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Daytona Beach: A Closed Society

by Robert E. Snyder

“I remember the 1920s when you could rent an apartment on Atlantic Avenue along the ocean for \$25 a week and store clerks with salaries of \$8 a week could afford to send their families to the beach in the summer for an annual vacation,” John Paul Jones, editor of *Florida Living*, wrote in 1993; “Summertime was Daytona Beach’s big season when the boardwalk was going full blast, day and night. Children and young couples had a safe, healthy place to laugh and play—much like Coney Island.”¹ Indeed, early-twentieth-century Daytona Beach took several strategic steps which would position it alongside Hampton Beach in New Hampshire, Atlantic City in New Jersey, Ocean City in Maryland, and Myrtle Beach in South Carolina, as middle-class vacation meccas. Yet, behind the image of mirth and merriment, progress and good works existed a racist and repressive Southern community. While Daytona Beach maintained an outwardly affable, liberal, and dynamic posture on tourism, it was inwardly adversarial, reactionary, regressive, and violent when it came to race relations. By the 1930s, the world’s most famous beach was not

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1. John Paul Jones, “Destination—Daytona,” *Florida Living* 13 (October 1993): 10.

simply for whites only but also home to a carefully controlled closed society.²

In 1914, the Florida Hotel Association officially organized at the Ridgewood Hotel in Daytona Beach to safeguard against undesirable characters and unlawful acts, and to promote the state's recreational resources. In 1926, the three neighboring communities of Daytona, Seebreeze, and Daytona Beach incorporated into the single municipality of Daytona Beach. Consolidation provided not simply uniformity of government but pooled resources. In the mid-1920s, when Daytona was a community of only 22,000, it founded a Chamber of Commerce to realize the dream of an international tourist destination. With a membership of over 6,000, the Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce was the second largest commercial body of its type in the United States, second only to that in Los Angeles. With an announced advertising budget of \$150,000, Daytona Beach also ranked near the top resorts in the United States in marketing its image.³

In 1927, Daytona Beach attracted a winter tourist population estimated at 126,500, and a summer crowd of 25,000. In 1933 and 1934, city registration booths recorded visitors from over thirty states. For the tourist season ending March 1934, visitors spent an estimated \$500,000,000 in Florida, with Daytona receiving a large

2. For an interpretation that comes down on the side of a congenial racial climate and flourishing black political activity in Daytona Beach, consult Leonard R. Lempel, "African American Settlements in the Daytona Beach Area, 1866-1910," *Annual Proceedings Of The Florida Conference Of Historians 1* (June 1993); idem, "Politics And The African American In Daytona Beach, 1876-1937," paper presented at the 92nd Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society, Ft. Myers, Florida, 19-21 May 1994; and idem, "The Mayor's 'Henchmen and Henchwomen: Both White and Colored': Edward H. Armstrong and the Politics of Race in Daytona Beach, 1900-1940," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79 (winter 2001): 267-96.
3. Frank Huffaker, "The South's Greatest Summer Festival," *Sunrise* 4 (1 July 1925): 10-11; Harold Colee, "The History of the Chambers of Commerce of Florida," in Ellwood C. Nance and Helen Nance, eds., *The East Coast of Florida: A History, 1500-1961*, 2 vols. (Delray Beach, Fla., 1962), 2: 400-406. Daytona would be innovative in other ways. In the early 1950s, the communities of Daytona Beach, Ormond Beach, Holly Hill, South Daytona, and Port Orange taxed themselves to promote the Daytona Beach Recreational Area. The advertising tax amounted to \$101,000 in fiscal 1952-1953. Other communities would follow Daytona's lead in allocating tax money to promote the tourism and area attractions; see Ianthe B. Hebel, ed., *Centennial History Of Volusia County, Florida* (Daytona Beach, Fla., 1955), 100.

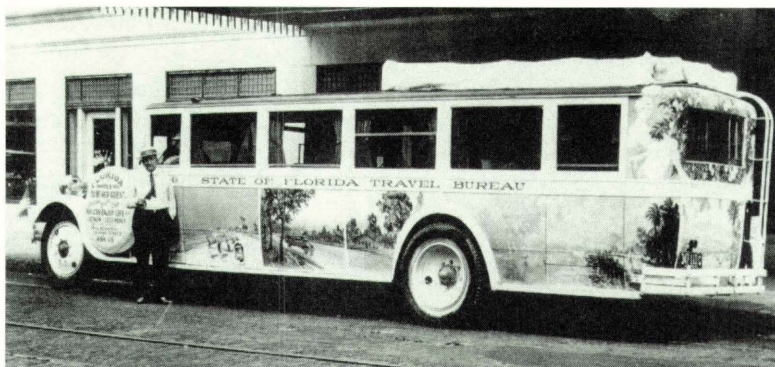
share of that tourist pie.⁴ To assure a uniform and coordinated campaign that would keep these travelers coming back, the Chamber of Commerce contracted in the late-1930s with a public relations firm to advertise in twenty northern metropolitan dailies each November, and four national magazines commencing each December.⁵

Daytona Beach promoted its July Frolics as the Greatest Summer Festival in the South.

“Growing weary of being known as a winter resort for multi-millionaires of the quiet type,” Frank Huffaker noted in 1925, “the Halifax people decided last year that it should be known as . . . ‘The Atlantic City of the South.’” Besides attracting more tourists in the summer, Daytona Beach also wished “to gain a firmer hold on the heart-strings of thousands of American and Canadian visitors.”⁶ Inaugurated in the summer of 1924, the Frolics started with the boom of a canon at sunrise on July 1, and ended with a shower of fireworks at midnight on July 4. For four days, celebrants publicly indulged in the sun, sand, and surf, and privately in suds, sex, and stakes. Among the events celebrated along the beach, on the pier, at the casino, and in other facilities were auto speed trials, thoroughbred horse races, track and field events, water polo and aquatic meets, baseball games, golf tournaments, band concerts, community sing-alongs, historic pageants, parades, costume parties, coronations, and fireworks displays. “One of the outstanding facts about the monster celebration was the orderliness of the crowds. Not a single case of violence, nor a single automobile accident was reported, although all classes were brought elbow to elbow and streets were jammed with automobiles,” Bill Harrison reported on the 1925 Frolics; “This is a record for a festival where liberty is usually interpreted as license.”⁷

Daytona Beach set its sights on superceding fetes for which Southern Europe had been noted. Tourists were encouraged to see Daytona Beach as an alternative to the French Riviera. In place of fog, evening chills, high costs, and foreign languages, travelers

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4. Pleasant D. Gold, *History Of Volusia County Florida* (De Land, Fla., 1927), 156; “Daytona Beach Section,” *Floridian* 1 (October 1934): 17; Michael G. Schene, *Hopes, Dreams, And Promises: A History Of Volusia County, Florida* (Daytona Beach, Fla., 1976), 126.
 5. *New York Times*, 21 October 1939.
 6. Huffaker, “The South’s Greatest Summer Festival,” 10-11.
 7. Bill Harrison, “It’s All Over Till Next Year!,” *Sunrise* 4 (15 July 1925): 4.



