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To Lauren, Luke, and Will
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By

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Chair: Jack Davis
Major: History

This dissertation is an urban history that examines the diverse market forces that shaped Cold War-era Tampa into a unique metropolitan space that defies generic Sunbelt categorization. After World War II, greater Tampa’s phosphate industry, cigar manufacturing, Busch Gardens, Ybor City project, suburban development, MacDill Air Force Base, and big agribusiness coexisted and competed, ultimately creating an economically distinct city unlike Atlanta, Phoenix, Orlando, and other urban places in the broadly defined Sunbelt.

The economic, political, environmental, and social impacts of greater Tampa’s most influential postwar industries are the subjects of this dissertation, and this study illustrates the ways in which these various economic enterprises interacted with one another and shaped the city’s identity. Chapter 2 examines the economic, environmental, and political history of Tampa’s phosphate industry. Chapter 3 is an economic, political, and labor history of the feminized cigar industry. Chapter 4 examines the social and economic implications of Tampa’s developing tourist economy. Chapter 5 is an environmental and economic history of the area’s booming postwar suburban growth sector and its relationship to the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa
Bay. Chapter 6 examines the history and economic impact of MacDill Air Force Base and big agribusinesses. This study then closes with a summary of how phosphate companies, women cigarworkers, tourist initiatives, orange and strawberry farms, fighter jets, migrant workers, sprawling suburbs, and a polluted river and bay combined to make Tampa a unique southern city. An urban space forged into a distinct American southern metropolis by competing and coexisting forms of postwar capitalism.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: COLD WAR TAMPA AND THE CASE FOR THE INTERINDUSTRIAL LENS

During the Cold War decades, the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce made two promotional films that illustrated what Tampa had become after World War II. The first film, *We Discovered Tampa*, was made in the 1960s and tells the story of a family’s winter holiday trip to the city. While in Tampa, the family visits Busch Gardens, the city’s port facilities, Fairyland, Ybor City, strawberry fields and citrus groves, a cattle ranch, and the Hillsborough River. By the end of the trip, Bob Henry—the family patriarch and a small business owner—is so enamored of Tampa’s tourist economy, port and transportation facilities, well-balanced industrial growth, weather, growing population, and leisure activities, that he decides to relocate his manufacturing business to “the industrial hub of Florida,” and he buys a ranch-style pool home in the suburbs.¹ The second film, *Tampa Serendipity*, chronicles a family vacation to Tampa in the mid-1970s. As in *We Discovered Tampa*, this family takes in many Tampa sites, and is awestruck by the city’s vacation variety and economic diversity. The family’s trip begins with a visit to Busch Gardens. They then tour a decommissioned naval submarine, go on a fishing trip, and ride the riverboat *Tom Sawyer* for a tour of the city’s phosphate, agricultural loading, and other port facilities. Near the end of their vacation, the family visits the Ybor City Latin Quarter, and converses with a nostalgic elderly cigar roller. The film then closes with the line “Tampa the sunny center of Florida’s greatest variety of vacation attractions…easy to picture, but too big to describe. You just have to come and see it for yourself!”

¹ *We Discovered Tampa* and *Tampa Serendipity*, Tampa Chamber of Commerce Collection, courtesy of the Tampa Historical Society, City of Tampa Archives.
This dissertation examines the market forces that created the multi-faceted city depicted in these Cold War-era promotional films, in an effort to more accurately historicize greater Tampa. The urban history told here also endeavors to divorce Tampa from the Sunbelt urban historiographical category and questions the Sunbelt category’s overall utility, by highlighting its tendency to deemphasize the diverse characteristics and distinctive aspects of post-World War II southern cities like Tampa, Phoenix, Los Angeles, and Atlanta.²

Using an interindustrial lens, which focuses on the interactions between Tampa’s major industries, this dissertation illustrates the various ways the city’s phosphate operations, cigar factories, tourism enterprises, suburban growth sector, MacDill Air Force base, and agribusinesses, competed and coexisted to make greater Tampa a metropolitan space unlike any other in the postwar American South. It also describes how these industries connected the city and its residents to Gilded Age cigar industry labor strife, Cuban Revolutionary politics and industrial sugar farms, Florida’s burgeoning post-World War II tourist economy, alarming pollution levels in the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay, the Soviet Union, migrant labor, frozen concentrated orange juice production, and the U.S. Cold War-era military industrial complex.

Since this dissertation challenges the Sunbelt historiographical category, the following section briefly examines some influential American postwar urban histories—and the urban categories they created—to explain why Sunbelt, postindustrial, galactic,

² For an examination of the politics of a broadly defined Sunbelt suburban south, as well as a theoretical challenge to the notion of postwar Sunbelt exceptionalism see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-19.
deindustrialization, and dual-city theoretical framings only partially historicize and regionalize postwar Tampa. Next, the chapter defines and defends this study’s use of an interindustrial lens to more precisely historicize Tampa. The introductory chapter then closes with a chapter outline.

**Urban historiographical categories and the interindustrial lens:** Ever since Kevin Phillips invented the term “Sun belt” in his 1969 work *The Emerging Republican Majority*, historians and political scientists have regularly used, and expanded the parameters of, the Sunbelt historiographical category in an effort to describe and analyze Tampa and other sprawling post-World War II growth-oriented cities.³ Early Sunbelt theorists, like Kevin Phillips and Kirkpatrick Sale, have argued that booming postwar southern and western cities, like Atlanta and Phoenix, were shaped by conservative politics, pro-business governments, sprawling suburbs, and dynamic economies, spurred in large part by low-paid service-sector jobs. Others have argued that the postwar Sunbelt was more of an attitude or conviction than a geographically bound area, an idea succinctly summed up by a member of Georgia’s Department of Industry and Trade when he declared, “The Sunbelt is not sunshine. It’s an attitude…conducive to business. The North has lost that attitude.”⁴ Still other historians, like Raymond Arsenault, have cited air conditioning, corporate relocations, automobile culture and related federal interstate construction, Cold War military spending, low-density urban living, annexation, and population growth as the defining characteristics and economic fuel that made Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Phoenix, and other Sunbelt

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urban areas megacities by the end of the twentieth century. Expanding the Sunbelt concept even farther, Carl Abbott has argued that the decline of former northern industrial hubs, like Detroit and Cleveland, is the primary determiner of Sunbeltism, and he in turn extends the boundaries of the Sunbelt to include Portland, Oregon, Denver, and even Baltimore. For Abbott and similar Sunbelt theorists, the “sunshine,” and even southern geography, are of no particular importance. All a city needed was pro-growth institutions, a booming population, and to be situated outside of the Rust Belt and the northeastern seaboard. With this broadly constructed and conceptualized Sunbelt in mind, Gary Mormino, Alan Bliss, and other historians have categorized postwar Tampa as a Sunbelt city.

The malleable boundaries and characteristics of Sunbeltism, however, illustrate the limited usefulness of Sunbelt classification. This is particularly the case with southern cities with industrial pasts and continuing Cold War-era industrial forms of production, like Tampa and New Orleans. As Arnold Hirsch notes in his essay on postwar New Orleans, though the Crescent City is “at least partly of it [the Sunbelt]…it remains a city of the past as well as the future,” and therefore it would “never be


mistaken for Houston.” Likewise, postwar Tampa, with its cigar unions, industrial infrastructure, Hillsborough River and Tampa Bay, ties to the Cuban Revolution, radical labor past, and phosphate operations, would never be mistaken for Orlando, Miami, or other Florida Sunbelt cities. In short, a close examination of Tampa reveals that similar to Hirsch’s New Orleans, Tampa from 1950 to 1980 was at best only partly of the Sunbelt, and thus a generic Sunbelt classification fails to adequately historicize the city’s regional, historical, and industrial distinctiveness.

Other postwar urban terms and concepts, like postindustrial, galactic, and deindustrialization, also fail to accurately categorize Tampa’s Cold War-era form. Simply put, the term postindustrial is a poor descriptor for a city whose economy was reliant on the heavy phosphate, agricultural, and cigar industries, as well as port operations. Galactic is also insufficient, though Tampa did have galactic characteristics. Pierce Lewis and Andrew von Hoffman have used the term galactic to describe decentered postwar urban spaces, in which residents, businesses, and jobs are no longer concentrated in traditional urban cores, but are instead dispersed throughout urban, suburban and exurban rings. Both point to Los Angeles and Atlanta—two cities in which less than 25% of residents lived in the central city areas after 1970—as prime examples of galactic Sunbelt cities. Even though Tampa had sprawling suburbs, shopping malls, and interstate highways after World War II, its downtown core, phosphate mining sectors, port, and cigar industry barrios—though partially destroyed during the postwar decades—were clearly delineated places essential to Tampa’s identity and history, a

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reality that makes galactic too imprecise a term for postwar greater Tampa.\textsuperscript{8} Finally, deindustrialization and deindustrial—like postindustrial—are inaccurate descriptors for a city with continuing heavy industry and a pervasive and influential industrial past.\textsuperscript{9}

Conversely, the dual-city historical model is applicable to postwar Tampa. Using the dual-city model, Kenneth Jackson, Thomas Sugrue, Mike Davis, Matthew Lassiter, Kevin Kruse, and others have described how affluent and predominately white suburbs were created in the postwar period, and how these suburbs contrasted with the increasingly segregated black and minority inner-city neighborhoods found in Atlanta, Oakland, Detroit, Los Angeles, and other American municipalities. This segregation was often federally subsidized in the form of highway routes, tax deductions, and real-estate practices, such as redlining. As in these cities, many of Tampa’s postwar suburbs were restricted to white residents only, and minority residents often found themselves contained in inner-city neighborhoods, and their economic agency undercut by interstate construction, urban renewal, and other government initiatives and race-based practices, a fact that is briefly examined in Chapter 4. But this study is not modeled on a dual-city framework, though in its effort to describe Tampa’s diverse economy, it sometimes highlights how Tampa industries were discriminatory and worked against the


interests of black Tampans.  

This urban history’s framework and theoretical underpinnings instead mirror those used by William Cronon in *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, a study of how the meat, grain, timber, and other industries shaped nineteenth-century Chicago and its hinterlands. Similar to the methodology used by Cronon to historicize industrial-era Chicago, this study examines how greater Tampa’s distinct industries, namely phosphate, cigars, suburban growth, tourist enterprises, industrial farms, and MacDill Air Force Base, linked the city, and its residents, to various hinterlands and the global marketplace. Because of this, this dissertation examines both Tampa proper and its hinterlands, which I define as stretching east from downtown Tampa into central Florida, south from downtown into areas south and southeast of Tampa Bay, and slightly north of downtown (Figure 1-1 and 1-2). This collective area includes sections of present-day Hillsborough, Polk, Hardee, De Soto, Hernando, Pasco, Highlands, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. Tampa’s hinterlands do not include Pinellas County and St. Petersburg, which are considered separate non-Tampa entities for the purposes of this study, because of their distinct governmental agendas and economies, and the

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fact that they are separated from Tampa and its eastern and southern hinterlands by
Tampa Bay.\textsuperscript{11}

Along with examining greater Tampa’s major industries, this dissertation also
pays particular attention to how the phosphate, suburban growth, tourism and other
local economic enterprises coexisted and competed to make postwar greater Tampa a
multi-purposed city tied to its hinterlands. This interindustrial lens, as I call it, is used
here in order to elucidate the ways Tampa’s primary industries coexisted, abutted, and
at times overlapped one another, and to underscore the fact that no single one
dominated the Tampa economy from 1950 to 1980.\textsuperscript{12} To be clear, this dissertation does
not argue that the term interindustrial should serve as a new postwar urban category. It
instead argues that through the use of an interindustrial lens, historians can perhaps
better demonstrate the economic particulars that made Cold War-era Atlanta, Orlando,
Phoenix, and other so-called Sunbelt cities individually distinctive, rather than relying on
a generic Sunbelt categorization that tends to flatten out urban peculiarities and mask
essential metropolitan characteristics.

In regards to Tampa specifically, the interindustrial lens helps to illustrate the
essential differences between prewar and postwar Tampa. Tampa’s pluralistic postwar
economy differed from its earlier industrial form. From the late 1880s to the 1920s,
Tampa’s economy was dictated by large-scale cigar manufacturing. Although railroad

\textsuperscript{11} William Cronon, \textit{Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West}, (New York: W.W. Norton &

\textsuperscript{12} The root word \textit{industrial} is used to acknowledge how greater Tampa’s MacDill Air Force Base,
phosphate industry, agribusinesses, tourist enterprises, suburban growth economy, and cigar industry—
the latter both in terms of history and continuing production—combined to make postwar Tampa a place
of heavy industry, pollution, consumption, sprawl, and contested historic memory. The prefix \textit{inter} is used
to highlight the ways these diverse industries were compelled to coexist, compete, and operate \textit{among}
and \textit{between} one another.
construction stimulated the growth of the area’s agricultural, phosphate, and tourist industries, cigarmaking was Tampa’s “primary stimulus for growth” during the period, according to historian Robert Kerstein. This argument is supported by the fact that in 1910 over 50% of the city’s workforce labored in cigar factories. But starting in the late 1920s, the economic primacy of cigar manufacturing was undercut by changing consumer tastes, an influx of federal dollars sparked by the Great Depression and World War II, and the growth of non-cigar industries like phosphate extraction, suburban growth, and tourism. Combined, these factors laid the foundation for Tampa’s multifaceted postwar economy. In contrast to the earlier cigar-centric period, from 1950 to 1980 the Tampa cigar industry was forced to exist among and between the phosphate, tourism, growth, military, and other economic enterprises that brought revenues to the city and tied it to new postwar markets.

Finally, the interindustrial lens is utilized in this study to not only separate Tampa from the Sunbelt, but also to highlight how Tampa’s various market forms combined to create a distinct and recognizable pluralistic urban form. Michael Katz and Gary Nash have argued that American urban historians have tended to define their subjects based on what they are not. For example, Nash writes that historians of early American cities have tended to “interpret the rise of materialistic, self-interested, contentious, class-oriented urban [polities] as a sign of social declension and shattered harmony,” and have in turn framed these early metropolitan areas based on what they no longer

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Similarly, historians of Gilded Age cities have often portrayed their urban subjects as unnatural, polluted, and unmoral places whose mere existence was evidence of industrial capitalism’s power to decay and disintegrate long-running human communities. The terminology used by historians to categorize post-World War II American urban spaces, has also tended to establish this not framing. For example, historians have often described decentralized American postwar cities that underwent disorienting processes of deindustrialization as they moved in a postindustrial direction. With this in mind, this study’s interindustrial focus is marshaled in part as a corrective, in that it attempts to define Cold War-era Tampa according to what it was, rather than what it was not. Tampa had a clear identity from 1950 to 1980, one that was defined by its suburbs, polluted air and waterways, phosphate industry, Air Force jet noise, cigar production and cigar industry memory, and other parts of its multi-faceted economy. All who visited and lived in Tampa knew that it was not Phoenix, Atlanta, Miami, or even St. Petersburg. It was instead a gritty, polluted, industrial, agricultural, and suburban manifestation, shaped by economic pluralism and the conflict it engendered.

Chapter outline: Each chapter in this dissertation examines a particular postwar Tampa industry, and describes how it worked to shape the city. Chapter 2 is an environmental, economic, and political history of Tampa’s phosphate industry. After

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World War II, the phosphate industry grew dramatically along with the global population, and the chapter describes how the phosphate industry polluted, industrialized, and connected Tampa to the Cold War global marketplace, while also ensuring that postwar Tampa would be shaped by heavy industry. Greater Tampa phosphate was an essential component of fertilizers used on industrial farms, suburban lawns, and in manufactured products throughout the world, and the industry tied Tampa and its eastern hinterlands to the global marketplace, even—after 1972—to the Soviet Bloc. Phosphate was an essential and unique postwar Tampa industry that employed thousands, fouled the local air and water, and more than any other heavy industry, shaped Tampa’s infrastructure, economy, environment, and politics.

The Tampa cigar industry’s postwar feminization and mechanization are the subjects of Chapter 3. Tampa’s cigar factories produced hundreds of millions of cigars annually after World War II, but in fewer factories and with fewer employees. By the 1950s, Tampa’s famous cigar industry was no longer the primary economic driver of the city, and its industrial and societal footprint shrank. Yet premium cigar production was an essential Cold War-era industry that still employed thousands of women. The Cuban Revolution, however, undercut the industry in the early 1960s. It also sparked the final Tampa cigar workers’ strike, and led to further industry consolidation. By the 1970s, women continued to make cigars in Tampa, but production and employment numbers declined, and by the end of the century, nearly every factory had been shuttered.

Chapter 4 examines two attempts to attract tourist dollars to Tampa during the Cold War. The first was the Ybor City reengineering and rebranding initiative. While women continued to work as cigarmakers in Tampa’s mechanized factories, Ybor
boosters tried to attract tourists to the barrio. Using Latin foods, señoritaism and a romanticized revisionist history that belied Ybor’s radical labor past, Ybor businesses hoped to attract tourists and capital investment with the allure of consumable Latin female bodies and Spanish bean soup. But ultimately promoters and developers were unable to reinvent Ybor, even after a federal urban renewal project demolished large swaths of the neighborhood. Instead, Tampa’s pluralistic economy, the Cuban Revolution, and existing industrial infrastructure thwarted the Ybor initiative. Conversely, Busch Gardens became one of the most popular tourist destinations in Florida from 1959 to 1980. Busch Gardens successfully blended industrial production with tourist-centered leisure in unique ways, and its success highlighted the Anheuser-Busch Corporation’s ability to build a sought-after attraction despite the Ybor project’s failure.

Chapter 5 is an economic and environmental history of Tampa’s suburban growth economy and its relationship to the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay. Like the phosphate industry, Tampa’s suburban-growth sector boomed during the Cold War. This growth mirrored the population boom that took place in other Sunbelt areas, and the Hillsborough River and the upper Tampa Bay were consumed, polluted, and used for leisure pursuits by Tampa suburbanites after World War II. But as the area’s population and housing stock grew, so did water pollutants. In response, policymakers attempted to build new infrastructure and reduce pollution levels, but the pro-growth political and business ethos of the time thwarted attempts to slow growth to protect the environment, and pollution levels rose, crescendoing with a 1979 sewage spill that befouled the Hillsborough River and sections of the upper Tampa Bay.

MacDill Air Force Base and big agribusinesses are the final postwar industries
examined in this dissertation, and are the subjects of Chapter 6. Both industries annually contributed millions to the local economy, yet they were sometimes seen as peripheral enterprises. Though perhaps not as pervasive as phosphate and cigars, the jet noise, migrant worker strikes, and strawberry festivals that defined MacDill and big agribusiness shaped Tampa’s identity and economy. Big agribusinesses made Tampa a home to extensive citrus canning facilities, beef and strawberry exporting, and a workplace for migrant laborers, while MacDill connected the city to the Cold War global order. The Air Force’s “Strike Command” and later “Readiness Command,” both stationed at MacDill during the Cold War, were important components of the nation’s postwar military industrial complex, and the base’s hospital attracted veterans and their families to greater Tampa.

This dissertation then closes with a summary of how phosphate, tourist enterprises, oranges, women cigarworkers, strawberries, fighter jets, migrant workers, sprawling suburbs, and a polluted river and bay combined to make Tampa a unique southern city. An urban space forged into a distinct American southern metropolis by competing and coexisting forms of postwar capitalism.
Figure 1-1. Map of greater Tampa in the 1960s. Shaded in purple at the tip of the large peninsula is MacDill Air Force Base. Directly to the right of the base, across the Hillsborough Bay, is the Alafia River. The triangular shaped islands northeast of MacDill are Davis Islands and Seddon Island, and the peninsula just to the east of the islands is where the city’s sewage treatment facility was located. Just north of this peninsula is Ybor City, and north of the islands is downtown Tampa and the mouth of the Hillsborough River, which travels through downtown and suburban central Tampa, then turns east and widens at the city’s drinking water treatment facility before running through suburban Temple Terrace. The large purple shaded area north of the widened section of the river is the University of South Florida. Busch Gardens is located just south of the university. Map Courtesy of the Hillsborough County John F. Germany Public Library, Map Collection.
Figure 1-2. Greater Tampa and its eastern hinterlands in the 1980s. Tampa's phosphate and agricultural lands were generally east-southeast of the city proper. The pink shaded area is Plant City, a major strawberry-producing locale. Below Plant City and to the east-southeast were phosphate extraction and processing areas. Map Courtesy of the Hillsborough County John F. Germany Public Library, Map Collection.
CHAPTER 2
RISE OF THE ROCK: INDUSTRIAL PHOSPHATE’S ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL CONNECTIONS

Billions of tons of Florida phosphate rock—the vast majority of it used in fertilizer production—were strip mined, processed, and exported through Tampa’s port after World War II. During the Cold War decades, central Florida was the nation’s leading producer of phosphate, and one of the world’s primary phosphate providers. As postwar worldwide demand for phosphate grew along with the global population, so did the greater Tampa phosphate industry’s workforce, output, profits, pollution, and industrial footprint. This ensured that large swaths of postwar Tampa were dedicated to the promotion of a heavy extraction and processing industry, one that connected the city and its hinterlands to distant farms, Cold War geopolitics, and the postwar debate over global overpopulation.

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1 Portions of this chapter were previously published in the *Florida Historical Quarterly.* See Brad Massey, “The Hammer, the Sickle, and the Phosphate Rock: The Political Controversy of Florida Phosphate Shipments to the Soviet Union,” *Florida Historical Quarterly,* Volume 94:4, (Spring 2016), 637-667.

This chapter is an environmental, economic, and political history of Tampa’s postwar phosphate industry. The chapter examines how phosphate shaped, polluted, and ensured heavy industry would—in part—define Tampa from 1950 to 1980. It begins with a study of the phosphate industry’s twentieth-century growth, and examines the successful economic and political crusade to expel phosphate trains and loading facilities from Tampa’s downtown core and residential neighborhoods, at the behest of pro-growth politicians, developers, and suburban residents. Next, the chapter describes the industry’s continuing expansion and pollution problems—both of which threatened Tampa’s emerging tourist and growing agricultural economies—as well as anti-pollution crusaders’ fight to curtail and control industry water and air pollution. It then chronicles the controversial Florida phosphate deal with the Soviet Union, a deal that connected Florida phosphate to Cuban sugar farms and other Eastern Bloc industries. The final section of the chapter examines how Tampa phosphate’s post-1960 land reclamation agenda increased industry profits and linked phosphate lands to the area’s suburban

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3 Through its examination of the ties between Florida phosphate and the Soviet Union, this chapter contributes to existing fertilizer and Cold War-era trade historiography. Gregory Cushman, Rory Miller, and others have highlighted how fertilizer, in the form of guano, connected the western coast of South America to the ‘Pacific World’ and the industrialization of Europe. These studies reveal how guano’s commodification connected distinct and disparate geographical regions, political structures, and people, linking them into webs of interdependence. As was the case with guano, Florida phosphate rock connected distant environments, political systems, peoples, and industries. In regards to Cold War-era political and trade historiography, this work supports Philip Funigiello’s and other scholars’ arguments that Henry Kissinger and other détente proponents hoped that economic trade with, and technological development of, the Soviet Union’s non-military economy would provoke Soviet elites to divert resources from the USSR’s military complex to its domestic economy. Philip J. Funigiello, American-Soviet Trade in the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 183, 194-195, 197-198, 224; Raymond L. Garthoff, Détemp and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan, Revised Edition, (Washington, DC: Brookings Press, 1994). For a recent overview of détente politics, see Jussi M. Hanhimäki, The Rise and Fall of Détemp: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2013). For an examination of the relationship between Western Europe and Comecon during the 1970s, see Takeshi Yamamoto, “Détemp or Integration? EC Response to Soviet Policy Change towards the Common Market, 1970-75,” Cold War History 7, no. 1 (March 2007): pp. 75-94.
development economy in the 1970s, as concerns over elevated local cancer rates grew.⁴

The phosphate industry never dominated Tampa’s postwar economy, but central Florida phosphate was an essential economic enterprise whose infrastructure, jobs, strip mining, reclaimed lands, and pollutants shaped Tampa and its hinterlands dramatically between 1950 and 1980. The relationship between phosphate and Tampa was also unique in the Sunbelt South. Although some heavy industries, for example oil and gas in Houston and New Orleans, shaped a select few Sunbelt cities, phosphate’s industrial footprint was distinct and regionally specific to postwar Tampa, and it ensured that the city would remain an industrial hub. This was true even as suburbs sprawled, MacDill Air Force Base grew along with the nation’s Cold War military-industrial complex, Busch Gardens became Florida’s top tourist attraction, and Tampa-area strawberry fields and orange groves expanded.

**Phosphate Industry Growth, 1945 to 1979**

Large phosphate deposits were discovered in central Florida in the late 1800s, and shortly thereafter phosphate extraction, manufacturing, and transporting became important and growing industries in the Tampa Bay region (Figure 2-1). Tampa phosphate’s early decades, however, were times of experimentation and instability and, according to one industry historian, mismanagement and inefficiency “as the infant industry struggle to achieve a stable and profitable operating basis.” Initially phosphate was manually extracted from the ground, with shovels, pick axes, and often with convict

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labor. But as profits and production increased in the early twentieth century, phosphate companies built towns and mechanized their operations. So much so, that by the early 1930s, observers described scenes in Florida’s phosphate districts that American coal miners would have found familiar. According to a *Tampa Daily Times* story, “a trip to a mine plant is not unlike a visit to a compact, independent principality. The company owns the base of operations, the surrounding countryside, settlements of the employees, all equipment used, and in some cases railroad locomotives…[and] miles of trackage.”

Along with industrial equipment and worker housing, some central Florida phosphate towns also had their own schools, churches, recreation centers, grocery stores, and other facilities.

By the 1930s, phosphate companies had reengineered large swaths of greater Tampa’s landscape and the city’s port operations. Draglines, which dug into the land to extract phosphate, had created vast “moonscapes” of scarred earth, and the primary phosphate-loading elevator at Tampa’s port—which was used to load phosphate onto transport ships—was the largest in the world (Figure 2-2). These jagged moonscapes and elevator stood as symbols of the Tampa phosphate industry’s extensive growth, profits, and industrial footprint (Figure 2-3).

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5 “Florida Phosphate Mines Illustrate Industrial Economy in Operation,” *Tampa Daily Times*, December 22, 1936, 8-B.

6 Draglines were used to strip mine the Florida earth (Figure 2-7). The use of the mining draglines after 1920 was a particularly important technological advancement, as dragline usage drastically reduced the cost of phosphate extraction. For a precise breakdown of the savings and other industry techniques in the first half of the twentieth century, see Blakey chapter 4, esp. page 79, (quote taken from xxi). Blakey argued that by the early 1970s the industry had gone through three distinct states of development, and that the scientific advances made between 1920 and 1940 laid the foundation for the industry’s growth and profits after WWII. “Florida Phosphate Mines Illustrate Industrial Economy in Operation,” *Tampa Daily Times*, December 22, 1936, 8-B. For a look concise look at the postwar Florida phosphate industry see Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 215-219. Scott Hamilton Dewey, *Don’t Breathe the Air: Air Pollution and U.S. Environmental Politics, 1945-1970*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), Part
After World War II, Florida phosphate production boomed, as the global demand for industrial fertilizers spiked. As a result, phosphate companies mined thousands of acres of Florida earth and the Army Corp of Engineers was charged with dredging deeper channels in Tampa Bay to accommodate the steadily growing number and size of phosphate exporting vessels crowding Tampa’s port. Between 1941 and 1953, phosphate companies mined and manufactured more central Florida phosphate than they had over the course of the preceding five decades. In 1958, Tampa’s phosphate elevator set a record when a single load—weighing in at 16,000 tons—of phosphate rock was lifted onto a vessel bound for Montreal. Between 1963 and 1968, Tampa’s port cargo tonnage doubled, the quickest expansion in history. Along with phosphate exporting, Tampa’s port also “emerged as a center for petro-chemicals and resumed its position as an important banana import center,” according to the Tampa Port Authority’s 1969 annual report. Over 39,000 tons of citrus, 40,000 tons of meat, and 3,900 vessels entered the port in 1969. Though these oranges and other commodities were profitable for port operations, they were generally top loaded onto phosphate transporting vessels, a fact that highlighted phosphate’s economic primacy. A 1979 economic study by the Lakeland-based firm Zellars-Williams concluded that the Brewster Phosphates, International Minerals and Chemical, and W.R. Grace phosphate corporations alone

had a “$200 million annual impact” in Hillsborough County and a combined yearly payroll of $188.8 million.\(^7\)

During these postwar boom years phosphate companies, like the International Minerals and Chemical Corporation, invested millions in their Florida phosphate operations, while marketing initiatives in Korea and in other distant corners of the globe developed new phosphate markets (Figure 2-4). By the end of the 1950s, phosphate was Florida’s third biggest industry, behind only tourism and agriculture, and Tampa-area phosphate linked the state’s mining lands, port cities, and industrial workers to the postwar global marketplace to a greater extent than ever before. As Tampa’s postwar suburbs mushroomed, Busch Gardens opened its doors to tourists, cigars were rolled, and oranges were grown and turned into frozen concentrate, the Florida phosphate industry produced over 70% of the nation’s phosphate exports and brought thousands of jobs and ships to Tampa. The industry also provided phosphate-based fertilizer for area orange groves and suburban lawns. In short, phosphate became a pillar of Tampa’s economy after World War II.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Although phosphate was shipped from a few Florida ports in the twentieth century, the vast majority of the state’s mined phosphate was shipped out of Tampa. Bill Boyd and photos by Ed Sessions, “World Shipments of Phosphate Bring Boom to Tampa’s Busting Port” and “Phosphate Shipments Bring Boom to Tampa; Record Cargoes Seen,” Tampa Sunday Tribune, April 1, 1951, front page; “Rotarians Hear Speaker Tell of Phosphate Rise,” Tampa Daily Times, August 13, 1954; “Record Phosphate Load,” Tampa Tribune, June 11, 1958; “There are many reasons for Tampa’s climbing into the big league shipping-wise but among the most important is increased efficiency at dockside,” Tampa Tribune, June 15, 1958; “Shipments of Phosphate From Tampa Said Gaining,” Tampa Tribune, June 15, 1958. Tampa Port Authority Annual Report 1969, Fiscal Year 1968-1969, Hillsborough County John F. Germany Library, Local Government Documents Archive. For a look at the complex relationship between Tampa’s late nineteenth- and twentieth industries and the pro-growth postwar agenda see Robert Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), chapter 6; Harry Costello, “Phosphate Firms’ Study Shows Industry’s Big Economic Impact,” Tampa Tribune, September 5, 1979.

\(^8\) “There are many reasons for Tampa’s climbing into the big league shipping-wise but among the most important is increased efficiency at dockside,” Tampa Tribune, June 15, 1958; Blakey, The Florida Phosphate Industry: A History of the Development and Use of a Vital Mineral, 90-103; Bill Boyd and photos by Ed Sessions, “World Shipments of Phosphate Bring Boom to Tampa’s Busting Port” and
The Fight over Phosphate’s Pollution and Industrial Footprint, 1960 to 1974

Industrial phosphate’s growth, however, did not go unchallenged. Whereas Gilded Age phosphate and cigar industry expansion were both heralded as welcome economic catalysts in Tampa by local businesses and politicians, the postwar expansion of Florida phosphate created diverse opposition groups.

Environmentalists, concerned residents, suburban growth sector businesses, the tourist industry, local politicians, and Cold War hawks all opposed phosphate operations at various times between 1950 and 1980. Local business officials and politicians who championed non-heavy industries—like suburban growth and tourism—worked to quarantine, or at least heavily segregate, an industry they believed degraded residential property values and leisure pursuits. These Tampans argued that growth and leisure were the cornerstones and future of Tampa’s postwar economy, and that fish kills, air pollution, dangerous radiation released by mining processes, slime ponds, and other environmental hazards spawned by big phosphate, threatened future growth-centered profits. Environmentalists were also concerned about industry pollution, but conserving and protecting the natural environment, and phosphate’s threat to public health, not profits, were usually their primary concerns. Although these environmental advocates also condemned the pollutants spewed by Tampa’s growth, leisure, and tourist-centered economies, their fight against central Florida phosphate’s strip-mined moonscapes, slime ponds, radiation, and dam breaks were unique to the Sunbelt South. Local politicians’ views of the phosphate industry and its pollutants, not surprisingly, were

generally shaped by their respective constituents’ concerns. Elected officials representing industry workers were often hesitant to criticize Florida phosphate, whereas politicians representing pro-growth residential business and suburbanites often criticized the industry. Finally, Cold War hawks, a group that did not emerge until the era of détente between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., criticized Florida phosphate’s ties to the Eastern Bloc. This was also a unique occurrence in the Sunbelt South.9

But getting phosphate trains and their pollutants out of Tampa proper was one of the first issues that collectively galvanized anti-phosphate politicians, residents and environmentalists (Figure 2-5). In the 1950s and 1960s, Tampa Bay-area residents incessantly complained about phosphate dust that wafted off the industry’s transporting trains. Tampa motorists griped that the trains crawled through the city twelve times a day, causing major traffic jams. In 1965, Newsweek revealed to a national audience Tampa’s phosphate transporting problems when it published a story that described how transporting trains clogged traffic and emitted clouds of dust that drifted “across Tampa Bay and bathed neighboring homes…in layers of fine white powder.”10

The industry was sensitive to this criticism, but phosphate company officials argued that transporting trains were a localized, and necessary, inconvenience with international implications. Without the phosphate trains, industry boosters quipped, Tampa’s port would lie dormant, because there simply were not enough bananas, chickens, beef, oranges, and other cargo to replace phosphate on shipping vessels. The industry also pointed out that phosphate’s $60 million annual contribution to the

9 The term détente is used in this dissertation to describe the thawing of tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union from roughly 1969 to 1979.

area’s economy was essential, and that if phosphate transporting was hindered the city “could become a ghost town.” With this in mind, the trains that “crawled” through the urban core—twelve times a day—spilling phosphate dust, jamming traffic, and creating an impediment to the goals of those who desired to turn the city into a more typical Sunbelt area of suburbs, service-industry jobs, consumption, and leisure, were not easily curtailed. Phosphate was simply too essential to the area economy and global food production, a reality highlighted by *Tampa Tribune* reporter Bill Cox’s argument in 1966 that “Tampa, by virtue of its relation to the phosphate industry, is the center of world food production.”

The phosphate train conflict ultimately led to the type of economic and political compromise that in part defined postwar Tampa. After much political and economic cajoling, the phosphate trains and their pollutants were removed from the downtown core and residential areas. Yet phosphate continued to be a leading local industry, and it coexisted—and at times competed with—Tampa’s other economic components.

The train compromise was brokered—in large part—by the industry’s threat to abandon Tampa port facilities in the mid-1960s. In 1965, the political fight over the trains commenced when the railroad company Atlantic Coast Lines (ACL) publicized that it would be moving its phosphate-loading operations to a $14 million fully

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11 Phosphate trains and terminals were not the only, or the first, industrial manifestations that pro-growth factions attempted to segregate from Tampa’s urban core. In 1959, Tampa agreed to pay $2.5 million—a sum that some argued was too high—to purchase 4.4 acres of Atlantic Coast Line land located downtown. This land was home to railroad warehouses and tracks. The parcel was located downtown adjacent to the Hillsborough River, just north of Lafayette Street (now Kennedy Blvd), and south of Cass Street. The purchase led to the removal of the “rat infested” train works and trains that a critic wrote “puffed patronizingly through Tampa’s downtown area, holding up traffic for blocks while railroad cars are shifted and pulled out. The downtown area takes on a bush league appearance while the trains take over.” See Kerstein, *Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa*, 133-134; Tampa Port Authority Annual Report 1969, Fiscal Year 1968-1969; Bill Cox, “Tampa Said Center of Food Production,” *Tampa Tribune*, January 21, 1966; *Newsweek*, “Ports,” 1965.
automated phosphate loading facility in Manatee County facility at the southern end of Tampa Bay—just outside of Tampa’s economic orbit—to alleviate the city’s alleged burden (Figure 2-6). If built, this facility would sever Tampa from its phosphate hinterlands and undercut its port business. City boosters and politicians were divided over the plan to reroute phosphate away from Tampa’s port. Sunbelt pro-growthers were elated and were eager to see phosphate trains and loading facilities relocated. Henry Toland, a local banker, argued the proposed relocation was a blessing, and he estimated it would not negatively impact the city’s economy. Tampa City Councilman W.D. West agreed, arguing that the phosphate trains that crept through downtown, Ybor City, and residential areas of south Tampa were a public nuisance and pollution hazard.

