiles. While this political difference between the generations of Cuban migrants softened over time in Tampa, the mass migration of nearly 20,000 Cubans a year to Miami helped create two distinct Cuban-American cultures within the state.

Conclusion

On November 18, 1963, President John F. Kennedy landed at Tampa’s Mac Dill Air Force Base. A diverse crowd of men and women stood behind metal guardrails, waving American flags, and cheering as the President walked off the plane. Once Kennedy stepped off the tarmac, he was welcomed by two rows of Latinos holding cigar boxes, four Latinas dressed in tobacco leaf dresses, and young Latino boys offering loaves of Cuban bread. The president thanked his goodwill ambassadors, chose a cigar, and took a loaf of Cuba bread. Kennedy had previously lost the state of Florida by a narrow margin in the 1960 election. But as he prepared to launch his re-election campaign, the president sought to include Latino voters. After riding through the city, waving at women and men from the backseat of his convertible, Kennedy arrived at Al Lopez Field where he addressed the women and men of Tampa, thanking them for their commitment to “keep[ing] this country and the rest of Latin

³⁹² Greenbaum, *More than Black*, pp. 272.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

America free.”³⁹⁴ Later that day he traveled to Miami, where he spoke to 35,000 Cuban exiles; Kennedy then boarded Airforce one for Dallas, where he planned to meet with Mexican-American supporters.

Between 1948 and 1960, Latinos in Florida became powerful players in the American electoral system. Introduced to national politics with the Henry A. Wallace campaign, Cuban-American women and men embraced the promise of a progressive candidate while learning what it meant to be an American voter. Many Ybor residents agreed with the political causes of the Progressive Party, even as other Latinos moved from the fringes to the center of American political life. Southern racism and vigilante suppression still sought to quell their vote; but as the Democratic party split and the vote diversified, the power of the citizens’ committees began to dwindle, and Latinos embraced their right to vote as citizens.

While the 1948 Progressive Party campaign highlighted the power of Latinos as voters, the Cuban Revolution showed how these women and men had changed between 1931 and 1955. Women and men in Ybor City maintained international bonds with family and labor networks on the island through the 1940s, but by the 1950s, these ties had unraveled. Some residents like Victoriano Mantiega dedicated their lives to the revolution through action, but most community members saw themselves as allies through ideology alone. Many donated money, but few were willing to protest, write propaganda, or spread awareness about the fight for true Cuban independence. It was not until after the revolution ended and Castro’s 26th of July Movement displaced the American-supported Batista that Latinos

³⁹⁴ John F. Kennedy, “Remarks in Tampa, Florida on the 50th Anniversary of Scheduled Air Service, 18 November 1963,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKWHA-243-001.aspx> (retrieved February 22, 2016).

celebrated in the streets.

President Kennedy and his campaign staff were well aware of this transition in Florida. Years prior, Latinos were active members of the Communist Party and both unwilling and unable to concede to a liberal democratic platform. By 1963, Florida Latinas and Latinos not only understood themselves differently, they also believed they were entitled to equality under the law. With the rise of the Cuban exiles throughout South Florida, Cubans would become a powerful electoral force that could determine the direction of Florida politics for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Every day in Tampa, Florida, women and men hurriedly weave through traffic on Interstate 4. Notorious for their unpredictable maneuvers, these drivers spend their time on the six-lane highway anticipating their next move, merge, and exit. In the spirit of rush hour, commuters rarely overt their eyes from the tail lights and bumpers of preceding vehicles. As drivers creep toward Exit 1 on the thoroughfare, a giant clock looms over the white, cement guardrail, briefly distracting the drivers from traffic. *El Reloj* (the clock) sits atop the old Regensburg and Sons' cigar factory, reminding passersby of the city's industrial past. Once one of nearly two hundred fifty cigar-making enterprises in Ybor City, the factory (also referred to as *El Reloj*) stands today as the sole survivor and last cigar-producing company in the famed "Cigar City."³⁹⁵ For decades, cigar workers knew when to wake, begin their shifts, , and punch out by the punctual chimes of the clock. It was within buildings like *El Reloj* where thousands of Cuban women and men created a community through labor.