This promotional bus, with panoramic murals of Florida outside and exhibits inside, traveled to northern states as an “official state car,” introducing and inviting visitors southward under the slogan “Florida Invites You to Be Her Guest, You Can Enjoy Life with Us for Less Money Now.” The Hotel Commission used a Florida East Coast Railroad car with a mural of “the American Tropics” for similar purposes. *Photograph by Tampa commercial studio of Boozer and Rodgers; courtesy of the Bureau of Archives, Florida Department of States, Tallahassee.*

steam and street railroads (256), wholesale and retail trade (252), saw and planing mills (219), manufacturing industries (217), building industry (214), forestry (110), construction (100), recreation and amusement (99), and scattered other industries. A final telling statistic on the status of Volusia County’s African Americans was that only 246 were employed in professional and semi-professional occupations.¹³ “Negro orchestras are in demand at white entertainments,” the Federal Writers’ Project noted in the 1930s; “The greater number of inhabitants are employed as domestics and unskilled labor, and during the tourist seasons many are in service at resort hotels as cooks, waiters, porters, and bellboys.”¹⁴ Not only were African Americans employed extensively in unskilled and semiskilled jobs, but women stood alongside men in menial and low paying jobs, trying to make ends meet.¹⁵ In addition

13. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930; Population: Alabama-Missouri* (Washington, D. C., 1932), III, Pt. 1, 409, 415, 434.

14. Florida Writers’ Project, *Florida: A Guide To The Southernmost State* (New York, 1939), 178.

15. Maxine D. Jones, “No Longer Denied: Black Women In Florida, 1920-1950,” in David R. Colburn and Jane L. Landers, eds., *The African American Heritage Of Florida* (Gainesville, Fla., 1995), 11-12.

to its occupational proscriptions, Daytona was also a place of residential segregation. As another student of the situation phrased it, "There was an understanding that each race would occupy its own area and keep out of the other. The early taxi driver would carry passengers of his own race—not both."¹⁶

Daytona Beach insisted on not only segregated institutions but also unequal ones. In the mid-1930s, the state school inspector reported on the deplorable conditions of the Campbell Street High School and elementary school to the supervising principal of Mainland schools. The high school had four teachers who were not certified, a library of only 650 books (when 2,000 were actually needed), and deficient toilet facilities. The elementary school had no library books at all, no playground equipment, no evidence of a play program, and children faced windows without shades. The only step that Mainland school trustees had taken was recommending to the county that temporary buildings be constructed to accommodate the overflow at black schools. The state inspector reported that all other local schools were in satisfactory shape.¹⁷

After instituting separate and unequal institutions, government agencies criticized African-American facilities for inadequacies. The Hospital Board reprimanded the black hospital in 1935 "because it is often difficult to find a physician when needed around the hospital." The black physicians took exception to the characterization and protested in one of the few ways open to them. In a letter to the editor of Daytona Beach's evening newspaper, the aggrieved pointed out that there were eighteen regular staff physicians serving the white hospital compared to only three "colored physicians" attending to their hospital. These three "colored physicians" served, moreover, 90 percent of the emergency cases of Ormond, Holly Hill, Daytona Beach, Port Orange, and adjacent communities. "We are not children, students nor hired servants. Our service to our people in the negro hospital is loyal, continuous, trying and fraught with many difficulties, all without one dime of remuneration," the physicians wrote; "As much as we desire to serve the unfortunate members of our own race, it is not our wish to stand in the way of some one who will do it better and more loy-

16. Ianthe B. Hebel, "Daytona Beach, Florida's Racial History," unpublished manuscript, 1966, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

17. *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, 8 May 1936.



In 1943, the Office of War Information in Washington, D.C., dispatched African American Gordon Parks on a documentary assignment to Daytona Beach. In February, he took this photograph of stark conditions which he captioned "Homes in the Negro Section." *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

ally. If you have in mind any person or group of persons who will serve the purpose better, and, if you expect of us any more than what we are doing now—you herewith have our resignation."¹⁸

Deplorable public health facilities for blacks continued. Periodically, newspapers responded to the request of parent-teacher associations, civic clubs, women's organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and others to print surveys of public facilities to educate the masses and exert pressure on controlling interests. State health authorities found in 1941 that hospital facilities for whites seemed adequate but not those for African Americans. The Halifax District Hospital, established in Daytona Beach in 1928, had 125 beds and was well equipped, but blacks had to use the Halifax District Hospital Annex, which had only twenty beds and six bassinets. Volusia County had provisions to deal with

18. *Ibid.*, 14 May 1935.

tuberculosis cases among whites but not among blacks who had to travel 240 miles to the state sanatorium in Tallahassee, which had a waiting list.¹⁹

Cultural events were closed to the town's black population. In the mid-1930s, a touring theater group brought the Pulitzer Prize-winning play "Green Pastures" to Florida. Described as a "biblical comedy-drama," the Marc Connelly play had an all-black cast and attempted "to show the living religion that is accepted by Southern negroes."²⁰ Although several Florida cities—Jacksonville, Orlando, Lakeland, and St. Petersburg—made provisions for African Americans to see the play, Daytona Beach barred them from the auditorium. "We have been on our own knees—figuratively speaking—for the last two weeks," Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and President of Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona, wrote in 1935, "trying to secure the considerations of those who are in authority to give the negro people of this community an opportunity to witness this masterpiece executed by their own people." Theater management refused to set aside sections for blacks on the grounds that it did not want to go against precedent and counter to ordinances of the auditorium. "I am wondering, what crime the negroes of this community have committed beyond the crimes of other people—that we should be thus humiliated and rejected?" Bethune indignantly asked; "The negro race has its types as all other races. The type of local negro who would desire to attend a performance like that of 'Green Pastures' is of the class who from a standpoint of dress, hygiene and conduct would not give offense to the most fastidious group and would readily adapt himself with perfect ease to the most cultural surroundings. He would acquit himself with credit in the most refined atmosphere." Despite more than three decades of Bethune-Cookman College's devotion to character building, educational development, and economic betterment of the community, Daytona Beach still turned its back on the definite and substantial contributions of African-American people in its midst. "The negroes of this community feel that this is an unjust slap in the face that they cannot accept graciously. I am chagrined, I feel humiliated—I feel sorry for my community. I dislike to have thinking negroes all over the country and world to feel that after

19. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 12 May 1941.

20. *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, 1 February 1935.