But those whose livelihoods and political fortunes were tied to phosphate operations disagreed, and Tampa mayor Nick Nuccio sought a middle ground. A Tampa city councilman representing Port Tampa argued, “I only hope the railroad can replace the phosphate with new industry or something—without the dust….The phosphate terminals may be moving from the port, but we’ve got to develop more tonnage in general cargo.” Others, who were sympathetic to both sides, like mayor Nuccio, advocated for a compromise. Aware of the economic importance of the industry, Nuccio criticized the sudden and unexpected relocation announcement. Yet he also welcomed it, believing that an end to the railroad traffic would be “good for Tampa’s growth and development.” By 1965, the year ACL’s proposed move was made public, Tampa’s Busch Gardens was Florida’s most popular tourist attraction. Furthermore, Tampa’s population and number of suburban homes had more than doubled between 1950 and 1960—thanks to pro-growth policies, interstate construction, and annexation—and the
Tampa Chamber of Commerce “took pride in advertising nationwide that Tampa was the nation’s fastest growing major city.” Mayor Nuccio was well aware of these facts and believed that the tourism and growth industries were essential to Tampa’s future. Still, he understood the importance and uniqueness of the local phosphate industry, and he worked to broker a deal acceptable to all factions.12

Ultimately, a compromise was struck that kept—but segregated—phosphate transporting and loading in Tampa.13 In early 1967, ACL and port officials announced that new phosphate loading and transportation facilities would be built along the East Bay. This was just a few miles southeast downtown, but it was closer to the mines and it rerouted the daily phosphate trains away from downtown Tampa and south Tampa’s suburban areas (Figure 2-6). “This effort has resulted in the continuation of Tampa and Hillsborough County as the industrial center of Florida. And on this foundation, I can assure you, Tampa will continue to grow industrially and prosper,” Tampa Port Authority chairman James S. Wood told the press.14 The compromise was not a best-case scenario for pro-growthers or environmentalists, but it was a victory for those who


desired to limit industrial phosphate’s local footprint.\textsuperscript{15} But despite the relocation, other forms of phosphate industry air and water pollution plagued the city and its environs in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{16}

While the problem of phosphate train traffic in Tampa was remedied by 1970, two other industry problems were not so easily collared. Unlike the phosphate trains, phosphate industry air and water pollution were more difficult to segregate in greater Tampa, and phosphate pollutants sullied the city’s exclusive suburbs, downtown, and hinterlands, while also threatening orange cultivation, cattle ranching, wildlife, human health, suburban development, and home values throughout the region.

Phosphate companies emitted pollutants that befouled local waterways during the Cold War, infuriating industry critics. The failure of industry “slime ponds,” which held the wastewater produced by phosphate mining and processing operations, was a recurring problem.\textsuperscript{17} Slime pond pollutants were dumped into the Peace River, Alafia River, upper Tampa Bay, and other local waterways during the period. For example, in 1964 a slime pond dam break led to a widespread Peace River fish kill, provoking Hillsborough County Commissioner Carl Carpenter to argue that the event—and others like it—were no accident. “It’s no secret that dam breaks occur just when it best serves the phosphate industry,” Carpenter said in 1964, and he argued that costly fines and government mandated cleanups for such so-called accidents would motivate the


\textsuperscript{17} Phosphate “slime” was a byproduct of the mining process. The slime was generally composed of water and clay that had been separated from phosphate ore, and slimes polluted local waterways several times in the 1960s and 1970s. Blakey, \textit{The Florida Phosphate Industry}, 113.
industry to curtail pollution. Anti-pollution activists from Polk and other Tampa-area counties threatened by phosphate pollution also criticized the industry, but problems continued. In 1965, another phosphate dam break killed fish and miles of aquatic grass in the Alafia River, a waterway whose mouth empties into the upper Tampa Bay, approximately 10 miles south of downtown Tampa. Two years later, a 200-acre phosphate holding pool dumped its waste into the Peace River—a waterway on the eastern fringe of Tampa’s phosphate hinterlands—near Fort Meade, making the river “the consistency of a mustard-flavored milkshake, and about as appealing.” Earl Frye, the director of the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, called the river a “total loss” after the spill, and critics noted that this was the third time in seven years that the Peace had been polluted by a failed phosphate slime pond. In 1971, 2 billion gallons of industrially polluted water turned a 75-mile stretch of the Peace River into an industrial sewer, and thousands of fish were killed as the polluted water snaked its way to Gulf of Mexico estuaries, causing algal blooms, destroying sea grass and vital marine habitat, and emitting foul odors into waterfront suburban neighborhoods.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Tampa suburbanites and developers complained that phosphate industry water pollution contributed to the grotesque smells emanating from the upper Tampa Bay, smells that cloaked downtown Tampa, suburban Davis Islands, and Bayshore Boulevard, in a cloud of rotten stench. These odors diminished property values, undermined residents’ quality of life, and threatened the agendas and profits of

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pro-growth Tampa boosters. Disgruntled Tampans, especially ones with homes on Tampa’s exclusive Bayshore Boulevard—a signature area roadway with stately homes that stretched from the southwest end of downtown Tampa to MacDill Air Force Base—and Davis Islands, a residential area just south of downtown, were some of the most vocal critics of industry pollution (Figure 1-1 and 2-8). Like the Sunbelt suburbanites described by Matthew Lassiter, these Tampans’ political actions were closely tied to their identities as property owners, and they pressured local politicians to curtail the pollutants that sullied Tampa’s water and diminished their properties and quality of life.

These suburbanites—and developers—wrote letters to and called the offices of U.S. congressman Sam Gibbons, Tampa city council member Jan Platt, and other Tampa politicians demanding action. In response, studies were launched and the phosphate industry was pressured to reduced pollutants. The environmental studies revealed that the upper bay’s putrid smell was caused in part by the industrial phosphate waste that was dumped into the upper Tampa Bay, just to the southeast of downtown, via the Alafia River—which had 14 phosphate processing plants in its basin area in 1970—and the Palm River. The other primary cause of the relentless odor was the partially treated sewage the City of Tampa dumped into the bay at Hooker’s Point, an area just south of downtown. Combined, the phosphate and sewage effluent had destroyed nearly all the sea grass in the upper Tampa Bay by 1970, and turned the waterway into an open-air cesspool of decaying vegetation and minimally treated suburban sewer sludge. The smell of upper Tampa Bay water had gotten so bad that by

19 Virginia Gardner, “Phosphate Move, Bay Smell Studies,” Tampa Times, June 10, 1965. There were a few theories about why the upper Tampa Bay smelled so bad. Some blamed improperly treated sewage, others dead rotting vegetation on the bottom of the bay, and others the phosphate industry.

20 Lassiter, The Silent Majority, 8.
1970, guards posted at MacDill’s Bayshore Boulevard security gate had to be relieved at frequent intervals so that their nostrils and stomachs could be given a reprieve. In response to the findings of the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration and other organizations, Gibbons told his constituents that action would be taken to remedy the noxious scents. Area U.S. congressman William C. Cramer sought action as well, and in 1970 asked Florida governor Claude Kirk to request immediate federal, state, and local action to address the bay’s environmental degradation.21

Save Our Bay Inc., the Tampa Audubon Society, and other Tampa-area environmental organizations also criticized the phosphate industry for polluting local rivers and upper Tampa bay, but protecting property values and future development were not their primary concerns. These local groups advocated for the protection of marine life, worked for the preservation of natural habitats, and railed against the dangers phosphate pollutants posed to human health. Along with criticizing the phosphate industry and the city for dumping partially treated sewage into the bay, these groups worked to curtail other area sources of pollution as well, like the Tampa Electrical Company (TECO), auto emissions, and ship-channel dredging.22 For example, Save Our Bay protested plans to dredge and deepen shipping channels in upper Tampa Bay in 1974, and later plans to extend Tampa’s crosstown expressway

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22 TECO was a notorious Tampa-area polluter. In 1969, it was estimated that 25% of Tampa’s air pollution was generated by the three TECO power plants that were close to downtown Tampa. Tom Raum, “Electric Smoke Blackens Tampa Skies,” Tampa Times, December 8, 1969.
over upper Tampa Bay and into eastern Hillsborough County suburbs. The bay’s shipping channels and ports had been dredged several times since World War II, at the behest of Tampa Port Authority officials, in order to accommodate larger and larger phosphate and oil transporting ships. This dredging had negatively impacted water clarity and quality, and—in turn—threatened marine life in the already heavily polluted upper Tampa Bay. Bill Blake, the president of the Florida Wildlife Federation, succinctly summed up the issue in 1979 when he told a St. Petersburg Times reporter that officials “have dredged on and off for the last twenty-five years. They haven’t been too careful with what they’ve done with the silt.” Another local environmental group, Citizens Against River Pollution, publicized that expanding phosphate operations overlapped local flood plain areas, threatening area wetlands and tributaries. Florida Defenders of the Environment, established in 1969, was yet another organization that worked to curtail water pollution in Tampa-area waterways. In 1972, in an attempt to create a united front, Save Our Bay, the League of Women Voters, the Sierra Club, Citizens Against River Pollution, and other Tampa-area groups united to form the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition.

Yet even with a coalition of environmental groups, local political support, and suburbanite mobilization, in an effort to protect property values, curtailing phosphate

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industry water pollution in the 1960s and 1970s proved difficult. As Robert Kernstein notes in his study of Tampa’s governmental regimes, between 1967 and 1979 Tampa-area phosphate companies that “exported their product from ports on the East Bay were able to operate with few regulations, although citizens voiced grievances about the serious environmental damage caused by their operations.” Although the phosphate industry was recycling water by the late 1960s and improving, in some regards, its waste management systems, industry pollution continued to plague local waterways. The environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s did, however, lay the foundations for the post-1980 Tampa Bay Estuary Program, which led to significantly cleaner Tampa waterways. But in 1971, Florida state legislator Guy Spicola addressed the difficulties faced by Hillsborough County pollution control director Roger Stewart and others who tried to enforce pollution control laws in Tampa, when he argued that criminal penalties for pollution emission were virtually unenforceable, and that Stewart and others had an “almost insurmountable burden” when attempting to prove pollution damage in court.

Phosphate industry air pollution was another issue that threatened the Tampa growth economy and agricultural interests. As Scott Dewy argues in his study of postwar Florida phosphate air pollution, the 1950s marked the beginning of the anti-phosphate environmental movement. But as was the case with industry water pollution, curtailing air pollution in the phosphate producing regions of central Florida proved difficult, as the balance of power leaned toward the business interests of big phosphate

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from 1950 to 1980. In 1970, Nathaniel Reed, Florida governor Claude Kirk’s environmental advisor, called Florida phosphate companies the “bad boys of pollution control” and challenged the industry to stop the “God awful cloud that occurs when acid and ammonia plants mix emissions.” Other Floridians, like Tampa Bay-area resident-turned-activist Harriet N. Lightfoot, agreed and demanded that something be done. In Tampa proper, residents of Davis Islands reported the damage that industry and TECO-emitted air pollution did to their homes and property, and Gloria Rosa—head of the Davis Islands pollution committee—reminded reporters of the pollution threats Davis Islands residents faced, and the continuing need to fight area polluters. Still, though real estate investors, suburbanites, chamber of commerce members, and scientists all railed against industry air pollution, the problem proved intractable.27

Some area farmers also urged local and federal government agencies to compel the industry to stop polluting the air, a fact the highlighted the danger industry emissions posed to Tampa’s eastern agricultural hinterlands. Cattle ranchers complained that phosphate pollutants sickened their animals, and they pointed to deformed steers as proof of the dangers of phosphate industry fluoride-laden smokestack emissions. In 1963, Tampa-area rancher Don McLean brought two deformed “canker-legged cows” to the steps of Florida’s capitol building in Tallahassee to publicize the threat of air pollution. University researchers who studied air pollution said that greater Tampa’s cattle and orange industries were threatened, and orange grove owners complained

27 Dewey notes that Polk County had more head of cattle than any other Florida county and produced a quarter of the state’s citrus crop, statistics that underscore the ways big agribusiness abutted phosphate operations in Tampa. Dewey, Don’t Breathe the Air, 179-182; Dewey, “Is This What We Came Here For?” 513-520. Morris Kennedy, “Environmental Movement Persists,” Tampa Times, September 15, 1975.
about brown leaves and shriveled, immature fruit. The U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Air and Water Pollution held hearings in response to the criticism and one analyst speculated that “agriculture and the phosphate industry were incompatible and that the people of Polk County should decide which they want.”

Despite such criticisms, phosphate companies, their air pollutants, and the industry’s environmental footprint continued to expand in greater Tampa in the 1960s and 1970s. As air and water pollution spewed forth from the industry’s bowels, a poem published in the Gainesville Sun in 1971 summed up the feelings of many industry critics:

“Ode to the Phosphate Industry”

For scenic beauty it’s tough to beat
A phosphate plant in the midday heat.

We’ll not forget this lovely view,
With dust and smoke, and aroma too.

They strip the land, our forests wreck,
Pollute our streams, but what the heck.

Their fertilizer for the farm is tops
To give us all those surplus crops.

For a detailed description of the effects of phosphate pollutants on the central Florida citrus and cattle industries see Dewey, Don’t Breathe the Air, 195-197.


Which we must pay so dear to store
While they fill bags to grow some more.\textsuperscript{31}

The complaints of farmers, environmentalists, and others did spark political action, but critics argued it was not enough. First, the state but a new permitting system in place to cap and then reduce fluoride emissions and in 1967, Florida lawmakers passed the Air and Water Pollution Control Act, which created a government agency to enforce the law. Furthermore, cattle and citrus producers who sued for damages in the 1960s began to win some court cases, and some phosphate companies were forced to purchase polluted pastures and grove land. In their defense, phosphate companies argued that they were spending millions to curtail pollutants. By January 1970, the industry reported it had spent a combined $74,502,809 on air and water pollution controls, $65,914,927 in operating these systems, and $4,500,000 in additional controls. It had also reportedly invested $17,820,926 in water conservation devices and operations.\textsuperscript{32}

By the 1970s, phosphate companies claimed to have drastically reduced their pollutants, and industry spokespersons regularly publicized phosphate’s local and global importance, while also claiming that some pollution emissions were unavoidable.\textsuperscript{33} The economic reality—company officials consistently pointed out—was that phosphate mining and related fertilizer production was Florida’s third largest industry. Thus, industry air pollution, open-air slime ponds, central Florida moonscapes,

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Gainesville Sun}, July 31, 1971.


\textsuperscript{33} Dewey, \textit{Don’t Breathe the Air}, 201, 207-208; Garth Germond, “Phosphate Industry Adopts Pollution-Control Policies,” \textit{Tampa Tribune}, January 31, 1969, 4-B.
and occasional river spills were the proverbial regional crosses to bear for global food production and green suburban lawns. The industry also threatened that if too many regulations were enacted, companies might be forced to abandon their Florida phosphate operations, negatively impacting the Tampa-area economy, throwing thousands out of work, and potentially leading to worldwide starvation. This, however, was unlikely in the face of the industry’s soaring postwar profits, and the fact that Tampa-area phosphate was near the surface and easily mined using modern strip-mining techniques.

With Florida companies mining approximately 1/3 of the world’s phosphate by the late 1960s, and with their profits skyrocketing, any talk of halting phosphate extraction and processing was a nonstarter, and phosphate mining, transporting, and manufacturing persisted. In 1974, Brewster, International Minerals and Chemical, and other companies shipped 35 million tons of phosphate to locations throughout the world, and employed a reported 61,000 workers either directly or indirectly. Florida phosphate was a polluter, but economic and geological realities dictated that phosphate mining would not disappear or relocate overnight, a fact underscored by the industry’s successful bid to rezone land in the early 1970s, and its 1974 deal with the Soviet Union.34

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34 The Tampa area had the highest air pollution levels in Florida thanks to its combination of sprawling suburbs, related automobile culture, the local power company’s (TECO) emissions, and the phosphate industry. For a thorough examination of the Florida phosphate industry from the end of World War II to 1970 and, in particular, industry air pollution and the intertwining interests of residents, businesses, and federal, local, and state governments, see Dewey, Don’t Breathe the Air, Part III. “Phosphate: A thriving threatened giant,” *Tampa Tribune*, November 9, 1975; Archie Blount, “Phosphate industry fears pollution controls,” *Tampa Times*, June 5, 1972; Morris Kennedy, “Slime disposal proves to be difficult problem,” *Tampa Times*, June 5, 1974, 1-F; Downs, “Phosphate Industry Key,” *Tampa Tribune*, December 11, 1974.
Tampa’s Ties to the Eastern Bloc, 1974 to 1980

It was in this economic, political, and environmental climate that the International Minerals and Chemical Company proposed building an $80 million fertilizer plant near the Hillsborough-Polk County line—approximately twenty-five miles from the new East Bay loading area—and the Brewster Phosphate Company requested that an 18,000-acre parcel be rezoned for phosphate mining in Hillsborough County in 1973. These plans were made public just months before a deal slated to send phosphate to the Soviet Union—thereby linking Tampa’s phosphate operations to the Eastern Bloc and Cuban sugar production—were publicized. The plans, unsurprisingly, drew criticism from local environmental protection groups and suburban residents, as well as Jan Platt, Bob Lester, Richard Stone, and other Florida politicians.

International’s proposed plant would reportedly produce 600,000 tons of phosphate-based fertilizer a year and emit 24,000 pounds of sulfur dioxide, 900 pounds of acid mist, 3,345 pounds of dust, and 323.4 pounds of fluoride per day, and Hillsborough County environmental engineer Dorian Valdes complained that the company’s application contained “sketchy unscientific information” and that it looked like it had been “prepared by a six-year old.”[^35] Not far from the Brewster’s proposed mine site was Sun City, a sprawling suburb for retired persons on the eastern fringe of Tampa Bay, and residents there feared that the proposed industrial phosphate operations threatened their leisure-oriented suburban homes and lifestyles. With its golf courses, small affordable homes, and restaurants, the neighborhood was a retreat for retirees.

and Earl Taton, the president of the Sun City homeowners association, told the press, “We don’t want the mining out here at all.” Taton argued that the industry already taxed local water supplies, and that the 7 million gallons of water per day Brewster was expected to use at the new site should be reserved for expanding suburban communities, not the phosphate industry. The Hillsborough County Commission initially sided with Taton and other concerned suburban residents, and it rejected the industry’s rezoning bid and zoned the land for agricultural use only instead. The *Tampa Tribune* reported, “One of the main reasons given by the commission for the reactions was the belief that the mining would further deplete the already inadequate supplies of water in the region.” 36

The issue, however, proved far from settled, and the Florida Farm Bureau was one organization that came to the defense of the industry. Farm Bureau president J.E. McLean, Jr. supported the proposed mining operation, and he cited the economic benefits of phosphate mining. A local Florida peanut farmer did as well, arguing that his land on a former phosphate mine was more fertile. Even though farmers whose land and agricultural commodities were damaged by phosphate emissions objected, Florida farmers whose operations were not negatively impacted by phosphate pollutants agreed, citing the rising cost of the phosphate-based fertilizers they used. From late 1972 to mid-1974, the price of phosphate had tripled. 37 This was putting a pinch on

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37 Florida farmer support of the phosphate industry, however, was not unanimous. Farmers with cattle and citrus operations near phosphate facilities had complained in the 1950s and 1960s that phosphate emissions damaged their crops and sickened their cattle. Dewey, *Don’t Breathe the Air*, 195-203.
Florida farmers, particularly cattle ranchers, as beef prices had fallen during the same period.

In phosphate’s defense, International and Brewster officials marshaled their standard tactics, which included citing the industry’s recent anti-pollution, reclamation, and recycling initiatives, as well as highlighting Tampa phosphate’s local economic importance and global reach. Brewster officials noted that they planned to reclaim the land after the mining operations ceased. They also argued that a new reclamation process permitted faster solidification of the settling slime ponds, thereby allowing for quicker land reclamation. James L. Cox of International also lobbied hard for the new operations, and though he admitted that the industry had been guilty of wasting water in the past, he argued his company was now recycling water and drawing less from the Florida aquifer. Cox pointed to a study by the U.S. Geological Survey stating that water levels in the Florida aquifer were rising. He also, in typical industry fashion, highlighted the economic benefits of the proposed plant and mine. The proposed operations were anticipated to pump $35 million a year into the local economy and employ 600 persons, many in high-paying jobs of $9,000 to $10,000 a year. Finally, Cox played the industry’s longstanding ace in the hole, arguing “15 million persons would die of starvation next year if Florida’s phosphate industry was not operating.” Ultimately, Hillsborough County allowed the parcel to be rezoned in 1974, but not until news of the Florida-Soviet phosphate deal went public and became part of the environmental and political debate over Tampa-area phosphate operations.38

38 Richard Dodge, “Farm bureau sees benefit in mining area phosphate,” Tampa Times, February 21, 1974; Peggy Shaw, “Cut in phosphate supplies hurting ranchers in area,” Tampa Times, April 1, 1974; Morris Kennedy, “Controls cut water waste in thirsty mining process,” Tampa Times, June 7, 1974; Debbie Stoudt, “Mining Zoning Approved by Planning Board,” Tampa Tribune, July 23, 1974; Morris
When word spread that the Occidental Oil Company had penned a deal in early 1974 to send Florida phosphate to the Soviet Union, Cold War politics became part of the debate surrounding the Tampa phosphate industry. News of the Occidental-Soviet deal created a new nationalistic thread of phosphate industry criticism. This nationalistic thread shared the concerns of environmentalists, suburbanites, and the politicians who criticized Brewster, International, and other phosphate companies for being environmental spoilers. But in addition, this thread argued that Florida phosphate was a finite national resource that should be reserved for domestic use. It also contended that the Florida environment should not be degraded in order to send phosphate to the nation’s Cold War enemy. These critics compared the Soviet-Occidental phosphate deal to the infamous 1972 U.S.-Soviet grain deal, which tarnished Florida phosphate’s public image.\(^\text{39}\) To these skeptics, the Occidental-Soviet deal reeked of phosphate industry—particularly Occidental—self-interest and anti-Americanism.\(^\text{40}\)

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\(^{39}\) Under the terms of the publicly decried grain deal, U.S. farmers sold $750 million worth of U.S. grain to the Soviet Union at subsidized prices. Labeling it the “Great Grain Robbery,” critics said the deal dramatically raised grain prices in U.S. markets. One reporter described the grain deal as “a good example of how separate U.S. economic and political interests can interact to produce a plan beneficial to none of these interests.” Mark J. Penn, “America Gets the Shaft,” \textit{Harvard Crimson}, November 16, 1973. According to a report by Schnittker Associates, the Soviets bought $750 million worth of U.S. grain, which made up a quarter of the 1972-1973 wheat crop. Though Schnittker cites five other conditions that led to increased grain prices in US markets, he concluded, “when news of the Soviet purchases spread through the grain world and domestic shortages began to appear, wheat prices doubled. Because the Soviets bought early and at low prices, the American consumer rather than the Russian government had to pay high prices. About one-half the beef inflation and $200 million in higher bread costs can be traced to the market effects of the Soviet grain deal.” John A. Schnittker, “The 1972-1973 Food Price Spiral,” report by Schnittker Associates prepared for the U.S. Congressional Joint Economic Committee, 1973, 498-507. For an early critical examination of the grain deal, see James Trager, \textit{The Great Grain Robbery}, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975).

Opponents of International’s proposed fertilizer plant and Brewster’s new Hillsborough County mine argued that they did not want industrial operations in their backyards to supply phosphate to the Soviet Union. Though these opponents were assured that the phosphate from International’s and Brewster’s Tampa-area facilities would not be heading to the Eastern Bloc, Tampa’s port facilities were an essential component of the deal’s nexus. Under the deal’s terms, Tampa was to be the receiving, storing, and initial transport point for Soviet-manufactured ammonia, potash, and other commodities, thereby linking the city to Eastern Bloc operations throughout the world.41

When the Occidental-Soviet deal was announced, the phosphate industry was already defending itself from accusations that it was akin to OPEC, and the deal quickly became a part of this narrative. One industry critic said that Florida phosphate corporations “with the Moslem nation [Morocco], may well have been the most successful of the main commodities producers that have aspired to emulate the model of OPEC.” Others said Occidental Oil Company, headed by businessman Armand Hammer, was in part responsible for the emerging phosphate cartel, just like it was in part to blame for empowering OPEC.42 And now, according to rumors, Moroccan and Florida phosphate producers had privately agreed to increase prices. Whether or not


42 In the late 1960s, Occidental was involved in a unilateral oil deal with Libya’s Omar Qaddafi. When unable to reach an agreement with other oil companies in regards to Libyan oil, and because his company was wholly dependent on oil from this North African state, Hammer broke from standing oil industry practice and brokered a separate deal with the dictator. Critics charged that the deal emboldened Libya and other OPEC nations. See Massey, “The Hammer, the Sickle, and the Phosphate Rock.” Also see Ann Crittenden, “White Gold: A Tale Similar to the Oil Saga,” Tampa Tribune, November 9, 1975; Epstein, “The Riddle or Armand”; Judith Stein, Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 78; “U.S. is Investigating Fertilizer Industry,” New York Times, August 9, 1975. For a brief critical description of the Occidental-Soviet deal, see Epstein, Dossier, 274-276.
this was the case, Florida phosphate companies reaped $4 billion in additional profits, according to a French study, thanks to the détente-era spike in phosphate prices, and now Occidental proposed to ship Florida phosphate to the Soviet Union at subsidized prices. The specter of a Morocco-Florida cabal was a political problem for the industry, and the anti-trust division of the Justice Department launched an investigation into industry price-fixing. Florida Secretary of State Richard Stone was also a vociferous critic of the Occidental-Soviet deal, and at a U.S. congressional hearing he argued that mining and processing Florida phosphate for the Soviet Union would strain the Florida aquifer and phosphate reserves.43

Some greater Tampa politicians and environmentalists—not connected to phosphate operations—shared Stone’s concerns. Like Stone, they were generally troubled by the idea that central Florida’s natural environment and water resources would be degraded and depleted in order to send phosphate to the Soviet Union. Hillsborough County commissioner Bob Lester argued that the environment was “suffering at the expense of an operation which has the power roughly equivalent to the Arab oil-producing nations.” The industry’s low tax liability was also cited. Up until 1971, the industry had avoided paying a Florida severance tax levied on industries that extracted valuable and irreplaceable minerals from the earth. In 1970, the Florida

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Supreme Court closed this loophole in the state tax law, yet industry tax liability was still low due to land reclamation clauses (described in the next section) and because the government had deemed phosphate-owned land yet to be mined “agricultural” under the state’s greenbelt law.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet in the end, Occidental was victorious—thanks in part to Armand Hammer’s congressional testimony—and the deal was sanctioned, linking greater Tampa to the Soviet-sponsored Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon).\textsuperscript{45} At a congressional hearing, Occidental president Armand Hammer argued that international trade deals were a path to peace and prosperity, the Occidental-Soviet agreement would create thousands of American jobs, Florida had ample phosphate reserves, and that it made fiscal and environmental sense to manufacture ammonia in the Soviet Union. “The alternatives are far too awful to contemplate—fear, famine, pestilence,


small wars, more Vietnams, cold wars, and even the potential for nuclear war,” Hammer testified.

With the congressional hurdles cleared, Occidental began its Soviet trade, and invested in new infrastructure in both Florida and the Soviet Union. Occidental built four new ammonia plants, a 1,500-mile pipeline, and ammonia-handling facilities in the Soviet Union. Millions of dollars were also spent in Florida to upgrade mining, shipping, and port facilities. Once the deal was underway, incoming Soviet ammonia and urea was shipped to Tampa’s port and distributed throughout Florida. In the late 1970s, Occidental’s new Swift Creek Chemical Complex in North Florida was dedicated. This complex was part of a $245 million project that also included new storage facilities at the Jacksonville port, two chemical plants, and new mining endeavors. The Florida secretary of agriculture attended the dedication and Occidental provided tours of the new facility, while critics grumbled the deal had driven twenty-nine U.S. ammonia plants out of production.46

The deal’s imports, exports, and new infrastructure tied Tampa and the broader Florida phosphate industry to the Soviet Union and socialist nations throughout the world, including Cuba.47 These links were not found elsewhere in the Sunbelt South,


47 In regards to détente-era U.S. foreign policy initiatives, the Occidental-Soviet deal complemented and ultimately exceeded détente supporters’ attempts to create a “flexible approach” toward Cuba. It also coincided with Cuba’s successful attempt to break its U.S.-sponsored political and economic Latin American isolation. As Chile, Argentina, Peru, and other nations reestablished economic and diplomatic relations with Cuba in the early 1970s, the U.S. did not block these reconciliations. The U.S. also supported the Organization of American States’ (OAS) decision to rescind Cuban economic and political sanctions, and select U.S. goods were sold to the island via third-party corporations. Ultimately, however,
and they reconnected Tampa to Cuban farms and politics. After the enactment of the 1962 Cuban embargo, the flow of Cuban tobacco to Tampa cigar factories was curtailed, but now Tampa-area phosphate created an indirect connection between the city and the island nation. Cuba’s primary economic role as a Comecon member in the 1970s was to produce as much sugar as possible for the socialist bloc. In an attempt to accomplish this, the Castro regime developed a state-run, Soviet-style agricultural system, and the U.S.S.R. agreed to pay inflated, fixed prices for Cuban sugar. The result, one historian has argued, was “a skyrocketing in the price premium paid by the Soviet Union” for Cuban sugar, and in 1981, Cuba signed an agreement to be the primary sugar supplier for the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and the German Democratic Republic. The fertilizer needed for this intensive agricultural endeavor was not produced in Cuba. Instead, it was the Soviet Union that provided low-cost fertilizer and fuel to the island. Thus, although Floridians were not sweetening their coffees and cookies with Cuban sugar, the Occidental-Soviet deal linked Florida phosphate to the economic system that sweetened the desserts of Russians, East Germans, and other Eastern Bloc inhabitants with Cuban sugar.48


48 Cuban fertilizer imports were reduced by over 80% after the fall of the Soviet Union, a statistic that illustrates the USSR’s role as Cuba’s primary fertilizer supplier. See Louis A. Pérez, Cuba Between Reform and Revolution, 5th Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 304; Jorge F. Pérez López, The Economics of Cuban Sugar, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 11-14, 18, 154; Sweig, Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know, 68-71; William V. Wallace and Roger A. Clarke, Comecon, Trade and the West, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Adam Zwass, The Council for
With its Eastern Bloc ties established, Occidental and the greater Tampa phosphate industry seemed poised to continue their profitable expansions at the dawn of the 1980s. “The industry concluded the 1970s with a rash of announcements relating to plant construction or expansion, diversification into the extraction of uranium from phosphate, and also unveiling plans and receiving permits for new mines,” wrote *Tampa Tribune* industry analyst Harry Costello. The Florida phosphate industry directly or indirectly employed 72,000 in 1979, and the vast majority of these workers labored in Tampa’s port and phosphate hinterlands. The Florida Phosphate Council reported that its eighteen-member companies had spent $1.26 billion in industry infrastructure in the 1970s—a sum 2.5 times more than the cost of Walt Disney World. Experts predicted that by 1985, the industry would extract 60 million tons of phosphate rock a year. Many prognosticators envisioned an increasingly profitable future for Florida phosphate, yet concerns over peak phosphate, environmental degradation, and the expansion of overseas phosphate mining operations loomed, worrying some industry analysts. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan proved to be the biggest immediate threat to the Occidental-Soviet deal, but even it only blocked the Tampa-Soviet connection for a short time.49 In December 1979, the Carter Administration blocked phosphate shipments bound for the Soviet Union when the Soviet military moved into Afghanistan.

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but upon taking office in April 1981, the Reagan Administration lifted the export ban on phosphate, fulfilling a campaign promise to the agricultural lobby, and in turn relinking Tampa to the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{50}

**Reclaimed Land, Cancer Scares, Suburban Collision, 1970 to 1980**

As Cold War tensions ebbed and flowed after the announcement of the Occidental-Soviet Deal, the greater Tampa phosphate industry continued to expand. This expansion coincided with the continuing growth of Tampa’s suburbs and agricultural industries, which led to increased land values in Tampa’s phosphate hinterlands. These soaring prices compelled phosphate corporations to increase their land reclamation efforts, in an attempt to provide—at a profit—land parcels for suburban homes and farms. These reclamation efforts, like the mining operations near Sun City, brought the industry into contact and conflict with Tampa’s suburban growth economy and its agricultural sector.

The reclaiming of mined phosphate lands was a practice that environmentalists and community leaders encouraged after World War II. But phosphate companies argued that reclaiming land was cost prohibitive. Furthermore, thanks to the fact that

uranium was sometimes unearthed during the mining process, elevated radiation levels plagued some reclaimed lands, particularly those mined before 1940. These mined lands threatened the health of industry workers and area residents. Because of this, and the high cost of reclamation, the phosphate industry only sporadically reclaimed land before 1962.

But new technologies, Florida’s population boom, rising land values, demand for suburban homes, agricultural expansion, and the emerging consumption-centered service and leisure economies made reclamation economical feasible in the late 1960s and 1970s. Between 1940 and 1980, Florida’s population ballooned from approximately 1.9 million to 9.7 million. Mirroring this trend, the population of Hillsborough County—the home of Tampa proper and its closest hinterlands—increased from 180,148 in 1940 to 646,960 in 1980. The overwhelming majority of this booming population growth—spurred in part by the construction of Interstate 4, Interstate 75, and Interstate 275, which combined bisected Tampa and connected it to its hinterlands—lived in formerly rural regions to the north and east of Tampa proper.51 Agricultural production in Tampa’s hinterlands also expanded after World War II, and greater Tampa became the state’s primary orange growing, canning, and processing center. The “Tampa trade area” was home to 60 of the 63 citrus canning facilities in Florida in 1948-1949, and these factories collectively generated 120,000,000,000 cans of processed citrus and 10,000,000 gallons of frozen orange concentrate. From the 1950s to the 1970s, Tampa-area agribusinesses mushroomed, and the Tampa Tribune reported that orange growers, in search of new areas for groves, drove up land prices in greater Tampa.

51 For a concise table of greater Tampa population figures and a summary of postwar Tampa suburban growth see Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth Century Tampa, 17,151.
Along with citrus, postwar Tampa produced strawberries and other agricultural commodities for the market, and through its port, the city shipped its agricultural bounty to distant lands.

This agricultural and suburban growth motivated phosphate companies—in search of profits and improved public relations—to increase their reclamation efforts after 1960, and at the Florida Phosphate Council’s annual 1961 meeting, the following pledge was written:

The rapid urbanization of the phosphate area within the past decade has made their use of land (for mining, water conservation, and water settling) a matter of concern to the industry as well as to the public. The influx of population has created a need for land not only for housing and industry, but also to replace that removed from agricultural and recreational uses by expanding communities and continuing mining activities. Recognizing these needs, the phosphate mining companies, as an industry, [should] adopt as a policy the planning of mining activities, where practical, so that the land involved shall help meet the aesthetic and practical needs of the community.52

The following year the American Agricultural Chemical Company reclaimed 700 acres for citrus cultivation, “donated” 740 acres to Polk County for a park, and began building a housing development. All the while, the company argued that reclaimed lands were more fertile than comparable unmined parcels, and that reclaimed land was usually more valuable than the “marshy mosquito breeding ground” that preceded mining operations.53 Other companies, like International Minerals and Smith-Douglas, built golf

52 This pledge is published in Blakey, The Florida Phosphate Industry, 118. Before the 1960s, there were some small-scale reclamation projects. For example, in 1949 American Cyanamid reclaimed 220 acres. But this project and others like it were often deemed economically unfeasible before the 1960s. See Blakey, The Florida Phosphate Industry, 117-119.