The city of Tampa is, and has always been, at odds with its Cuban women and men. As the city's economic infrastructure changed between 1930 and 1964, government officials concurrently ignored, suppressed, and silenced the needs and demands of Ybor City's radical, working-class residents. Between 1890 and 1929, Ybor City's radical *tabaqueros* had gained a reputation for forceful, public, and at times, violent protest. The predominantly Latino-led unions and Latino, artisan workforce represented a threat to the authority of cigar

³⁹⁵ The company was sold in 1953 and is now owned by the J.C. Newman Cigar Company. Jerome R. Stockfisch, "Time and Time Again," *Tampa Tribune*, Oct 29, 2002, pp. 4.

factory owners and city leaders. While Ybor's wealthy manufactures conspired with City Hall, *tabaqueros* (cigar makers) planned walkouts, strikes, and protests at the Labor Temple.

In these early decades, Latinas supported union work, but did not plan the workers' agenda or have a voice in the means of collective action. As members of the women's auxiliary, these *mujeres* (women) prepared food and found alternative work in *chinchales* (tobacco workshops) or Anglo homes in order to supplement the unemployment insurance paid to the family. The network of mutual aid and grassroots unionism made it possible for workers to survive months without work, and the nature of cigar work made it impossible for owners to replace *tabaqueros* with low-wage, unskilled workers, at least in these early days. The value of cigar work *hecho de mano* (made by hand) was a prized feature of Ybor City's products and an international luxury. By 1930, however, this tradition changed. The collapse of the American economy and the fall of the cigar industry pushed men out of the factories and women into a place of power within their communities, unions, and families. Latinas rose as the primary wage earners and began to negotiate for equal pay and equal work for their communities. In this process, Latinas navigated the complex waters of Jim Crow racism and American nativism.

"From Picket Lines to Picket Fences" has closely examined the relationship between national identity and immigration in Ybor City. It considers how race, ethnicity, and political affiliation influence who has access to citizenship and why this matters. On the micro-level, this dissertation examines how Latinas and Latinos in Florida negotiated political policies and social mores that governed their daily lives. It is an untold story of Latinas and Latinos in the southeast—one that encourages scholars to consider Jim Crow's reach as intersectional, rather than black and white, highlighting the interplay between different racial and ethnic

groups as each sought representation. The broader implications of this case study illustrate how histories of local and regional conflict underline present-day political battles. Understanding the politics of the past brings visibility to unacknowledged histories and challenges resistance to a diverse and inclusive American identity.

Unlike other southern cities, Tampa's multi-racial population led to codified tri-racial segregation. Therefore, race is essential to understanding how the community changed. Race also influenced how Latinas and Latinos contended with their own sense of self in relation to Tampa's Anglo-dominated government and the broader nation. For both African Americans and Latinos, white supremacy and racial violence denied African Americans the right to use public facilities, achieve equal opportunity in employment, attend well-funded schools, and vote,. Although Ybor immigrants originally understood race through a more fluid, Latin American perspective, otherness in Tampa was determined by language, political affiliation, *and* skin color. Jim Crowism legally defined the place of Ybor Latinas and Latinos in southern society and limited how these women and men could adapt to the fall of the cigar industry.