30 years of work and struggle in a community like this that we have not yet awakened the confidence and interest in our white constituency to use their influence to help us provide cultural advantages," Bethune intoned; "We take our dose. If I were not a Christian I would say that we take it with bitterness. Mr. Editor, readers of this letter, whether I am living or whether I am dead, I resent for my people and with my people, such treatment."²¹

Although it was a bitter pill for Bethune to swallow, friends and followers rallied to her side. "Probably you do not realize it but my heart ached with yours relative to the 'Green Pastures' episode. I know what your life has meant in your community. I know you have many dear, kind white friends in your community, for you will be surprised how many I have been able to make in the past five years in Texas," a friend from San Antonio wrote; "But don't despair, these very friends will become stronger than ever from this experience and if not these, God will raise up others, just keep your heart sweet and pray, 'Father Forgive.' We have many problems but God is not dead."²²

Through separate facilities, seating restrictions, ticket prices, and other discriminatory mechanisms, white elites limited and circumscribed black recreation in Southern cities.²³ In the mid-1930s, Miami's Orange Bowl emerged as one of the premier New Year's Day college football games. Bethune-Cookman college contacted the management of the Orange Bowl about securing seats for four student representatives to view the game. "We understand that you will have space for a few Negroes but that they will have to make reservation in advance for seats," college Secretary Mitchell politely inquired; "If our folks may attend the Classic, kindly let us know the cost of the tickets and indicate whether or not we should send for them prior to the game, or if they may be purchased at the gate." A sold-out game provided Orange Bowl officials with a convenient reason for maintaining their policy of exclusion and for holding out hope for only some form of segregated admission in the future. "Unfortunately, our stands are sold to capacity each

21. *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, 5 February 1935.

22. Elizabeth Carter-Brooks to Mary McLeod Bethune, 4 March 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Fla. Hereafter referred to as MMB MSS.

23. Gregory A. Waller, *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930* (Washington, D.C., 1995), 161-79.

year," Myron S. Greentree, the Director of Ticket Sales, explained, "and until we have sufficient money to enlarge them, it will be impossible to arrange a seating for our colored friends."²⁴

Shut out of public facilities and activities, many African Americans found hanging out on street corners and in various dives a diversion open to them. Several numbers games flourished in these locales. Bolita was a popular lottery. Numbers from one to one hundred were placed in a sack, the sack tossed around a circle of people, and eventually one number taken from the sack. For a bet of 10¢ it was possible to win from \$5 to \$7, depending on the size of the day's wagering. The Negro Ministerial Association, merchants, and other civic minded groups complained that gambling was "draining the life blood" out of the black community. "Even on Sunday when church is going on," one businessman complained, "you can see men with cigar boxes selling numbers on the streets." Officials claimed that bolita flourished in the jook joints and dives along Second Avenue and Canal Road as well.

Besides throwing away money through gambling, blacks were criticized for squandering nickels in "jook organs." Once slot machines were outlawed in October 1937, vendors introduced mechanical music machines that played songs in exchange for change. "People have the change, they are in the habit of putting their money in slots, and we want to help them," one juke joint operator explained.²⁵ Daytona Beach authorities repeatedly raided "shine joints," confiscated equipment, and issued stiff fines of \$100 for simply the possession of game tickets and gambling equipment. Illegal activities provided authorities with convenient excuses for demonstrations of authority, particularly raids in the black district.²⁶

To articulate their concerns and interests in the mid-1930s, blacks formed the Daytona Beach Negro Citizens' Committee and placed before the city planning board projects they wanted implemented: a recreational center in Cypress Park, drainage of the west side of the black neighborhood, pavement of Campbell Street, and sidewalks along Cypress Street. The projects redressed long stand-

24. Bertha L. Mitchell to the Management of the Orange Bowl Classic, 24 December 1939; Myron S. Greentree to Bertha L. Mitchell, 27 December 1939, both in MMB MSS.

25. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 18 October 1937.

26. *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, 2 July 1936.

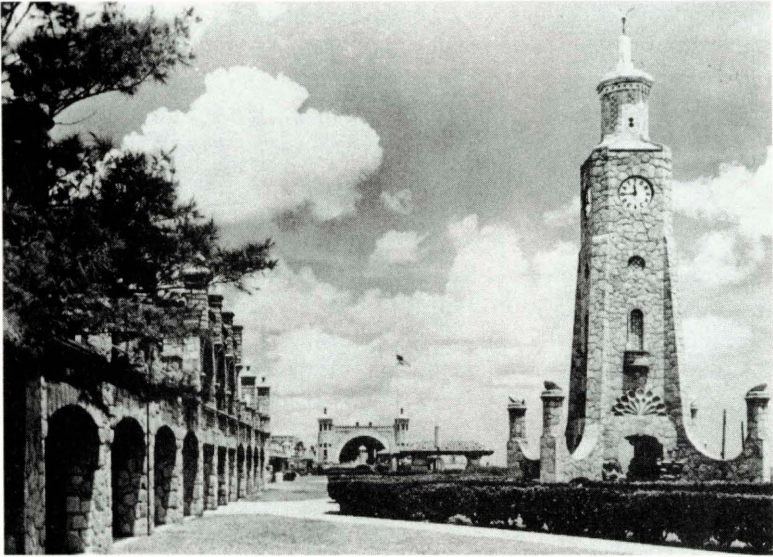
ing neglects and what African Americans considered most pressing. "Negro people are earnestly awaiting favorable consideration of these projects," Mary McLeod Bethune, President of the Citizens' Committee, stated; "The projects cover actual needs for the well-being of the negro people of Daytona Beach."²⁷

Nonetheless, Daytona Beach's political administration repeatedly shortchanged blacks in federally underwritten municipal projects. Mayor Edward Armstrong's administration received funding for three WPA projects: a \$252,000 boardwalk project consisting of two casinos, concession buildings, an amphitheater with stage; \$42,000 in airport improvements; and \$10,000 for a nursery. Tourist-related projects often triumphed over social services. Requests from blacks for a playground and school house never made the mayor's list. An application for a \$8,785 open-ditch drainage project for the black district was forwarded to Washington, where it failed to receive funding. "Couldn't Mayor Armstrong have shaved the cost of that elaborate and expensive casino development by a few thousands of dollars so that the negroes of Daytona Beach might have had their play park, their swimming pool?" the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, a liberal crusading newspaper, editorially inquired; "Again and again they have been promised a recreation park, a swimming pool—a play place. Again and again they have bowed their heads when the promise was broken . . . Does Mayor Armstrong think that because he has tricked the negroes in the past with broken promises he can get away with it again? In the past he could tell them the city had no money with which to build the things he had promised them. He can't make them believe that this time."²⁸

Armstrong insisted that development of the oceanfront was more important to Daytona Beach's economic well-being than recreational facilities and public improvements for African Americans. "A majority of the population of this city are well aware of the fact that the negroes are segregated, and on that account do not reap any benefit from either of these projects as they have neither the use or the privilege of the promenade. In those improvements they have only been and are 'the hewers of wood and drawers of water,'" a resident railed against the injustices; "In their