53 “Phosphate Firms Convert Wastelands,” Tampa Times, February 13, 1961, 6-C; Morris Kennedy, “Smudged industry image buffed by higher phosphate profits,” Tampa Times, June 7, 1974. In the second half of the twentieth century, Florida’s population increased by six fold. For a concise look at Florida’s booming postwar population, see Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams, 12-14.
courses, country clubs, baseball diamonds, and other amenities for suburban residents in the 1960s. Like American Agricultural Chemical, these corporations alleged that pine trees grew faster and that phosphate water pits were filled with bass, bluegill, perch and other species of fish that provided leisure opportunities for suburban residents. Phosphate companies also argued—as they sold reclaimed parcels to suburban developers in the late 1960s and 1970s—that improved mining technologies had reduced the high radiation levels that plagued previously reclaimed land.

In his 1973 study of the phosphate industry, Fredric Blakey argued that reclaimed phosphate land “may ultimately be worth more than the phosphate mined from it.”54 Reclamation was thus a win-win scenario for the phosphate companies, in that it was good for both profits and public relations. This was true even though nearly half of industry land was still reserved for slime ponds, gypsum stacks, and other waste disposal needs, according to Arthur Crago of American Cyanamid. Nevertheless, greater Tampa’s growing agricultural enterprises and suburbs allowed phosphate companies to pocket profits through a trifecta of phosphate extraction, reclamation, and land sales, unique in the Sunbelt South, and in the 1970s the industry reclaimed over 31,000 acres.55

Government policies also encouraged industry land reclamation. In 1975, the Florida Senate approved a bill that gave millions in tax rebates to phosphate companies that restored land. Under the terms of the bill, the state returned half of the 5% severance tax collected from mining operators if companies restored land within five

54 Blakey, *The Florida Phosphate Industry*, 115-120, 140.

years after the cessation of mining operations. Although Florida state senator Robert Graham from Miami argued that Florida should not be “shortchanged” out of revenues because phosphate companies later sold reclaimed land for a profit, and Senator Jack Gordon attempted to double the severance tax to bring in revenue for the state’s prisons, welfare, and youth services, the industry tax rebates continued.\textsuperscript{56}

But favorable tax policies and profitable reclamation practices, did not quell the emerging concerns in the 1970s over the safety of living on reclaimed lands. Tampa environmentalists and scientists argued that elevated radiation and fluoride levels made living on reclaimed phosphate land dangerous, and that formerly mined plots were often too close to existing phosphate mining operations. Some even contended that Florida beef and citrus that had been exposed to elevated radiation levels on reclaimed lands could transmit radiation to those who consumed orange juice and hamburgers.\textsuperscript{57} EPA officials and local politicians commissioned studies to examine the problem, and one revealed that those living on reclaimed land were twice as likely to develop lung cancer. Not surprisingly, the industry disputed the study and argued that reclaimed lands were safe for suburban homes, playgrounds, and agricultural enterprises. Though they admitted some reclaimed lands had high radiation levels, phosphate companies pointed out that radiation levels were still within safe limits, and therefore the government should not restrict suburban development of reclaimed land.

\textsuperscript{56} Robert Graham’s proposal called for the state to place a lien on reclaimed land, so that the state could then get back the money, in the form of a tax rebate from a trust fund set up by the state, if a phosphate company sold reclaimed land at a profit. “Rebate for Reclamation Wins Passage in Senate,” \textit{Tampa Tribune}, May 21, 1975.

Those representing the growth economy and supporters of governmental deregulation also contested the report. Howard Shaw, a local building and zoning official, said that the EPA’s claim about cancer was “the worst possible interpretation” of the dangers of lung cancer from living on reclaimed phosphate land. Shaw told local politicians that the EPA used samples from thirteen local houses with the highest radiation levels, and that the report’s conclusions regarding cancer rates were based on the control factor that residents would remain in their homes 24 hours a day. “If you let that poor hermit out of the house for just 25 per cent of the time,” chances of cancer would go way down Shaw argued. Phosphate companies, eager to protect the profits reclamation wrought, noted that the radiation levels on reclaimed Florida lands were lower than those recorded in seven western states, and that there was currently no cause for alarm. U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, who objected to what he viewed as over regulation of the Florida phosphate industry, told reporters in 1976 that “regulatory control over the phosphate industry was ridiculous in the face of the world’s growing population.” Secretary Butz lamented the fact that twenty different permits were required before mining operations could even commence, and he cautioned against regulations that he claimed created legal battles and drove up prices.

58 Between 1970 and 1980 Hillsborough County’s population increased from 490,265 to 646,960, even though the population of the city proper fell from 277,753 to 271,523. This statistic highlights the rapid growth rate of the area’s northern and eastern suburbs. Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 17 and 157. For a summary of reclaimed land projections and usage in the 1960s and 1970s see John W. Sweeney, Land Use Conflicts and Phosphate Mining in Florida, Bureau of Geology, Florida Department of Natural Resources, Information Circular No. 72, 1971, pgs. 1-12.

Regardless of whether the industry was overregulated or living on reclaimed land was dangerous, the debate highlighted how starkly the economics of land reclamation had changed since the 1950s. It also illustrated the ways Tampa’s phosphate industry, suburban growth economy, and agribusinesses abutted each other in the 1970s. Phosphate companies that were reluctant to reclaim land before 1960, were, by 1976, fighting a moratorium on residential construction on reclaimed phosphate lands, because suburbanization and agricultural expansion had altered the economics of reclamation. Whereas before 1960 it had cost $300 an acre to reclaim land, which was then worth approximately $100 an acre, by 1975 land could be reclaimed for approximately $700 an acre and sold for $1500.

Concerns about living on reclaimed land, however, now threatened the new economics of reclamation, and new studies revealed that so-called “old land”, which was land mined before the 1950s, had the highest levels of radiation. This was a problem for the phosphate, agricultural, and growth industries because old sites were often the best suited for development and by 1975, 40,000 acres of old land had already been reclaimed by the phosphate industry. Making matters worse for phosphate companies, in 1977 the television program 60 Minutes aired a segment that broadcast the damage phosphate mining operations did to Florida’s natural environment. Footage from a helicopter revealed to a national audience the so-called “moonscapes” and slime ponds that strip mining and other industry practices created in Tampa’s hinterlands, some little more than 30 miles from downtown. The segment argued that the industry was unregulated, that it consumed millions of gallons of water, and that it destroyed

wide swaths of central Florida. An industry spokesman claimed *60 Minutes*’s accusations were preposterous and that regulations were in place. He also argued that the industry was “not creating a scarred and useless environment” and that it was now recycling water. Phosphate officials were also upset that the segment failed to point out the tens of thousands of jobs the industry created and its positive economic impact. Longtime critics, on the other hand, applauded the exposé.61

Fortunately for the industry, public relations improved after the *60 Minutes* broadcast. A new environmental report provided partial peace-of-mind for central Floridians living on reclaimed land and those drinking central Florida water. The study concluded that phosphate mining could not be directly linked to increased radiation levels in west central Florida ground water. Robert F. Kaufman, a hydrologist contracted by the EPA, said that “we found that the phosphate industry can’t be blackballed for the radium content in water,” though he did claim that further study was needed to absolve the industry of all blame. Furthermore, it was difficult for researchers to determine just how much radium in water was too much. “The presence of any radium can be harmful,” Kaufman said, but the danger is “not easily visible and difficult to record. It’s not like a noxious chemical that has immediate effects.”62 But the EPA study did recommend some alterations to industry practice. The report encouraged mining companies to line their waste ponds with an impervious material that would stop poisonous acids and radioactive wastes from seeping into the ground.63 It also called for the industry to

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63 For EPA reports on the industry see William Herring, *Review of New Source Performance Standards for Phosphate Industry*, Emissions Standards and Engineering Division, Environmental Protection Agency, EPA-45013-79-038, November 1979; *Evaluation for Control Technology of the Phosphate*
reduce air pollution by stopping the transport of dry phosphate. Shipping wet rock, instead of dry, would reduce the release of sulfur dioxide, radium, and other particles into greater Tampa’s air during the transporting process. Finally, to phosphate officials’ applause, Charles Roessler, a University of Florida radiation health physicist, equated the risk of getting cancer from living on reclaimed land with getting struck by lightning—an ironic conclusion seeing as Tampa was and is the lighting capital of the U.S.—in a report prepared for the Florida Phosphate Council. According to his study, Polk County homes that were on land reclaimed after 1940 had radiation levels well within safe limits.64

Yet concerns about elevated cancer rates did not disappear. In 1978, a year in which 44 million tons of phosphate products were shipped from Tampa’s port, seventeen American Cyanamid employees were diagnosed with cancer. When news spread of these cases and overall elevated cancer rates in phosphate workers, industry officials went on the defensive. When asked about cancer-ridden employees, one phosphate official argued, “Here we have 10,000 people working in this industry and we are worried about 17 cases of cancer. What is so damn unusual about this?....You can

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get cancer from eating beef these days.” Far more than seventeen workers, however, had been stricken with cancer since World War II.65

The cancer that afflicted phosphate workers took many forms. Cancers of the nose, tongue, larynx, soft palate, throat, esophagus, colon, bladder, prostate, and lung were reported, and a John Hopkins University research team was dispatched to study the cancer cases. While the researchers investigated, some pointed to phosphate acid plants, in particular one that was closed in 1971, as the culprits. Others blamed the ever-present phosphate dust. During the investigation, the research team faced hurdles. For example, Brewster’s employee medical records were destroyed in a 1975 Labor Day fire. Because of this incident and spotty record keeping, the Hopkins team often had to rely on employee memory and contemporary sources, and investigators found that employees, even many that had been diagnosed with cancer, were not interested in blaming American Cyanamid, Brewster, or other Tampa-area phosphate companies for their afflictions.66

Although there were exceptions, collectively workers and their families were hesitant to blame phosphate operations for the cancer outbreak. Widows of cancer victims argued that their dead husbands never blamed phosphate operations, and one argued that the cancer cases were just a “statistical aberration.” Workers tended to agree—at least publicly—and one told the press, “it is good work for men who did not finish high school.” Another said, “I ain’t about to quit my job unless they determine for a fact that if I’m working here, I’ll get cancer…. Matter of fact, I still wouldn’t believe it.”


Betty Jo Strickland, whose husband died at 45 from cancer, leaving behind her and their four children, made a similar argument. Her husband was a heavy smoker, she said, who “didn’t have a bad thing to say about Brewster and I know if he was alive, he would tell you that…There is a certain amount of hazards with any job.” One miner flatly said, “If you are going to die, you’re going to die.” Another, while chewing tobacco exclaimed, “this here cancer deal, in my book, is just a coincidence. I’m thirty-eight and if I live to be sixty I’ll be lucky. Cancer or a heart attack—sooner or later something’s going to catch up with me.” Yet another said, “John Wayne had cancer and he never worked in a phosphate mine…even if they found out phosphate caused cancer, I wouldn’t quit. Someone’s got to do it.” “Yes I have cancer,” said phosphate worker Marvin Lassiter. “It is inoperable cancer lining the rib cage…I do not connect it in any way with my work as an engineer at Brewster, nor do I feel it is related to phosphate.” Lassiter also told a reporter that he had smoked almost his entire life. “It is my overall feeling that we do not need the investigation,” said thirty-four-year-old phosphate worker and union head Obie Barlow. Barlow, a chain smoker, had been diagnosed with throat cancer. He also only had an elementary school education, but made $7.25 an hour at Brewster, at a time when the federal minimum wage was $2.90. “It comes to $290 a week, and I happen to think that’s damn good….And you talk about having to breathe in dust and fumes. Look, have you ever been to Los Angeles? Well, I have. You breathe in that heavy smog, and the next day, you got a sore throat. I ain’t never had a sore throat from breathing the air at Brewster.” Other union officials were also disinterested in pressing the issue, even though it was reported that Brewster employees’ cancer raters were 4.9 times greater than the national average. Even more skeptical employees who looked to phosphate
officials to explain some health problems, generally publically stopped short of placing full blame on phosphate operations. With a controversial acid plant closed in 1971, the Brewster company’s medical records burned in 1975, and the EPA now reporting that radiation levels were safe in the area, it was difficult to pinpoint the cause of elevated cancer rates, and cancer ridden employees became an acceptable facet of greater Tampa’s phosphate lands.67

The globally connected Florida phosphate industry boomed between 1950 and 1980, and it tied Tampa’s port, its hinterlands, phosphate miners, the Florida aquifer, Cuban sugar farms, Soviet ammonia manufacturers, and other disparate places and peoples into an industrial web of interdependence. In 1980, the St. Petersburg Times reported that since World War II phosphate had become one of Florida’s largest industries, and that it provided “thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in economic benefits to the state, but had also been a major source of water pollution.” More than any other Cold War-era industry, phosphate ensured that Tampa and its eastern and southern hinterlands would continue to be defined—in part—by heavy industry and the pollutants and dangers that came along with it.

Phosphate differentiated Tampa from Phoenix, Atlanta, Miami, and other southern cities. As historian David Clark points out, postwar land-locked Phoenix obviously lacked port facilities, and the city attracted “light and clean industries, especially electronics.” These electronics businesses “used little water,” emitted few pollutants, and created products trucks could easily transport, making them the ant-

thesis of Tampa’s phosphate industry. Atlanta, even though it was a southern financial and transportation hub, also lacked port facilities and a heavy industry like phosphate. The same is true of greater Miami. By 1980, Miami was a “dynamic center of international banking and commerce,” according to Raymond Mohl, and the city’s tourist industry—founded on its beautiful beaches—was its “single largest economic force.” Yet Miami had nothing comparable to Tampa’s heavy phosphate industry. These Sunbelt cities, and others, also lacked the economic Eastern Bloc ties that the Florida phosphate industry created in Tampa.68

Looking back at the close of the 1970s, a Tampa newspaper reporter argued that “the biggest change in Tampa’s economy in the last 50 years has been the decline in the cigar industry and the rise of the phosphate industry.” Phosphate shaped Tampa more than any other heavy industry from 1950 to 1980, and it ensured that the city and large portions of its hinterlands continued to be Florida’s industrial hub.69


Figure 2-1. Map of Tampa-area phosphate deposits. The majority of Florida phosphate rock was extracted from and processed in areas clustered in west central Florida. The area shaded in dark red in the above *Tampa Tribune* figure denotes the location of large phosphate deposits in the Tampa area. *Tampa Tribune*, December 16, 1973.
Figure 2-2. Phosphate being loaded onto a ship in Port Tampa in 1958. Note the dust cloud and the large phosphate-loading elevator. Phosphate dust clouds were a source of pollution in Tampa from 1950 to 1980. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, photo by Donald J. Marks, Don and Gladys Marks Collection, N2013-17, Box #1, image # DGM0290.
Figure 2-3. A phosphate “moonscape,” replete with slime ponds, created by the American Cyanamid Company in Donner, FL. These craterous landscapes and waste ponds were caused by phosphate strip mining and other industry operations. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Reference Collection, 1959, Image #RC17492.
Figure 2-4. An aerial view of International Minerals and Chemicals Corporation’s phosphate operations near Bartow in 1962. Mining and industrial spaces like these were found throughout Tampa’s phosphate hinterlands. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, General Reference Collection, image # RC17480.
Figure 2-5. A phosphate transporting train being loaded in Tampa’s hinterlands in 1952. Trains like this ran through downtown and areas of suburban Tampa until 1970, spewing phosphate dust and other pollutants. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection. Department of Commerce Collection, image # C016032.
Figure 2-6. The new East Bay phosphate-loading location. Note the A.C.L. railway running through downtown Tampa and the south Tampa peninsula. After the new East Bay phosphate terminal was opened, phosphate train traffic was diverted from these business and suburban areas. *Tampa Tribune*, January 23, 1967.
Figure 2-7. A phosphate dragline in operation in 1948. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Department of Commerce Collection, Image #C009278.
Figure 2-8. An aerial view of Bayshore Boulevard in 1956, with downtown Tampa and the mouth of the Hillsborough River in the background. The boulevard linked downtown to south Tampa suburbs and MacDill Air Force Base. The roadway was home to exclusive Tampa homes, but rotten smells caused by pollution-related marine vegetation die-off in upper Tampa Bay plagued the boulevard during the Cold War. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Postcard Collection, 1956, Image # PC12422.
CHAPTER 3
LINGERING SMOKE AND LABORING WOMEN: THE FEMINIZATION AND
CONTRACTION OF TAMPA CIGAR MANUFACTURING

From the 1890s to 1929, Tampa cigar factories employed over 10,000 workers, attracted thousands of immigrants to the city, dominated the local economy, and transformed a formerly sleepy southern frontier outpost into a multi-ethnic industrial city. During this period, Tampa became a culturally heterogeneous cigarmaking metropolis tied to Cuba’s tobacco-growing regions.¹ The city was also marred by labor strikes and elite-sponsored vigilante activity during the Gilded Age, and cigar factory workers made Tampa a home of radical leftist labor politics and collective social clubs.² Unlike postwar Sunbelt cities that were not shaped by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century industrialization, large-scale cigar manufacturing molded modern Tampa.

On its surface, the significantly downsized post-World War II Tampa cigar industry seems less dynamic, and has therefore garnered less scholarly attention, than its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century precursor. In fact, when describing it at all, historians have often categorized postwar Tampa cigar manufacturing as being in an


² For a look at women’s activism and vigilantism in Tampa between the 1880s and the 1930s see Nancy Hewitt, Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s, (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Ingalls, Urban Vigilantes in the New South.
irreversible and inevitable decline, a historic reality symbolized by the industry’s disempowered and unskilled post-1920s female workforce.³

This chapter is an economic, political, and women’s labor history that complicates and enriches this narrow understanding and framing of the postwar Tampa cigar industry, while also highlighting how postwar cigarmaking differentiated Tampa from other Sunbelt cities. Even though Tampa cigar manufacturing was contracted and consolidated during the Cold War, it still employed thousands of women and was an essential component of postwar Tampa’s economy and identity. It was also a distinctive industry whose labor practices, economic ties to Cuba and the broader Caribbean, and cultural dynamics were not found anywhere else in the Sunbelt South. Raymond Mohl and Roger Biles have argued that Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, and other “sunbelt cities and metro areas never experienced the nineteenth-century industrial revolution.”⁴ Because of cigar manufacturing, this was not the case in Tampa, and postwar cigarmaking was in some ways more reminiscent of manufacturing enterprises in northern cities. With this in mind, this chapter examines the economic impact and feminization of postwar Tampa cigarmaking, the industry’s relationship to Cuban tobacco, the post-1962 cigarmaking decline, and how cigarworkers fought to protect their jobs and large-scale Tampa cigar manufacturing.

The first section of this chapter takes a look at Tampa cigarmaking from the 1940s to the Cuban embargo order of February 1962. During this time, cigar production


rates steadily increased—recovering from the steep declines of the Great Depression—and 6,000 laborers manufactured cigars, while more and more machines were brought into the factories. The factory floor was almost entirely feminized during this period—continuing a process started before the war—and this section describes how unionized workers successfully fought for wage and benefit increases in the 1950s. The chapter’s second section chronicles the ramifications of the Cuban Embargo, the final Tampa cigarworkers’ strike, and industry consolidation and decline.\(^5\) Tampa cigar production was altered and the industry’s workforce reduced when the flow of Cuban tobacco was halted in 1962. This severing of Tampa from its Cuban tobacco supply led to the last organized industry strike—an event that highlighted the important role cigar manufacturing played in Tampa’s economy—and contributed to the ultimate decline of the industry.

**Women Cigarworkers, Machines, and Economic Stabilization, 1945 to 1961**

The Great Depression ended Tampa’s cigar-making golden era, but cigar manufacturing remained a centerpiece of Tampa’s economy during the 1930s.\(^6\) Slumping sales after 1929 caused cigar manufactures to increase factory mechanization levels, and after a large strike in 1931 *lector* platforms were permanently removed from Tampa factories and more cigar machines were brought in, to increase output and decrease operating costs.\(^7\) But since its foundation as a cigar manufacturing


\(^7\) Cigar factory *lectors* were paid and selected by cigarworkers to read to them while they labored. Readings included newspapers, political tracts, and fictional works. Factory owners often viewed *lectors* as a radicalizing influence. Tampa *lectors* are described in many of the works cited above and also Gary
center in the late 1880s, Tampa had been the domestic home of premium hand-rolled cigar production—particularly of “Clear Havana” Cuban tobacco cigars—and manufacturers wished to continue this tradition. Thus, cigar executives planned to continue producing hand-rolled premiums, while using machines to make non-premium cigars.8

Increased automation levels in factories worried workers and union leaders in the 1930s and 1940s.9 Cigar consumption and production rates shrank in the early 1930s, which caused factory owners to lay-off thousands of workers, and factory employees feared that continuing mechanization would lead to more layoffs, lower wages, and less worker autonomy. Yet fortunately for workers, large-scale layoffs were halted as cigar consumption and production rebounded in the mid-1930s, and cigar unions were able to secure collective bargaining rights. With the glaring exception of Hav-A-Tampa, a company that specialized in low-priced machine-made cigars, the vast majority of Tampa’s major manufactures accepted collective bargaining in the 1930s.10

As the instability and lay-offs of the early 1930s abated, Tampa cigarworkers and factory owners breathed a sigh of relief, but most were still concerned about

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9 Glenn Westfall, "Don Vicente Ybor, the Man and His Empire: Development of the Clear Havana Industry in Cuba and Florida in the Nineteenth Century," Thesis (Ph.D.)--University of Florida, 1977, 86, 106. The first mechanized factory in Tampa began production in 1889. It failed, however, and hand-rollers ultimately replaced machines. Thus, unlike cigar factories in other American cigar-producing cities, most large Tampa factories production was centered on hand-rolled cigars before the 1930s.

cigarmaking’s future. A 1939 industry study by the University of Florida’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research chronicled many of the changes that the economic depression and mechanization had wrought, and it predicted that factories would continue to mechanize and employment levels would remain flat. But Tampa’s signature industry could survive, the study concluded, if more cigar machines were brought into factories, new advertising campaigns were launched, and hand rolling of premium Cuban-Tobacco cigars continued.\textsuperscript{11}

The good news for both workers and cigar executives was that cigar production and consumption rates climbed after World War II, and although their numbers had been cut in half, 6,000 thousand cigarmakers still labored in Tampa factories.\textsuperscript{12} By 1949, Tampa cigar companies were producing over 500,000,000 cigars a year, and industry boosters were optimistic about future profits. In 1951, a Tampa trade group predicted $50,000,000 worth of cigars would be produced. That same year Swisher Cigar Company vice president L. D. Hupp proclaimed that Florida’s overall cigar operations were in good economic shape. By the mid-1950s, Tampa cigar production—founded on its reputation for fine Cuban tobacco leaf—had survived the Great Depression, booming cigarette consumption, world war, and the early Cold War’s threat of nuclear annihilation. Although Americans’ cigarette consumption continued its meteoric rise after the war and into the early 1970s, Americans’ cigar consumption and


production rates steadily grew from the 1940s to 1971, ensuring a consistent consumer market for Tampa cigar producers.¹³

Still, cigar workers, factory owners, and local politicians continued to express concern over the future of large-scale Tampa cigarmaking. In 1951, two large Tampa factories relocated to Allentown, Pennsylvania, one citing Tampa’s high labor costs. In response, Tampa’s mayor and local business officials formed a committee to study the exodus. After news of the relocation became public, Tampa mayor Curtis Hixon told the press, “I realize the owners of these factories have to protect their financial interests, but I want to know why those interests cannot be protected just as well in Tampa…After we get the solution, we can proceed with the purpose of bringing Tampa to a supreme position in the cigar manufacturing world.”¹⁴ Agreeing with the mayor, *Tampa Tribune* reporter J.A. Murray wrote, “Tampa cigar factories are vital to the future of Tampa, as the citrus industry is vital to the future of Central Florida, and tourists to all of the state,” a statement that highlighted the economic importance of cigarmaking and two other Tampa industries.¹⁵ Although Tampa’s economy had diversified by the 1950s, the city’s

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overall economic health was still reliant on cigar production. In other words, even though big agribusiness, phosphate, tourism, MacDill, and the suburban growth sectors were burgeoning, the city still needed its foundational cigar industry to ensure its economic health. Employment figures in the cigar industry may have been reduced—from 50% of Tampa’s working population in 1910 to 10% in 1950—but that 10% and the over 6,000 workers it represented were still vital.\(^\text{16}\)

Fortunately for factory managers and workers alike, the community’s effort to preserve and protect Tampa cigar manufacturing was successful in the 1950s, and cigar companies increased production and workers’ wages until 1962. In 1952, Tampa cigar factories produced 592,573,642 cigars, and though the industry did not create new jobs, cigarmakers’ pay did not stagnate. New cigar union contracts increased wages substantially in 1954, and 10% wage increases were negotiated for handbanders and cellophaners, and 4,000 workers received substantial cost-of-living raises. Five years later, in August 1959, the Cigar Makers International Union again won pay raises for thousands of Tampa cigarworkers. Cigar factory relocations to Tampa and local operational expansions encouraged industry optimists, while also illustrating Tampa’s ties to industrial northern cities. Standard Cigar Company’s move from Cleveland to Tampa helped buoy employment numbers, and in 1957 Perfecto Garcia and Bros. Cigar Company expanded its executive offices adjacent to its Tampa factory. That same year,

Tampa cigarworkers produced over 60% of U.S.-made fine cigars, and women operating cigar machines made nearly 95% of Tampa cigars. The transition to a female labor force in Tampa factories began in earnest in the 1920s and 1930s, but women had worked in Tampa’s tobacco industry since its inception. The craft of hand-rolling cigars was largely a man’s occupation during the first decades of cigar production, but women worked as tobacco strippers, bunchers, banders, and in other cigar manufacturing occupations, and some even hand-rolled in factories. However, as factory managers brought more and more machines online, cigar executives actively recruited women to operate them, emulating the hiring practices of Hav-A-Tampa, a company that employed women workers exclusively. In the 1930s, an American Tobacco Company executive argued that women were not bothered by the monotonous nature of cigar machine operating, like men were, and that women were more “tractable” (Figure 3-1).

By the outbreak of World War II, women far outnumbered men on factory floors in both union and nonunion shops, and Standard Cigar Company emulated American Tobacco and Hav-A-Tampa’s model of hiring women workers only, when it opened its


18 Ingalls, Urban Vigilantes in the New South, 46, 158-159.
Tampa factory. Rather than hiring laid-off hand-rollers and others with industry experience, the company recruited inexperienced women who lived outside the city, in an attempt to resist worker unionization. Union shops, like Corral-Wodiska, also hired women to operate machines, and thus female employment was not synonymous with anti-unionism during the early Cold War.

The vast majority of these laboring women, in both unionized and non-unionized factories, were over forty-years-old during the period. As fewer and fewer young adults were getting jobs in cigar production, older women workers held on to jobs, motivated by attractive manufacturing wages. According to a local industry study, cigarworkers often made more money than they could in other unskilled occupations, and although the work could be tedious, many women continued working in the industry after they established families. In fact, approximately half of married women cigarworkers were their family’s primary breadwinners. Tampa cigar factories were therefore manufacturing enterprises where thousands of women—in a Sunbelt South where service-sector jobs proliferated—were able to acquire well-paid industrial work.

Cigar employment levels remained steady in the late 1940s and 1950s, but the debate between management and workers over factory mechanization levels continued. Cigarworkers fretted over just how many jobs cigar machines might make obsolete in the years ahead. Most cigarworkers, even those who principally operated machines, hoped to preserve as much of the fine handcraft industry as possible, because hand-rolled cigars required skilled labor, preserved Tampa’s traditional manufacturing

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19 Newman, Cigar Family, 97.

practices and associated jobs, and protected the city’s reputation for quality cigars.

Frank Diez, a Tampa cigar union official, contended “the machine is not the answer in Tampa,” and that “although the factories are making about as many cigars as they were in, say, 1921, before machines came in general use, there are only half as many workers.” Diez also argued that a switch to machines would hurt local merchants, who relied on cigarworker wages, and that Tampa cigar executives should strive to be a high-end niche market, now that cigarettes were undercutting the low-end market.

Echoing the University of Florida’s 1939 study, Diez also said Tampa cigar companies needed to nationally market the city as the home of premium Cuban cigars. Conversely, many factory owners publicly stated that cigar machines were the future, and they agreed with *Tampa Tribune* reporter J.A. Murray’s contention that “chances are Tampa will be making some fine cigars by hand as long as there are craftsmen to make them. But over the long pull, this cigar city’s future lies with the machine.”

While this debate continued throughout the 1950s, Tampa factories continued to manufacture millions of machine- and hand-made cigars, and in 1961, the city set a production record when over 750,000,000 cigars were made. Rather than disappear after World War II, the Tampa cigar industry was an essential component, albeit a declining one, of Tampa’s early Cold War-era economy. This was true even though

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greater Tampa's population numbers and suburbs swelled after the war, and its tourism, agricultural, and phosphate industries experienced breakneck growth. Cigar factories also consistently employed several thousand women from 1945 to 1961, and the industry linked the city to Cuban tobacco fields and, ultimately, Cuban revolutionary politics, in ways not seen in other areas of the Sunbelt.\textsuperscript{23} The year 1961, however, would prove to be the historic highpoint of Tampa cigar production. In early 1962, the Cuban embargo led to industry consolidation, a workforce reduction, and the final cigarworkers strike.

\textbf{The Cuban Embargo and the Last Industry Strike, 1962 to 1964}

The fear of losing access to Cuban tobacco united Tampa cigarworkers and factory management officials. Whereas cigar executives and workers were often divided over factory mechanization levels, both groups believed Cuban tobacco was the indispensable element of Tampa cigar production, and that there was no substitute for high-quality Cuban leaf. This was true even though most Tampa cigars were machine-made by 1962, because the Tampa-Cuba tobacco link was seen as essential for not just the high-end production market, but also for industry-wide branding and advertising. Such fears motivated Tampa manufacturers to acquire as much Cuban leaf as possible, when rumors of a tobacco embargo circulated in 1961 and early 1962. Workers and owners may have been at odds over industry mechanization, but they were united by their collective fear that a Cuban tobacco embargo might destroy the industry.

\textsuperscript{23} Raymond Mohl and Roger Biles argue, “With little inherited from the industrial era, the sunbelt cities grew as the nation’s economy moved away from factory production toward a technology-based, informational, and service economy.” Tampa’s cigar industry bucked this Sunbelt trend. Mohl and Biles, “Introduction: Part III, The Modern Metropolis,” \textit{The Making of Urban America}, 210.
When President Kennedy barred Cuban tobacco imports in February 1962, James J. Corral, Corral-Wodiska owner and Tampa Cigar Manufacturers’ Association president, predicted a sharp reduction in the Tampa cigar workforce when stores of Cuban leaf were depleted and non-Cuban substitute leaf was used. Non-Cuban leaf would mean cheaper cigars, Corral argued, and a reduction in profits and hand-rolling operations. Gradiaz-Annis cigar company president Morton L. Annis hoped that his factory could substitute non-Cuban tobacco and still make a cigar that would sell at current prices, but Corral and other cigar manufacturers dismissed such wishful thinking, claiming that there was simply no substitute for Cuban leaf. Without Cuban tobacco, Corral worried, the city’s reputation for premium cigar production would be tarnished.24

Though the majority of Tampa’s cigar manufacturers were anti-embargo, management officials publicly declared—as did the majority of Florida politicians—that U.S. Cold War policy trumped local industry concerns, and that they would patriotically support any government restrictions on Cuban commodities. Florida U.S. senator George Smathers supported the embargo, saying that he hoped “all free nations” would join in.25 Florida state senator and future U.S. congressman Sam Gibbons of Tampa agreed, believing a robust embargo, combined with an aid package for laid-off cigar workers and tax reductions on tobacco from non-Cuban sources, like Honduras and Nicaragua, could both punish Castro and protect Tampa cigar manufacturing. But it was

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clear from the outset of the embargo that not all free nations would halt trade with Cuba. Canada and Mexico, two nations whose cigar industries were prepared to buy the Cuban leaf previously purchased by Tampa factories, said that they would not join the embargo. Early calls by cigarworkers, Gibbons, and others for the federal government to provide relief for unemployed Tampa cigarworkers also found little support. The federal government denied financial relief to displaced cigarworkers in 1962, and refused to provide funds to support cigar companies’ efforts to develop a substitute for Cuban cigar tobacco. A U.S. Department of Labor spokesman proclaimed that it was not the place of the federal government to subsidize cigars, which it deemed a luxury product.  

Tampa cigar factory owners cautiously lobbied against the embargo in 1962, but to no avail. Cigar executives argued that the embargo hurt the Tampa economy more than it did Castro’s socialist marketplace. Citing a U.S. Treasury Department study that concluded the $12,000,000 worth of Cuban leaf that was annually shipped to Tampa factories would end up being sold to tobacco manufacturers outside the U.S., cigar executives questioned the embargo’s rationale. Cigar company officials argued that since the embargo did not initially block Cuban tobacco cigars rolled in Canadian and other overseas factories from being sold in the U.S., American cigar aficionados would simply buy the Cuban cigars they used to get from Tampa factories from Canadian and German producers, indirectly sending American dollars to Castro’s pockets. They also noted that Spain had recently signed a new trade deal with Cuba. This meant one more

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competitor with access to Cuban tobacco. The *Tampa Times* reported that “Tobacco
men charge—off the record—that the embargo was not called to stymie Cuba’s
economy but to satisfy mounting demands by the U.S. voters for some sort of action
against Castro.”

Rumors swirled that some Tampa cigar factory owners would find loopholes in
the embargo. One reportedly involved sending Cuban leaf to Jamaica for minimal
processing, perhaps stripping, and then importing it to Tampa factories. But Tampa
cigar executives proved reluctant to use such methods to circumvent the embargo.
They instead argued that the embargo violated established tenets of international trade
and weakened the Tampa economy, not Castro’s regime. The federal government,
however, was not persuaded by these arguments, and its seizure of Tampa-bound
Cuban tobacco, and its later blockage of Cuban tobacco via the Canary Islands,
highlighted its dedication to enforcing the president’s order. U.S. customs officials
seized two shiploads of Cuban tobacco at the Tampa port on February 8, just days after
the embargo was signed. Tobacco importers argued that the shipment had been
contracted and paid for before the embargo was signed, and therefore its delivery did
not defy the embargo’s terms. Customs officials disagreed, thereby putting in jeopardy
the estimated 33,000 pounds of tobacco still in Cuba that Tampa manufactures had
allegedly already paid for. The decision regarding these two shiploads would set the
tone for the embargo, and determine whether Cuban tobacco for which “commitments,
but not letters of credit” had been drawn up, would be allowed into the U.S. They were


Layoffs Starting in Tampa: Ban on Cuban Leaf First Felt by Rollers of Fine Havanas,” *New York Times*,
February 8, 1962.
not, which effectively ended the import of Cuban tobacco to Tampa factories. MacDill Air Force Base’s new Strike Command, which was in many ways a response to the success of the Cuban Revolution and the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, also highlighted the federal government decision to take a hardline toward Cuba.\textsuperscript{29}

With Cuban tobacco shipments now blocked, Tampa cigar companies began to lay off employees. Approximately 600 workers were dismissed just two weeks after the embargo order was signed, adding to the 225 workers that had been laid off a few weeks earlier. “It hurts me more than it is going to hurt Castro,” one worker told the press.\textsuperscript{30} Factory owners argued that reduced tobacco supplies, thanks to the embargo, made dismissals necessary, and that they anticipated more. A cigar union official “estimated that from now on some 10 to 20 workers a week would be laid-off.”\textsuperscript{31} The layoffs led to worker protests, but firings continued. Over 1,000 Tampa cigarworkers rallied to protest the Cuban embargo, after a cigar union resolution sanctioned public worker demonstrations, and workers challenged the pro-embargo stances of Smathers, Gibbons, the local press, and other officials (Figure 3-2). At a gathering of unionized cigarworkers, the name of Senator Smathers was booed when spoken. “We don’t want to get mixed up in domestic politics,” one worker said. “We are here because we’re worrying about our bread and butter.” Another embargo opponent, reflecting the views


\textsuperscript{31} “600 Cigar Workers Lose Jobs in Tampa,” \textit{Tampa Times}, February 20, 1962.
of both workers and factory management officials, exclaimed that “the embargo was the cause of pure caprice in domestic politics.”