This dissertation centers on women's lives, work, and actions, as well as community mobilization and collective action. It does show in order to reveal how the American racial system influenced immigrant families' understanding of themselves, their community, and political power. During the 1930s, immigrant Latinas stood at the center of the movement for economic justice in Florida. These women joined the Popular Front, rallied with the CPUSA (Communist Party USA), organized strikes for labor equality, marched against fascism, and publicly criticized American foreign policy. From the perspective of Tampa's white majority, support for radical politics marked Latinas as foreign tramps and neglectful mothers. As the

welfare state developed during the 1930s, Latinas and Latinos were systematically barred from access to government benefits. Although official policy did not originally exclude non-citizens from access to aid, Tampa officials who processed relief applications prioritized Anglo applicants. As a result, the number of Latino and African American women and men with relief positions was significantly lower than that of Anglo-Americans. Who was worthy and deserving of aid became a question inextricably linked to race and citizenship.

Economic scarcity in the late 1930s exacerbated tensions between Anglo Americans, African Americans, and immigrants. As all women and men vied for access to limited relief resources, conservative national rhetoric blamed non-native women and men for “stealing” jobs and relief positions. This rhetoric incorrectly situated all “foreigners” as non-citizens or “aliens,” and used this as a rationale to deny national benefits to outsiders. For Ybor’s Latinas and Latinos, this argument was particularly problematic. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, many of Tampa’s *cubanos* and *cubanas* had lived and labored much of their lives in the United States; and most had native-born children. While many Latinos maintained connections to Cuba, they identified Florida as their home. But as national, nativist sentiment made relief positions more difficult to attain, restricted access to relief distribution transitioned from de-facto discrimination to de-jure exclusion. By the 1940s, representatives from the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) descended on Tampa to find and register all “aliens.” At this time, the Latinas (and limited Latinos) employed on relief projects were removed from relief rolls to make room for “deserving” citizens.

This question of who deserved government resources and American jobs influenced how Latinas and Latinos in Ybor City saw themselves. One Works Progress Administration (WPA) official noted, “Although born and educated in American and being so much

American as any other native” young Latinos will “always answer to the question of nationality that they are Spaniards and Cubans.” The observant official further noted that this “inferiority complex” was “so prolonged” that these women and men admitted that they were “Latinos and not American[s].”³⁹⁶ While this admission reflected Latinos and Latinas continued ties to their homelands, it also illustrated the absence of camaraderie between unemployed Anglos and Latinos. This is unsurprising, considering an Anglo man in need of work found a position on the government relief rolls, whereas a working-class, American-born Latino could not. Latinas who sought relief and mothers’ aid were classified as improper mothers (and sometimes prostitutes), and their children were seen as delinquents. In his quest to police American identity and prosecute difference, Martin Dies, chairman of the House un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), targeted Latinas and Latinos for their radicalism, devotion to labor unionism, and ethnic differences. The national movement to define Americanism made Ybor Latinas and Latinos into undesirable foreigners and ethnic others.

The impact of these damning stereotypes pushed Latinas and Latinos to look for alternative ways to achieve national belonging; for some, World War II provided that opportunity. While Ybor City’s women continued to work in the cigar factories, men found work in wartime industry, mainly the Tampa shipyards. The abundance of work and increase in wages brought stability to many Latino families who had long struggled to feed their families and pay rent. Furthermore, wages increased for both Latinas and Latinos, and when labor disputes erupted in the cigar industry, *tabaqueras* negotiated for themselves by

³⁹⁶ Tampa Report, Manuscript, Federal Writers’ Project (hereafter FWP), Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida) pp. 20.

threatening the manufacturers' wartime quotas. WWII allowed Latino families to have a sense of economic security for the first time in nearly twelve years.