27. Ibid., 31 August 1935.

28. Ibid., 30 October 1935.



The clock tower on the boardwalk with Daytona Beach spelled out on the clock face. The bandshell to the rear and arcade to the left were built with New Deal money out of couquina rock from a nearby limestone quarry. *Courtesy of Special Collections, University of South Florida, Tampa.*

own section of the city there have been very little improvements or projects even given or accomplished though many promises have been given them in the past in reference to their living conditions, sanitary improvements, street repairing, water facilities and drainage.” Opportunities offered by Bethune-Cookman college were taken as an example of progress that could be made. “The negro when given a chance will improve his condition, as a race they seek improvement and will often rise above their environments and overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable,” explained the *New-Journal*.²⁹

While the town’s fathers and vested interests blamed blacks for Daytona Beach’s plight, outsiders saw matters differently. “The poor negroes are not to blame. They are governed by fear. They know what happens to a person or his family if he opposes racketeers. So the poor souls haven’t the courage to throw off the iron chains by which they are bound to the present city administration,”

29. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1935.

a northern visitor to Daytona Beach noted; "I believe they should have all the advantages it is possible to give them in the way of education, recreation, parks, their own bathing beaches with necessary buildings for their comfort and pleasure. But I doubt if they ever get these things under the present regime."³⁰ As another anonymous visitor observed, "the people of the north think there is no more slavery. How surprised they would be if they could see the poor negroes and some white folks jump when Armstrong snaps the whip. I am sure most of the negroes would like to see clean, honest government in beautiful Daytona Beach. But they are afraid to vote against their slave driver and overseer. I wonder what Booker T. Washington and the other truly great and noble negroes would say if they could see their poor brothers bending to the yoke of tyranny and afraid to vote except as they are told they must."³¹

No event revealed more the depth and intensity of racism and repression in Daytona Beach than the 1939 slaying of Lee Snell. Snell was an African-American taxi driver who on the morning of April 29, 1939, hit and killed Benny Blackwelder when the twelve-year-old white boy rode his bicycle into the middle of the intersection of Second Avenue and Keech Street. The boy was thrown about twenty-five feet by the impact. Snell stopped within thirty-five feet of the collision. Harry Blackwelder, brother of the boy, rushed Benny to Halifax hospital within five minutes of the accident and before police had arrived. But the young Blackwelder died soon thereafter.

Constable James Durden arrested Snell on the charge of manslaughter and set the following week for a preliminary hearing. At 2:15 p.m. on April 29, Durden removed Snell from his cell in the city jail to transport him to the county jail in Deland. About four miles outside of Daytona Beach, two armed men in a coupe overtook the constable, blocked the road, and forced the occupants out. Snell sought protection by holding onto the Constable, but the armed men ripped him away and warned Durden that if he interfered "we'll get you." The assailants then shot Snell with a high-powered rifle and a double-barreled shotgun. Snell was initially incapacitated by a shot to the knee as he attempted to run away and then executed at close range. Durden claimed that he attempted

30. *Ibid.*, 27 November 1935.

31. *Ibid.*, 29 November 1935.

to defend his prisoner but was overpowered. "I had hold of the shotgun when it went off," Durden stated; "I thought he was going to shoot me." Three blacks arriving upon the scene in another automobile saw what took place. The slaying was also witnessed by a fruit dealer and travelers in another car. The highway vigilantes subsequently turned their automobile around and drove away in the direction of Daytona Beach. In a Special Bulletin, the *Daytona Beach Evening News* declared, "It was a lynching."³²

Dr. M.N. Work of Tuskegee Institute reported that the murder of Lee Snell was the second lynching in the United States that year.³³ Both had occurred in Florida. Twenty-eight days earlier a white man, Miles W. Brown, had been lynched in Panama City. Florida would lead the nation in the number of lynchings in 1939. "We yell our heads off at the outrages and inhuman treatment carried on by Hitler in Germany," the *Tampa Tribune* remarked on events; "Instead, we should clean our own house first."³⁴

Snell's murder was part of a rising tide of racial anxiety in Florida. Two days later, the Ku Klux Klan paraded without a permit through the black section of Miami, in full regalia with seventy-five automobiles. With license plates covered, they burned twenty-five crosses at intersections and left cards with red letters warning blacks to stay away from the election polls on primary day.³⁵ On a Saturday evening during the busiest time of the day, full regaled Klansmen invaded the black business section in Live Oak. Equipment in black businesses was broken up, and minorities found in the streets, including women and children, were beaten. Although Klan actions took place one block from the police station, neither officers nor the sheriff could be found.³⁶

African-American presses in Atlanta, Washington, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and other major cities paid close attention to the racial unrest in Florida. Mistreatment of racial

32. Earl Blackwelder reportedly shot Snell with the rifle, and Everett Blackwelder fired the shotgun. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 29 April, 30 April 1939; *Miami Herald*, 30 April, 1 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 30 April, 1 May 1939; *New York Times*, 30 April 1939; *Washington Star*, 30 April 1939; *Washington Times-Herald*, 30 April 1939; "Another Lynching In Florida," *International Juridical Association Monthly Bulletin* 7 (June 1939): 138.

33. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 30 April, 1 May 1939; *Miami Herald*, 30 April 1939; *Washington Afro-American*, 8 July 1939; "Another Lynching In Florida."

34. *Tampa Tribune*, 5 May 1939.

35. *Miami Herald*, 2 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 2 May 1939.

36. *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 July 1939.

and ethnic groups in Florida often times made front pages and earned banner headlines in distant urban centers.³⁷ Black presses encouraged the victimized to league together and become more activist in realizing their rights. "It is time that Negroes woke up down there in the deep South and started to call the bluff of their oppressors," the *New York Age* editorialized; "Some will probably have to be martyrs to the cause, too, but we're willing to bet that when Negroes start fighting back and using the same methods of their oppressors that lynching among other evils will become a thing of the past."³⁸

The Florida branch of the International Labor Defense immediately sent Margaret Bailey and M. Jardine Osborne to Daytona Beach to gather facts first-hand, and contacted the national office of the NAACP about possible assistance. "The opportunity to obtain conviction of the lynchers is very good and with the cooperation of the National Association for Advancement of Colored People we will in all probability be successful," Bailey wrote to Walter White, Secretary of the NAACP; "Our financial situation however, is a serious drawback in the legal work we expect to become involved in. Mr. Osborne, in Daytona, who is our investigator, needs a great deal more assistance than we are able to provide. We therefore would like to know if the N.A.A.C.P. could help us out from their National Office."³⁹ White indicated that the NAACP was already "working on this and other cases in Florida."⁴⁰

The ILD also appealed to the Attorney General of the United States, Frank Murphy, for a federal inquiry. "Our investigator now in Daytona Beach reports a grave condition which we believe only federal action will alleviate," the ILD dispatch read; "We are convinced that a wave of lynch terror will develop if past whitewash

37. See, for example: *New York Age*, 6 May, 13 May, 3 June, and 10 June 1939; *Washington Afro-American*, 10 June, 8 July, 22 July 1939; *Atlanta Daily World*, 1 May, 3 May, 7 May, 9 May, 11 May, 29 May, and 11 June 1939; *Chicago Defender*, 6 May, 13 May, and 3 June 1939.