Workers and local lawmakers asked the federal government for assistance, but it refused. Union representative Frank Diez said that the federal government should consider aid for Tampa cigarworkers. Citing the generous federal aid given to Cuban refugees, Diez and others argued that Tampa cigarworkers were also victims of the Cold War and should be provided for accordingly. The U.S. Labor Department disagreed. Department spokesman John D. Coates said that the city’s unemployment problem was a local one that needed a local solution, and that the federal government would not directly aid dismissed workers. Furthermore, Coates argued, to draw a “parallel between Cuban refugees and Tampa cigarworkers was to mix national security questions with domestic ones.” Another Labor Department spokesman said that cigarworker unemployment should and could be solved by the local business community. Sam Gibbons agreed, arguing that it was the “patriotic duty” of local businesses to tailor their operations to hire displaced workers. Gibbons also contended that cigarworkers were victims of U.S. Cold War policy, and that the federal government should provide up to 52 weeks of unemployment assistance while workers were retrained or looked for new jobs. Although it extended no federal aid to displaced


33 Fred Smith, “U.S. Tell Committee of 100 to Hire Cigarmakers,” Tampa Tribune, April 26, 1962.

34 Telegram to President Kennedy March 9, 1962. After this telegram, Gibbons exchanged letters with President Kennedy’s office asking if Tampa cigarworkers could receive federal relief from the Area Redevelopment Act. The request was denied. As a candidate for the U.S. Congressional district that included Tampa’s cigar factories, Gibbons lobbied to secure aid for displaced workers. See letters
workers, the federal government did close an embargo loophole—which angered both factory owners and workers—when it blocked the importation of Cuban-tobacco cigars manufactured in other countries. Initially, factories in Germany, Canada, and Spain could roll Cuban-leaf cigars and sell them in the U.S. Yet due in large part to the Tampa cigar lobby, the federal government outlawed the sale of Cuban leaf cigars in the U.S. in March 1962.

With this new restriction in place and the cigar workforce reduced, some manufacturers grew optimistic about Tampa’s cigar-making future. James Corral and others were convinced that their experiments with non-Cuban tobacco could reap profits now that Cuban tobacco was banned from the U.S. market. But workers worried that without Cuban leaf Corral and other factory executives would layoff hundreds of tobacco inspectors, blending room workers, and other cigar industry employees, and that is exactly what happened. By mid-1962, cigar factory executives had dismissed hundreds of workers, and fewer than 4,000 employees labored on factory floors. Talk of home foreclosures and repossessions mounted, and some laid-off workers complained about the federal government’s seeming indifference toward them, as lines at local unemployment offices lengthened.

Large Tampa cigar companies used the early embargo period to impose new labor contracts, which sparked the final cigarworker strike in 1962. James Corral and

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other factory managers argued that new contracts were needed to ensure future profits in the post-Cuban tobacco leaf era. The first factory to impose a new “northern-style” contract was Garcia & Vega, which had been acquired by the Philadelphia-based Bayuk Cigar Company. Bayuk’s new contract allowed the company to install new production systems without first consulting cigarworker unions.\(^{37}\) The contract also emphasized production speed over quality. Bayuk did not negotiate this new contract in conjunction with other local manufactures and unionized factory workers, which bucked the traditional Tampa practice of factory owners negotiating wholesale with the city’s unionized cigar workforce. Tampa union officials were concerned that under the Bayuk contract workers would be unable to protect jobs and collaborate with factory managers to ensure quality cigars were made. This collaboration, they argued, created quality-control standards that protected workers and Tampa’s reputation for high-end premium cigars.\(^{38}\)

James Corral imposed a similar contract at his Corral-Wodiska factory. He told the press that though it was not his desire to decrease wages or undermine worker authority, new labor contracts needed to be implemented for the industry to survive. If an old-style Tampa contract was signed at Wodiska-Corral, he argued, the factory might close. The Tampa monopoly on Cuban-tobacco premium cigar production had ceased


with the imposition of the embargo and the severing of Tampa from its Cuban-tobacco source, and production methods now needed to change to reflect this new reality. “Today we are not in a position to stand this type of operation. We have to compete; we have to make cigars that we are going to have to sell for considerably less money.”

Approximately one month after this pronouncement, Corral-Wodiska announced a new cigar rollout: the Bering Blue Label. The new cigar would sell for 30% less than the Cuban-leaf cigars Corral-Wodiska had previously produced, and would be manufactured under a union contract similar to Bayuk’s. Though Corral-Wodiska still anticipated making Cuban-leaf cigars for approximately one year with pre-embargo tobacco it had stored, the Bering Blue Label was the cigar of the future, and a symbol of the new reality of post-embargo Tampa cigar manufacturing. The Blue Label’s wrapper tobacco came from North Florida, and the filler tobacco from Central America, a fact that highlighted the creation of a new tobacco hinterland. An advertising campaign for the new product was launched, and the company announced that “to maintain the present number of employees—with increased automation—the firm will have to boost sales by some 30 to 35%.”

Local union officials criticized the plan. The Pickers and Packers local 474 president said that the workers were not reluctant to change, but that the proposed Bering Blue Label production techniques would shrink the factory workforce and undermine worker-management quality control and collaboration. Rumors of anti-union tactics at the Bayuk and other nonunion factories in the city also concerned union

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officials. Negotiations between Corral executives and workers were stalemated in August 1962. Union officials wanted a more traditional contract labor contract, but James Corral refused. Corral said he would endure a strike, even if it put the rollout of Corral-Wodiska’s new Bering Blue Label cigar in jeopardy, rather than acquiesce to an old-style labor contract.41

Over 500 Corral-Wodiska workers went on strike on October 2, 1962, after a 15-day contract extension signed on September 16 expired. This was the Tampa cigar industry’s final strike, and it served as a bridge between Tampa cigarmaking’s radical labor past and its now declining and consolidated present and future. After the embargo and strike, cigarmaking became a more marginal component of Tampa’s economy. The failed strike did highlight, however, that the industry’s women workers were more than mere tractable hands at the machines of a fading southern manufacturing enterprise. It also illustrated Tampa’s unique—in regards to other Sunbelt cities—ties to Caribbean tobacco, the Cuban Revolution, and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century labor movements.

In response to the strike, Corral-Wodiska threatened to replace absentee workers with nonunionized laborers. The Cigar Makers’ International Union supported the strikers, stating that disciplinary action would be taken against Corral-Wodiska strikebreakers. James Corral told the local media that since unionized workers were on strike and a new contract had not been signed, he was free to hire nonunion workers, which he did. Violence ensued outside the factory on the first day of the strike, as strikers ringed the entrance of the factory in an effort to block strikebreakers from

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entering. The *Tampa Tribune* reported, “Latin tempers flared and rocks flew this morning” at Corral-Wodiska, but others argued that the army of police surrounding the factory was the threatening force on the strike’s first day. By noon only a small group of workers had made it inside the factory, and picketing strikers allegedly mobbed a car transporting women and children to the factory. One vehicle window was shattered, as strikers “rushed toward cars they suspected of carrying strikebreakers.” The police circled and observed the strikers on the first day, waiting for a court injunction, which arrived the following day, banning all strike activities except orderly demonstrations. The majority of the picketers outside the factory were female laborers, and 15 strikers were arrested for various offenses—including throwing bricks, cans, paint-infused eggs, concrete, and other items on strikebreakers and their vehicles—by the end of the first day (Figure 3-3). Strikers were reportedly particularly infuriated when female factory cigarworkers attempted to cross the line, while office workers and supervisory personnel reportedly “came and went without more than a few catcalls being thrown at them.” The environment around the factory was so frenzied that when strikebreakers left the plant in the afternoon, police officers planned to use fire hoses to disperse any rioting strikers. Later that day, local union president Joe Sanchez bonded the arrested strikers out of jail.

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43 Two “riots” were triggered on the strike’s first day. The first erupted when six women entered the factory to work in the morning, and the second when the same women left in the afternoon. Nine women and eight men were arrested. “Tempers Flare at Strike-Bound Corral-Wodiska Cigar Plant,” *Tampa Times*, October 8, 1962.
for $500 each, and stated that workers were willing to forego pay increases for two years if a more traditional contract was signed, but Corral refused to negotiate.44

The strike continued for several weeks, and worker protests took on different forms. On day two, five women crossed the line and went to work at the factory, their entrance supervised by seventy Tampa policemen. Strikers outside the factory told the press that three women had been injured on the first day of the strike. One of the injured women had immigrated from Havana three years ago after her husband was allegedly shot by Castro’s forces for being an anti-communist, and another reported being injured when she was clubbed by a policeman. Rumors swirled about the increased police presence at Corral-Wodiska on the strike’s second day, and some protestors charged that policemen were getting $2.50 an hour extra pay for strike duty and $25 bonuses for every strikebreaker working in the factory. Tampa police chief Leon Powell denied these allegations, stating that the officers were only receiving their standard pay. With each passing day more strikebreakers crossed the line and worked at Corral-Wodiska, and by the end of the strike, Corral had hired over 200 nonunion workers.

Strikebreakers’ willingness to cross the line and management’s refusal to negotiate with unionized workers, sparked violent threats and actions that reminded

some locals of the cigar industry strikes from the industrial era. For example, a bomb threat was called into Corral-Wodiska on October 10. Factory representative Justo Rodriguez dismissed the threat, saying that the plant was guarded around the clock and no one could have snuck a bomb into the factory. Weeks later, however, firebombs, in the form of Molotov cocktails, were thrown at two strikebreakers’ homes. One bomb ignited the front room and porch of a non-union strikebreaker, and another strikebreaker reported receiving several threatening telephone calls. The day after the bombings, Corral-Wodiska stated that nonunion workers laboring at the plant during the strike would not be fired. Later more fire bombings and two shotgun blasts hit strikebreakers’ homes. No one was injured in the incidents, but a resident in one of the targeted residencies told the press that the shotgun blast only missed him by about 12 feet. Strikebreakers expressed concern about traveling to and from the factory, and cautious drivers leaving Corral-Wodiska at the end of the day were reported to double around blocks and to hurriedly merge with oncoming traffic in order to avoid being tailed by militant strikers.⁴⁵

The Corral-Wodiska strike ultimately ended in failure, and closed the book on Tampa cigar industry strikes, but it did remind Tampans of the continuing importance of cigar manufacturing and its workers’ connection to Tampa’s past. The 48-day strike ended on November 17, 1962, and James Corral successfully secured the labor contract he insisted was needed. Union workers voted to end the strike, even though

they failed to secure an acceptable contract, and there were no guarantees that they would be rehired. Meanwhile, Corral-Wodiska executives stood by their promise to retain nonunion workers hired during the strike, and factory officials said that striking workers would be hired on an as-needed basis, and that they would consider seniority when rehiring unionized cigarworkers. Many union workers, now out of work, were despondent. “There was no sign of joy as the union members filed from the Labor Temple in Ybor City last night,” the *Tampa Tribune* reported. Union official Joe Sanchez lamented:

> What choice did we have? It was a matter of protecting what little we had left…The company reached the peak of production and didn’t have to call us back. We had nothing left to fight with. It was go back to work with strikebreakers, or continue to suffer the losses of a strike while more jobs went to non-union workers.46

The new Corral-Wodiska labor contract called for “new packing room systems and new packing wage rates based on productivity.” The contract hastened cigar factory mechanization and negated workers’ control over quality standards and production processes. Union workers fortunate enough to be rehired alleged that they were treated unfairly upon their return to the Corral-Wodiska factory floor. One returning employee said that when rehired union workers complained to a foremen about unfair conditions, they were told, “If you don’t like it, go to hell, you aren’t needed here anyway.”47

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Tampa’s cigar industry was altered after 1962 and the subsequent Corral-Wodiska strike. There were no more strikes, and mechanization levels increased—as hand-rolling operations were greatly decreased—and workers were disempowered. All the while, Ybor boosters who perceived industrial cigar production as the past instead of the future of the neighborhood persisted in their attempts to reengineer Ybor’s history and infrastructure to make it more amenable to tourism. By June 1963, the cigar labor force was reduced to approximately 3,000 workers, when just five years earlier the industry had been Tampa’s largest employer. Unemployed cigarworkers reportedly searched for alternative skilled-labor positions and employment retraining. Florida’s Unemployment Service argued that a new industry was needed in Tampa, and it was surprised by the large number of female cigarworkers who requested to be taught welding or other skilled trades. These women desired skilled positions that paid high wages, like their former cigar industry jobs, not the meager wages of service-sector employment. Unfortunately for workers, the city’s other industries did not need hundreds of newly trained welders or other skilled laborers. Hoping to aid workers, Sam Gibbons attempted to secure federal financial assistance and workforce training for displaced cigar workers living in his district. Echoing his telegram to President Kennedy in 1962, Gibbons said laid-off cigarworkers were Cold War victims, and that finding a solution to the cigar unemployment problem was his top priority. But federal assistance proved difficult to secure.48

48 See USFSC-SGP Box 1967 #3, Folder: “Cigar Workers” for letters from laid-off cigar workers to Gibbons written in 1963. This folder also contains a list with the names and contact info of laid-off cigar workers in mid-1963. For a look at Gibbons’s efforts to provide assistance to laid off cigar workers see Box 1966 #6, Folder: Gibbons Press Release, Press Release from January 8, 1964. Chuck Schwanitz,
Although it was contracted and consolidated, Tampa cigar manufacturing persisted after 1962. From 1963 to 1979, between 3,000 and 4,000 workers, the vast majority of them cigar-machine operating women, were consistently employed in the industry. The industry even enjoyed a bump in sales and consumption in 1964, when the U.S. Surgeon General warned consumers about cigarette smoking’s dangers, and argued that if American consumers had to smoke, cigars were safer than cigarettes.\(^49\) With cigar consumption and production on the uptick from 1964 to 1971, remaining Tampa factories, like Corral-Wodiska, successfully transitioned to Honduran, Nicaraguan, African, and other sources of tobacco.\(^50\)

Furthermore, the political support and protection provided by Cold War hawks helped keep Tampa cigar manufacturing profitable from 1962 to 1980. George Smathers’s and Sam Gibbons’s stringent pro-embargo stances aided industry consolidation and ensured a protected domestic market. Gibbons sponsored a bill that outlawed U.S. trade with nations that continued trading with Cuba. Gibbons was particularly critical of Britain and France for their post-1962 economic ties to Cuba, and he advocated for economic isolation of Cuba. Tampa cigar manufacturers praised the

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\(^50\) Some cigar manufactures said they “had” Cuban tobacco after the embargo. This generally meant that they had a small portion of Cuban leaf tucked away in a warehouse. In actuality, this was just a advertising ploy. Nearly all pre-embargo Cuban tobacco was exhausted months after the embargo was enacted. See USFSC-SGP Box 1967 #3, Folder: W&M: H.R. 8461 (Cigar Bill-Permit MFG in bonded MFG Warehouses of Cigars), particularly the letter from Frank Gonzalez of the Cigar Manufacturers Association to Gibbons, and “FTC Unwraps Cigar Ads, Finds No Cuban Tobacco,” St. Petersburg Times, March 12, 1971; Newman, 157-159; Orval Jackson, “Havana or No Havana Leaf—Bright Future Seen For Cigar Industry,” Tampa Tribune, December 29, 1964; Tom Inglis, “Honduran Tobacco for Tampa Cigar,” Tampa Tribune, January 5, 1967; “Cigar makers see sales boost,” Tampa Times, December 30, 1967; “Those Fine Tampa Cigars,” Tampa Times, February 13, 1967.
hawks’ hardline, reasoning that they could only produce and market non-Cuban cigars under rigorously enforced embargo conditions. Gibbons and others also championed tariff reductions on non-Cuban tobacco, and successfully fought against a 1972 bill that would have led to increased taxes on Tampa producers.\textsuperscript{51} Finally, Tampa cigar manufacturers, whose factories still produced 95\% of the nation’s long-leaf filler cigars in the late 1970s, were relieved when the temporary thaw in Cuba-U.S. relations during the Carter Administration was reversed, thereby ensuring their protected domestic market.\textsuperscript{52}

The new Hav-A-Tampa facility that opened 10 years after the embargo began was in many regards a symbol of Tampa’s post-embargo cigar industry. Hav-A-Tampa built a new production facility in East Tampa in the early 1970s, outside of the city’s historic cigar-production district, which local boosters were then planning to transform into a walled city with bloodless bullfights and Latin foods to attract some of the millions of tourists that visited Florida in the 1970s. The new facility was designed to increase


manufacturing efficiency, and was reportedly "one of the most modern cigar manufacturing facilities in the world." The plant was large by Tampa cigar factory standards, with a single floor structure of 200,000 square feet, and was bankrolled by Hav-A-Tampa’s earnings, which were up during the late 1960s. In 1969, the company reported net earnings of $0.29 per share. This was up from $0.17 per share the previous year, and company officials predicted that 1970 would be Hav-A-Tampa’s most profitable year ever. In 1972, the company had 53 divisions in 7 states and when it announced its new factory plans, Hav-A-Tampa had more total revenue, assets, and profits than any other American cigar company. Company president D.H. Woodberry said that the new facility, even with its high levels of mechanization, would be hiring new workers to woman its machines. Though Hav-A-Tampa was a producer of non-premium, low-end cigars, and not the high-end variety that Tampa was known for, the company’s profits, mechanization rates, and female workforce were in many ways symbolic of embargo-era Tampa cigarmaking.53

New labor contracts, advertising campaigns, and steady cigar production and employment highlighted the industry’s staying power in the 1970s. In 1976, workers at three large Tampa factories, including Corral-Wodiska, received substantial benefit and wage increases.54 The next year Tampa cigar executives unveiled a new collective promotional campaign. “People in Tampa and elsewhere have forgotten the importance of Tampa as a major cigar producing center and we hope to re-establish that image for the city,” Stanford Newman, president of the Tampa Cigar Manufacturers’ Association,


told the press.\textsuperscript{55} As part of the campaign, a sign was displayed at Tampa’s airport and the Tampa Cigar Manufacturers’ Association sponsored the opening of the Ybor City Museum. Cigar companies designed new marketing campaigns to attract younger consumers, and an industry observer said Tampa cigarmaking was facing a “youthful” future. The Hillsborough county school system even created vocational programs to train cigar factory workers and managers. Cigar manufacturing reportedly contributed approximately $80 million to the Tampa economy annually from 1978 to 1981, and production exceeded 700 million units in 1979, nearly matching the peak production year of 1961. A federal trade official at a 1981 luncheon for Tampa cigar manufacturers lauded the industry’s ability to thrive. Cigar producers also cheered the Reagan Administration’s declaration that the federal government would “ease up on health advisories to the American people.” Even the pope was reminded of Tampa cigarmaking when a Florida bishop from St. Petersburg gave John Paul II a box of Tampa cigars.\textsuperscript{56}

Yet, as Tampa cigar production consolidated, and Tampa’s other industries, like phosphate, tourism, and suburban development, became more economically influential than cigarmaking, the remaining women cigarworkers receded from public view. While a


few thousand women still worked in cigar factories in the 1970s, the promoters of Tampa’s tourist economy attempted to craft a marketable and consumable Tampa-based Latin identity. With Latin themes and foods, they hoped to attract some of the over 20 million tourists that visited Florida annually in the late 1960s. According to Ybor businessman and promoter Anthony Pizzo, this identity was based on “pretty Spanish girls, the distinctive and interesting architecture of old Ybor City buildings, tempting and attractive Spanish foods, and the cigar industry, one of the few handcraft specialties left,” not contemporary women operating cigar machines.57 Thus, Spanish bean soup, pretty señoritas, and elderly hand-rolling male cigarmakers were used to craft a new tourist-centered Tampa brand. A sign at Servando Lopez’s small hand-rolling cigar workshop in Ybor, which read, “Come in and See the Lost Art Revived,” was a case in point, as was the 1976 depiction of 76-year-old Tampan Faustino Fernandez as the “last of a dying breed” at the Smithsonian Institution’s and the National Park Service’s Festival of American Folk Life.58 A 1980 Tampa Times story was one of the few descriptions of contemporary machine-based cigar manufacturing in Tampa. The story described the laboring hands of women workers, most of whom listened to Spanish radio, in particular the soap opera “Una Sombra Entre Los Dos” at 1:30 pm every day.

57 Ingalls and Pérez, Tampa Cigar Makers, 216; Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 144-145.

These women had now largely become invisible to the public, and as the Cold War approached its end, most lost their jobs when Tampa cigar factories were shuttered.\footnote{Lloyd Woods, “Cigarmakers swing with the Latin beat,” \textit{Tampa Times}, June 21, 1980; Jean Stubbs, “Reflections on Class, Race, Gender and Nation in Cuban Tobacco, 1850-2000,” \textit{Revisiting Caribbean Labor}, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishing, 2005,) 132-133.}

Tampa cigar manufactures, who were optimistic about the industry’s future in the late 1970s, failed to recognize the threats posed by non-Cuban Latin American cigar producers and declining domestic cigar consumption. The post-1973 decrease in cigar consumption and competition from Latin American cigar factories ultimately led to the closing of all but one Tampa cigar factory during the 1980s. While at first Tampa cigar manufacturers seemed immune to the decrease in domestic cigar consumption that began after 1973, after 1980 their operations were jeopardized. Cigar consumption declined dramatically after 1973, over health concerns and a ban on cigar television advertising. At first, the largest consumption declines were seen in machine-made non-premium brands, and this did not negatively impact Tampa factories specializing in premium machine-made cigars. Crop problems in Cuba and labor problems in Jamaica, Nicaragua, and other cigar producing islands in 1979 and 1980, also protected Tampa cigar sales in spite of consumption declines.

But competition from Latin American cigar hand-rolling manufactures operating in free exporting zones, particularly in the Dominican Republic’s Santiago Zone, began to undercut sales of Tampa machine-made premium cigars in the 1980s.\footnote{Shopland, \textit{Cigars}, 2, 21; “Import Shortage A Boom for Tampa,” \textit{Tampa Tribune}, August 7, 1980; Miller, “Puff jobs.”} The number of hand-rolled cigars imported to the U.S. skyrocketed in the 1970s and 80s. In 1970, 46 million cigars were imported to the U.S. By the end of the decade, the number had
reached 100 million. These handmade cigars ultimately posed an insurmountable challenge to the premium machine-made cigars, and the small cohort of premium hand-rollers left in Tampa, because consumers could purchase hand-rolled imports for the same price as Tampa machine-made cigars.61

The rise of Latin American, particularly Dominican, hand-rolled cigars, which was initiated by the development of free exporting zones and the successful cultivation and sourcing of non-Cuban tobacco, undercut Tampa cigar manufacturing as the 1970s came to a close.62 Although the full ramifications of imports were not felt in Tampa until after 1980, by the late 1970s the bulk of cigar labor was, according to historian Jean Stubbs, no longer “in Florida but where poorer people, often indigenous and black women willing to labour long in return for little.”63

61 Newman, Cigar Family, 171-172.


63 Stubbs, “Reflections on Class, Race, Gender and Nation in Cuban Tobacco, 1850-2000,” Revisiting Caribbean Labor, 132; For sources on the final demise of Tampa cigarmaking see Shopland, Cigars, 203-206; “68—year-old cigar factory in Tampa To Close Friday, idling 70 workers,” St. Petersburg Times,
Large-scale cigar manufacturing did not end in Tampa when the Great Depression struck or when American cigarette consumption boomed. Tampa cigar production instead continued between 1950 and 1980. During this time, factories underwent extensive mechanization and the cigar-making workforce was reduced and feminized. All the while, cigar manufacturing persisted and was shaped by the Cuban embargo, the final industry strike, changing consumer tastes, and free exporting zones. Furthermore, postwar cigar manufacturing connected Tampa to northern industrial cities and operations, while also linking the city to the Caribbean, in ways not seen in Los Angeles, Phoenix, Orlando, or other postwar Sunbelt cities.64

For example, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Orlando were Sunbelt spaces that did not have pre-World War II industries with ties to the Caribbean. Instead, according to David L. Clark, postwar “Los Angeles pioneered a new type of city and economy. It was the predecessor of the Sunbelt and the first postindustrial metropolis.” Los Angeles’s primary industries after World War II, entertainment and aerospace, Clark argues, overcame Los Angeles’s regional isolation, as did Phoenix’s electronics manufacturers. Conversely, Tampa’s postwar cigar industry was a regionally grounded one that was defined by its ties to Cuban and—after 1962—other Caribbean islands’ tobacco fields.

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politics, and labor markets. Also, like Los Angeles and Phoenix, land-locked Orlando’s postwar tourism industry lacked Tampa’s regional and industrial ties to the Caribbean.

All told, Tampa cigarmaking history from 1950 to 1980 is a complex and dynamic story about women’s industrial labor and the persistence and ultimate decline of an influential industry that, like phosphate, linked Tampa to its distinct hinterlands in specific ways.
Figure 3-1. Women cigarworkers in 1949. This 1949 picture captures the labor of two of the thousands of women that operated cigar machines in Tampa after the war. Nearly every postwar cigar industry photograph that chronicled women’s cigar-industry labor, mimicked the framing style shown above, in that they pictured faceless women, engaged in labor, not looking at the camera. University of South Florida Libraries Digital Collection, Burgert Brothers Photography Collection, “Women Making Cigars at Machines at Swann Products, Incorporated,” Image # B29-00065252.
Figure 3-2. Disgruntled cigar worker angered over the Cuban Embargo. Scenes like these and the Corral-Wodiska strike challenged the ‘tractable’ cigar worker archetype boosters’ crafted in the 1950s. *Tampa Times*, March 8, 1962.
Figure 3-3. Women being arrested in front of the Corral-Wodiska cigar factory in 1962. The women that struck at the Corral-Wodiska factory in 1962 challenged the postwar construct of the docile female cigar worker, which boosters’ marshaled in an attempt to make Ybor a place of tourism and stable industrial production, both of which were divorced from Tampa’s radical labor past. Tampa Tribune, October 9, 1962.
CHAPTER 4
SEÑORITAS, SOUP, BEER, BIRDS, AND THE DARK CONTINENT: YBOR CITY, BUSCH GARDENS, AND THE TOURIST ECONOMY

The U.S. tourist economy boomed after World War II, and Florida became a popular vacation destination that Americans thronged to in search of sun, sand, roadside attractions, and—after 1970—mouse ears.¹

Florida’s modern tourism industry was first developed in the late 1800s and was designed to entertain those enriched by the nation’s emerging industrial economy. Late nineteenth-century Florida was a vacation destination for the moneyed and leisured—and sometimes the infirm—and a stay in the Ponce de Leon, Tampa Bay, or other swanky and exorbitantly expensive hotels was a symbol of conspicuous bourgeois consumption, as were Florida interior river cruises and hunting expeditions.²

During the early and mid-twentieth century, Florida tourism was opened up to the American masses, and Tin Lizzies and other early automobiles brought so-called “tin can tourists” to the state in the 1910s and 1920s. These visitors, encouraged by early American automobile culture, used the nation’s expanding roadways to travel to, and often campout in, Florida.³ Although these visitors—to a certain extent—democratized

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² For a contemporary description of conspicuous consumption see Thorstein Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions, 1899. The often quoted and cited Veblen argued that the nineteenth century moneyed used public consumption, in this case of a Florida vacation, to publicly demonstrate their social and economic power. For a brief description of the Tampa Bay Hotel and its associated hunting opportunities, see Mormino and Pizzo, Tampa the Treasure City, 88-94. For a look at Henry Plant and Henry Flagler’s Gilded Age hotels see Susan Braden, The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

³ For a look at the ties between American automobile culture and postwar vacations see Mark S. Foster, A Nation of Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), 94-99. Foster writes, “Vacationing by automobile was the preferred means of travel for four out of five families.” He also cites that in 1946 there were an estimated 20,000 motels in the U.S. and that by the mid-1960s
the Florida vacation, it was not until after World War II that the state’s tourism industry exploded. New hotels, motels, and attractions were constructed throughout the state after the war, and more often than not, these new tourist enterprises were designed to attract the postwar American middle-class. Florida tourism boosters largely staked their fortunes, and were often handsomely rewarded, on the growing middle-class desire to create Florida vacation memories. In 1949, approximately 4.7 million tourists visited the state, spending $825 million. In 1967, 19.4 million thronged to Florida, spending over $4.9 billion.\textsuperscript{4} Tourism became Florida’s largest industry during the Cold War, and a vacation to the state “signified both a democratic right and a republican virtue,” as well as serving as a monument Americans’ commitment “to mass consumption and what were assumed to be its far-reaching benefits.”\textsuperscript{5}

In short, as the “consumers’ republic” grew so did postwar consumption-oriented Florida tourism, and this chapter examines Tampa boosters’ attempts to make their city a tourist destination through a reengineering of industrial Ybor City and the creation of Busch Gardens. With its cigar factories, phosphate trains, notorious underworld, and history of labor unrest, Tampa’s Ybor City was usually not on tourists’ minds in the late 1940s and 1950s. Nevertheless, Ybor boosters worked diligently from 1950 to 1980 to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{4} \cite{Morris1971}
\item \textsuperscript{5} Mormino, \textit{Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams}, 76-77. Liz Cohen argues that the division between citizenship and consumption collapsed after World War II, and that the \textit{“purchaser as citizen”} meant American consumers’ purchases, even in excess, stabilized the postwar economy. Thus, purchasing things, like a Florida vacation, both served the national interest and was patriotic, even more so if you drove to Florida in a new car. Cohen, \textit{Consumers’ Republic}, 6-9.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
reinvent the neighborhood to attract tourists and their dollars. Their plans to make Ybor a tourist mecca, however, largely failed, as the neighborhood’s industrial history, continuing industrial production, and complex political connections to Cuba challenged, and at times contradicted, boosters’ attempts to make the barrio a Sunbelt tourist mecca largely divorced from its earlier industrial history.

Conversely, the Anhesuer Busch Corporation struck tourist gold between 1959 and 1980 with its north Tampa Busch Gardens tourist attraction. Busch Gardens was established in the late 1950s as a free attraction offering brewery tours, free beer tastings, and exotic bird exhibits. Initially, the attraction was created both to draw attention to the company’s beer production and assuage its north Tampa suburban neighbors’ concerns over the construction of a large industrial brewery near their homes. But Busch Gardens evolved into a major Florida tourist attraction that continually expanded during the Cold War. Unlike the stunted and ultimately failed Ybor project, rather than reframing and rebranding Tampa’s industrial cigar past, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation based its attraction on the postwar industrial production of a consumable—beer—and on exotic animals, thrill rides, and African themes. This mix of animals and industrial production differentiated the park from other Florida attractions. For example, whereas Walt Disney World was a tourist space purposefully devoid of industrial manufacturing and infrastructure, Busch Gardens successfully wedded industrial production with a tourist attraction, a formula that proved well suited for Cold War-era Tampa.⁶ Although the city had other tourist attractions, the Ybor City

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⁶ Walt Disney World (WDW) drastically transformed Orlando, and serves as an example of the power of tourist-oriented consumption to transform a city in the postwar decades. It therefore stands as a counterpoint to industrial cities like Detroit and economically pluralized Tampa. Foglesong argues that “seldom has the location decision of a single corporation so transformed a city,” and he cites that in 1969
reinvention project and Busch Gardens were the most heavily capitalized and politically fraught postwar tourism-oriented projects, and both highlight how Tampa boosters attempted to craft marketable Latin and African identities in an attempt to attract tourist dollars.

This chapter begins with an examination of the attempt to reengineer and reinvent Ybor City in the 1950s via the Alcalde initiative, the creation of a marketable form of Latinness, and the failed Latin Quarter project. Whereas before the Great Depression, Ybor’s Latin residents were often seen by Tampa elites as a labor force to be controlled—through the use of vigilantism, threats, violence, and deportations—the Ybor City rebranding project framed Tampa Latinness as distinctive and alluring. This was particularly the case with the Latin female bodies it marketed, which were consistently framed as hypersexualized tourist consumables, a market strategy this chapter labels señoritaism. The chapter then examines Ybor boosters’ plans to expel black residents from the barrio, the use of federal urban renewal funds to reengineer and market the neighborhood, and several other failed initiatives. The chapter’s final section examines Busch Gardens, a far more successful tourist endeavor. Busch Gardens began as a free brewery tour with a complimentary exotic bird exhibit, and the park grew more and more popular, ultimately becoming Florida’s most visited tourist

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3.5 million visitors came to Central Florida. In 1971, WDW’s first year of operation, 10 million visited Central Florida and the numbers increased steadily throughout the next decades. WDW was also able to create their own private government in Central Florida, one that increased tax revenues but often impeded the area’s passive local government’s abilities to manage the area’s growth and resources. Foglesong, Married to the Mouse, 2-6, 11.

7 Several different redevelopment plans, many of which are examined in this chapter, were created for Ybor City. For the sake of clarity, however, the term “Ybor City project” is used in this chapter to refer to the overall and overarching attempt to redesign and reinvent Ybor City in order to attract tourists from the end of WWII to the mid-1970s. More specific initiatives, like the proposal to make Ybor a walled city, are also referred to in this chapter.
attraction by the 1960s. In response to this popularity, the park developed an African theme—unrelated to local Tampa history—and thrill rides that sold African caricatures to visitors. Throughout the postwar decades the attraction was a smashing success, and was profitable even after Walt Disney World opened its doors 1971.

Ybor City and Busch Gardens were unique tourist attractions in the postwar South, and they differentiated Tampa from other Sunbelt cities. Unlike Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, which had only minor tourist enterprises from 1950 to 1980, Tampa business officials and politicians hoped to make their city a major tourist destination. But unlike Orlando after the opening of Walt Disney World, tourism never dominated the Tampa economy. Tampa also—because it had no beaches—was not as tourist-centric as Miami and other coastal Florida cities. Thus, Tampa was a tourist destination, but not one in which vacationers generally spent more than a day or two visiting.

The Alcalde Program, Señoritaism and the Latin Plaza, 1945 to 1963

Talk of turning Ybor City into a tourist attraction began in the 1930s. As the national economic crisis shrank employment in the cigar industry from over 10,000 workers to around 6,000, Tampa boosters argued that the end of the so-called Golden Age of cigarmaking had arrived, and that Ybor needed a new industry. Many believed that tourism was the answer. In 1940, one travel book stated that Tampa “once intended to rival the towns of the East Coast as a tourist resort…developed largely into a commercial and manufacturing city, and as a winter playground is far surpassed by St. Petersburg.” But like Tampa tourism promoters, the writer saw the tourist potential for the city, arguing “to me the most interesting thing in and around Tampa is the section of town known as Ybor City. Here you might imagine yourself abroad.” Tampa boosters agreed, and in the 1930s, they created cigar festivals and advertising campaigns to try
and attract tourists and rebrand Ybor City. Yet Ybor City’s past made this challenging. From the 1890s to the 1920s, Ybor City was a major multi-ethnic cigar-manufacturing center that had a reputation for labor strife, vigilante activity, gambling, political corruption, and organized crime, and reinventing such a gritty industrial place proved challenging (Figure 4-1).\(^8\)

The outbreak of World War II put serious tourist-centered development plans for Tampa on hold, as war-related industries, labor, capital, and infrastructure shaped the city more than the emerging consumption ethos.\(^9\) But after the war, the idea of turning Ybor into a tourist attraction was reignited, even though industrial cigar production continued to be an important component of the area’s economy. To make the Ybor barrio a tourist destination, most local businesses and politicians agreed that industrial and residential portions of Ybor needed to be demolished and rebuilt, so that a more marketable Latin-esque theme and heritage could be invented. Boosters also argued that the neighborhood’s black residents, many of who had moved in during the 1930s, needed to be removed. With this in mind, after the war Ybor City businesspersons began calling for a wide-ranging demolition of Ybor’s distinctive infrastructure. This destruction, it was argued, was necessary to clear unsightly slums and create a “Spanish Atmosphere” that would attract tourists.\(^10\)

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9 For a look at how the war influenced greater Tampa see Gary Mormino, *Hillsborough County Goes to War: The Home Front, 1940-1950*, (Tampa: Tampa Bay History Center, 2001).