Young, male Latinos w found ways to build ethnic and racial bridges in the military. For white Latinos, the experience of military service proved an exercise in Americanization. When the U.S. armed forces needed bodies, immigration status no longer mattered, and all white men (including Latinos) were potential soldiers crucial to the success of the Allied Powers. In Tampa, young Latinos had grown up believing they were unequal to their Anglo neighbors. Public spaces outside the community segregated Latinos from Anglos, leaving these men to feel like foreigners in their own land. The U.S. military, however, officially classified Latinos as white and put them in military units with Anglos. According to oral history reports, the artificial barriers of racism were broken in these collective spaces of struggle. But because “race and nationality are not by any means synonymous terms,” young, black cubanos had a different experience.³⁹⁷

Afrocubanos who volunteered or were drafted during World War II learned that their blackness was inescapable in the United States. Because these young men had lived in an environment where racial divisions were less formalized elsewhere in the South, the weight of Jim Crow had not weighed as heavy on them. In Ybor City, a person of African heritage could be considered white or *mestizo*, depending on their phenotypic expression. There was not “one Latino race,” for within this ethnic identity, there was a “great variety... which on the surface might indicate progress.”³⁹⁸ As Nancy Hewitt has noted, some African American activists in Tampa were “lighter than the Latin[o]s claiming to be white,” and within one

³⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 27.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 37.

family, different people could have completely different experienced with race and the repercussions of its power.³⁹⁹ In the U.S. military, however, Afro-Cubans were put into segregated units. The American concept of the “one-drop rule” delineated all *afrocubanos* as black, even if that was not how they saw themselves. For these young men, segregation was particularly damning. Not only did they feel the weight of what it mean to be black and American, they struggled to find a sense of community between themselves and African Americans. Afro-Cubans in Tampa not only believed themselves to be Latino first and African second, they considered African Americans to be uneducated and unequal.⁴⁰⁰ In Tampa, here was no sense of unity between the two communities, as they lived in different spaces and had different identities. This complicated interactions during WWII when the U.S. presumed their sameness and asked them to serve together.

When the war ended and men returned home, Latinos classified as white used their new sense of power to “protect” Ybor City from destruction by African Americans. As the city of Tampa sought to prepare for population growth and city expansion, the Hillsborough County Commission proposed that the city’s African American community be razed and portions of Ybor City be “renewed.” in reality, this proposal of renewal was a plan to demolish homes, expand roadways, and redirect the majority of urban traffic through Ybor City. With this plan, African Americans would potentially be displaced into Ybor City. “White” Latinos protested the plan by illustrating their racial difference. Community

³⁹⁹ Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 13; María De los Reyes Castillo Bueno, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Anne McLean (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴⁰⁰ Susan D. Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), pp. 160.

members wrote articles and petitions, sending them to the local white press and city officials and claiming that Latinos in Ybor City wanted and needed African Americans removed from their neighborhood. Even the liberal editors of the Spanish language press, Victoriano and Roland Manteiga, claimed that African Americans had become an “unavoidable factor” in the destruction of Ybor City. They planned meetings at the *Círculo Cubano* to unite white, Latino community members against the “invasion” of neighboring blacks.⁴⁰¹

While it is possible that these working-class women and men sought to keep their community separate because of ethnic solidarity, their use of American, racial language illustrates their inability to see the prejudice they experienced as Latinos as similar to the discrimination they directed at African Americans. Unsurprisingly, the expression and use of racial language by Latinos corresponded with the process of Americanization. Once Latinos saw themselves as citizens with access to political power and influence, their sense of self within the American racial hierarchy changed. Just as Anglo Americans had denounced the morality of Latinas and Latinos during the Depression and World War II, Latinos subsequently believed that black women and men would ruin their neighborhood.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Latinas and Latinos entered the polls and engaged in the American electoral process for the first time. The Henry Wallace campaign and the rise of the Progressive Party spoke to Ybor Latinas and Latinos because of its pro-union, anti-fascist message. Members of the community joined the party and assumed positions on the local committee. They canvassed in Ybor City, spoke on Wallace’s behalf at *sociedades* (ethnic clubs) and union halls, and began a propaganda campaign that targeted the local, Anglo newspapers. Unlike other cities in the South, Tampa was a space where a community of color

⁴⁰¹ “Ybor City Plan,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 6, 1952, pp. 3.