38. *New York Age*, 13 May 1939. Also see, *Atlanta Daily World*, 9 May 1939; and *Chicago Defender*, 13 May 1939.

39. "Florida ILD Fights Lynch Whitewash," *Equal Justice* 8 (June 1939): 15.

40. Margaret Bailey to Walter White, 1 May 1939; Walter White to Margaret Bailey, 5 May 1939, both in Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Administrative File: Lynching, Daytona Beach, Florida 1939-1940, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter the administrative papers of the NAACP at the Library of Congress will be referred to as NAACP MSS LIC.

verdicts are made the precedent for judicial action in this case.” The ILD made reference to a lynching that had occurred the previous year on Florida’s west coast near Perry as further evidence of the deplorable status of race relations.⁴¹ Citing a statute which made conspiracy to deprive citizens of their Federal constitutional or statutory rights a crime, the ILD pressed Washington for action.⁴²

Various groups joined the chorus demanding that state officials spearhead an investigation. From St. Petersburg, Frank McAllister, Southern Secretary of the Workers Defense League, requested that Governor Fred P. Cone appoint a “special representative” to conduct an investigation leading to the arrest and conviction of guilty parties. If this failed, the WDL recommended that the United States Department of Justice should intervene. “All decent Floridians,” McAlister implored the governor, “are hoping you will use the power vested in your high office to aid in erasing this blot against all Florida residents.”⁴³

The use of the word “lynch” and the involvement of outsiders quickly raised the hackles of some native whites. Local residents complained that the term was inappropriate in the Snell episode because no rope or mob was involved. “Every sizeable city has its murders, but only backward communities have lynchings. So let our northern newspapers, and let the officers of the International Labor Defense take notice,” a Winter Park resident argued; “This was not ‘the second lynching in one month in Florida,’ as was stated. As a murder, it does not call for protests from outside the state. It is for the law officers of the county to handle—with relentless justice, let us hope. In short, the fair name of neither Daytona nor of Florida is involved.”⁴⁴ The case nonetheless came to be referred to as a lynching because Snell was taken away from legal authority and murdered.

As “lynch” came to be associated with the execution of Lee Snell, the primary concern of the town fathers was damage to Daytona Beach’s image. “The untruthful report will do more

41. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 1 May 1939; ILD News Release, 12 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

42. 18 U.S.C. 51, Criminal Code 19; “Another Lynching In Florida.”

43. *St. Petersburg Evening Independent*, 1 May 1939; *Miami Herald*, 1 May 1939.

44. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 30 April 1939. Also see, *Tampa Tribune*, 20 May 1939.

harm to Daytona Beach than all the constructive advertising that can be done by the Chamber of Commerce or other organizations for many months," T.E. Fitzgerald cabled Mary McLeod Bethune; "I trust that you, because of your high position as a negro leader, will offset as best you can the iniquitous report. My only interest is that of fair play and the protection of the city in which your wonderful school is located."⁴⁵

At a coroner's inquest held before Peace Justice Charles Reers, Constable Durden apprized jurors that Everett and Earl Blackwelder, older brothers of the accident victim, had executed the black taxi cab driver. Two other witnesses could not identify the Blackwelders as the assailants but did confirm the details of what had transpired: that Snell was shot at close range in the leg and crippled, and then shot in the back and killed. The coroner's jury charged the Blackwelder brothers with first-degree murder. Warrants were issued for their arrest. Ben Blackwelder Sr. told authorities that his sons would give themselves up to the law after the funeral of their younger brother.⁴⁶

The NAACP complained to Governor Cone about the delay and the continued violation of federal and state laws. "In view of the two lynchings in Florida, and in view of the reported outbreaks of lawless bodies of men such as the Ku Klux Klan, we strongly urge you as Governor of the State of Florida to take the necessary steps to prevent the recurrence of these flagrant violations of the law, and to seek the punishment of those guilty," Walter White wrote; "Since the coroner's jury at Daytona has charged the Blackwelder brothers with the killing of Lee Snell we urge you to do all in your power to see that they are vigorously prosecuted to the end that the case will not be a mere gesture but rather an honest attempt to enforce the laws of the State of Florida and the nation."⁴⁷

The Snell case placed Governor Cone once more on a political hotseat. Having opposed federal anti-lynching legislation on the ground that states were strong enough to deal with such situations, Cone, who once reportedly said that no black college president was worth \$5,000 a year in salary, worked to distance his office from the nasty business of lynching. "I always leave those matters

45. T.E. Fitzgerald to Mary McLeod Bethune, [May 1939], MMB MSS.

46. *Miami Herald*, 5 May 1939; *Washington Post*, 1 May 1939; *Washington Post*, 3 May 1939.

47. Walter White to Fred P. Cone, 5 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

to the attorney general and the prosecuting attorneys," Cone stated through his secretary; "It is up to the law to take its course." Attorney General George C. Gibbs also removed himself from the case: "There is no reason for the state to intervene. It's a matter for local authorities." But State Attorney Murray Sams signified that he was taking over the probe. "I want to go into this matter thoroughly and in an orderly manner," he stated.⁴⁸

The case was taken before the Volusia County grand jury. After hearing the testimony of ten witnesses, the grand jury indicted the Blackwelder brothers for murder in the first degree. Since the state constitution permitted bail, even in capital cases, the grand jury recommended reasonable bail. Nationally syndicated columnist Westbrook Pegler took Florida to task, noting that in recent months three cases of vehicular homicide had been dispatched within the state through \$200 fines: "In a region where the Negro is likely to become a peon if he strays into the bush and, at best, may be impressed into field work at the white man's own price, with a term on the road gang in stripes as the alternative, he is flattered when his demise in a hit-and-run scrape calls for a \$200 fine." Focusing on the tragic events in Daytona Beach, Pegler observed that the way law enforcement officials handled the situation reminded him more of a Banana Republic than an American state. "Instead of shooting the men himself, according to his duty and the law," Pegler remarked on Durden's confrontation with the Blackwelder brothers, "he invoked the Cuban and Mexican law of flight for his helpless captive." Acts of reprisal by white friends and relatives, Pegler reminded readers, were still part of the code of honor and justice in Southern states. "A trial will ensue, but negricide is not a capital offense in Florida," Pegler caustically concluded, "some rebuke seems necessary. After all, civilization, though it may not actually march, nevertheless has learned to creep in Florida."⁴⁹

Among the people feeling the rising heat of scrutiny was Constable Durden. Although a Coroner's jury and a Grand jury did not find any law enforcement agencies culpable for Snell's

48. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 2 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 2 May, 17 May 1939; *Atlanta Daily World*, 7 May 1939.