10 D.B. McKay, “Writer Points to Practical Value of Restoring Ybor Old World Charm,” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, April 22, 1951. In this piece, McKay described Tampa’s relationship to the Cuban Revolution and
At the forefront of this Ybor City project was the indefatigable Ybor booster Anthony “Tony” Pizzo, who reigned as Ybor’s chief promoter from the 1950s to the 1970s. As an Ybor businessman, amateur historian, and unqualified sentimental Ybor City devotee, Pizzo lobbied incessantly for the redevelopment and rejuvenation of Ybor, and he and a group of supporters launched the *Alcalde* promotional program to rebrand and market the barrio. Started in the early 1950s, the Alcalde was the ceremonial mayor of Ybor, who was charged with advertising Ybor to tourists and encouraging capital investment in the neighborhood. The Alcalde initiative was unveiled at the grand opening of the Tampa International Airport in August 1952, and—as the first Alcalde—Tony Pizzo “crashed” the ceremonies. In an effort to highlight Ybor City’s potential as a Tampa tourist attraction, Pizzo dramatically landed a small plane during the event, passed out cigars, presented a key of Ybor City to Tampa mayor Curtis Hixon, and “extended the Old World hand-kissing custom” to women attending the ceremony.11

At this event and in the ensuing years, Pizzo and the Alcalde initiative marketed Ybor’s unique food, architecture, Spanish heritage, and “pretty señoritas” as tourist consumables, while also pitching Ybor as a potential trade and travel center that linked Latin American countries, particularly Cuba, to the American South. In a promotional cigar production. About the cigar industry and cigarmakers he wrote “The Latins employed in the industry and related enterprises...are as a rule good and loyal citizens, supporting the organized charities generously and giving aid to all worthwhile projects and plans calculated to benefit Tampa. Therefore it is not unreasonable that they ask and anticipate united and active support in furtherance of their ambition to create here a beautiful and novel community typical of the land from which they—or their forebears—came, a lodestone for tourists.” This statement highlights how much things in Ybor had changed, as McKay before the 1930s was a stalwart conservative opponent of the cigar unions and other forms of organized labor. For McKay’s earlier views on organized labor and his relationship to vigilante committees see Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 105-106, 203.

letter sent to the *Life* magazine editor, Pizzo wrote that Ybor’s attractions included “pretty Spanish girls, a distinctive and interesting architecture of old Ybor City buildings, [and] tempting and attractive Spanish foods. It has its serious side, too. Tampa and Ybor City are just now advocating to get more Latin American trade and travel.” Pizzo also promoted Tampa’s role as a producer of high-end, hand-rolled Cuban-tobacco cigars, even though at the time Tampa cigar manufacturing was undergoing extensive mechanization. The Alcalde initiative printed fake currency, developed a flag for Ybor City, sponsored business and tourist trips to Havana and other Latin American cities, and invited politicians and businesspersons to banquets, balls, and festivals (Figure 4-2 and 4-3).12 The Alcalde also developed its own navy to participate in the annual Gasparilla invasion, but—unlike the other boats—the Alcalde navy used pretty señoritas to distract and repel the Gasparilla invaders. In a telling memo outlining an upcoming Alcalde promotional event, Pizzo was reminded by a supporter to visit the Ybor cigarmakers’ social clubs and arrange to have a picture taken with “a dozen domino players who have typical Latin faces.” He was also told not to forget to be accompanied by señoritas. In a 1953 letter from Ye Mystic Krewe—the most influential crew and sponsor of the annual Gasparilla parade—Pizzo was told to be accompanied by women “looking like the pick of the Goldwyn Girls” at an upcoming promotional event (Figure 4-4).13

12 Letter from Tony Pizzo to the editor of *Life* magazine, and “Announcing the First Annual International Banquet,” undated flyer. Both from Box #1 Academy—Alcalde (1953) Folder: Pizzo-Alcalde 1953 (Tony Pizzo) (Pt. 1), Anthony P. “Tony” Pizzo Collection at the University of South Florida Special Collections (hereafter cited as USFSC-Pizzo); “50 Mayors, Latin American Officials Are Invited to First Alcalde Banquet,” *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 9, 1952.

13 “Win a Trip to Cuba Gasparilla Festival,” promotional flyer, undated, and Memo to Tony Pizzo, September 15, 1952. Box #1 Academy—Alcalde (1953) Folder: Pizzo-Alcalde 1953 (Tony Pizzo) (Pt. 1), USFSC-Pizzo; The above cited Pizzo folder also includes the following newspaper clippings “Shrimp Boat
Latin female marketing constructs—particularly on cigar bands and in advertisements—had long been used to promote cigar brands and increase sales. But beginning in the 1930s, hyper-sexualized señoritas were created by Tampa advertisers to both sell cigars and promote Ybor City to tourists. For example, promotional materials for Ybor City’s *La Verbena* cigar festivals of the 1930s included pictures of señoritas alluring positioned inside of cigar boxes (Figure 4-5 and 4-6). These and similar advertisements highlighted Ybor boosters’ early attempts to use señoritaism to both market cigars and rebrand industrial Ybor as an exotic and alluring, but safe, borderland. Like the Southern belle archetype used in Mississippi and other regions of the Deep South, to attract tourists in the mid-1900s, señoritaism was used to promote Tampa as a tourist-welcoming place of hospitality and sensuality. Yet unlike the belle, señoritas were used to market Ybor as a consumable frontier land somewhere between Latin America and the American South (Figure 4-7).  

Throughout the 1950s, the trifecta of Latin food, cigars, and señoritas was used in various ways to attract tourists to Ybor. For example, the Alcalde navy threw Cuban bread at the ships involved in Tampa’s annual Gasparilla festivities and brought

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14 For a description of how the “Southern belle” archetype was used to allure tourist to the Deep South see Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 158-161. Some scholars have examined the use of female sexuality in Florida advertising and promotional campaigns, but Ybor’s pretty señorita construct has yet to be examined. See Nicole C. Cox, “Selling Seduction: Women and Feminine Nature in 1920s Florida Advertising,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 89 (Fall 2010): 186-209 and Shemuel Fleenor, “Manufacturing the ‘Magic City’: Miami From Frontier to ‘Roaring Twenties’, Thesis—(PhD), University of Florida, 2015.
“beautiful señoritas” aboard its vessels to distract its fictional maritime enemies.\textsuperscript{15} Señoritas were also used to conduct the purposefully corrupt Alcadel elections (Figure 4-8).\textsuperscript{16} Free Spanish bean soup was another staple of promotional Ybor City festivals, and one Alcadel declared war on any “foe or enemy that dares to intrude on or molest the traditions of our world famous Spanish, Italian and Cuban cuisine.” The multi-purposed use of Cuban bread, Spanish soup, and señoritas was central to the Alcadel initiative’s attempt to craft a marketable “Latin” identity,\textsuperscript{17}

The marketable Latin identity that the Alcadel program and other promotional initiatives invented coexisted with the still productive and profitable cigar industry, a fact that was perhaps best exemplified by the city’s Cigar Week festivals of the 1950s. These festivals celebrated Tampa’s cigar factories, while also marketing Ybor City to visitors. Cigar Week events promoted Tampa’s Cuban-tobacco cigars, and included parades, parties, and the coronation of a cigar king and queen. “Eight pretty girls,” all with Latin names, competed for the crown of cigar queen in 1956, and boosters attempted to form a college football bowl game for the city, the Tampa Cigar Bowl. Factory owners, union officials, local bankers, U.S. Senators Spessard Holland and George Smathers, who in 1958 said he would “legislate on behalf of Spanish Bean Soup” and had it shipped and served in the U.S. Senate’s dining room, and numerous local politicians participated in the Cigar Weeks. Further highlighting the importance of

\textsuperscript{15} Tampa’s Gasparilla festival began in 1904 and continued annually during the period examined in this dissertation. In short, the Gasparilla festival is a promotional event that involves a “pirate” flotilla invasion and parade through the city.


\textsuperscript{17} Bill Boyd, “Fun-Loving Ybor Latins, With Their Own Flag, Setting Out to Conquer the World,” \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, August 29, 1952.
the Tampa-Cuba connection, Cuban ambassador Dr. Miguel de Campa and the governor of Cuba’s Pinar del Rio province, the area Tampa’s premiere cigar tobacco was grown, traveled to Tampa to attend Cigar Week festivities.\(^{18}\)

But many boosters argued that championing Ybor’s food, Latin architecture, and señoritas was not enough to make the neighborhood a tourist mecca. They instead believed that the barrio’s existing population and infrastructure needed to be reengineered. Many Ybor business owners and tourism proponents argued that black Ybor City residents should be evicted from the barrio because they undermined the Latin flavor needed to attract tourists. A study by the local Milo M. Smith development firm argued that “Ybor City’s Latin people are leaving at an alarming rate, but even more alarming is the fact that an important part of Tampa, its customs, traditions and its heritage will vanish with them.” Whereas Latin non-whiteness, particularly in the form of elderly cigar rollers and señoritas, had become desirable in Ybor, the Tampa development community viewed black residents as an impediment to the tourist-oriented space they wished to create.\(^{19}\)


\(^{19}\) Milo M. Smith, “A Plan for Redevelopment: Ybor City,” Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage, Section H, Shelf 16, Item #1996.051.4254.
Ronald Manteiga, editor of the Ybor City-based newspaper *La Gaceta* and an ardent Alcalde program critic, was one of the few commentators who pointed out the irony and faulty logic of the Ybor City reinvention program. Manteiga argued that the Alcalde initiative needed to work to protect the neighborhood’s fabric and its Latin residents, not advocate for its destruction and reinvention. In particular, he insisted that the Alcalde program needed to address the fact that so many Latins were moving out of the quarter, and so many black Tampans moving in. Manteiga thought that instead of kissing hands, parading around with señoritas, throwing Cuban bread, passing out free soup, and focusing solely on developing a tourist economy, the Alcalde program should focus on protecting and preserving the barrio’s *actual* industrial history and *existing* infrastructure. Manteiga argued that the “Latin Quarters” of Tampa were doomed to disappear in 10 to 15 years, if drastic steps were not taken. For instance, Manteiga argued that the “Latin American rental barons” who rented out their dilapidated properties to black Tampans “who had nothing, and needed dwellings to live in,” should be stopped. Although Manteiga wrote that he was not interested in “casting reflections upon the Negro Race,” whom he argued were treated unfairly and burdened with their own problems, he did believe that their presence posed a threat to Ybor’s preservation.\(^{20}\)

This exclusion from housing and the emerging tourist economy made an already challenging Jim Crow-era economic environment more difficult for Tampa’s black

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\(^{20}\) Roland Manteiga, “Ybor City...The Vanishing ‘Latin Quarters,’” *La Gaceta*, April 15, 1955. The notion that black Tampans threatened the historic and marketable Latinness of Ybor proved persistent. For example, one local historian wrote decades later that “African Americans tended to move in, taking advantage of the low-cost housing and at the same time contributing to the breakup of the Latin ethnic identity of the community.” Frank Lastra, *The Making of a Landmark Town*, (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 2006), 200, 207. Another critic of the Alcalde program was Manuel Diaz, who criticized the program’s use of funds. See “Manuel Diaz Blasts Alcalde Association Again,” *La Gaceta*, April 15, 1955.
residents. Robert Catlin’s study of the postwar black “urban experience” in Tampa reveals that in 1980, Tampa’s black poverty rate of 35.1% “was only surpassed by the poverty rates of blacks in New Orleans and Milwaukee.” Like in other cities throughout the postwar Sunbelt, real estate-industry redlining practices, federal programs whose funds were less accessible to black Americans, like the GI Bill, and overt racism created inequitable political and economic conditions for black Tampans. Adding insult to economic injury, Ybor promoters’ goal to evict Ybor’s black residents in order to make the neighborhood more tourist-friendly in the 1950s and 1960s, was yet another instance in which southern politicians and businesses undermined the economic opportunities of African-American residents.21

In the end, calls for more historic preservation, and less destruction and population removal, went unheeded in the late 1950s. Ybor business leaders instead lobbied for a large demolition, renewal, and reinvention plan that would transform industrial Ybor into something that it never was: a Latin French Quarter-esque tourist attraction. The Latin Plaza project, which was supported by the Alcalde initiative, was the first formal plan that called for widespread destruction of Ybor’s existing historical infrastructure and the removal of current residents.22 The project advocated for the clearing of a 12 ½ acre “slum” area in Ybor, and construction of a sprawling complex with outdoor cafes serving Cuban bread and coffee, tropical gardens with plants from South America, and Spanish carriages that would transport tourists to the location of Tampa’s first duel, which was fought in 1887 “over a beautiful señorita." Mexican


silversmiths, artists, and other “Latin American” attractions, including a 40-foot tall bronze statue, currently on display in Bologna Italy, were also planned. Tony Pizzo argued that the Latin Plaza was essential if Ybor was to be transformed into an important tourist destination and gateway trade area for all of Latin America. Other proponents said the Plaza would be an international attraction, and draw as many visitors as central Florida’s Cypress Gardens.\textsuperscript{23} The Plaza would do for Tampa what the French Quarter had done for New Orleans and without it, Pizzo and others argued, Ybor might become just another Tampa slum (Figure 4-9).

The Latin Plaza, however, was never built, and this failure was a foreshadowing of things to come. The Tampa City Council ultimately balked at the cost of the project, and refused to fund it. Because of Tampa’s multi-faceted economy, the council had different agendas, and proved unwilling to invest over $1.5 million on a single tourist attraction that came with no guarantees of future revenues. Plaza proponents were reportedly “up in arms,” and argued that the project would bring needed cash and investments to the city, and that the council was being short sighted. A pro-plaza \textit{Tampa Times} editorial argued:

> To sacrifice the Latin Plaza at this time would be regrettable. The Latin Plaza is a civic project toward which many citizens of Tampa have worked untiringly and unselfishly. It holds forth the hope of a bright future for Tampa. Tampa is a great city. It can be a greater one.

Approximately 3,000 persons signed a petition protesting the diversion of funds for other capital projects, but city officials were unwilling to bear the expense, especially after a report was published that claimed the project would cost well over its initial $1.5 million.

estimate. In the end, the city’s other priorities, like port improvements, updating the city’s drinking water treatment facilities, and suburban-growth related spending, trumped the plaza.

Conflicts over the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its aftermath also undermined plans to build a plaza and turn Ybor City into a major tourist destination in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Although support for the Castro-led Revolution was not universal in Ybor City during this period, many Tampa-area Cubans were sympathetic to the anti-Batista cause. This made Tampa a contested ideological battleground from 1959 to 1963, a fact highlighted by a November 1961 confrontation at Ybor City’s José Martí Park, as well as the creation of the Tampa Fair Play for Cuba Committee (TFPCC).

While giving an anti-Castro speech at Martí Park, Luis Aguero was disrupted by Tampa-area residents Elpido Baso and Richard Ysidron. According to police reports, during Aguero’s speech Baso and Ysidron rushed the stage, brandished weapons, ripped the microphone from Aguero’s hand, tore down an American and a Cuban flag, and incited a riot. Both were arrested and charged with disturbing the peace and displaying a deadly weapon, and Baso and Ysidron received six-month sentences in the city jail.

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This incident—the likes of which were unfathomable in Tampa’s recently opened Busch Gardens, Orlando’s later Walt Disney World, or other Sunbelt tourist attractions—and the establishment of the TFPCC, underscored Ybor’s contested political relationship to Cuban Revolutionary politics, and the ways in which this relationship made the barrio a decidedly un-touristy locale of political confrontation.²⁷

The TFPCC was a vocal supporter of the Cuban Revolution until the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the pages of Manteiga’s La Gaceta, which was a longtime Batista critic, cautiously supported the new Castro-led Cuban government until 1963. La Gaceta regularly denounced local and global communists movements—particularly Stalinism—in the 1940s and 1950s, yet it saw potential in the early Cuban Revolution, and argued “Tampans hope that Castro is, as his enthusiastic adherents vow he is, friendly to the US and that he is anti-Communist.” According to historian Frank DeBenedictis, La Gaceta “proved to be not only a bulwark against the dominant Anglo-American community in Tampa, but also took issue with communists in Ybor City.” By 1962, it was reported that TFPCC had 300 members, 1,000 sympathizes, and that its public meetings were well attended. Castro was allegedly positively portrayed at TFPCC gatherings before 1962, and one supporter said life in Havana had improved dramatically since the overthrow of Batista. Not surprisingly, U.S. government officials and the media attacked the organization for its alleged pro-Castro agenda, and Ybor

City—to the chagrin of tourism promoters—was deemed a hotspot of radical leftist politics.28

The politic sentiments of Baso, Ysidron, the TFPCC, and other area pro-revolutionary persons and organizations were in part a result of the industrial ties between Cuban tobacco and Tampa cigar factories, as well as Ybor City’s radical labor past. These industrial ties and labor history—and the politics they engendered—made it difficult to transform Ybor City into a depoliticized tourist-friendly Sunbelt place. Furthermore, the imposition of the 1962 Cuban Embargo—and the cigarworker strike it caused—made the reinvention of Ybor even more arduous.

And there were other obstacles that Tampa’s interindustrial makeup created for Ybor boosters’ proposed Latin fantasyland. Long phosphate trains still crept through Ybor City and downtown in the late 1950s and 1960s, snarling traffic and spewing air and noise pollution, and other Tampa industries ensured it would be difficult to reach a collective consensus regarding Ybor’s future, past, and present. For example, the growth economy, agribusiness, and MacDill Air Force Base—like phosphate—were all generally ambivalent about the Ybor City project, as their profits came from homebuilding and other non-Ybor related industries. Many unaffiliated local politicians and businesspersons generally saw the potential of the project, but their economic priorities simply lied elsewhere. Thus, though Ybor boosters wanted to make the neighborhood less industrial and more tourist-friendly—via the invention of a more marketable history, the demolishment of large sections of Ybor City, señoritaism, and

the building of new Latin-esque infrastructure—the economic realities of Cold War-era Tampa and Ybor City’s industrial and political history erected hurdles that thwarted their plans.

**Urban Renewal, Bull Fights, Fires, and Failure, 1964 to 1980**

The plan to construct a Latin-themed tourist attraction in Ybor City persisted throughout the 1960s and 1970s, even though Tampa’s politics, economics, and history presented challenges. Approximately two years after the death of the original Latin plaza plan, a 1962 *Tampa Times* article summed up plaza-proponents’ sentiments. “No one argues with the value of our Spanish restaurants, Busch Gardens and Fairyland. But something more is needed to solidify Tampa’s appeal for the tourist dollar. The answer is not difficult to find—revitalization of Ybor City as a Latin Quarter.” In an effort to support this vision and craft a tourist-centered Ybor, the Barrio Latino Commission (BLC) was created. The BLC was modeled on the organization that helped reinvigorate New Orleans’ French Quarter. “You may laugh,” one supporter of the BLC said, “but New Orleans has turned their old buildings into a paying business.”

Although it lacked the ambition of the previous Latin Plaza plan, the BLC and Ybor tourism promoters celebrated a small, and what they hoped would be a trend-setting, victory when plans for the Ybor Mall project were unveiled in 1963. The plan called for off-street parking and for a modest pedestrian mall along 16th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues in Ybor. Importantly, ample parking—to accommodate both out-of-town tourists and the area’s growing suburban and auto-centric population—was a

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The central component of the mall’s design. The BLC, the Alcalde program, and several Ybor business owners hoped that the pedestrian mall was just the first part of Ybor’s reengineering.30 Some Ybor promoters even hoped that the barrio could still be a trade and business gateway to Latin America, and one businessperson envisioned Ybor as a future place of “intra-hemisphere cultural contacts” that could thwart the expansion of communism, ultimately leading to “hemispheric solidarity and the preservation of freedoms that are as dear to the Latin Americans as they are to North Americans.” But with relations with Cuba soured—particularly after the 1963 missile crisis—the focus of Ybor promoters ultimately shifted away from Latin America trade and travel and instead toward tapping into American tourist dollars.31

To this end, señoritaism lived on, and at the Ybor Mall’s 1963 dedication Tampa Mayor Julian Lane declared—in the presence of “attractive girls appearing in mantillas and colorful gowns”—that “this is the start of the revitalization of Ybor City,” and that the mall’s opening “should put an end to the Doubting Thomases we have had through the years who said nothing would ever be done to bring back Ybor City.” Congressman Sam Gibbons and other politicians seconded Lane’s comments, and locals attempted to attract antique dealers and art galleries to Ybor, while a development firm publicized its plan to build a swanky new hotel in Ybor.32


Though many viewed the one-block pedestrian mall as a modest success, the big news of the 1960s was that Ybor City was designated a federal Urban Renewal site. Reinvention leaders thought that this would spur on the creative destruction they advocated. In particular, the Alcalde and others saw urban renewal as the perfect vehicle to remove black residents and old buildings from the proposed tourist district. Ultimately, urban renewal did demolish large swaths of what some deemed slums, and created a blank urban space for the creation of a tourist enterprise. The problem was, however, that after the destruction the promised tourist mecca was never built.

In 1964, the Urban Renewal Program (URP) began its work. URP officials stated that the program would have three distinct phases. The first was demolition, and the final two were devoted to development. URP planners divided Ybor City into three sections for the purposes of urban renewal, and work crews began demolishing old buildings (Figure 4-10). Urban renewal studies argued that over 90% of Ybor’s existing infrastructure needed to be demolished, and over 150 acres of land were cleared—and hundreds of buildings destroyed—all in an effort to restore Ybor’s “Old Word” charm, which ironically included a plan for a 300-foot space-needle with a restaurant, as well as a fountain built for former Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. Townhouses, art studios, and parking lots were also planned, and boosters hoped to attract 3 million tourists a

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33 The term “creative destruction,” which describes the process by which capitalism destroys old economic structures to make way for new ones, was coined by Joseph Schumpeter in 1942. See Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), Part II, Section VII.


year. As slums came down along with Ybor’s once vaunted Labor Temple, one editorial argued that by 1970 Ybor “will have shed its shabby cocoon and emerged as the beautiful butterfly it should be.”

But phases two and three of urban renewal never began, thereby leaving out the essential “creative” aspect of Ybor’s destruction. By 1967, urban renewal proponents began to wonder why the building phases had been delayed, and local businesses complained that they had lost customers since the area had been razed. Although the Ybor delegation of the URA board said that sales of cleared land parcels would begin shortly, such pronouncements proved false. The routing of the Interstate 4 thorough Ybor City further destroyed portions of the neighborhood in the 1960s. The interstate’s route, as historian Alan Bliss has argued, was designed in part to clear black residents from the northern sections of Ybor City. The routing of local interstates was also used to funnel traffic, infrastructure, and money into the predominately white suburban growth economy, Busch Gardens, and Tampa’s port and related phosphate industry operations. In the end, urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 4—while advantageous for suburban grow, agriculture, the phosphate industry, Busch Gardens,


38 As Alan Bliss and many other historians have noted, the use of urban renewal funds and interstate routing to clear slum areas in Tampa was not unique to the city, but instead occurred in cities throughout the U.S. Bliss, Making a Sunbelt Place, 244-252.
and port operations—wrought destruction in Ybor and little in the way of renewal and economic advancement.39

Yet it was not until the failure of Jim Walter’s walled city and bull-fighting initiative that hopes of dramatically reengineering Ybor were dashed. Jim Walter was a leading Florida businessman who made his fortune building postwar suburban homes, and his company, in cooperation with Ybor City restaurant owner Cesar Gonzmart and other local business and political leaders, developed a plan to make Ybor a walled city with bloodless bullfights. The project—which made absolutely no mention of Latin American trade and business—called for the construction of a bull-fighting ring and new buildings, and was Disneyesque in aesthetic and intention. The estimated cost of the walled-city project was $15 million, and Walter anticipated that it would draw $50 million in annual revenues, and create many service-industry jobs in Ybor.40 The walled city was to be built on a URA-cleared 18-acre parcel. It would include 47 shops, 5 nightclubs, and a large castle-themed hotel. Planners projected that the city and its attractions would “halt deterioration and restore the disappearing Latin flavor of Ybor City,” and that bullfighting would begin before Orlando’s Walt Disney World opened its doors to tourists. When interviewed, Walter said that “Frankly I think it would be a crying shame not to restore the famous quarter with a high-class tourist attraction.” Yet the plan largely ignored

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40 By 1977, 26% of Tampa’s workforce was employed in the service sector. Kernstein, *Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa*, 158.
Ybor’s industrial-era history, but it did bring the growth economy’s power and capital to Ybor.  

With their plans in hand, Jim Walter and Cesar Gonzmart lobbied state officials to approve bullfighting in Florida. Gonzmart even dawned “Edwardian attire” and traveled to Tallahassee to lobby state legislators. Humane societies around the country criticized the proposed project, and one group of protesters dragged a large plastic cow to the Florida State Capitol steps. But Gonzmart and others made it clear that the bullfights would be more of a carnival spectacle than a bloodbath, and that no swords would be used. The show would instead be absurdist, with perhaps “midget bulls and bullfighters.” In the end, the lobbying tactics of Gonzmart and Walter were successful, and the state approved bloodless bullfighting. Tampa Mayor Dick Greco praised Walter for his bold plan and fortitude. “If anyone in the community can make this thing go he can,” Greco said, adding that the plan needed “guts and money,” both of which Walter and his associates had plenty of.

Yet like past Ybor City initiatives, bullfighting and the walled-city plan were stunted. The plan’s death in the afternoon came when Florida lawmakers banned bullfighting statewide when a bullfight in Bradenton that went frightfully awry. During the Bradenton event, a bull charged the crowd, prompting two police officers to shoot the rampaging beast multiple times in front of a stunned audience. This brought bloodless bullfighting in Florida to a bloody, grisly end, and Walter and his associates argued that

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without bullfighting the walled city was unfeasible, and as the dream of bullfights faded, so did grand plans for Ybor.

Urban renewal ultimately led to the displacement of black Tampans, local businesses, and elderly Latin residents. It also destroyed large swaths of Ybor, and only a handful of new buildings were erected. Adding insult to injury, a last ditch attempt to convince Busch Gardens’ officials to build an attraction in Ybor also failed. By the mid-1970s, Hillsborough Community College (HCC) was the largest landholder in the Ybor renewal area, and although Ybor did become home to some local artists and businesses, the jobs, classrooms, and art they produced were far from the Cuban coffee shops, bullfights, space needle, hotels, European statues, uniformed Italian policemen, and Mexicaan silversmiths boosters had anticipated. Interestingly, some historic preservationists and members of the BLC argued that Hillsborough Community College’s buildings of hard geometric and minimalist design did not sync with Ybor’s historic architecture, but neither would have Walter’s walled city, the proposed space needle, or the Latin plaza structures of the late 1950s.

As the 1980s approached, Ybor was a partially leveled neighborhood that some viewed as a ruin. Bringing the gendered understanding of Ybor señoritaism to a tragic end, Frank Lastra, a one-time Ybor Chamber of Commerce president wrote, “Ybor City was like a lovely woman who had been raped and abandoned. She would gather herself and try to regain her composure, her dignity, her self-confidence—but she would never be the same. Those who lived through the experience and felt its physical and

43 Haciendas de Ybor, a subsidized apartment complex designed to house elderly Latins displaced by urban renewal, was the only replacement housing provided in Ybor.

44 Lastra, Making of a Landmark Town, 263-265, 268; Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 144-145.
emotional impact will never forgive the ravaging. Annual Latin fiestas and celebrations remained staples of Ybor City, but they took place along artists’ studios, gay bars, and empty lots, rather than bullfights, space needles, and carriage rides. As a consolation prize of sorts, the modest Ybor Square project was completed in the 1970s. This project, like the Ybor pedestrian mall built in 1963, rejuvenated and reengineered just a small two-block area of Ybor, and it paled in comparison with the grand plans of old.

But there was good news for Ybor’s historic preservation community and museum aficionados in the late 1970s. After funding was secured from federal, state, and local authorities, work began on the Ybor City State Museum in 1977. The museum was housed in a renovated industrial-era Ybor bakery, a fitting location that meshed with boosters’ postwar attempts to sell Ybor’s Latin cuisine to tourists. As well as renovating the bakery, the museum preserved some of the original cigarworkers’ casitas (little houses), and constructed exhibits that examined the cigar-making period from 1886 to the 1920s.

Still, the museum and Ybor Square provided little comfort to those who desired a full-scale renovation, and fires and publicized accounts of underworld activity further tarnished the barrio’s reputation as the 1970s came to a close. Fire was a major problem in Tampa in the 1970s, and Ybor’s City’s aging infrastructure was a target of a

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local arson ring. In the late 1970s, the Tampa Police Department arrested and charged the local fire marshal, government officials, relators, and organized crime figures with arson and defrauding insurance companies. This group of arsonists—who met in an Ybor City office—was allegedly responsible for the blazes that burned down a warehouse in Ybor and other Tampa structures. Two of Ybor’s most popular gay bars in the late 1970s, Rendevous and El Goya, a warehouse in north Ybor, and the Guiterrez building on 7th Avenue and 16th Street, were also torched.

But Ybor’s most symbolic and tragic fire of the 1970s was the one started by a disgruntled man. In 1976, 64-year-old Renaldo Garcia Gonzalez, who regularly walked 50 blocks a day to get from his apartment to the Ybor City neighborhood he grew up in, set himself on fire in an alleged fit of rage. Gonzalez told people that he made the long daily journey to get away from “the Americans” living in his small retirement facility. Described by his neighbors as angry and temperamental, Gonzalez sat down on a street near Ybor Square, doused himself in rubbing alcohol, and lit himself ablaze. An employee of the Good Samaritan Home, the rundown facility where Gonzalez was apparently resigned to living, said that Gonzales complained about personal problems, not feeling well, and his annoyance about living away from Ybor City. Those who supported the Alcalde initiative, the walled city, and other attempts to transform Ybor

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City into a tourist attraction between World War II and 1980, likely shared Gonzalez’s discontent, if not his suicidal tendencies.

**The Creation and Evolution of Busch Gardens, 1959 to 1980**

In contrast with the failed Ybor City reengineering project, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation launched a successful tourist attraction that continuously grew from 1959 to 1980. Unlike Ybor promoters, Busch Gardens’ designers did not set out to rebrand an urban industrial space, or craft and market a consumable form of Tampa Latin identity. The facility’s developers instead used a large blank suburban space, in the form of an industrial park, to create an industrial brewery and tourist attraction that was well suited for Cold War-era Tampa for a few reasons. First, the company produced a consumable product—beer—on an industrial scale for a state and region whose drinking-age population ballooned, along with its overall population, from 1959 to 1980. Second, the brewery and attraction were conveniently located near postwar Tampa’s newly built interstates and other roadways. This made it easier for the corporation to ship beer out and funnel tourists in. Also, contrary to popular perception, much of Tampa was more than an hour’s drive away from the closest Gulf of Mexico beaches, but Busch Gardens’ north Tampa location was well positioned to attract northern tourists driving southward to Florida’s west coast shores. Finally, its location on a spacious suburban industrial-park parcel (Figure 4-11) provided the industrial facility and attraction with room to expand, which it did consistently along with the region’s population after it opened its doors.
In the mid-1950s, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation set out to develop a new industrial production facility and tourist attraction in Tampa.\textsuperscript{50} As Tampa’s population increased rapidly after World War II, so did the regional beer sales of the Anheuser-Busch Corporation. In response, the company planned to build a new brewery facility for the growing central Florida beer market, and Tampa’s recently established northern industrial park, which was adjacent to the newly created University of South Florida and residential north Tampa suburbs, was chosen. The location offered essential amenities and new infrastructure, which included gas lines, city sewer facilities, and a direct line to Tampa’s drinking water plant, and in 1959 the company dedicated its new $20 million industrial brewery.\textsuperscript{51} With this dedication and grand opening, Anheuser-Busch established a large manufacturing operation in the northern suburbs that was physically removed from the phosphate, cigar, and other Tampa industries, yet was connected to them via its role as a local employer and political actor, as well as its links to, and reliance on, local roadways and the Hillsborough River’s waters. The company, however, designed the facility to be more than a mere locus of industrial beer production, and at the brewery’s dedication corporate chairman August A. Busch declared:

\begin{quote}
In constructing this facility Anheuser Busch wanted to do more than just build a factory. It is our company’s belief that a modern industrial plant should also add to the area in design and landscape. It should contribute to its attractiveness and add to the beauty of the community—in addition to being a plant that is also functional and efficient.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50} The decision to develop an industrial park in northern Tampa in the 1950s had broad ranging business support. Kernstein, \textit{Politics and Growth in Twentieth Century Tampa}, 152.

\textsuperscript{51} “Planned Industrial Area, Tampa Hillsborough County, Florida” and “Tampa Industrial Hub of Florida,” promotional booklets, City of Tampa Archives, undated but 1950s, Box 29.

\textsuperscript{52} “Busch Gardens Dedicated,” \textit{Tampa Times}, March 31, 1959.
The brewery was therefore both an industrial beer-making facility that offered tours—and complimentary beer samples—and a 15-acre wildlife home to 550 parrots, macaws, other tropical birds, a 99-foot dome, and lagoons (Figure 4-12).

Upon opening, the park was an immediate commercial and public relations success. Long lines at the park and robust regional beer sales, revealed that Anheuser-Busch had successfully melded industrial beer production with a wildlife-centered tourist attraction in Tampa. In its first three years of operation, thousands of visitors crammed the park, prompting the company to expand its wildlife displays. All the while, Anheuser-Busch brewed beer for a thirsty and growing Florida market while phosphate was mined, cigars were rolled, and the Ybor City rejuvenation project floundered. Busch Gardens quickly became a defining component of Tampa’s postwar economy and identity, and pictures of the park adorned Tampa promotional materials in the early 1960s. One pamphlet published by Busch Gardens immodestly, but accurately, described the park as “an attraction unique in American industry” (Figure 4-13). The Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce promotional films We Discovered Tampa and the later Tampa Serendipity, both contained segments in which a family visits Busch Gardens. These films and other promotional materials accurately testified that Busch Gardens was Tampa’s most popular tourist attraction in the 1960s and 1970s.

Tampa’s Fairyland (a children’s attraction), New York Yankees spring training games, the banana loading docks, charter fishing vessels, the Hooker’s Point shrimp fleet, and

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54 “Busch Gardens,” promotional pamphlets, Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage; We Discovered Tampa, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, City of Tampa Archives, undated but 1960s.
other sites and businesses vied for tourist in the 1960s and 1970s, but none rivaled Busch Gardens’ appeal.  