had political power. As Wallace toured the nation and faced rejection throughout the South, he found in Tampa, specifically Ybor City, a surprisingly warm welcome. Because Wallace insisted that he would not speak in segregated spaces, the Progressive Party Committee arranged for his political rally to be in the center of Tampa at Plant Field. While Anglos protested and boycotted the event, over 2,500 women and men attended the rally to support their candidate. Although he did not win, Wallace did receive the majority of the votes in all Latino neighborhoods throughout Tampa. Wallace, who spoke Spanish and advanced an anti-racist, pro-union, anti-fascism platform mirrored the political consciousness that Latinos already held. It should be noted that while Latinos used American racial rhetoric to justify segregation in Ybor City, their support of an anti-racist candidate was not necessarily hypocritical. For most, the Wallace anti-segregation platform was not a high priority. If anything, Ybor Latinas and Latinos were consistent in their indifference toward interracial coalition building.

Once the Wallace campaign brought Latinas and Latinos into the American electoral fray, their commitment to U.S. politics grew, and they became increasingly less radical than their parents and grandparents. When Fidel Castro arrived in Ybor City in 1955, he expected to find the active, radical Cuban émigrés who supported José Martí in the fight for independence from Spain. And while some Ybor Latinos remained committed to the revolutionary goal of a *Cuba libre* (free Cuba), the majority of his countrywomen and men had become progressive Americans. Castro's visit to Tampa was part of a month-long campaign to establish a U.S. network that he hoped could help sustain the Revolution. But of the Latinas and Latinos who lived in Ybor City, only 300 joined a 26th of July Movement support organization. When Castro gave a fundraising speech at the Labor Temple to mark

the culmination of his visit, he noted that the empty chairs in the room were there to honor the ghosts of José Martí and his Ybor revolutionary fighters who attended in spirit. While perhaps counterintuitive, the lack of collective support for Castro in Ybor City was not because Latinas and Latinos did not support the Revolution. Most had great hope for a free Cuba and believed that if Castro were successful, Cuba would be a better place. Ybor Latinos donated money to the revolutionary movement, but most were unwilling to spy or smuggle for the revolutionary cause.

By 1960, Ybor City's women and men were pro-Castro, Cuban-American, and active members of the Democratic Party. Indeed, their dedication to the promise of *Cuba libre* led to the creation of two distinct Cuban communities in Florida: Tampa and Miami. And their commitment to political engagement made them the most influential voting block in the city of Tampa and the state of Florida. Because these women and men were dedicated to working-class politics, their American identities were linked to their immigrant pasts. In 1959, when the state began to flood with Cuban immigrants escaping the communist, Castro regime, Ybor Latinas and Latinos saw these newcomers as traitors to the promise of an independent and free Cuban nation. The newly arrived *cubanos* were the same wealthy and middle-class individuals who had oppressed the parents and grandparents of Ybor Latinos, and long-time residents were unwilling to forget. Most of Ybor City's women and men may have been middle class by the 1960s, but they never abandoned their ideological commitment to economic equality and human rights.

Since the 1960s, Ybor City's Latinas and Latinos have remained a powerful political force in the city of Tampa. Four sons of Ybor City went on to become mayor, and one (Bob Martínez) became governor. Delia Sanchez, who grew up in the streets of Ybor City,

dedicated her life to ensuring equal access to welfare and government. She was the architect for the national Headstart program, as well as free and reduced lunch program. Evelio Grillo was the first Afro-Cuban to lead the city's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and his daughter coordinated some of the first sit-ins at Tampa lunch counters. As twenty-first-century Tampa contends with the shifting tide of Cuban politics, the women and men of Ybor City celebrate the United States' closer relationship with the island. While *cubanos* in Miami have marched and protested an end to the U.S. embargo against Cuba, Cuban-American in Tampa have lobbied for the creation of a new Cuban consulate in their city. For to these women and men, the revolution still lives, even if they have come to redefine its meaning and place in their American lives.

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