49. Westbrook Pegler, "Fair Enough," 5 May 1939, Westbrook Pegler Papers, Writings & Speeches, Columns File, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa; Pegler, "Fair Enough," *New York World Telegram*, 5 May 1939; *Dallas Dispatch-Journal*, 5 May 1939.

death, Durden feared for his job. "It is my information that representatives of the undesirable Negro element of this city and other individuals who are interested in my political defeat, are circulating a petition directed to your Excellency therein soliciting my removal as Constable of the Eighth Justice District of Volusia County," he wrote to Governor Cone. In defense of his courage and honesty, Durden stood on his record of fourteen years of public service: "I will not be a victim of persons whose motives are entirely selfish and dishonest."⁵⁰

The trial of the Blackwelder brothers was postponed several times because either the judge did not draw a jury pool, or the defense needed more time to prepare or wanted more time to elapse for "any passion or feeling to die down." The prosecution repeatedly objected to the delays, claiming that the defense counsel has never shown "they even have a defense."⁵¹

Daytona's African-American community tried to insure that the interests of their race were protected by forming the Lee Snell Defense that met with a Deland attorney in May 1939. As a local newspaper reported, "The meeting was given over largely to discussion of prospects for equitable court proceedings in the prosecution of the alleged slayers of Lee Snell, and the probability that federal intervention might be invoked to insure justice on all sides." Backed by the ILD and "some tourist sympathizers," the defense committee wanted an attorney and stenographer of its choice within the courtroom to provide a record and serve in an advisory capacity to the prosecuting attorneys.⁵²

The ILD also rolled out its big guns in hammering Washington for federal intervention. Congressman Vito Marcantonio of New York, who served as President of the ILD, transmitted Jardine and Bailey's report from Daytona to Attorney General Murphy, citing cases establishing jurisdiction of the Department of Justice and requesting federal investigation and prosecution. The East Harlem Congressman listed several occurrences which suggested collusion between authorities and

50. J.M. Durden to Honorable Fred P. Cone, 11 May 1939, Governor's Correspondence 1937-1941, Series 368, Box 99, Volusia County, Fred P. Cone Papers, Florida Department of State, Bureau of Archives & Records Management, Tallahassee. Durden's letter is the only document involving the Snell case to be found in Governor Cone's papers.

51. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 14 May, 17 May 1939.

52. *Ibid.*, 20 May 1939.

lynchers: the Blackwelders knew the time and route of Snell's transfer, only one deputy was assigned to transport Snell, the deputy did not put up an armed fight to protect his charge, and the Blackwelders were not imprisoned after being identified as the ambushers.⁵³ "The fact that these questions arise, as well as the whole picture of the case, indicates clearly to me that that local authorities are unready, unwilling, and unreliable in the prosecution of the lynchers. Intervening by more disinterested authority is essential. The state has declined to intervene, holding it a purely local matter," Marcantonio reminded Murphy; "The Snell case is the third lynching in Florida in the last nine months. Failure to exact full penalties from the murderers in the first two, clearly indicates the way that is being prepared for this one. Together with responsible Florida groups, I share the opinion that unless there is Federal intervention, this horrible crime will probably go unpunished, and aid and comfort will thereby be given to those individuals who hold, with apparent justification, that in some parts of the country the murder of a Negro is a crime for which there is no punishment."⁵⁴ The NAACP in Washington requested a copy of the Marcantonio letter. "You can understand our desire to see the memorandum you sent, since as far as the essential facts are concerned, the Snell and Brown lynchings seem to be on all fours," Secretary White wrote; "We believe, however, that the attempted terrorizing of Negro voters by the Ku Klux Klan at Miami is clearly a violation of federal statute."⁵⁵

But Snell sympathizers were dealt a blow when U.S. District Attorney Herbert S. Phillips of Tampa informed them that the Blackwelders could not be prosecuted by the federal government, citing a recent Alabama case where it was ruled that remedies sought for wrongs committed against persons of African descent was a state action. Phillips conceded that "while cases occasional-

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53. Reinhard H. Luthin, *American Demagogues: Twentieth Century* (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), 208-35.
 54. Vito Marcantonio to Frank Murphy, 12 May 1939; ILD News Release, 15 May 1939, both in NAACP MSS LIC; "Florida ILD Fights Lynch Whitewash," *Equal Justice* 8 (June 1939): 5; *Chicago Defender*, 20 May 1939; *Miami Herald*, 15 May 1939.
 55. Walter White to Vito Marcantonio, 16 May 1939; Vito Marcantonio to Walter White, 23 May 1939, both in NAACP MSS LIC. The Daytona Beach branch of the NAACP also made an eleventh hour appeal to national headquarters for federal intervention; Reverend R.J. Jones and B.S.F. Tisdale to White, 16 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

ly arise that shock us and justify feeling of resentment on the part of every law abiding citizen, we must all recognize, as the supreme court recognizes and holds, that this is a dual government. We have our state government and our national government. If the state officials in all such cases will for their duty and exercise due caution in the selection of juries trying such cases, the law will be vindicated."⁵⁶

Despite the setback, special interest groups continued to pressure Washington for justice. The Tampa branch of the NAACP implored Florida's senators, Claude Pepper and C.O. Andrews, to support federal anti-lynch legislation. "I am sure Senator, that you recall the statement that, there isn't any need for a Federal anti-lynch law, because you were sure that Florida could take care of its lynching problems, that the law would uphold the lynchers and give them leave to give themselves up if they choose? or did you mean that, the law enforcing agencies would bring the guilty ones to justice?" William E. Glover, Secretary of the Tampa branch of the NAACP, critically asked; "If you recall, some of the senators filibustered the anti-lynch bill out of the senate. I do not recall any of these senators, attempting to filibuster the law against kidnapping. The Tampa Branch, N.A.A.C.P. asks you, as Senator for Florida, to kindly use your influence and support to help pass the anti-lynching bill, when it comes up for debate."⁵⁷

In the meantime, one of the largest jury venires in Volusia County history was drawn by Circuit Judge H. B. Frederick. The names of potential veniremen were published in local newspapers, exposing them to public pressure. Both the prosecution and defense explored the racial angle of the case in jury selection. The State Attorney questioned veniremen on whether they could convict a white man for killing a black. "If you believe from the evidence that the defendants are guilty of an unlawful homicide of lesser degree will you so find, even though the person alleged to have been killed was colored?" Sams asked prospective jurors. Occasionally he bore in deeper and harder: "Would you give them [the Blackwelders] a better break for killing a negro than a white

56. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 21 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 21 May 1939; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3 June 1939.