Motivated by the thousands of visitors annually spilling through the gates, Anheuser-Busch expanded Busch Gardens, as the broader Florida tourism industry boomed. In 1949, a reported 4.7 million tourists spent $825 million in Florida. By 1967, those numbers had increased to 19.5 million tourists spending $4.9 billion, and Busch Gardens was the most popular attraction in the state. In 1959, only 70,000 tourists visited Tampa, and now Busch Gardens was drawing thousands daily, filling Ybor boosters with envy. In 1965, the park celebrated its 2-millionth visitor, and attendance records were shattered. Prompted by the attraction’s immense popularity, Anheuser-Busch created a Serengeti Plain and a monorail system that visitors rode to see elephants, zebras, antelopes, “vicious” ostriches, and other animals imported from the African continent. By the late 1960s, Anheuser-Busch officials had expanded the park to over 150 acres. The company also built a $1.1 million “Old Chalet,” modeled on a building in Lucrene, Switzerland. The chalet was home to a restaurant and antique displays. Helicopter service to Busch Gardens from the Tampa International Airport and the city’s convention center, and a land acquisition that expanded the park to 268 acres, testified to the park’s continuing success in the 1960s. These expansions took place as

55 “Tampa’s Fairyland, Storybook Park for Children” and “More For You to See and Do in Tampa,” promotional pamphlet, Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage; Bruce Stritter, “Busch Gardens Tops List of Tampa Tourists Sights,” Tampa Tribune, February 13, 1962.

reports rolled in that Florida had become a year-round destination, and that the state now attracted more tourists in the winter than the summer.\textsuperscript{57}

Not even the Disney Corporation’s 30,000-acre attraction just south of Orlando could dampen Anheuser-Busch executives’ public optimism about the future of Busch Gardens. When news of Disney’s proposed park went public in 1965, Busch Gardens officials, like Cypress Gardens owner Dick Pope, said that they believed the future Walt Disney World would draw even more visitors to their tourist enterprise. “The more attractions located next to Busch Gardens the better,” an Anheuser-Busch public relations spokesperson told the press in 1965. Their optimism proved well placed. Even after Walt Disney World opened its turnstiles, tourists thronged to Busch Gardens. Unlike other Florida attractions that were financially undercut by the opening of Walt Disney World, Busch Gardens was profitable throughout the 1970s.\textsuperscript{58}

The 1971 grand opening of Walt Disney World and the booming Florida tourist economy did, however, inspire Busch Gardens’ management team to reorient the park. Starting in 1970 Busch Gardens began charging admission, transforming the park from a brewery that offered a free attraction into a for-profit attraction adjoined to an industrial production facility. Now visitors would have to pay to enter the park, and pay they did, in droves, again proving that tourism and industry could be successfully merged in ways that Walt Disney would have considered anathema. Dissimilar to Walt Disney World, a


purposefully alcohol-free child-oriented place of fantasy and make-believe, Busch Gardens was a brewing and distribution facility, where industrial production and labor—and in some cases intoxication—were on display.  

Busch Gardens’ expansion continued after it started charging guests $1.25 for entry in 1970, and Anheuser-Busch invested millions in the park throughout the 1970s. In 1970, August A. Busch announced that the company planned on spending $10 million in park improvements over the next eight years. The plan was to “diversify the company into the outdoor attractions field.” Throughout the 1970s new exotic animals were brought in, and by the end of the decade, 3,000 roamed, flew, or slithered around the park. The attraction also developed an extensive animal-breeding program and a related educational mission. As the 1970s wore on, Anheuser-Busch built the Trans Veldt train, the Stanleyville area, and a log flume ride. Busch Gardens developers, instead of looking to Ybor’s Latin American roots or other facets of Tampa’s history, rebranded Busch Gardens “The Dark Continent” in 1976 and developed an African theme (Figure 4-14 and 4-15). By 1979, the park had opened a Moroccan Village, Timbuktu, a Nairobi section, and African-themed rides, including the African Queen. Attractions also included snake charmers, belly dancers, and African marching bands.

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59 Although historians have chronicled the rise of Walt Disney World and the infamous exchange between Walt Disney and a Busch family member that allegedly drove Walt Disney World out of Missouri and into central Florida, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation’s ability to build a conjoined tourist attraction and industrial facility that was profitable, popular, and unique even after Walt Disney World was opened, has received scant attention. For an examination of the negative impact of WDW’s opening and the interstate and turnpike systems had on other Florida attractions see Revels, Sunshine Paradise, 116-118, 134.


Via this “Dark Continent” theme and related attractions, the park created a marketable caricatured form of Africa and Africans that some declared racist, but tourists found alluring. In the mid-1970s, the park entered the thrill ride market when engineers built the Python and Scorpion roller coasters, rides that tipped visitors upside down and round-and-round at fast speeds (Figure 4-16).63

Busch Gardens never grew as large as Disney World, nor did it ever intend to do so, but the attraction was nonetheless a success. Tourists regularly packed the park in the 1970s, and it was the second-most visited Florida tourist attraction from 1972 to 1980. The park was so popular, in fact, that in 1976 and 1978 park officials were forced to temporarily close Busch Gardens’ ticket offices because the park had reached capacity. Not surprisingly, as the 1980s approached, company officials unveiled new plans to expand the attraction (Figure 4-17).64

From 1959 to 1980, Busch Gardens was able to do something that the failed Ybor projects were not: namely, mix industrial production with a tourist attraction. Although beer production and distribution did not have deep historic roots in Tampa, like they did in Milwaukee and other well-known northern brewing cities, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation was able to grow and Tampa adapt its attraction and industrial facility in response to Florida’s growing tourist industry and population. This made Busch Gardens a perfect fit for Cold War-era Tampa, and a unique Sunbelt tourist attraction. Unlike in Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, and some other Sunbelt cities, where tourism was not a primary industry, Busch Gardens made Tampa a nationally


64 Revels, Sunshine Paradise, 138; Bane and Moore, Tampa, 136-137; Tampa Serendipity, Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce promotional film, City of Tampa Archives, undated but after 1972.
recognized vacation destination. This complimented Tampa’s other tourist-centered enterprises, like Major League Baseball spring training games. Yet Busch Gardens and other local tourist attractions did not dominate the Tampa economy like they did in Orlando or along Florida’s beaches. They did, however, help greater Tampa shed its reputation as a Florida “hell hole” of phosphate dust, cigar smoke, putrid air, labor strife, and organized crime. In particular, Busch Gardens—with its birds, giraffes, beer samples, and rides—created a soft-edged contrast to Tampa’s heavy industries and their pollutants.

The success of Busch Gardens and Ybor City’s rebranding, though a failure, were the primary tourist initiatives in Tampa from 1950 to 1980. During this period, Busch Gardens successfully blended industrial production with tourist-centered leisure. Although such an attraction might have been successful in another locale, Busch Gardens flourished in postwar Tampa. Conversely, the failure to transform Ybor City into a major Florida attraction highlighted the limits of combining preexisting industrial infrastructure with a tourist enterprise. In the end, Ybor boosters were unable to transform the cigar-industry barrio into a walled city with bullfights or another type of tourist attraction. Ybor City’s existing infrastructure, continuing industrial production,


Tampa’s pluralistic economy, and the Cuban Revolution all worked to thwart the attempts to make Ybor more tourist-centered, while reminding Tampans of Ybor’s *actual* industrial-era past and present. This proved to be the case no matter how much Spanish bean soup was ladled up or how many pretty señoritas marketers paraded out.
Figure 4-1. Postcard of Ybor City during its industrial period. Note how the cigar factories are interspersed amongst residential homes. After the Great Depression, the cigar industry was greatly consolidated and many factories closed, and Ybor boosters attempted to reinvent the industrial neighborhood. Courtesy of the Special Collections Department, University of South Florida.
Figure 4-2. Promotional card with the Alcalde flag and pledge. Note the colors and cigar in the center. Also, note how the text merges “espanoles, italianos, and cubanos” into one distinct Latin group of “Americanos” for marketing purposes. USFSC-APP, Box #1, Folder: Alcalde.
Figure 4-3. Ybor City Chamber of Commerce flyer. Along with señoritaism, food and ties to Cuba were central components of the Alcalde initiative. Note the long soup line and the trip to Cuba trip giveaway. USFSC-APP, Box #1, Folder: Alcalde, flyer undated, but likely mid-1950s.
Figure 4-4. Señoritas at a promotional event. The picture was taken at a banquet attended by Tampa Mayor Curtis Hixon and other local power brokers. Note that the señoritas are holding an Alcalde flag. The man standing on the far right-hand side of the photo is Tony Pizzo, the first Alcalde of Ybor. *Tampa Tribune*, August 29, 1952.
Figure 4-5. La Verbena del Tabaco Festival Queens, University of South Florida Libraries Digital Collection, Burgert Brothers Photography Collection, 1937.
Figure 4-6. “La Verbena del Tabaco Festival Queens,” 1937. The above two photographs are from a late 1930’s Ybor cigar festival and marketing campaign. Both highlight the early prewar attempts to use señoritaism to sell cigars and Ybor City. Note that the women are packaged and ready to be sold to consumers. Also note the Ybor City emblem on top right-hand section of the open cigarbox lid in Figure 4-5. The campaign was a precursor to the full-scale attempt to use señoritaism to market Ybor City to tourists after World War II. University of South Florida Libraries Digital Collection, Burgert Brothers Photography Collection.
Figure 4-7. Ybor City promotional pamphlet. In this Ybor City promotional pamphlet, we see two ‘Old World’ versions of the señorita. The Old World señorita was used to connect Ybor to traditional Spanish customs, which were far removed for Ybor City’s actual industrial history and reality. John F. Germany Public Library, Vertical File Collection, Folder: Ybor City.
Figure 4-8. A picture of an Alcalde election. Note the señorita policing the ballot box while women cigar workers cast their ballots for the ceremonial mayor of Ybor City. The señorita and the female cigarworker were central components of the attempt to reinvent Ybor City after World War II. *Tampa Daily Times* photo, undated newspaper clipping, but late 1950s. USFSC-APP, Box #1, Folder: Alcalde.
Figure 4-9. Artistic rendering of the Latin Plaza. This plaza was to be the centerpiece of a reinvented Ybor, and home to several Latin food and entertainment vendors, as well as a constructed space for señoritaism. *Tampa Daily Times*, March 19, 1957.
Figure 4-10. Urban renewal in Ybor City. This photo highlights just a small portion of the destruction urban renewal wrought in Ybor City in the late 1960s. Urban renewal destroyed a large swath of the barrio, but never rebuilt or renewed much, and no Latin Plaza or walled city was ever built. *Tampa Tribune*, August 8, 1969.
Figure 4-11. Aerial view of Busch Gardens in 1960. Note the suburban houses, industrial brewery, and the visitors' parking lot. Florida Memory Photographic Collection, photograph by Jim Stokes, Department of Commerce Collection, image # C034379.
Figure 4-12. The Busch Gardens bird show and hospitality house in 1960. The attraction began as a free bird show with free beer tastings, and consistently grew between 1960 and 1980. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, photograph by Charles Barron, Department of Commerce Collection, image # C033014.
Figure 4-13. Busch Gardens promotional pamphlet. By 1970, Busch Gardens had expanded drastically, and was home to a monorail and African animals, both of which are depicted in the above promotional pamphlet. Later the park added thrill rides and more animals. Promotional pamphlet from the Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage.
Figure 4-14. A picture of Busch Gardens in the 1970s. Note the African theme. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Department of Commerce Collection, image # COM01352.
Figure 4-15. Busch Gardens’ “Dark Continent” theme. By the late 1970s, the park had developed a Dark Continent African theme. Although this theme would later be deemed racially insensitive, tourists continued to mob the park in the 1970s, and—on a few occasions—filled the park to maximum capacity. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Department of Commerce Collection, image # C678789.
Figure 4-16. The Python roller coaster. By the late 1970s, the park had built thrill rides, including the Python, pictured above. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Department of Commerce Collection, image # COM01363.
Figure 4-17. 1977 aerial photo of Busch Gardens. Note the park’s growth and the changes to the surrounding area in the above 1977 aerial photo, compared to Figure 4-11. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Department of Commerce Collection, image # C683932.
CHAPTER 5
RANCH HOMES, A RANCID RIVER, AND A POLLUTED BAY: THE POSTWAR GROWTH ECONOMY, THE HILLSBOROUGH RIVER, AND THE UPPER TAMPA BAY

The 59-mile Hillsborough River was a multi-purposed waterway and the primary source of Tampa’s drinking water from 1950 to 1980. The Hillsborough begins in the Green Swamp, a relatively remote part of central Florida approximately 50 miles northeast of downtown Tampa. The Green Swamp portions of the river fluctuate with rainfall levels, and some upper stretches of the waterway are unidentifiable at times. At Crystal Springs, however, near the Hillsborough-Pasco line, the river takes on a year-round discernable form, and from there snakes through woodlands and over rapids, and ultimately through Tampa suburban areas and downtown, before emptying into the upper Tampa Bay (Figure 1-1).¹

This chapter examines the relationship between Tampa’s growth industry and the consumption and pollution of the Hillsborough River and the upper Tampa Bay. The chapter begins with a description of the Hillsborough River’s essential role as the liquid foundation for Tampa’s unrestrained post-World War II housing and development economy, and its use as a recreational wildlife park starting in the late 1930s. It then chronicles the rising pollution levels that plagued the Hillsborough River and the upper Tampa Bay, as the local population boomed and hundreds of thousands of suburban homes were built in the 1960s and 1970s. The chapter then concludes with a description of the city’s new sewage treatment plant, which was built in the late 1970s to curb the pollution that had destroyed local marine life and threatened property values, and a sewage spill event in 1979 that fouled and closed portions of the Hillsborough

River and upper Tampa Bay for approximately one year. This spill dramatically demonstrated the consequences of unrestrained postwar growth and the community’s failure to build corresponding adequate infrastructure in a timely manner.

Like in other Sunbelt cities, Tampa’s extensive postwar growth released pollutants into the air and water after World War II. Atlanta, Houston, and other large Sunbelt cities struggled with air pollution emitted from cars and growth-generated water pollution. Thus, unlike the topics covered previous chapters, the growth-related pollution crisis that Tampa faced from 1950 to 1980 during these years was not unique to the city. Still, suburban growth and pollution—which mixed with phosphate and agricultural industry pollutants—were defining characteristics of postwar Tampa, and they threatened two unique and distinct local waterways, namely the Hillsborough River, which provided the majority of Tampa’s drinking water, and Tampa Bay, Florida’s largest open-water estuary.²

Drinking, Swimming In, and Polluting Tampa's Waters, 1950 to 1975

The Hillsborough River has been Tampa’s primary drinking water provider since the 1920s, and it was the Hillsborough’s waters that provided the liquid foundation for much of the region’s rapid postwar growth. The high salinity levels and hardness of water extracted from local wells drove Tampa water department officials to search for a new water source, as Tampa’s population boomed in the 1920s, and they settled on the Hillsborough River. This made the relationship between the Hillsborough and the Tampa metropolitan area unique by Florida standards, as most Florida cities drew their public water from the Florida aquifer. In fact, although surface water only provided a small percentage of the state’s overall public water supply after World War II, the Hillsborough provided nearly all of Tampa’s drinking water.3

Drawing water from the Hillsborough was both advantageous and problematic for the postwar Tampa water department. On the upside, Tampa water officials did not have to pump from the aquifer, and the Hillsborough—which was fed by rain that fell in the Green Swamp, the Crystal Springs outflow, and other sources—generally provided more than enough water to meet the city’s needs in the 1940s and 1950s.4 On the downside, the river’s surface water was exposed to more forms of pollution and required


3 In the 1970s, only 14% of Florida’s public water was taken from surface sources. The majority of this surface water was siphoned from the Hillsborough. *Water Resources Atlas of Florida*, eds. Edward A. Fernald and Donald J. Patton, (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1984), 66.

intense treatment to make it ready for human consumption. Whereas Florida aquifer water required only limited treating, water from the Hillsborough needed heavy processing to meet mandated standards. Tampa’s water department had to chlorinate, coagulate, filtrate, flocculate, control for pH, and stabilize Hillsborough water. The agency also had to treat for taste, odor, and algae to meet governmental standards. In comparison, Tallahassee needed only to chlorinate its water, and Jacksonville, Orlando, and Pinellas County (St. Petersburg and Clearwater) only to chlorinate and aerate.

While the middle Hillsborough provided drinking water for area residents, the upper river served as a wilderness and recreational refuge for citizens. During the Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built Hillsborough River State Park. The park offered visitors a comfortable and crafted wilderness locale in which to experience so-called wild and natural Florida. In heavily engineering the park—clearing existing vegetation and in some sections making it “closer to a large garden” than a wilderness preserve—the CCC designed it to showcase the area’s beauty, naturally occurring rapids, and extensive wildlife (Figure 5-1 and 5-2). The park’s cabins, picnic tables, and floating swim platforms created a consumable form of leisure-oriented nature that attracted many residents and tourists.

As the area’s population ballooned after World War II, park attendance spiked and the city of Tampa water department pumped more water from the river for new businesses and suburban sinks, lawns, and showers. Greater Tampa water demand soared as new homes were built and water intensive industries were opened. In 1950,

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approximately 250,000 people resided in Hillsborough County. By 1970, over 490,000 called the county home, and suburban neighborhoods like Town N’ Country and Carrollwood underwent a building bonanza. This mirrored the broader Florida population explosion. As Cynthia Barnett notes in her study of Florida’s dwindling fresh water sources, between 1945 and 1960 Florida became home to 558 new residents every single day. New industries and corporate relocations spurred growth in Tampa as well, and between the end of World War II and the early 1980s approximately 800 businesses relocated to the area. Schlitz Brewing, Anheuser-Busch, and other water-intensive companies had all tapped Tampa water sources by the 1960s. “There is a steady upward trend in the demand for water,” L.J. Cobb, the Tampa water department’s superintendent, told a Tampa Times reporter in 1958. Critics warned—as early as the 1950s—that the postwar population and business boom were stretching water resources, but pro-growth businesspersons and politicians, like mayor Nick Nuccio, celebrated the growth, and the city of Tampa water department devised plans for new wells and successfully reengineered its Hillsborough River treatment plant’s intake so that it could suck up more water to quench the thirst of the area’s growing population.

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Along with providing for the growth and industrial economy’s essential water needs, government officials “tamed” the Hillsborough—at the behest of suburban residents and the growth agenda—to control flooding in the 1960s. Before 1960, the Hillsborough periodically flooded, inundating homes and displacing residents, particularly in Tampa’s northern suburbs near Lake Magdalene. Between 1921 and 1960, the river overflowed its banks eight times, damaging property and killing residents caught in its natural flood zone. Tropical storms and central Florida’s infamous deluging summer rains usually caused the torrential episodes, which homeowners and businesses said threatened their properties, land values, and operations. But it was Hurricane Donna’s floodwaters and storm surge—which inundated downtown Tampa and suburban Temple Terrace in 1960—that sparked a call for action that ultimately led to an enormous infrastructure project that controlled river flooding. After the 1960 hurricane, the Florida Legislature created the Southwest Florida Water Management District (nicknamed ‘Swiftmud’) and tasked it with enacting flood controls. Swiftmud’s reengineering of the Hillsborough, via a by-pass canal and other drainage areas, and local lakes began soon thereafter, and although it took over two decades to complete Tampa’s new flood prevention infrastructure, after 1960 the era of devastating Hillsborough River floods was over. This primed former flood zone areas for new development and growth.9

And grow is exactly what the Tampa metropolitan region did in the 1960s and 1970s. During these decades, Florida’s “Third Great Land Boom” was in full swing, and

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Jim Walter’s construction company and other development corporations built shell homes, new suburbs, and trailer parks in Miami, Orlando, Jacksonville, and other areas throughout the state. Although high interest rates and the Arab oil embargo temporarily slowed new construction in the early 1970s, tourists, clamoring to visit Busch Gardens, Walt Disney World, and Florida’s beaches, and new residents continued to flood the state, ballooning Florida’s population to just under 7 million by 1970 and 10 million by 1980.10 As the state grew, so did greater Tampa. So much so, in fact, that local politician Jan Platt labeled local expansion “barely contained chaos” in the 1970s.11 Hillsborough County’s population alone leaped from 397,788 in 1960 to 646,960 by 1980. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Tampa region was hot, and a 1978 U.S. News & World Report named Tampa one of the “star cities” of the South.12

But this growth came with an environmental price, particularly in regards to the water quality of the Hillsborough River and the Tampa Bay’s upper sections. Like in Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and other Sunbelt cities, residents and environmentalists expressed concern over rising pollution levels. In Tampa, the environmental health of the Hillsborough River and the upper Tampa Bay—where a majority of the area’s minimally treated sewage was dumped—became a primary concern. In the 1940s and 1950s, the city of Tampa modernized its sewage system to a limited extent, but not enough to meet the ever-increasing demands placed on it by the growth economy. After the war, the city acquired public land on which to build an


11 Mormino and Pizzo, Tampa the Treasure City, 190.

12 Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 157-158; Population statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.
updated sewage treatment facility that discharged into the upper Tampa Bay, just southeast of downtown (near the phosphate loading areas). But as Alan Bliss has noted, the postwar population explosion quickly strained this system. This was true even though it was Tampa’s first “coherent wastewater treatment system.” Making matters worse, the increasing number of septic tanks being installed in the growing suburbs by developers also posed a problem in greater Tampa’s low and wet topography. Adam Rome argues that after World War II, “like the automobile and the highway, the septic tank was a key element in the suburbanization of the United states,” because they made more land available for development. But septic tanks often leaked, spreading disease and fouling ground water and local waterways, and these problems plagued Tampa. The simple fact was that growth outpaced waste system upgrades, and as early as 1957 city of Tampa water department officials and the Hillsborough County Health Department “viewed with alarm the threat of local sewage to the Hillsborough River” and upper Tampa Bay.

Pointing out the problem, however, proved far easier than fixing it. The shallow and stagnant nature of upper Tampa Bay ensured that city wastewater discharged just southeast of downtown Tampa, which was mixing with phosphate industry wastes from other area waterways like the Alafia River, would sink and stick to the bottom, fouling the water, killing sea grass and marine life, and stinking up the air (Figure 5-3). During

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13 In 1947 the city acquired the land where the Hookers Point sewage treatment facility was later built. The Army Corps of Engineers expanded the site via its channel dredging operations (see Chapter 2 for the relationship between channel dredging and the phosphate industry). The Corps dredged the bottom of upper Tampa Bay as part of its harbor dredging operations, and used the dredged muck to create dry land for the plant and its pipelines. Alan Bliss, “Making a Sunbelt Place: Tampa, Florida,” 1923-1964, Thesis (Ph.D.)--University of Florida, 2010, 220-227.

the summer months, the stench along Tampa’s famous Bayshore Boulevard and around Davis Islands, caused by barely treated sewage effluent and vegetative die-off, grew so infamous that tourists and residents avoided the area.¹⁵ Jacksonville, Miami, and other cities also paid a high environmental price for pollution, but Tampa’s sewage, unfortunately for residents’ noses and Tampa Bay marine life, tended to settle closer to shore. Making matters worse, Tampa’s “environmental zealots” were “significantly less evident and enjoy[ed] much less support than in many other Florida communities,” according to a business environment report commissioned by the Tampa Chamber of Commerce in the 1970s. Thus, although Save Our Bay Inc. and other groups lobbied against growth and phosphate-industry pollution and dredging, environmental activists had only limited success before 1980.¹⁶

Although the cause of the problem was clear by 1960, pollution levels in the upper Tampa Bay and the Hillsborough River grew dramatically throughout the 1960s and 1970s, eliciting a cascade of newspaper articles, scientists, and politicians to bemoan the worsening environmental conditions (Figure 5-4).¹⁷ Florida Speaker of the

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¹⁶ The Fantus Company’s business-climate study is described in Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 190-191. Dale Twachtmann, Tampa’s top water official, would later say that although there were some individual environmentalists advocating for environmental action in Tampa, there was little advocacy by environmental organizations and groups in the city. Dale Twachtmann on Water Management, Oral History interview with Julian Pleasants, February 20, 2006, Podcast Recording, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program Collection, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida; Kerstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 191; Barnett, Mirage, 24-25; For a look at Jacksonville’s water pollution problems see James B. Crooks, Jacksonville: The Consolidation Story, from Civil Rights to the Jaguars, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 13-14, 67, 76-68.

House Terrell Sessums summed up the pollution issue in the upper Tampa Bay when he wrote to Chairman of the Florida Environmental Committee Guy Spicola in 1973:

The water quality of Tampa Bay, including Hillsborough Bay, needs to be substantially improved as quickly as possible. Our local governments are committed to a program of tertiary treatment which industry and other polluters should be required to equal. Otherwise, expensive local efforts will be undermined and rendered useless by other polluters and Tampa Bay will continue to be a highly polluted open sewer. I believe that almost all or our people want a clean, unpolluted bay suitable for swimming, fishing, and other recreational uses as quickly as possible and are willing to pay their share of any fair and reasonable coast.18

Yet even in the face of rising pollution and related political concern, growth and other industries were not to be thwarted in Tampa, and as the years passed the environmental strain on the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay grew more acute, as agricultural, heavy, and the growth industry took their toll. Residents complained that garbage littered the Hillsborough’s banks and fecal matter sullied its waters, and in response they organized the Hillsborough River Protective Association in 1966, but to little avail.19 In 1969, after an oil-tanker truck crashed on Interstate 4 and spilled 6,200 gallons in the Hillsborough, the public grew more aware of the river’s vulnerability. Tides carried the oil up and down the river, and attempts to remove it were unsatisfactory.

18 Memorandum From Terrell Sessums to Guy Spicola, November 13, 1973, Regarding Water Quality Standards in Tampa Bay, Box 14, Folder: Environmental Protection, Terrell Sessums Papers at the University of South Florida Special Collections (hereafter cited as USFSC-TSP).

The following year the oil tanker *Delian Apollon* spilled 20,000 gallons of heavy crude into Tampa Bay when it ran aground, an event that also raised Tampans’ environmental awareness.\(^\text{20}\)

But a potentially deadlier pollution incident threatened the Hillsborough in 1969, when Plant City and local businesses dumped polluted water into Lake Thonotosassa, setting off a cataclysmic fish kill that threatened to leak into the middle section of the Hillsborough (Figure 5-5). Five companies, including a shrimp and three citrus processing plants, and the Plant City wastewater department dumped inadequately treated waste into Pemberton Creek, the lake’s main tributary.\(^\text{21}\) Over a 2-day period an estimated 80% of the lake’s fish died, and scientists anticipated a 100% kill event. The owners of Pete and Louise’s Fish Camp, situated on the lake’s banks, were victims of lake’s befouling, and all they could do was gaze out at the floating fish, try to ignore the stench, and reportedly consider when, not if, they would close the camp.\(^\text{22}\) Hillsborough County officials worried that the pollution would leech into the Hillsborough River, which was connected to the lake via Flint Creek.\(^\text{23}\) Two years later, when a study of American fish-kills in the U.S. was released, the Lake Thonotosassa event was ranked the #1 episode of 1969, because it substantially out-killed other pollution events. Although the


\(^{23}\) Pemberton Creek flowed into a southern portion of the lake, and Flint Creek connected a northern section of the lake to the Hillsborough River.
feared leeching into the Hillsborough never occurred, Lake Thonotosassa’s death warned residents about the dangers of untreated discharges and the local watershed’s interconnected nature.\(^{24}\)

Just months after the Lake Thonotosassa pollution spill, Florida pollution control chief Nathaniel Reed argued that the state must invest in infrastructure improvements to protect the environment. “The federal aid is not coming, and we’re falling behind. We can’t wait.” Tampa, Jacksonville, and other Florida cities and counties needed to get ahead of the pollution problem, he argued. Reid Bigges, the vice chairman of Duval County’s pollution control board, was downright apocalyptic about Florida’s pollution problem. “No country in history has destroyed its waters at a rate comparable to the United States. There is not a single unpolluted watershed left...Pollution is the fifth horseman of the Apocalypse.” If the nation was willing to spend billions in Vietnam, Bigges asked, why was it failing to curtail and cleanup pollution?\(^{25}\) A 1970 pollution study written in support of the Florida Pollution Control Bonds Amendment (Amendment IV), which would amend the Florida Constitution and thereby allow the issuance of state bonds for pollution control initiatives, estimated that 6.5 million Floridians were reliant on septic tanks, which tended to leak into the groundwater, and that it would cost at least $1.8 billion to update Florida’s sewage infrastructure to stop the deadly discharges.\(^{26}\)


\(^{26}\) “Hillsborough County Pollution Commission: Hillsborough County Pollution Control Act and Regulations,” Box 93, Folder: Air and Water Pollution, USFSC-TSP; Florida Pollution Control Bonds, Amendment 4 (1970).
Despite the threat of the fifth horseman saddling up, Tampa’s water pollution problems worsened as its population grew, and by the early 1970s concerns about the Hillsborough River’s pollution levels, and its ability to provide adequate drinking water, rose. Although the city of Tampa water department and the Hillsborough County Pollution Commission adopted anti-pollution measures in the 1960s and 1970s, Tampa’s high growth rate undermined these initiatives. For example, in 1963 Tampa announced that it would end the practice of dumping alum sludge—a gelatinous byproduct of the water treatment process that impaired local water quality—into the river just downstream of the water treatment facility. The City of Tampa water department had produced and dumped large amounts of alum sludge—because of the Hillsborough waters’ high treatment demands—as the area’s population grew, and environmentalists cheered the news, arguing that alum sludge dumping poisoned the river. The city, however, was unable to abide by its own decree, and as new suburban homes were built and treatment facilities were not updated, periodic alum dumping resumed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This dumping led Hillsborough county environmental protection director Roger Stewart to fine the Tampa water department, and suggest that additional sewer and water hookups be stopped until the treatment facility was updated.

But a moratorium on hookups, a move that could halt new construction, was a nonstarter for Tampa developers and pro-growth government officials. The Hillsborough County Commission and Tampa mayor Dick Greco blocked Stewart’s fine and quashed

27 Barnett argues that Florida’s urban postwar pollution problems were a consequence of development outrunning existing infrastructure. Barnett, Mirage, 24.

any ideas regarding a moratorium. “I for one don’t want to stop this sort of thing [development] because I think its progress,” Greco said. Greco also argued that alum dumping was only an aesthetic issue. “Fish have been frolicking in it for years,” he argued, saying there was no concrete proof that alum dumping was harmful. Florida’s Department of Pollution (FDPC) disagreed, and threatened to support the blockage of new hookups to Tampa’s water and sewer system. One FDPC official declared that the city’s sewage system and its treatment facility were “severely inadequate.” Nonetheless, new hookups continued and no moratorium was enacted.

Save Our Bay Inc., Citizens Against River Pollution, the Tampa Audubon Society, other environmental groups, and thousands of suburbanites grew more and more concerned about the Hillsborough’s and the upper Tampa Bay’s environmental decline in the 1970s. This concern mirrored growing national and statewide anti-pollution sentiment. The Staten Island sewage blob, the 1969 Cuyahoga River Fire, the Echo Park dam project, and other events brought water pollution to the forefront of the nation’s consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to the passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act and environmental initiatives by the Sierra Club and other organizations. In Florida, and throughout the nation, environmental groups, many led

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29 Mayor Greco would later resign in March 1974 in order to take a job with a commercial development firm, a move that highlighted the close relationship between local Tampa politics and the development industry. Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 160.


and organized by women, worked to stop pollution. Water resources and pollution
became a major focus of the League of Women Voters, and the organization pressured,
successfully, the federal government to spend over a billion dollars on sewage and
other waterworks infrastructure. In Florida, the league sponsored conferences, and
environmental champions like Ruth Clausen encouraged citizens to pressure local
politicians and fight for clean water. The League fought to reduce pollution in Biscayne
Bay and other waterways in Florida, and in 1972 with the help of Republican state
legislator Mary Grizzle of Pinellas County, the league and other environmental groups
cheered the passage of the Wilson-Grizzle Act, which mandated that sewage effluent
dumped into Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, Pinellas, and Hillsborough County bays and
rivers be extensively treated. The League was not alone in its advocacy. ManaSota-88,
Conservation 70s, and other environmental champions worked to bring attention to the
pollution problems in Tampa and other areas in the state.33

Coinciding with this widespread environmental concern were fears about local
and global overpopulation. A 1970 *St. Petersburg Times* story questioned just how
much the state’s population could grow before its quality of life was negatively impacted.
Florida’s miles of beachfront, sparkingly springs, and favorable climate set the stage for
a population crush, something the newspaper frightfully labeled “Destruction by
Numbers.”34 Perhaps soon, the paper warned, Florida would become like Sunbelt Los
Angeles, an overcrowded place where smog kept school children inside and poisoned
Southern Californians’ lungs. Was growth really good, or was Florida on a path to a

78-79, 139; Ed George, “Wilson-Grizzle Act Going Down the Drain,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, May 26,
1980.

“perilous tomorrow”? Global concerns about growth, perhaps most fully expressed by the Zero Population Growth (ZPG) movement, also questioned the value in expanding communities and populations that taxed resources, polluted the air and water, and consumed vast quantities of food and other resources.\(^\text{35}\)

Yet even in the face of these population and environmental concerns, the pro-growth agenda was not to be slowed in Tampa. Instead, water pollution in the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay increased in the mid- and late 1970s, but new plans were hatched to curtail pollution. In 1974, Tampa mayor Lloyd Copeland requested $6 million from the city for a “crash” program to kick-start a solution to the sewage and water problems, but like former mayor Greco, blocking new construction was a nonstarter for Copeland and other local pro-growth powerbrokers. Copeland instead argued that Tampa needed to guarantee that new sewer and water hookups would be available for new homes and businesses. City water officials said the growing potable water demand could be met, but only if facilities were updated. In response, plans were drawn up for new sewage and water treatment infrastructure and work commenced, but sewage issues persisted for the rest of the 1970s. In July 1974 reports surfaced that the city’s sewage treatment plant dumped raw sewage into the upper Tampa Bay, motivating the Tampa City Council to reconvene its environmental advisory committee. Committee chairman John Betz warned that growth and development were contaminating the bay and the 71 million gallons of water taken daily from the Hillsborough River. Mayor Copeland, who had been reluctant to reconvene the committee, argued that Betz’s “scare approach” was problematic, but just months later,

a new study revealed a twenty-two-fold increase in bacteria levels in the Hillsborough River since 1959.\textsuperscript{36}

City officials worked to alleviate area water pollution in the mid-1970s, but updating Tampa’s drinking-water treatment facility, not the area’s wastewater system, was their top priority. In 1974, Tampa water department officials revealed their plans to update the city’s drinking-water treatment plant. The upgrades were designed to increase production and better control alum-sludge discharges. The city also revealed plans to upgrade the sewage system and treatment facility. The pro-growth ethos that dictated local politics ensured that upgrades to the drinking-water plant would take precedence over the sewage system improvements for two reasons. First, the repairs needed to improve potable water quality and treatment capacity were much cheaper than new sewage infrastructure. A new water treatment intake, sand filtering system, and settling basin were projected to cost the city less than $10 million—whereas needed sewage infrastructure was predicted to cost at least $70 million—and these improvements would protect the city’s water supply during the dry season and provide water for the growing population.\textsuperscript{37} Second, inadequate water supplies were an immediate threat to growth and new sewage infrastructure was not. Without adequate water supplies, growth would grind to a halt, but new developments could withstand a delay in improved sewage systems, and developers could still hookup to the existing system or install private sewage and septic systems if need be. Because of this,


\textsuperscript{37} Fortunately for the city improvements to the drinking water treatment facility were completed before the 1975 drought. The Tampa Times reported that had the treatment plant failed to construct a new intake pipe in 1974, “the whole system would probably be sucking in nothing but dry air right now.” Dale Wilson, “Where the Hillsborough Flows it’s Drought-Ruined Landscape,” Tampa Times, May 28, 1975.
Tampa’s sewage improvement project moved much slower than its drinking-water treatment upgrades in the mid-1970s, to the consternation of environmental champion Guy Spicola, the Hillsborough Environmental Coalition, Save Our Bay Inc., and other concerned parties.  

Polluting therefore continued as the infrastructure projects of the late 1970s dragged on. In 1977, the city illegally dumped alum sludge again—citing “unusually dark river water” being sucked into the treatment plant’s intake that required heavy treating—in violation of local environmental ordinances, and the Tampa water department asked the Tampa city council to approve $26,000 in emergency spending to avoid further dumping. The problem, according to water department officials, was that decaying vegetation up river increased tannic levels in river waters, which forced the department to use three times the normal amount of alum to produce water that met community and government standards. This increase overtaxed alum sludge holding areas, ultimately forcing the department to dump the sludge in the river. It was either dump, or stop producing water for the area’s growing population. A water department official summed up the conundrum when he told reporters, “We don’t have a choice. We can’t stop producing water.” Roger Stewart, the county’s EPC director, remarked, “I’m inclined to

believe the (treatment) system is under designed for the product they’re trying to produce.”

Unfortunately for marine life, the river’s mid- to late 1970’s pollution problems did not end there. In 1974, the city temporality dumped untreated sewage into the river in order to fix a maintenance issue at a wastewater lift station. In 1975, the mystery of why the Hillsborough was consistently turning red on Fridays was revealed when the county’s EPC office discovered that a water softening plant, located just a few miles north of downtown Tampa, was discharging potassium permanganate, an agent used to kill odors and bacteria in water, through a floor drain and into the river. Months later the county’s EPC cited an apartment complex, located just above the city’s drinking water reservoir, for dumping raw sewage into the Hillsborough. Though a water department spokesperson declared that consumers should not be alarmed, the spill highlighted the numerous threats faced by the river.

Dangerously polluted water was found upriver as well. The Hillsborough County Health Department declared that Hillsborough River waters flowing through Hillsborough River State Park were contaminated with fecal matter, and in 1971 county officials banned swimming in the river. While some early blame was cast at the park’s “jerry rigged sewer lines,” it soon became clear that the problem lay upstream. Storm

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runoff and pollution from local cattle farms turned out to be the leading culprit. The news temporarily sunk the park’s appeal. With swimming off-limits, the park reported empty cottages and a steep drop off in visitors in the early and mid-1970s. “Attendance is off a lot,” a park employee said. To attract visitors, plans were soon drawn up for a large sand bottom chlorinated “swimming lake” in the park. A 1975 study showed that bacterial counts in upper sections of the river were extremely high, and one testing location reported a dramatic increase in bacterial counts in just a few years. Blackwater Creek, a Hillsborough tributary that wound through a cattle region, was also cited for extremely high fecal counts.

As the 1980s approached, concern for the river and upper Tampa Bay grew more general. A 1977 environmental study confirmed what everyone knew: Hillsborough River water quality had declined tremendously since the 1950s. Fecal counts in the river had increased by over 1000% from 1964 to 1974, and Betz and others warned that swimmers should think twice before diving into the river at any location. In regards to drinking water, higher upstream bacteria counts meant that the city’s treatment plant had to use more alum, which scientists warned was carcinogenic. “If Tampa lost the Hillsborough River as a source of drinking water, all growth in the county would have to cease,” John Betz said in 1977. Pollution levels in

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the upper bay soared as well, as the city kept dumping partially treated sewage just south of downtown near the mouth of the Hillsborough. 46

The elevated pollution levels of the 1970s and steadily increasing growth, coincided with a romanticizing of the upper Hillsborough’s natural qualities. Since the park’s founding in 1938, the upper stretches of the Hillsborough had been a naturalist’s paradise, renowned for canoeing and wildlife watching and—until 1971—swimming. The Sierra Club—which held events at the park—and canoe aficionados thought of the upper river as an anachronistic piece of lost natural Florida. 47 Local newspapers published photos of the wilderness wonderland, and one Tampa Tribune reporter wrote that the river’s upper stretches were “out of sight of a fast-intruding civilization…a wide wild slash through a tropic jungle so various and surprising it can make you entirely forget the frantic highways and the teeming sidewalks.” 48 Another Tribune reporter argued that residents should see the “lost wild America” of the Hillsborough before it was too late. 49 Gloria Jahoda’s River of the Golden Ibis, a popular history of the Tampa region and the Hillsborough River, also chronicled the contrasts between the lower Hillsborough and the upper “wilderness river.” 50 Still another local reporter pointed out the contrasting qualities of the river, writing that after canoeing the entire length of the river’s upper wilderness areas his group was saddened by the thought that after the city dam the water would careen “toward the toilets and the washing machines vomiting

forth detergents” and other pollutants. The truth was, however, that the upper river’s waters, although surrounded by a wilderness canopy, were polluted and dangerous to human health.

**Hope at Hooker’s Point and the 1979 Sewage Spill, 1975 to 1980**

But hope for the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay sprang anew as 1980 approached. In 1978, the city’s long-delayed new sewage treatment facility came online. When the new $90 million Hooker’s Point sewage treatment plant began operating, environmentalists’ hopes for a less polluted future seemed possible. The new facility was designed to dramatically increase sewage treatment capacity and efficiency. Dale Twatchmann, Tampa resources and public works administrator, declared that the treated water would be so clean he would drink a glass from the plant once it hit peak efficiency. “There aren’t many happy days, but this is one of them,” he said. Talk of treated potable water, marine life’s return to the heavily polluted upper Tampa Bay, a cleaner Hillsborough River, and a reduction in the awful stench that cloaked Bayshore Boulevard and Davis Islands filled residents with hope. The city’s drinking water treatment facilities were also augmented when the $13.2 million Morris Bridge Treatment Plant was opened in mid-1979. Better sewage and water facilities, it seemed,

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would be the anti-pollution story of the 1980s, but in the summer of 1979 the system failed, poisoning the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay.53

A wastewater lift station failure in mid-1979 led to a prolonged sewage spill that drastically polluted the Hillsborough River’s middle and lower sections, and closed the river to human activity for approximately one year. In July 1979, a central Tampa sewage-pumping station failed, dumping raw sewage into the river just several miles north of downtown. After a two-week long delay, the county EPC banned swimming and other recreational activities in the lower and middle river. EPC officials posted signs warning the public of the polluted river’s health hazards, and Anheuser-Busch, Pepsi, and other businesses were asked to temporarily limit their respective “peak flows,” of water intake and sewage outflows, to minimize pressure on the system as much as possible (Figure 5-6). Water samples confirmed that large amounts of untreated human waste, from the area’s bloated population—Hillsborough County alone had over 646,000 residents by 1980—and new industries had made the river unfit for swimming and deadly to marine life.54

To make matters worse, city officials were unable to stop the deluge, and untreated sewage from the lift station continued to dump into the Hillsborough and empty into the bay for months, threatening residents living along the banks of the river and all who dared go in or around the waterways. Measured bacterial counts were reported to be 115 times above the maximum limit allowable by state regulations one month after the event began. “This is a serious health problem,” a county official argued,

53 “Fact Sheet, History of the City of Tampa Water Department.”

stating the obvious. Some who had entered the river before—and a few foolhardy residents after—the EPC posted no swimming signs reported ear, stomach, and other ailments. One riverside homeowner reported that his yard reeked like a septic tank. Another blamed the government, telling a reporter “what makes me so mad is that government is hard on industry” for dumping waste into the rivers, but now government was dumping “on their own whims.” Although the resident’s frustration was understandable, the critique missed the mark. The local government did deserve a share of the blame, but so did the pro-growth industry, whose development projects taxed the city’s water and sewer systems.55

In short order, finger pointing began. Elected officials criticized EPC director Roger Stewart—who had earlier called for a sewage hookup moratorium—for failing to warn residents of the polluted river's health hazards in a timely fashion. “Why did it take you two weeks?” asked a county commissioner. Stewart and EPC officials argued that they took action as soon as they were made aware of the problem's severity.56

Residents asked how and why this happened, seeing as the new sewage treatment plant was operational. Project coordinators explained that although the plant was up and running, new sewage infrastructure running to the plant had yet to be completed because of funding delays. “We delayed a $24 million project because we obviously wanted Uncle (Sam) to pick up three-fourths of the cost instead of having the people of Tampa paying the full $24 million,” said Tampa’s director of sanitary sewers Jay Silliman when discussing portions of the necessary, but delayed, infrastructure.


56 Tom Inglis, “Davin, Stewart Clash on River Warning Delay,” Tampa Tribune, August 9, 1979.
Although Tampa did get $18 million from the federal government for new sewage lines eventually, funding and construction delays pushed the project’s completion back several years. The nation-wide urban sewage infrastructure projects of the 1970s created backlogs for sewage pipes and other necessary equipment. Like Tampa, other booming Sunbelt cities—and cities outside of the Sunbelt—were working to upgrade their sewer and water facilities, which slowed construction and delayed funding. Engineers pointed out that by the time of the spill some of the system’s concrete pipes had shriveled dramatically, and that many of the 80,000 pipes that connected homes to the sewage system were mere pressed cardboard. When the spill erupted the city was busy laying new pipes, but the project was far from complete.

For the Hillsborough’s and upper Tampa Bay’s marine life it was too late. Massive fish kills were reported in the lower and middle river, and hundreds of dead fish littered its banks, as bacteria levels in upper Tampa Bay spiked. Senior EPC scientist Rick Wilkins forecast that the heavy summer rains would make the problem worse, and he speculated it could take up to 2 years for the river’s marine life to regenerate, as the spill decreased the river’s oxygen to lethal levels, suffocating marine life. “I would suspect that the discharge killed all the benthic invertebrates (animals that live on the bottom),” Wilkins said. “You only have to take oxygen away for one day and you’ve killed everything that lives there.” County health officials warned that typhoid, hepatitis, and other maladies could inflict those failing to heed warnings to stay out of and away

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from the river and upper bay. The Tampa wastewater department reported that the problem would not be fully remedied until new lines and pumping stations were up and running, which would take months.

For nearly one year the river was off-limits to recreation, and even after the no swimming signs were removed, experts continued to warn that heavy rains might increase pollution to unsafe levels in the Hillsborough and the upper Tampa Bay. “The river should be safe to swim in now,” declared an EPC official, as the signs came down, but he added “whenever we start getting our summer rains” bacteria counts might go up.

Pollution problems persisted—albeit to a smaller degree—after 1980. In 1981, untreated sewage was again dumped into the middle section of the Hillsborough and the upper Tampa Bay. The upper river also continued to face its own pollution threats from Tampa’s agribusinesses. In the 1980s, two citrus processing plants and a dairy operation were cited for discharging waste into an upper tributary of the Hillsborough River. A park ranger said that “after watching dead fish float past Hillsborough River State Park for the past three weeks,” he and another ranger paddled up stream to see where the pollution was coming from. They reported that they “found hundreds upon hundreds of dead fish belly up,” and that “it smelled so bad [in Blackwater Creek] we had to turn around and go back out.” An EPC biologist said the creek “looks absolutely septic. The water is green and it smells vile.” The biologist went on to say that the event


was “worse than when the city of Tampa was overflowing raw sewage into the river in 1979.” With this event in mind, it is not surprising that swimming in Hillsborough State Park was prohibited throughout the 1980s. Overall, however, pollution levels in the Hillsborough and upper Tampa Bay decreased significantly as new sewer lines were laid and old facilities were decommissioned in the early and mid-1980s. It was thus during the 1960s and 1970s that environmentalists and politicians laid the foundation for the extensive cleanup of local Tampa waterways in the 1980s and thereafter.

From 1950 to 1980, the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay steadily grew more polluted as greater Tampa expanded. Attempts to limit new sewer hookups—thereby restraining growth and pollution—failed to elicit timely political traction, a fact evidenced most dramatically by the 1979 sewage spill event. This environmental degradation was a defining characteristic of Cold War-era Tampa, and it revealed the dangers of outgrowing existing water and sewage infrastructure, and the consequences of unconstrained growth in the postwar South.

Similar problems afflicted Sunbelt cities that underwent a population boom after World War II, and therefore—unlike phosphate, cigars, Ybor City, and Busch Gardens—Tampa’s postwar growth industry and its pollutants were not unique to the city. For example, Miami, Houston, and Los Angeles all grappled with the pressing need to provide fresh water to their ever-expanding populations during the Cold War. Sewage treatment was also a problem for these cities, and in the 1960s a Baylor University

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62 1981 Environmental Quality Report for Hillsborough County, John F. Germany Public Library, Local Documents Collection, 154; Sylvia Wright, “Firms Cited for Dumping; Fish Die in Hillsborough,” Tampa Tribune, undated clipping, John F. Germany vertical clipping file.

medical professor called Houston’s Buffalo Bayou, which runs through the city, “just plain sewer water.” But growth-related pollution did manifest itself in distinct ways in greater Tampa from 1950 to 1980, because of the distinct biology and geography of Tampa Bay and the city’s reliance on the Hillsborough River for liquid sustenance.64

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64 Susan Smyer, “City of Houston Wastewater History,” May 2008.
Figure 5-1. An early promotional pamphlet for Hillsborough River State Park. The park was a Great Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps project. Note that this pamphlet, and Figure 5-2, highlight the park’s amenities and the swimming, fishing, wilderness views, and picnicking opportunities offered. By the mid-1970s, the stretches of the river in the park were polluted and closed to swimming, causing attendance to plummet. Pamphlet undated, but likely late 1930s or 1940s. Courtesy of the John F. Germany Public Library vertical file collection, Folder: Hillsborough River.
Figure 5-2. Promotional pamphlet for Hillsborough River State Park. Note the emphasis on swimming and picnicking in a constructed natural space. Pamphlet undated, but likely 1940s. Courtesy of the John F. Germany Public Library vertical file collection, Folder: Hillsborough River.
Figure 5-3. Aerial view of the Hillsborough River’s mouth in 1956. Notice the phosphate train in the right-side foreground, the smoke stacks on the left side along the river’s banks, and downtown Tampa in the right-side background. The mouth of the river was extensively urbanized and industrialized after World War II, in contrast to the river’s upper stretches. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, General Reference Collection, image # RC20679.
Figure 5-4. A 1977 St. Petersburg Times figure that illustrates the elevated pollution levels that afflicted the upper Tampa Bay. Note that the area south of Davis Islands was the most polluted section of Tampa Bay. “Tampa Bay: It will never be as it was,” St. Petersburg Times, November 26, 1979.
Figure 5-5. Lake Thonotosassa fish kill. This event reminded residents of the dangers of pollution and the Tampa-area watershed’s interconnectivity. *St. Petersburg Times*, February 9, 1969.
Figure 5-6. The posting of warning signs during the sewage-spill event of 1979. This pollution disaster closed the Hillsborough River’s middle and lower stretches to recreational activities for approximately one year, and devastated marine life. Tampa Times photograph by August Staebler, undated clipping, John F. Germany Vertical Clipping File, Folder: Hillsborough River.
CHAPTER 6
STRIKE COMMAND AND STRAWBERRIES: THE ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND SOCIETAL IMPACT OF MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE AND BIG AGRIBUSINESS

MacDill Air Force Base and intensive industrial farming in greater Tampa were key postwar institutions. Although citrus groves, strawberry farms, and the military installation were sometimes considered peripheral industries—because of their transient workforces and locations on Tampa’s periphery—both significantly contributed to postwar Tampa’s economy and identity.

World War II and Cold War-era military spending shaped many Sunbelt cities, a fact that has received much scholarly attention and is central to Sunbelt theory. Bradley Rice and Richard Bernard argue that a near universal Sunbelt characteristic is “the positive impact of World War II on metropolitan growth.”¹ This was clearly the case in Tampa, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, and other Sunbelt cities, as historians have often noted. But little has been written about the agricultural enterprises that surrounded some Sunbelt cities, and when scholars have taken notice, they have often divorced agricultural production from their nearby Sunbelt metropolises. With the above in mind, this chapter reinforces the notion that military spending was a primary economic driver in postwar Tampa, while also detailing the particular ways MacDill influenced the area’s economy and environment. The chapter also connects postwar Tampa to the broader central Florida agricultural sector, thereby recognizing and regionalizing Tampa’s relationship to orange, strawberry, vegetable, and cattle production.

This chapter begins with an examination of MacDill Air Force Base’s expansion during World War II. It then describes how the base became home to Strike Command

in the 1950s. Next, the base’s expansion after 1960, its relationship to the Tampa-area growth economy, and the noise, air, and water pollution the installation emitted is examined. The chapter then highlights the base’s role during the Vietnam War, the shift from Strike Command to Readiness Command during the era of Soviet-U.S. Cold War détente, and MacDill officials’ attempts to improve public relations with greater Tampa residents in the 1970s. After describing MacDill’s impact on Tampa in the 1970s, the chapter shifts focus and examines the area’s agricultural enterprises in the postwar decades. In the decades before and after World War II, greater Tampa was an important producer of beef, oranges, strawberries, and other agricultural commodities, nearly all of which were trucked out or shipped through the port. This tied Tampa’s soil and those who worked it to America’s burgeoning consumption-centered economy. After describing these general trends, the chapter examines Tampa-area growers reaction to the 1964-1965 U.S. Department of Labor plan to block licensed foreign agricultural laborers from working on Florida farms. Finally, the chapter closes by chronicling the 1978 Fulwood Farms strawberry workers strike, an event that highlighted Tampa-area farmers use of undocumented migrant labor after 1965 and the harsh living and working conditions faced by greater Tampa agricultural workers.

**MacDill During World War II and the Early Cold War, 1945 to 1960**

World War II military spending brought America’s military complex to Florida full-force. As the nation prepared for war, Florida became an essential training ground and strategic location. U.S. military planners considered fortifying Florida a key to protecting U.S. interests in the Caribbean, particularly the Panama Canal. As a result, according to a University of Florida economic report, Florida was “becoming one of the heaviest fortified areas in the U.S.—a status commiserate with her strategic location in the
Caribbean.” In the late 1930s, the WPA began building Florida military installations and by the time the war was over, the federal government had spent billions on Florida military bases that trained and housed millions of Americans from around the country. And Florida was more than a distant training ground detached from the global conflict’s violent encounters. German U-boats brought the war to Florida’s coast, sinking merchant vessels just off the peninsula’s shores and depositing a small group of German saboteurs, who were soon captured, on a Florida beach.  

Although Floridians and other Americans celebrated the end of the war, many fretted about what would happen to Florida’s economy in the absence of government spending. By 1944, Florida had 175 military installations and between 1940 and V-J Day, military earnings had increased by a staggering twentyfold. By December 1945, only 70 installations remained and statewide military earnings shrunk. The war had been an economic boon for many communities, and the cessation of hostilities, though celebrated, concerned many Florida residents and businesses. But Cold War-era militarization and the related threat of nuclear annihilation and another world war motivated American politicians and military officials to pump federal funds into some

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Florida cities, shaping them in distinct ways. Tampa, with its MacDill Air Force Base, was one such place.⁴

Federal spending first began to dramatically alter Tampa’s economy during the 1930s, and this spending continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s, thanks in large part to MacDill’s World War II and Cold War functions. During the New Deal, the federal government spent approximately $16 million in Hillsborough County and employed approximately 9,000. As World War II approached federal expenditures swelled, and money was funneled into Tampa’s shipbuilding, military airfields, and other war-related facilities and projects. For example, in 1942 businessman Matthew H. McCloskey constructed a facility to build “ships for the war effort,” just south of downtown Tampa.⁵ But the most important wartime facility, in regards to Tampa’s economic future, was MacDill Air Field. Construction on the field began in 1939, when the WPA and War Department slated over $1 million for the 5,700-acre project. The U.S. Army opened the base in 1940 and its payroll topped $305,000 by 1941. MacDill was home to 5,000 military personnel and 61 units by 1942, and quickly grew thereafter, as American involvement in the war escalated. The U.S. Army also built Drew and Henderson Air Fields in Tampa, but MacDill was the city’s largest military installation during World War II. By 1944, MacDill was the workplace for more than 15,000 U.S. military personnel,


⁵ Kernstein, Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa, 94-95.
and Tampa’s economy was reaping the benefits. The base connected the city to military bombing operations, and MacDill was the training ground for B-17, B-26, and B-29 pilots before they were sent to the front. But at the war’s end, the future of MacDill was uncertain, and the federal government closed scores of Florida military installations by the fall of 1945. Seeing and fearing the trend, Tampa boosters argued that the economic impact of a potential MacDill, Drew, or Henderson could be immense.

Eventually Drew and Henderson fields were closed and repurposed, but MacDill survived as a military installation after teetering on the brink of closure throughout the late 1940s. After 1945, MacDill’s personnel numbers dropped dramatically. Pararescue, Survival Training, and other American military units were still stationed at MacDill in the late 1940s, but base proponents fretted that the installation’s closure was eminent. The topography and location of MacDill, however, convinced federal policy makers to keep the base open. Air Force planners argued that since MacDill was on the tip of the south Tampa peninsula, officials did not have to worry about new buildings being erected that could block existing flight paths. They also cited Tampa’s year-round warm weather and transportation facilities as a benefit. By 1950, though the Pentagon was still debating the base’s future, 7,000 military personnel and 1,000 civilians worked at the installation, and their postwar mission was “the peace-time task of maintaining a first-line striking force for the protection of the U.S.” The outbreak of hostilities on the Korean peninsula

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7 “We Get the Big Air Base,” Tampa Morning Tribune, July 14, 1939; “Base Planned as Beautiful Military City,” Tampa Daily Times, December 28, 1939; “Peterson Base to Eventually Cost $20,000,000,” Tampa Morning Tribune, July 14, 1939.
in 1950 convinced many that MacDill and other Cold War installations—creations of the emerging military-industrial complex—were necessary, and MacDill became an important component of Cold War policy-makers’ attempt to create a “peacetime national security state” that emphasized the use of air power and mobilization as an effective counterweight to potential Soviet aggression.8

Throughout the 1950s, the base was an exemplar of the nation’s Cold War security apparatus. The federal government poured funds into MacDill and other Sunbelt installations—like in San Diego and Los Angeles—in order to have its military at so-called “ready strength.”9 In the mid-1950s, the base was home to the Air Force’s Strategic Air Command (SAC) and its new B-47s, which were making transatlantic history by crossing the Atlantic—flying from London to Tampa—in just over 9 hours. The Air Force billed the flights as proof of U.S. military readiness. SAC was primarily responsible for training pilots to be “ready to take off instantly—fully equipped, fully briefed, ready in every respect—as the first frantic announcement of an enemy attack comes shrieking off the wires.” SAC’s airpower, proponents argued, could stymie the plans of communist nations that looked to conquer the world.10 “They must be ready to take a devastating atomic load anywhere in the world,” a Tampa Daily Times reporter wrote, and newspapers publicized that MacDill’s B-47s were capable of delivering atomic payloads to distant war zones, making them a symbol of the U.S. Air Force’s

8 For an examination of the Cold War national security state, of which MacDill was apart of, see Michael J. Hogan, A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); “MacDill in Scenes,” Literary Florida, January 1950; Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams, 163.


postwar global reach. During the 1950s, the base was also the headquarters of the Tactical Air Command and the RAPCON radar system, a technological military marvel at the time, touted as being able to function in all weather. This military technology illustrated how MacDill connected Tampa—in potentially catastrophic ways—to Washington, D.C., London, Moscow, and other important outposts throughout the Cold War globe.11

Yet MacDill’s readiness function was not the only way in which the base shaped Cold War-era Tampa. The base’s hospital, which created influential health-care ties between active-duty American military personnel, veterans, and greater Tampa, also contributed to the city’s economy and population makeup. In 1957, base officials opened MacDill’s new hospital, which cost over $3 million, and the facility served both active and retired military personnel and their families. MacDill officials and Tampa boosters argued that it was the best military hospital in the American South. With new operating rooms, emergency facilities, a clinic, and even an auxiliary power plant, the hospital was state of the art, and designed with growth in mind. In fact, upon opening the hospital was swarmed by patients and immediately overwhelmed, as veterans and their family members, many of whom had recently settled in central Florida during the postwar population boom, as well as active-duty personnel, streamed through the doors. The hospital was so busy, in fact, that in early 1957 hospital administrators announced a 90-day suspension of all “elective” procedures for non-active duty persons. With its dense crowds and doctor shortages, the hospital tied MacDill to

persons throughout the central Florida area, and its packed corridors highlighted just how fast the healthcare industry was expanding along with Florida’s population after the war.\textsuperscript{12}

Still, despite its Cold War military role and health-care facility, the Tampa Chamber of Commerce and many residents feared that the base would close in the 1950s, and in 1962 it almost did. In 1954, the base’s $2.5 million payroll was an essential element of the city’s economy. On top of that, the base spent an additional $750,000 each month on local supplies and services, and after 1956 the hospital attracted thousands from the central Florida area, drawing even more resources into the local economy.\textsuperscript{13} But rumors constantly circulated that MacDill would be decommissioned, and its 7,000 military personnel and B-47 fleet relocated, and medical facilities closed. In 1960, it appeared that the pessimists were right to worry, when the Pentagon announced that it would close the base by mid-1962. Military planners argued that emerging ballistic missile technology, in the form of Atlas and Titan, reduced the need for manned aircraft installations. Although one optimistic Tampa booster told reporters that MacDill’s closure would not pinch the city too hard because it was no longer a one-industry town, others were not so sure. Phosphate, cigars, suburban development, and other industries were economic drivers and might ensure the prosperity of the city, yet the loss of over $3 million a year in payroll and other revenues would literally cost Tampa, and it would be difficult to fill the economic void left by


\textsuperscript{13} “Tampa’s Biggest Payroll,” \textit{Tampa Morning Tribune}, February 9, 1954.
MacDill’s shuttering. Also, veterans groups argued that closing the base hospital would be an injustice to central Florida veterans needing medical care. With this in mind, the City of Tampa and Hillsborough County jointly appropriated $40,000 to find an alternative use for MacDill, and hoped to convince the U.S. Public Health Service to take over the base’s hospital, and for NASA to use the tip of the south Tampa peninsula for the Apollo space program. Others hoped that if the Air Force left, the MacDill site might become a naval facility. But even if MacDill’s former land and building could be successfully repurposed, losing the base would effectively dismantle an essential component of Tampa’s postwar identity. As one local booster wrote, “it has meant a lot to the community to have the high type personnel stationed at MacDill, and they have played an important part in community, civic life.”

The heating up of the Cold War, however, and the related headquartering of Strike Command at MacDill, ultimately persuaded officials to cancel the planned base closure. During the debate over the base’s future, some officials, like U.S. Senator George Smathers, questioned why a military installation so close to Castro’s evolving Leninist experiment would be shuttered. The failed Bay of Pigs invasion and later missile crisis, reinforced Smathers’s contention, and the Pentagon ultimately decided to make MacDill the home of the Air Force’s Strike Command. Strike Command, a force of “versatile fighting men” ready to be “sent on a moment’s notice to anywhere in the

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14For letters from veterans groups and others concerned about the future and repurposing of MacDill see, Mayor Julian Lane Papers, Box 29, Folder: MacDill Airforce Base, City of Tampa Archives: Hereafter cited as CTA-JLP. In particular see the Tampa Chamber of Commerce letter to the Secretary of the Air Force dated March 2, 1960; Scott, _Tampa’s People With a Purpose_, 206-207; Harry Robarts, “Air Force Says MacDill Will Close in June of 1962,” _Tampa Tribune_, November 29, 1960.
world,” was headquartered at MacDill in 1961. Strike Command employed 5,500 military and civilian personnel, and was in part created in response to North Korea’s invasion of South Korea, the Lebanese invasion of 1958, and, of course, the Cuban Revolution. Strike Command was a combat-ready force that could be instantaneously deployed to ensure that no proverbial Cold War dominoes fell, and it was designed to “infiltrate, insurrect, and intimidate” communists around the world.

Although concerns about base closure continued even after Strike Command was headquartered at MacDill, the federal funds that Strike Command brought to Tampa’s Air Force installation were substantial. In 1965, the Pentagon requested $9.6 million for new MacDill infrastructure and other improvements, including a new headquarters building for Strike Command. By the mid-1960s, MacDill officials bragged that the base was the home of the greatest fighter planes in the world. The Phantom—which could fly at over 100,000 feet and twice the speed of sound—and other advanced military planes utilized MacDill’s runways and storage facilities, making the base the home of cutting-edge aviation technology. MacDill was also a training and departure point for Air Force mechanics sent to the steadily escalating war in Vietnam. And of

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\textbf{Pollution, Crashes, and Integration, 1962 to 1980}

Although many Tampans believed that MacDill spending was an important component of Tampa’s postwar economy, the relationship between the city and the base was not without its problems. In particular, thanks to Tampa’s postwar growth economy, some suburban residents railed against the noise, air, and water pollution emitted by the base. Hence, the logic and priorities of Tampa’s multi-faceted makeup brought MacDill and the suburban growth economy into conflict, and compelled them to compete and coexist.

Since the early years of the Cold War, MacDill authorities worked hard to integrate the base and its personnel into the broader Tampa community. The World War II years had at times created conflict between the city and the base. Prostitution was rampant in the city during the war, and the city’s women’s jail was consistently overcrowded. Military officials blamed the Tampa Police Department and local politicians for not sufficiently cracking down on local prostitutes, while city officials blamed the base. During the early Cold War, Tampa boosters and military officials worked to reframe the relationship between the base, its personnel, and the Tampa community, once it became clear that MacDill was likely in Tampa to stay. Base and city officials crafted a public image based on integration and cooperation. For example, in a \textit{Tampa Daily Times} story an early SAC commander—administrative officer Elliot
Vandevanter—was depicted as an upstanding executive and family man, one who enhanced the image of the city rather than making it a cauldron of vice (Figure 6-2). The officer and the pilots under his command reportedly spent quiet nights at home, a testament to their upstanding character and concerns that their personal “readiness” would be stymied by hangovers and other party-associated ailments. “Whenever you go to MacDill or any other SAC base,” the *Tampa Daily Times* reported, “you find a personality type parallel to the middle-management class.” In this story and others like it, Officer Vandevanter and his SAC team were publically framed as respectable men with briefcases, the anti-thesis of reckless World War II-era adventure seeking flyboys, who sought out good times defined by alcohol and promiscuousness.\(^\text{18}\) Like in Atlanta, Charlotte, and other Sunbelt cities, Tampa wished to depict itself as a Southern home for business professionals, and thus the local press depicted MacDill’s personnel as upstanding white-collar citizens.

Framing SAC officers and other MacDill personnel as upstanding citizens, however, did not stop the pollution emitted by the base that many locals abhorred. One pollutant that particularly troubled neighbors was noise from the MacDill’s aircraft. In the 1950s and 1960s, residents of South Tampa, Davis Islands, Interbay, and other Tampa neighborhoods complained about the noise emanating from MacDill’s aircraft as they flew overhead during takeoffs and landings. Although MacDill officials attempted to control the noise level, and made promises that new technologies would decrease the volume, problems persisted. In the mid-1950s, MacDill authorities claimed that new jets

that could fly faster and climb higher would reduce air noise. But this proved not to be the case, and noise complaints persisted through the 1960s. In fact, jet noise became such a problem and point of conflict between the Air Force and Tampa's suburban community that the federal government allocated $1 million to study the problem and invest in sound suppressors for engine testing procedures, but noise persisted throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Residents regularly complained that base noise negatively affected their quality of life and their property values. One Tampa woman even argued that jet noise devalued her home by $3,000. Residents complained that the noise was deafening, and that it occurred both day and night, and made their neighborhoods a “slum.” “You have to live here to know what we go through night and day with jet traffic,” Interbay resident Theo Marullo told the *Tampa Times*. MacDill officials altered flight patterns and drastically decreased weekend flights, but they contended that most operations were essential. Six day-a-week and late-night training missions for the Phantom II and other aircraft were necessary, they argued, due to the airpower demands of the escalating Vietnam War. U.S. Congressman Samuel Gibbons even told one Tampa resident that noise emitted by the base was the “sound of freedom.” Yet even Gibbons took noise complaints seriously, and his office worked with the Air Force in an attempt to find a solution.\(^\text{19}\)

Making matters worse, the nuisance of noise was not the only MacDill pollutant or danger faced by greater Tampa. The base’s air and water pollution emissions also irked residents and undermined suburban property values during the postwar decades. As fears over the declining environmental health of the Hillsborough River and connected upper Tampa Bay ecosystem grew, environmentalists and local politicians criticized MacDill for emitting pollution. In 1968, Hillsborough County Commissioner Frank Neff said at a Tampa pollution conference that MacDill, like the city, was guilty of dumping improperly treated sewage into the Tampa Bay, thereby damaging the estuary. MacDill effluents—like the one’s released in the Hillsborough River and at Hooker’s Point—were cited as a contributor to the pollution in upper Tampa Bay and the related stench along Bayshore Blvd, a roadway that connected MacDill to downtown Tampa (Figure 2-8). Environmentalists and suburbanites argued that MacDill’s sewage processing facility, which dumped refuse into the upper Tampa Bay approximately 7 miles from downtown Tampa, was inadequate, much like the city’s facility. In response, base officials said they would work to update the facilities in the 1960s, but that the increasing cost of the Vietnam War would delay federal funding needed to complete the project. Along with emitting water pollution, the base was also cited by Hillsborough County’s environmental protection agency for emitting air pollution.

But the deadliest and scariest, albeit infrequent, threat MacDill’s operations posed were airplane crashes. In May of 1966, a MacDill F4C crashed in a residential area of Davis Islands, just south of downtown Tampa, damaging five homes. The accident was the fourth time a MacDill aircraft had crashed in a residential

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neighborhood since 1962. Fortunately in two of the accidents, the pilots were able to eject unharmed, but one accident killed a pilot and created a “fiery trail some 600 yards” through a residential neighborhood in Tampa. Luckily, the crash did not kill any residents. A later accident in Lakeland led to the death of two more pilots. These accidents were in part a result of increased training flights sparked by American military escalation in Vietnam. The flights, base officials argued, were needed to prepare pilots. The pollution and accidents, although far from military planners’ search-and-destroy jungle missions in Vietnam, tied Tampa to the Cold War and America’s vast military-industrial complex in harrowing ways.21

Hospital overcrowding at MacDill also continued to be a problem throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Since opening in the mid-1950s, MacDill’s medical facilities were understaffed and overwhelmed by veterans and their family members, and many complained about long wait times to see doctors. The Air Force argued that it was doing all that it could to provide care for veterans and their families, but administrators made it clear that caring for active-duty personnel was the hospital’s top priority. As one Air Force official wrote in 1976, there was no way MacDill facilities could provide “total medical care when the capacity simply does not exist.”22 Although active-duty personnel were provided for, the Air Force argued that veterans should seek civilian care when possible. This advice frustrated many central Floridians that hoped to use the base’s


medical facilities, but the long waits were not surprising considering the large number of veterans who lived in Florida after World War II. By 1959, the *Tampa Tribune* estimated “some 12,000 to 14,000 families of retired military personnel” were living within 100 miles of MacDill, and these numbers only increased in the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, a reported 1,000 retirees were coming to Florida every week, and by 1970 14.6% of Florida’s population was over 64 years old. This was approximately 5% higher than the national average. Based on these statistics, it is no surprise that MacDill’s healthcare facilities were overcrowded as soon as their doors opened.

As the Vietnam War wound down in the early 1970s, rumors again swirled that U.S.-Soviet détente would shut MacDill’s gates, but the base proved resilient in the face of federal government spending cuts. MacDill was not decommissioned in the 1970s, and it instead continued to be an important component of Tampa’s economy and culture. As Strike Command gave way to U.S. Readiness Command, several thousand military personnel remained at MacDill, and, fortunately for pilots, Tampa residents and military planners, plane crashes decreased in the 1970s. Yet jet noise still plagued certain areas of the city, and in one case a piece of MacDill military ordinance—in the form of a 25 lb. practice bomb—was accidently dropped in a homeowner’s yard.