57. William E. Glover Jr. to Senator Claude Pepper, 23 May 1939; William E. Glover Jr. to Senator C.O. Andrews, 23 May 1939; Oscar Johnson to William E. Glover Jr., 30 May 1939, all in NAACP MSS LIC.

man? Sometimes people says its all right to kill a negro—you don't feel that way do you . . . would the fact that the slain person was 'a darky' make any difference in your decision?"⁵⁸ In the end, out of sixty-five Volusians, fifteen prospective jurors were either excused or failed to appear for jury selection, and a jury of twelve whites—a group which the local press labeled a "cracker jury"—was secured.⁵⁹

Just to witness jury selection, approximately 250 white spectators crowded into the courtroom proper. Over 150 blacks packed onto a balcony designed to seat 70 people. "Heat, humidity, and humanity joined forces to contribute to the discomfort of all present," the *Daytona Beach Evening News* reported; "Sheriff Stone and his deputies searched some of the spectators as they arrived, but found no weapons."⁶⁰

At the trial, Durden dropped a bombshell when he wavered: "I won't be positive, but I think it was the Blackwelders who took Snell from me." Although Sams produced a transcript from the coroner's inquest indicating that Durden had known the Blackwelders for twelve years and identified them without hesitation, the Constable now claimed that under the mental strain of the situation he might have been mistaken. Durden's recanting of testimony was followed by a mild demonstration from blacks in the balcony. Judge Frederick demanded order and admonished the spectators for their outburst. Since other witnesses could testify only to the details of the killing and not the identity of the perpetrators, the state was unable to make its case. Neither of the defendants appeared on the stand nor did they offer any witnesses in their defense. "They (the state) have not even proved to my satisfaction that Lee Snell is dead," T.N. Tappy, a defense counsel, scornfully remarked, "much less that these defendants were the men who took the negro from the custody of a constable and killed him."

One hour and six minutes after the case was given to the jury, the brothers were acquitted. The so-called "cracker jury" reportedly reached a unanimous decision on the first ballot, but waited for more than one hour to announce the verdict of "not guilty." In an Extra Edition, the *Daytona Beach Evening News* declared, "Everett

58. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 26 May 1939. Interpolation in the original.

59. *Ibid.*, 24 May, 25 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 26 May, 27 May 1939.

60. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 26 May 1939.

and Earl Blackwelder rose out of the shadow of the electric chair.⁶¹ “Although disappointed over the verdict, a packed gallery of negroes listened quietly as the clerk read the judgement of the 12-man jury,” a reporter indicated; “There were no demonstrations of race feeling as had been rumored, leading the sheriff to have every negro spectator [searched] before entering the balcony; no weapons were found.” A band of Blackwelders wept with joy upon hearing of the acquittal.⁶²

It was an emotionally crushing blow for the black community. Snell’s murder spelled out once more that African Americans were expendable residents of Daytona Beach and were at risk at all times and everywhere. Mary McLeod Bethune courageously stepped up to express the indignation and horror that blacks felt but were too afraid to vocalize, explaining to Governor Cone how “cold-blooded murder” had “almost paralyzed” residents of color. “With such an unjust handling of a case of murder, there is no safety for any Negro citizen in this State,” Bethune pronounced; “Some word of assurance from you is greatly needed by my people in Daytona Beach. We are lawabiding citizens and have measured up to Community requirements, to State and National laws. Governor Cone, what have you to say about this cold-blooded murder of Lee Snell?”⁶³ Her letter was also disseminated in the African-American press.⁶⁴

Bethune also sent a letter to the editor of “our leading White paper,” the *Daytona Beach Evening News*. “I think the people of this community, the governor of Florida, and the supreme seat of justice of the United States should know and realize,” Bethune began, “the crushed hearts and sense of helplessness for their own protection, of the loyal and law-abiding negroes of this country, state and nation, in the results of the cold blooded murder of Lee Snell.” Relating Snell’s history as a law-abiding citizen, a veteran of World War I who fought in the trenches of France for his country and people, a member of Chris Gadson Post #2 Colored Veterans, and a celebrant of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Bethune continued, “What answer can you give to Hitler for this

61. *Ibid.*, 27 May 1939, and Extra Edition: *Florida Times Union*, 28 May 1939; *Miami Herald*, 28 May 1939; *Tampa Tribune*, 28 May 1939; “Florida ILD Fights Lynch Whitewash,” 5; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 1939.

62. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 27 May 1939. Interpolations in the original.

63. Mary McLeod Bethune to Fred Cone, 30 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

64. See, for example, *Atlanta Daily World*, 11 June 1939.



In another Gordon Park's photograph, Mary McLeod Bethune, President of Bethune-Cookman College and Director of the Negro Division of the National Youth Administration, is seated in her office on campus, pen in hand. A portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt, hanging on a wall alongside other luminaries, is reflected like a guardian in the mirror over Bethune's shoulder. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

brutal handling of an American on American soil? We are disturbed and perplexed. How long will you kick us and shoot us and burn us without your consciences speaking to you? . . . Citizens of Volusia county, and of Florida, the eyes of America and the world

are turned this way taking note of your standard of justice.” Although local blacks were devastated by what had transpired, they had to keep faith in the system and believe that someday they would prevail. “If we were called upon tomorrow to shoulder arms and protect our city, our state or our nation, we would answer the call of the roll,” Bethune concluded; “In turn for our loyalty and unflinching patriotism what are you willing to do for us?”⁶⁵

Despite her well-known and influential position in the city, state, and nation, Bethune privately acknowledged that she did not know if the recipients of her letters would even pay any attention to them. “We are doing everything we possibly can to arouse sentiment against the unjust handling of this case,” she told Walter White; “I am sure you know just how much it has hurt all of the Negroes of this community.” While Governor Cone withdrew behind the comfort and silence of capitol walls, the *Daytona Beach Evening News* carried Bethune’s impassioned letter. Wire services continued to report the story and spread the word to distant places.⁶⁶ Bethune also sent copies of her correspondence on the Snell case to interracial groups monitoring human relations and promoting equal rights.

Bethune received reassurance that she was not alone in her thinking and actions. “Your expressions relative to the verdict in the Blackwelder case are certainly not too strong,” the head of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation responded; “I do not see how any fairminded person could feel otherwise. I am deeply distressed and humiliated.”⁶⁷ Indeed, influential organizations and people gave voice to the pain that they shared over the federal government’s refusal to become involved, over Constable Durden’s waffling in his testimony, and over the jury’s verdict of acquittal. “Florida has again fallen flat in its flimsy effort to uphold the law in the protection of the life of human beings,” the *Tampa Bulletin* intoned; “The interested bystander or the observant onlooker may get the impression, from the result of the Blackwelder case, that murder may be committed with impunity in Volusia county. That

65. *Daytona Beach Evening News*, 1 June 1939; Mary McLeod Bethune to Mr. Editor, 30 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC. Bethune’s letter is also found in Prevention Of Lynching MSS.