Pollution continued to be an issue as well. Although the base improved its sewage treatment facility by the 1970s, another pollution concern emerged, when the base’s incinerator, allegedly used for burning classified documents, was cited for pollution. All

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the while, like phosphate companies, base officials stressed the economic impact of the military installation, and MacDill’s airshows and open houses—which it held for public relations purposes—attracted thousands of visitors.26

Tampa mayor Dick Greco’s 1971 flight in a MacDill fighter jet highlighted the close ties between the base and the city. Mayor Greco’s comment that “I don’t particularly like airplanes, but this one is so much a part of Tampa, I felt I should take a ride,” which he said just before takeoff, summed up the sentiment of many residents. After World War II MacDill was in some ways a “city within a city,” but it was also an integrated component of Tampa’s interindustrial economy.27

Agribusiness in Tampa, 1945 to 1964

Greater Tampa farms were important agricultural producers in the first half of the twentieth century, and after World War II, Tampa-area agribusinesses increased their output exponentially. By the 1960s, most small farms and farmers had succumbed to large agribusinesses in the Tampa area, and citrus, strawberries, and cattle were three primary postwar agricultural commodities. In fact, Hillsborough County produced more strawberries than any other county in America for over a hundred years. The postwar


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decades were a time of large harvests, migrant labor, and occasional labor unrest, and the economic impact of big agribusiness was substantial. Industrial agricultural shaped greater Tampa and connected it to the global food market and migrant labor, and Tampa’s strawberry farms, orange groves, and other forms of agriculture used tremendous amounts of water, stressing the local resources of an area that was already home to polluted waterways, a water-intensive phosphate industry, and rampant suburban development. Historian Gary Mormino has argued that the evolution and corporatization of modern Florida agriculture was one of “the most powerful themes propelling the state’s growth: displacement and resettlement, increasing specialization and the concentration of capital, and new levels of consolidation and scale.” This was certainly the case in postwar Tampa’s agricultural lands.

The foundation for this growth was laid in the 1920s and 1930s. During these decades, changing consumer tastes prompted citrus and vegetable growers to increase production and launch new marketing campaigns. For example, between 1911 and 1929, American consumption of citrus doubled from 20 lbs. of per capita to 40 lbs., and citrus, primarily orange, consumption soared from there. Although a 1929 Mediterranean fly outbreak and related bad harvest temporarily derailed agricultural

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production, the advent of canned concentrated orange juice in the 1930s and later frozen concentrated orange juice, solved a delivery and flavor problem for the citrus industry. They also made Florida citrus a global commodity. The winter vegetable market boomed as well, and in the 1920s Hillsborough County was a leading vegetable producer, and the Plant City area—approximately 30 miles from downtown Tampa and linked to the city by Interstate 4 in the 1960s—produced about 60% of the state’s strawberries.30

After World War II, Tampa and greater Florida agribusinesses boomed alongside phosphate mining, tourism, and suburban growth. In 1960 Florida farms produced four-and-a-half-times more commodities than they had in 1930. Advances in fertilizer technology, the state farmer’s market, the Agricultural Marketing Board, postcards, fiddle tunes about the “Orange Blossom trail,” the global postwar population boom, and other initiatives spurred this increase. Florida’s production of beans, tomatoes, corn, and other crops skyrocketed along with its population, and in 1945 Florida overtook California as the number one orange producer, and by 1960 Florida harvested three times more oranges than California.31

Tampa-area farmlands played an important role in this agricultural bonanza. Thanks to its port, its proximity to central Florida orange fields, and industrial capacity, Tampa became an important orange growing and processing center. During the early Cold War, the Port of Tampa—whose primary export was phosphate—was the nation’s largest exporter of citrus products. But the city did more than export fruit. Tampa was


also the leading center for the production of canned and later frozen concentrated orange juice, destined for breakfast tables in the U.S. suburbs and markets throughout the world (Figure 6-4 and 6-5). In the early 1940s, hundreds of workers—most of them women—worked in canning facilities, and canned juice was shipped to England, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Sweden, Norway and other countries. As noted in chapter two, the Tampa area was home to 60 of the 63 canning facilities in Florida in 1948-1949, and these facilities collectively generated 120,000,000,000 cans of processed citrus and 10,000,000 gallons of frozen orange concentrate, reportedly solving the “overproduction” concerns of industry analysts. As one industry observer wrote, “orange concentrate has suddenly become the hope of the nations’ surplus-ridden $800 million orange industry. It is fast revolutionizing American breakfast preparations, and may make the squeezer as out-moded as grandma’s coffee grinder.” Tampa orange farmers and citrus-related businesses predicted that in the future increasingly more of Florida’s oranges would be processed into frozen concentrate, and other products like citrus-based cattle feed—itself a $5.5 million industry by 1950—would reap huge profits (Figure 6-6). 32

As the frozen concentrate market took off, so did Tampa-area orange cultivation. The Tampa Tribune reported that orange growers were looking for new lands in the 1950s, which drove up the price of groveland, and that by 1954 approximately 27.6

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million orange trees were under cultivation in Florida, a nearly 80% increase since the end of World War II. As the 1950s closed, analysts marveled at the industry’s tremendous growth and corporate consolidation since World War II, and Homer E. Hooks of the Polk County-based Florida Citrus Commission told a reporter that he predicted the “development of citrus products during the next decade that we only dream of today.” By 1970, over 50 million orange trees were producing for the market, and the majority of them were clustered in the central Florida region.33

Tampa fruit, vegetable, and cattle producing hinterlands and industrial manufacturing facilities expanded along with the state’s orange industry and changing American consumer tastes. Unlike water-locked neighboring Pinellas County, where orange groves and agricultural lands gave way almost completely to suburban development by 1970, Hillsborough County and its eastern and southern neighbors continued to be prominent producers of agricultural commodities. Contrary to Pinellas County, Tampa’s agricultural hinterlands to the north, east, and southeast had ample space in which to sprawl, but this did cause agribusinesses to abut, compete, and coexist with phosphate mining operations and newly developed suburbs.

Some orange groves and cattle farms were impacted by phosphate production, and agricultural industries polluted local waterways. Orange growers argued that phosphate pollutants damaged their groves, and cattle ranchers complained that phosphate air emissions sickened their cattle. But some growers and ranchers

established operations on reclaimed phosphate lands. Runoff from farms, like MacDill’s sewage discharges, polluted local waterways, like the Hillsborough River. The agricultural industry also used vast amounts of water. Cynthia Barnett study of Florida freshwater sources highlights that “the largest slice of the state’s water pie” goes to agriculture. Thus, the industrial-scale agribusinesses in Tampa’s hinterlands put tremendous pressure on water sources that were also tapped into by the phosphate and growth industries.34

Using Florida’s freshwater sources as their foundation, strawberry, orange, vegetable, and cattle Tampa-area agribusinesses linked the city to the booming global population. Like with phosphate, Tampa’s port connected the region’s hinterlands to international markets, but some of the region’s produce found its way to local markets and the booming Tampa suburbs. Local grocery store chains Publix and Winn Dixie, as well as Morrison’s cafeteria, reportedly purchased large portions of Hillsborough County’s market vegetables in the early 1960s. In order to feed the world’s hunger stomachs, beef production from the Tampa region also expanded, tracking the rise of fast food restaurants and boxed beef, and a related 36% increase in national beef consumption between 1960 and 1972. In 1959, Polk and Hillsborough County—which were the top-two cattle producing counties in Florida—each had cattle herds that topped 77,000 head.35

Tampa’s agribusinesses were connected to various markets by the city’s port, the federal interstate system, and marketing campaigns. By the 1950s, Minute Maid, 34 Barnett, Mirage, 38-39, 56.

Snow Crop, and Birds Eye dominated the Florida orange juice market, and they spent lavishly to promote their products after World War II. For example, Minute Maid produced radio shows and made legendary singer Bing Crosby a centerpiece of its early postwar corporate marketing campaign. Other orange producers and strawberry farmers also used festivals, ornate advertisements, and actors to promote their products as well. Along with this advertising, new infrastructure paved the way to increased agricultural profits. In 1967, Tampa built a state-of-the-art cattle-exporting facility near the Hooker’s Point sewage treatment plant. This made Tampa home to one of the “few ports in the entire nation where [live] cattle could be exported,” and the port was already the nation’s top citrus exporting location. Like the cattle facility, the postwar interstate system and the booming American trucking industry connected Tampa agricultural commodities to produce stands and refrigerators throughout the nation. Local farms also tied the city to migrant workers, both domestic and foreign, during the Cold War.  

**Migrant Labor in Agricultural Tampa, 1960 to 1978**

Of course crops do not harvest themselves, and Tampa’s agribusinesses needed workers’ hands to supply goods to the market. As the number of orange trees and strawberries grew, so did the need to hire field hands, thereby making migrants, their labor, and their dwellings an important component of postwar Tampa’s economy and society. Historian Cindy Hahamovitch has argued that corporate and government sponsorship of the transportation and use of migrant labor changed the ethnic and racial makeup of farm laborers in the twentieth century. This was certainly the case in

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agricultural Tampa. Like in South Florida’s sugar farms, migrant labor was used extensively after World War II by greater Tampa agribusinesses, and after the 1960s, the vast majority of migrant workers were undocumented foreign workers. In this regard, the hiring, housing, and working conditions imposed on migrants by Tampa agribusinesses in many ways mirrored conditions found in America’s other agricultural communities.

After World War II, both domestic and foreign-born workers labored on Tampa-area farms. As the Cold War evolved, however, nearly all Tampa farms hired foreign-born laborers. Officials estimated that in the early 1950s Florida had a migrant labor force of approximately 16,000. Hahamovitch and others have argued that Florida growers preferred foreign-born labor during the Cold War decades. Growers believed that foreign-born workers were more productive, and farm-crew managers admitted that they could drive them harder and discipline them with threats of deportation, in ways inapplicable to domestic pickers. A vice president of the U.S. Sugar Corporation reinforced this notion when he said that if he could fire and deport American workers the way he could foreign-born ones “they’d work harder too.” Foreign-born workers were also cheaper, and allowed growers the opportunity to pit one group against another if need be. As historians have regularly pointed out, for much of American history factory owners, growers, and others labor-reliant capitalists have considered immigrants to be a “golden stream,” that increased revenues by supplying ample labor, depressing wages,


and undermining solidarity and organization in the labor movement. This was certainly the case in postwar Tampa.39

The controversy that erupted over the blockage of foreign workers by the Department of Labor in the mid-1960s illustrated how prevalent the use of foreign labor had become in Tampa citrus operations. Beginning in the 1950s, federal officials worked to promote domestic labor, and U.S. Labor Secretary William Wirtz reasoned that if the flow of foreign-born labor into Florida and other agricultural markets was thwarted, conditions would improve for domestic migrant workers. Wirtz and his supporters hoped to both improve wages, working, and living conditions for farm workers, while also domesticizing farm labor. The televising of Edward R. Murrow’s “Harvest of Shame” in 1960—which broadcast to a national audience the hardships faced by Florida’s agricultural workers—exacerbated these existing sentiments, and exposed Americans to the harsh conditions faced by migrants. In 1964, Wirtz and his supporters successfully blocked the legal flow of foreign-born farm laborers to Florida and other American agricultural areas, when the Bracero program that funneled Mexican workers into the Southwest U.S., and the program that brought Bahamian and other guest workers to Florida, was ended.40

Tampa-area growers, and the politicians who represented them, lobbied against this blockage of foreign labor, arguing that domestic labor was insufficient and inferior.

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40 Mormino, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams, 221.
U.S. Congressman Sam Gibbons received a series of letters from growers and others involved in Tampa-area agribusiness that decried Wirtz’s policy. One letter—which is representative of much of the correspondence Gibbons received from growers—argued that domestic migrant laborers were often not “worth the bus ticket to bring them to Florida,” and that the federal government was creating a problem where one had not existed. But U.S. Department of Labor did not budge, and when foreign labor was curtailed in 1965, domestic citrus pickers noted improving conditions on Florida farms. A 1966 *St. Petersburg Times* story noted that citrus workers were receiving higher wages and were no longer being charged for harvesting bags. Workers complained that housing continued to be substandard, but that overall farm conditions had improved.\(^{41}\)

Growers’ desire for foreign labor, however, ultimately won out, and undocumented foreign workers were used in the fields in the late 1960s and 1970s. Growers claimed during these decades that domestic labor was inadequate, and their arguments against American workers were often racially tinged. Farm administrators charged that foreign laborers were willing to work longer hours and for less pay, whereas domestic workers, especially the nation’s working-class black population, were just too lazy for farm work. For example, one Polk County grower complained that only 20% of Wauchula’s black population was willing to work hard. As historian Erin Conlin argues in her study of Bahamian workers in Florida, domestic field hands rejected the “Depression era wages” Florida growers tried to impose for fieldwork during the 1950s and 1960s. After World War II, domestic farmworkers’ expectations instead rose, much

to growers’ chagrin, and many left farm labor behind for better paying industry jobs. This spurred farm owners to argue that foreign laborers were better harvesters, harder working, and that they had skills domestic workers were either unable or unwilling to procure. Some growers also said that domestic workers had been made soft and lazy by the liberal welfare policies of President Johnson’s Great Society, and that they abused the food stamp program.42

Although the federal government did not reopen Florida fields to foreign guest workers, Tampa-area farmers won the labor debate via extra-legal means. While farm proceeds and outputs grew in the 1960s and 1970s, Tampa growers complained that high picking and labor-recruitment costs caused fruits and vegetable to root in the fields. Farm owners also claimed that the high cost of phosphate-based fertilizers—which was good for Florida phosphate companies’ bottom lines—cut into their profits. One Florida farm owner told a reporter, “As far as I see it, we’re being pushed into a bind. We’re getting about the same price but fertilizers and other things we buy are going up.” Some even threatened to abandon farming altogether. All the while, many farms began to hire more “undocumented” laborers, citing that only foreign labor could solve these problems. By the mid-1970s, Tampa’s agribusiness workforce was nearly entirely composed of foreign-born laborers. As Mexican labor historians Ronald Mize and Alicia Swords have argued about other American agricultural sectors, Tampa’s agricultural production and consumption rested primarily on the backs on Mexican labor, mostly of the undocumented variety. By the early 1970s, the vast majority of domestic pickers—

like those chronicled in the *St. Petersburg Times* story—that saw improvements in working conditions and wages in 1965, by 1970s were no longer engaged in farm labor because of growers’ preference for undocumented Latin workers.\(^{43}\)

Despite all the complaints about labor and costs, Tampa’s agribusinesses raked in huge profits in the 1970s as undocumented migrants harvested the fields. In 1974, cash receipts for Florida farms totaled more than $2 billion. Citrus, tobacco, and sugar cane made up over half of Florida’s agricultural commodities. Cattle, honey, strawberries and other products were also important to the state’s agricultural sector. Analysts estimated that the Tampa area produced 1 of every 200 eggs in the world. Although suburban developers were gobbling up large tracts of land—by the 1970s farming in Pinellas had become almost nonexistent—Hillsborough and other Tampa-area counties were still producing agricultural commodities in bulk. Between 1959 and 1973, the state’s crop output increased 69%, and a 1974 U.S. Census study concluded that Florida ranked second in the nation in corporate farming. A University of Florida agriculturalist predicted a 36% increase in Florida agricultural production between 1975 and 1985. Florida’s agribusinesses employed a reported 132,000 workers “in primary production” and 200,000 more in agricultural processing, transportation, and marketing in the mid-1970s. Florida Governor Reubin Askew told the press in 1975 that Florida “agriculture is a $10 billion industry that produces either directly or indirectly about one third of all the employment in our state.” Festivals and farmers’ markets celebrated the agricultural bounty of the Cold War period, while pickers generally labored and lived in the shadows. This was the case with Plant City’s annual strawberry festival, which

\(^{43}\) Mize and Swords, *Consuming Mexican Labor: From the Bracero Program to NAFTA*, xxxii, xxxvi.
expanded exponentially during the Cold War. After World War II, the strawberry festival was a multi-day event, involving parades, parties, and the crowning of a strawberry queen, and it celebrated growers and consumers, while ignoring the workers in the fields, much like the cigar industry ignored the women that operated Tampa’s cigar machines in the 1970s (Figure 6-7).44

But not everyone ignored the hardships field hands endured. Askew requested that farm owners improve conditions for field hands, many of whom he claimed “remain forgotten outsiders, mere onlookers to the prevailing prosperity of our agricultural economy” in the 1970s. Echoing these sentiments, a critic of Florida corporate farming argued that one firm kept its migrant workers in “virtual bondage” and that “nearly every dollar they [migrants] earned went to pay for the overpriced food and illegal booze” the company provided. Workers also criticized the industry, and at times fought to improve farm conditions.45

**The Fulwood Farms Strawberry Strike, 1978 to 1980**

The 1978 Fulwood strawberry workers’ strike highlighted greater Tampa’s move toward undocumented agricultural labor, and it legitimated Governor Askew’s concerns over the treatment of farm workers. In 1978, migrant farmworkers—nearly all “Chicanos”—on Ronnie Fulwood’s strawberry farm went on strike. The U.S. Justice Department investigated the standoff between Fulwood and the migrants, and the strike ultimately cost Fulwood and the workers over $1 million in wages and strawberries. The

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44 “Souvenir Program…for the 26th Annual Strawberry Festival,” Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage, Item # 2005.800.120, 12B02, Box 4039.

event also underscored the Tampa area’s transition to undocumented migrant agricultural labor after the mid-1960s.

The protest and strike began when a migrant worker was allegedly beaten by a farm official, and later by a deputy sheriff, after being arrested for aggravated battery and resisting arrest. Workers complained the man, who was hospitalized after the alleged beating, was unfairly attacked, and a protest and a work stoppage were organized. The Hillsborough County Sheriff’s office denied that a deputy had beaten the man, and it dismissed the protest as a publicity ploy. Nevertheless, 200 workers picketed and struck over the alleged incidents. The picketers also protested an alleged physical altercation between a farm supervisor and two migrant female workers, as well as harsh working and living conditions at Fulwood. One worker told the press, “we want better treatment and better wages,” and another said that migrants “are not going to let anyone push us around.” Police ultimately arrested 55 workers for unlawful assembly and blocking a Fulwood Farms’ driveway, but the protest continued, and workers contended—like the Corral-Wodiskia cigarmakers from 1962—that the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s office was taking sides. Fulwood officials argued that the events were overblown, and just an attempt by workers to increase already high wages and complain about conditions. Fulwood farm supervisor Tommy Dickens said, “We are paying good wages here. We think this is just a trick to get organized labor in here, and we don’t need it.” Workers disagreed, and told an investigator for Florida’s Department of Community Affairs that at the farm pesticides were sprayed while they worked in the fields, and that in at least one instance migrants were paid by the hour at the end of the
day instead of being paid—as they were told before work commenced—by the amount harvested. Other safety concerns were also reported.46

The day after the standoff started, Fulwood began evicting workers from migrant housing on the farm and brought in black workers to harvest strawberries. Both actions exacerbated the confrontation. Fulwood officials said the housing was for working migrants, and that if the migrants were not working they could not live there, and the NAACP pleaded for black workers not to cross the picket line. The United Migrant Association supported the strikers, and stated that hundreds of other migrants could potentially join the protest. With the assistance of labor organizer Benito Lopez, the strikers made a series of demands that included all picketing workers be rehired and evictions halted, Fulwood wages be increased to match the average of other strawberry farms, crew leaders be officially registered with the proper authorities, physical abuse be stopped, and a grievance committee formed (Figure 6-8). Fulwood countered that it paid less because its berries were easier to pick, and it refuted claims of abuse and unsafe working conditions. Farm officials also complained that the farm was losing tens of thousands of dollars due to the work stoppage.47

With Fulwood officials refusing to talk or meet with Lopez and others, the pickers and Fulwood were at an impasse. The U.S. Justice Department, the Florida Department of Commerce, Catholic priests, nor mediators could persuade Fulwood officials to meet with Lopez and other organizers. “We will not negotiate,” a farm official said. Farm


supervisor Tommy Dickens dismissed the migrants, saying “They’re like ladybugs. When you are driving down the road, who needs them?” Fulwood officials built a dirt trench and told Lopez and other protestors they would be arrested if they crossed it. The workers threatened to do so, but the arrival of 30 deputies stymied these plans (Figure 6-9). Bay Area Legal Services filed a lawsuit against Fulwood, on the behalf of workers, arguing the farm violated labor laws, and the U.S. Justice Department launched an investigation of the alleged physical abuse of workers on the farm. Later the farm was opened to the public for picking, as Fulwood officials continued to complain of steep revenue loses, and workers continued their protest, complaining of discrimination and injustice. One protesting migrant worker said, “We are the blacks of 20, 30 years ago,” and others chanted, “Up with the race. Up with the Chicanos. Up with the strike.” Fulwood did receive support from some local growers, and a counter demonstration was organized. Strawberry grower C.O. Tew told the press, “Something like this could happen to any of us. It can start on rumors and the farmer has little he can do about it.” But the counter protest was reportedly more anti-Lopez and more generally anti-labor organization, than it was supportive of Fulwood, who had allegedly alienated many local growers.

In the end, the largest agricultural labor conflict in Hillsborough County in the 1970s, which took place on a farm of the largest strawberry grower east of the Mississippi River, lasted eight days. The strike did not fundamentally change Tampa-area agribusiness and farm labor practices, even though it did put pressure on Fulwood’s operations. For example, the Hillsborough County health department pressed Fulwood to improve conditions, after a visit to migrant quarters on the company’s local
farms revealed sewage leaks and other health threats. Still, the confrontation between the workers, Benito Lopez, and Ronnie Fulwood did not overthrow the undocumented labor regime that defined greater Tampa agriculture in the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, migrant labor continued to be used, and agricultural commodities continued to stream out of Tampa farms.\textsuperscript{48}

As the 1980s dawned, Tampa and its hinterlands were still important agricultural producers. Despite the area’s growing population, suburban and tourist economies, and phosphate and other heavy industries, much of the region continued to be agricultural in nature. In 1981, Hillsborough County alone was estimated to have 318,852 acres under cultivation, and to have produced 70 billion oranges and 80,000 head of cattle. These farms and their commodities, and others from neighboring counties, and the migrants and other farm workers who harvested their bounties, ensured that agriculture was an important component of Tampa’s interindustrial economy.\textsuperscript{49}

MacDill Air Force Base and agribusiness shaped postwar Tampa in distinct ways. To some, MacDill and agribusinesses seemed like peripheral industries, as they both attracted transient, and some argued undesirable, persons to the city, and they located on Tampa’s periphery. The military base brought Air Force personnel to the Tampa and the agricultural fields attracted migrant workers, who by the 1970s were


\textsuperscript{49} Michael Bane and Mary Ellen Moore, \textit{Tampa}, 120-121.
largely foreign born, like the industrial-era cigarworkers from Tampa’s signature industry. Nevertheless, MacDill and the industrial-agricultural spaces of Tampa greatly influenced Tampa’s development and identity from 1950 to 1980, just like U.S. military spending and large agribusinesses shaped Los Angeles and Phoenix. MacDill connected Tampa’s environment and residents to the Cold War order, and big agribusinesses—in particular oranges and strawberries—tied the city to the global marketplace in distinct ways. The money MacDill pumped into the local economy, the pollution it emitted, the open-houses it held, and the destruction its planes tragically caused, in the form of crashes and other accidents, linked Tampa’s waterways, skies, and neighborhoods to the postwar national security state, the Cuban Revolution, and Vietnam. Tampa’s agribusinesses created different, yet influential, ties. Agricultural commodities tied the city to strawberry daiquiri mixes, backyard grills, and breakfast tables throughout the country, and even the broader global marketplace. Agribusinesses also brought migrant workers to the city, thereby connecting Tampa to the streams of migrants who followed the harvest, and foreign-born guest, and later undocumented, workers.
Figure 6-1. Aerial view of MacDill Air Force Base in 1954. The sprawling base was an important contributor to Tampa’s economy and identity after World War II, and the base tied Tampa to the Cold War global order. “Aerial View of Military Housing at MacDill Air Force Base,” Burgert Brothers Collection, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System, image # ocm52255079.
Figure 6-2. Strategic Air Command administrative officer Elliot Vandevanter with briefcase in hand. Throughout the Cold War period, base officials and civilian leaders depicted MacDill personnel as upstanding middle-class citizens, to assuage residents’ concerns over the presence of MacDill personnel. *Tampa Daily Times*, April 13, 1954.
Figure 6-3. Wreckage of a MacDill F4C jet. Jet noise, water pollution, and occasional airplane crashes reminded Tampans of how MacDill tied the city to the American Cold War military-industrial complex. Pictured here is a wreck that killed two MacDill pilots when their plane tragically crashed into an orange grove. *Tampa Tribune*, September 28, 1965.
Figure 6-4. A picture of a frozen concentrated orange juice factory in the 1950s. Greater Tampa was Florida’s top citrus processing center after World War II. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection. Reference Collection, image # RC15590.

Figure 6-5. A 1963 frozen concentrated orange juice advertisement. Florida citrus and other agricultural products connected Tampa to breakfast tables around the world. Courtesy of State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory Photographic Collection, Steinmetz Collection, 1963, image # JJS1823.
Figure 6-6. Tampa-area orange harvest. Tampa was home to industrial-scale orange growing and processing from 1945 to 1980. Note the caption, which references Tampa’s port and the importance of citrus to Florida’s economy. “Citrus Developments Aid Exports,” Port of Tampa Commercial Digest, 7-11, October 1949.
Figure 6-7. The 1961 Strawberry Festival program. This festival, and others like it, celebrated the agricultural bounty of the postwar period. These festivals, however, never referenced the workers that labored in Florida fields. Currie B. and Lavinia Sparkman Witt Research Center at the Tampa Bay History Center, Collections Storage.
Figure 6-8. Striking migrant workers picketed and criticized Fulwood Farms’ attempt to use black replacement laborers during their strike. Benito Lopez—a labor organizer—is pictured above leading the workers. *Tampa Tribune*, April 13, 1978.

Figure 6-9. Police officers at migrant worker strike. A 1978 strike at a Hillsborough County strawberry farm illustrated Tampa-area farmers’ use of undocumented foreign-born workers in the 1970s. Police, pictured above, were called in to “protect” private property during the strike. *Tampa Tribune*, April 13, 1978.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

From the beginning, Tampa was an industrial city—in contrast to most of the rest of Florida—and its economy rested on a series of businesses rather than one leg alone. The climate was and is a never-ending boon, providing the county with the basis for its huge agricultural industry as well as attracting visitors and residents.—Michael Bane and Mary Ellen Moore, *Tampa: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 1981.

This dissertation has argued that from 1950 to 1980, the phosphate industry, cigar manufacturing, Ybor City, Busch Gardens, suburban growth, pollution, MacDill Air Force Base, and big agribusinesses molded greater Tampa into a distinct and recognizable southern city that defies simple Sunbelt categorization. Using an interindustrial lens, the urban history told here has demonstrated how these economic manifestations, and their pollutants, were compelled to exist among and between one another. During the Cold War, no individual industry ever dominated greater Tampa's economy. Instead, the city's various industries combined to make Tampa the pluralistic place depicted in the two Tampa Chamber of Commerce films—*We Discovered Tampa* and *Tampa Serendipity*—that are described in this dissertation's opening paragraph.

Tampa-area phosphate operations ensured that draglines, phosphate moonscapes, and industry emitted air and water pollution shaped the city and its hinterlands. From 1950 to 1980, phosphate companies—like Brewster and International Minerals and Chemicals—created economic and environmental links between Tampa's port, the Florida aquifer, European farms, Cuban sugar fields, the broader Eastern Bloc economy, and American suburban homeowners who sprinkled phosphate-based fertilizers on their lawns. Phosphate operations also abutted, polluted alongside, and competed with Tampa's other major postwar industries. For example, suburban homes were built on reclaimed phosphate lands, phosphate trains rumbled through postwar
Ybor City, and industry pollutants mingled with suburban sewage and agricultural runoff to pollute the upper Tampa Bay. Even after 1980, the phosphate industry continued to be a major economic component of greater Tampa’s economy. It also continued to be a polluter, a fact recently highlighted when a sinkhole at a phosphate facility caused 215 million gallons of radioactive and acidic wastewater to be dumped into the Florida aquifer in late 2016. This event drew the ire of the Sierra Club and other Tampa-area environmental groups in ways reminiscent of the Cold War decades.\(^1\)

Like phosphate companies, Tampa’s postwar cigar factories ensured that areas of the city were dedicated to industrial production from 1950 to 1980. After World War II, Tampa’s cigar companies continued to roll, box, and sell hundreds of millions of cigars annually. But the industry was consolidated and further mechanized during the 1950s and 1960s, and it no longer dominated the Tampa economy. Still, Tampa cigar producers employed several thousand women during the early Cold War, and the industry connected the city to tobacco fields in Cuba, cigar smokers around the world, tourists, and Ybor City’s industrial past. The success of the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent American embargo, however, transformed the industry after 1962. The embargo sparked the final cigarworkers’ strike, which ultimately failed, and paved the road to further industry consolidation and worker marginalization. Although a few thousand women still worked in Tampa cigar factories in the late 1960s and 1970s, the decline of Tampa cigarmaking encouraged Ybor boosters, eager to reinvent the barrio,

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to create a nostalgic revisionist history they hoped would attract tourists to the city. As of late 2016, only one factory—which employed approximately 150 cigarworkers—still manufactured cigars in Tampa, but tourists could watch elderly tabaqueros roll cigars in select Ybor City storefronts.²

The attempt to rebrand Ybor City and the creation and success of Busch Gardens were two of postwar Tampa’s primary tourist-centered initiatives. Ybor boosters and promotional organizations, for example Anthony Pizzo and the Alcalde program, marketed Ybor to tourists as a place of Latin foods, beautiful señoritas, and folksy cigar production. In order to make their tourist mecca dreams a reality, they encouraged large-scale demolition of the barrio’s alleged “slum” areas, and boosters promoted a revisionist history that downplayed the strikes, radical labor politics, and the Afro-Cuban residents that were defining components of Ybor’s past. By the late 1960s, the federal urban renewal program had bulldozed large swaths of Ybor and displaced black and elderly residents, but Tampa’s factionist economy, the Cuban Revolution, and the various difficulties involved in reinventing an industrial urban space, thwarted the plans to reengineer Ybor into a major tourist destination. This was true even when the homebuilder Jim Walter brought his vast capital resources, political connections, and phantasmagoric plan to transform central Ybor City into a walled city with bullfights in the mid-1970s. In the 1980s, the dream of a new Ybor remained unfulfilled and, according to anthropologist Susan Greenbaum, “institutionalized racism in housing and

lending markets,” in the barrio continued, as developers’ schemed to evict black residents and craft a marketable Latinness.\(^3\)

Conversely, Busch Gardens became a wildly successful Florida tourist spot from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Throughout the 1960s, Busch Gardens was Florida’s number one tourist destination, a title it held until Walt Disney World opened its doors in 1971. Through a formula of bird shows, an industrial brewery, and later “Dark Continent” African themes and thrill rides, the Anheuser-Busch Corporation profitably blended beer production and amusements. The company’s brewing facility provided beer to a booming Florida market, and its bird and animal exhibits entertained millions of tourists that visited Florida annually during the Cold War. Eventually, the attraction began charging visitors, and park management officials continuously added more animals, shows, and rides. Even after Mickey Mouse began greeting Walt Disney World patrons, Busch Gardens remained an immensely popular destination, and it was Florida’s number two tourist spot from 1972 to 1980. Unlike the Ybor initiative, Busch Gardens’ designers had no interest in revising or incorporating elements of Tampa’s “Latin” past. They instead developed an African theme in an industrial park conveniently, in terms of roadway access and adequate parking, nestled in Tampa’s northern suburbs.\(^4\)

Greater Tampa’s suburban-based growth industry, and its relationship to the Hillsborough River and upper Tampa Bay, also shaped the city. Like Orlando, Miami, and other Florida cities, Tampa’s population ballooned after World War II. This growth was dependent on the Hillsborough River’s waters, which Tampa’s water department

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treated and piped to thousands of homes and businesses after World War II. As Tampa’s suburbs sprawled after 1950, the Hillsborough River’s lower and middle sections were consumed and polluted at alarming rates, while its upper stretches, particularly those within the boundaries of Hillsborough River State Park, were crafted into leisure-oriented wilderness areas. Throughout the period, suburban sewage and agricultural runoff—like phosphate wastes—polluted the river and upper Tampa Bay. Yet the alarming pollution levels, which destroyed nearly all marine life and sea grass beds in the upper Tampa Bay by the mid-1970s, did not stop growth. The economic priorities of developers and pro-growth politicians, like Tampa mayor Dick Greco, instead trumped the concerns of Save Our Bay and other environmental organizations. The lobbying of environmentalists, concerned residents, and local politicians did, however, lead to the construction of Tampa’s new Hooker’s Point sewage treatment facility. Local action also laid the foundation for the post-1980 establishment of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, the return of sea grass beds to the upper Tampa Bay, and the vastly improved overall health of the Hillsborough River and Tampa Bay.

Finally, like the other industries examined in this dissertation, MacDill Air Force Base and big agribusinesses pumped money into the greater Tampa economy and were important components of the city’s Cold War-era identity. MacDill brought military personnel to Tampa, and its aircraft and facilities created noise, water, and air pollution, as well as the occasional fiery tragic accident in Tampa’s suburbs and agricultural lands. MacDill linked Tampa to the American Cold War-era military-industrial complex, including its nuclear weapons and related threat of nuclear holocaust. Meanwhile, big agribusinesses made Tampa a center for citrus canning and cultivation, as well as a
home to industrial-scale strawberry, cattle, and vegetable production. Tampa-area growers also attracted domestic and foreign-born migrant workers to the city’s agricultural lands. MacDill Air Force Base and big agribusinesses contributed millions of dollars to the greater Tampa economy, and shaped the area’s demography and labor practices. In short, the economic and environmental footprint of MacDill and big agribusinesses, which included airplane noise, health care institutions, pollution, and migrants, were defining components of Tampa’s identity from 1950 to 1980.

Combined, these industries made greater Tampa a distinct southern city that defies simple Sunbelt classification, as well as other postwar urban categories, like postindustrial, galactic, and deindustrialization. Though accurate in certain regards, these labels fail to adequately categorize a diverse urban area that provided industrial fertilizer for the world, manufactured Cuban-tobacco cigars, sold señoritaism and Spanish bean soup to visitors, mixed industrial beer production with a family-centered tourist attraction, housed military planes with nuclear payloads, canned frozen concentrated orange juice, and was home to sprawling suburbs and migrant workers. Since 1969, historians have used Sunbelt framing to describe the American South’s booming post-World War II population and economic growth. By doing so, Carl Abbott and others have helped historians make sense of important and generalized late twentieth-century economic and population trends. But perhaps now, it is time for urban historians to move away from Sunbelt theory, and adopt methods that better reveal the historical distinctness of post-World War II American cities like Tampa.

With this in mind, this study examined Tampa’s most influential postwar industries to create a counterpoint to the “sloppy regionalizing,” which Clyde Browning
and Wil Gesler have argued is a foundational problem with Sunbelt framing, in order to
better historicize Tampa from 1950 to 1980.\textsuperscript{5} This is not to say that Tampa did not share
c Characteristics with other southern cities. For example, like Atlanta, Miami, and Phoenix, Tampa’s population and suburbs boomed during the Cold War decades, and Tampa became an auto-centric urban place. In fact, after 1980, Tampa in some ways was more similar to some of its regional Sunbelt neighbors. In the 1980s and 1990s, downtown Tampa underwent a building boom like many other southern cities, and the University of South Florida, financial institutions, and new healthcare facilities became major economic drivers in the city. Also, some of the city's distinctive features, like cigar manufacturing, faded. Nevertheless, Tampa’s diverse mix of heavy and non-heavy industries, its industrial-era history, Busch Gardens, Ybor City, and its port and waterways, just to name a few, made the city unique even after 1980.

In conclusion, this dissertation—through its examination of greater Tampa’s major Cold War-era industries—has argued that from 1950 to 1980 greater Tampa took on a distinct urban \textit{form} forged by the phosphate, cigar, growth, tourism, and agricultural industries, as well as the U.S. Cold War military-industrial complex. This urban form juxtaposed—and at times overlapped—sprawling suburbs, Busch Gardens, reclaimed phosphate lands, frozen concentrated orange juice factories, strikes, air and water pollution, cancer, and fiery plane crashes. This amalgamated form made Tampa a unique southern urban space, crafted by its industries, hinterlands, and the global connections they engendered.

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