66. Mary McLeod Bethune to Walter White, 31 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

67. R.B. Fleazer to Mary McLeod Bethune, 5 June 1939, Prevention Of Lynching MSS.

impression, we are pained to admit, wouldn't be far-fetched."⁶⁸ "Let us not overlook the fact that, although the case ended strictly according to formula, it was allowed to proceed through more than the usual number of stages," the *Miami Daily News* editorialized; "The game was fought hard and carried into extra innings. That is progress. The only question is whether the federal anti-lynching bill senators in Washington will think the progress is fast enough." Reflecting on the editorial of the *Miami Daily News*, the operator of a funeral home in Miami stated that "it would be impossible to live in some Southern communities if there were not some 'quality' whites."⁶⁹

The NAACP considered the acquittal of the Blackwelders such a miscarriage of justice that the lobbying group wanted to use it nationally to galvanize forces behind a federal anti-lynch law. Upon reading about the case in the *Washington Post*, Thurgood Marshall, a special counsel with the NAACP who would later argue the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case before the Supreme Court, suggested to Secretary White that the NAACP prepare "a sheet to be planographed of the newspaper clippings concerning this case for Congress, and just put a caption on it similar to 'The States Refuse To Stop Lynching.'" Marshall also encouraged White to contact Governor Cone about investigation and prosecution of Constable Durden on perjury charges. "Ask him if this is his idea of the way to stop lynching," Marshall counseled; "This is a good case for us and we should go to town." White in turn asked two bright and rising associates, Roy Wilkins, then Assistant Secretary and Editor of *The Crisis*, and George B. Murphy Jr., Director of Publicity and Promotion, to cull statements from newspaper clippings and create a leaflet on the atrocity.⁷⁰

While Bethune was grateful for the moral support, it was an emotional roller coaster. She knew that local residents would have to shoulder the crusade at this point, and it would be a long mission. "I have found out that the federal government has no juris-

68. Editorial from *Tampa Tribune* reprinted as "Violence In Volusia" in *Tampa Bulletin*, 3 June 1939, Prevention Of Lynching MSS, Clipping File. For other editorials voicing a similar sentiment, see *Tampa Tribune*, 31 May 1939.

69. *Miami Daily News*, 29 May 1939; Kelsey Pharr to NAACP, 29 May 1939, NAACP MSS LIC.

70. Thurgood Marshall to Walter White, 28 May 1939; Walter White to Roy Wilkins and George Murphy Jr., 31 May 1939, both in NAACP MSS LIC.

blacks in a locality's population." Florida had a long history of violence accompanying vigilance. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Florida was a "frontier" state with "typical lynching counties"—thinly populated, largely rural, predominantly agricultural, a high rate of illiteracy, low income, materially disadvantaged, and controlled by white elites in scattered towns. By the 1930s, lynchings were taking place increasingly in urban areas—Panama City, Tallahassee, Daytona Beach, Tampa, and Fort Lauderdale—rather than rural crossroads and small towns. These were among the fastest growing cities in the state. "There was more to these urban sites than the quaint country stores, unpaved streets, sawmills, cotton gins, parochial Baptist and Methodist churches, and small, corner gasoline stations of the quintessential lynch villages of the South," historian Walter Howard has pointed out; "Most of them contained large and diversified populations, sizeable business enterprises, libraries, colleges, and even the state legislature in the case of Tallahassee."⁷⁴

As Florida's population nearly doubled from 968,470 residents in 1920 to 1,897,414 people in 1940, and the number of blacks climbed from 329,487 to 514,198, whites who had traditionally enjoyed uncontested authority felt the pressures of an accelerating and modernizing society and reverted to primitive behavior to safeguard traditional values and customs. An influx of tourists, businesses, and people from the outside created demands for public services, drove up the cost of living, intensified competition for jobs and housing, injected diversity, and made it difficult to maintain the status quo. New Deal programs altered relationships and shifted the locus of power from the states to the federal government. Whites tried to preserve their status and keep blacks in "their place" by reverting to violence and intimidation. The automobile provided vigilantes with greater mobility for enforcing and expanding the scope of white supremacy and black subordination.

74. Walter T. Howard, "Beaches & Hanging Trees: Lynch Law In Florida, 1930-1940," *Carver* 10 (spring 1992): 14; Howard, *Lynchings: Extralegal Violence In Florida During 1930s* (Selingsrove, Penn., 1995), 19-20, 132-48. For the broader backdrop of the region, and more detailed interpretations of the interplay between extra legal violence and society, consult W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence Of Death: Lynching In The South* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1997), especially Brundage, "Introduction," 1-20; and Norton H. Moses, comp., *Lynching And Vigilantism In The United States: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn., 1997).

In the 1930s, Florida became a lynch-prone state, witnessing one lynching per year during the decade, with the exception of 1933. Mississippi, the next most active vigilante state, had two lynch-free years during the Great Depression, Georgia and Louisiana three, and other Southern states four. Virginia had only one extra-legal execution.

While African Americans were most commonly punished in the South for alleged sex crimes against white women, the cult of Southern femininity was not the cause of most lynchings in Florida, nor were all the victims of vigilante justice black. Anyone who challenged a closed society—political dissidents, union organizers, civil libertarians—faced violence. Threats to the established order, whether directed against overseers in turpentine camps, businessmen in cities and towns, or patrolmen on the beat, provoked extra-legal action.⁷⁵ In Daytona Beach, the striking and killing of a white child by an automobile operated by a black was seen not as an accident or a tragedy, but an example of recklessness, insolence, and insubordination.

The Snell case was in many ways a capstone to the racism and repression of the 1930s, and a foreshadowing of the crusade for civil rights that World War II would precipitate. Although it would take a world war, Supreme Court decisions, and a civil rights movement to create a more open and equitable society in Daytona, an undercurrent of racism, repression, and resentment would continue for many decades, making front page headlines in conflicts over such events as Black College Reunion Week, damaging the community's image, and revealing that there was still much work to be done to guarantee basic human rights in one of the great playlands of the world.⁷⁶

75. Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes In The New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1988), 208.

76. On the problems of Black College Reunion Week see, for example, *St. Petersburg Times*, 12 August 1998, 21 May, 29 September, 30 September 1999, 11 January, 3 March, 22 March, 2 April, 4 April, and 30 March, 2001; *Tampa Tribune*, 9 April, 12 April, 29 December 1999, 22 March, 2 April, 3 April, and 30 March 2001.