

## Midas Returns: Miami Goes to War, 1941-1945

by Gary R. Mormino

For a city not yet half a century old, a city buffeted by hurricanes, depressions, and real estate busts, Miami welcomed December of 1941 with a giddy optimism. Prosperity, the result of defense spending, resurgent tourism, and increased homebuilding and investment buoyed the mood of Miami residents. A new Miami was emerging from the sunshine and shadows of the past. Behind the great divide lie the graves of John Collins, Carl Fisher, and George Merrick; on the other side awaited a new Miami, a south Florida to be defined by year-round tourism, a civil rights movement, and air-conditioned suburban sprawl.

December 7 dawned as no ordinary Sunday. For some time, the first Sunday in December had been regarded as the start of the tourist season. The *Miami Herald* prophesied, “2,000,000 Tourists Expected this Season.” The *Herald’s* H. J. Aronstam enthused, “We’ve crossed our fingers and donned rose-colored glasses today as the curtain goes up for the best tourist season in history.”<sup>1</sup>

Newspaper boys hawking early morning papers arose to a Chamber of Commerce day: 62 degrees, warming to a high of 75. C. A. Delancey, Jr., recounted that the *Herald* came with a fancy wrapper, for the purpose of mailing to a snow-bound friend. A scan of the world brought good news from an unlikely source: The Soviet Union, seemingly on the brink of destruction by the German Juggernaut, had finally launched a successful counterattack.<sup>2</sup> The *Miami Daily News*, upon hearing of the Soviet’s success, editorialized, “Today is one of the brightest [days] the civilized world has enjoyed since September 1939.”<sup>3</sup> Thousands of Jews, many having escaped pogroms in Russia or fearing for relatives still living in Warsaw or Kiev, read the news with bittersweet anxiety.

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The word came first by radio. Many Miamians were listening to their Zeniths or Philcos when announcers interrupted programs to read a special bulletin: "This morning the forces of Imperial Japan attacked Americans at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, this morning, from the air." The news also came during Sunday dinner at favorite restaurants, such as Edith and Fritz's, 3236 N. Miami Avenue, which featured "squab chicken," or the Pig and Whistle, at N.W. 7th Avenue and 34th Street. Others heard about the attack while attending *Her First Romance*, an afternoon matinee at the "air conditioned" Royal Theatre, or the "adults only" movie house, the Flagler. Miami's majestic Olympia Theatre on East Flagler featured live performances that Sunday. The *Miami Herald* immediately printed a special extra edition. C. A. Delancey sold eight-hundred copies in two hours.<sup>4</sup>

When December seventh dawned, Miami tourist officials exuberantly hoped for a \$175 million winter; by afternoon, the spectre of oil-covered beaches, total blackouts, and a Dade Dunkirk haunted Miami. Sheriff D.C. Coleman shrugged his shoulders and told reporters, "It's bound to curtail our season. . . . I don't know of anything we can do but take it on the chin."<sup>5</sup>

Questions peppered conversation. Where the hell *is* Pearl Harbor? How could we have been so unprepared? Why would Japan stoop to such treachery? What will this mean for my family? For the Boris Morguloffs and thousands of others, the war meant military service for their sons. Don Morguloff soon joined the army. By nightfall, the war in the Pacific lapped the shores of Biscayne Bay. "Navy guards with bayonets fixed patrolled the Miami waterfront while civilians took up posts at the city's water plant in Hialeah," the *Herald* somberly reported. The war in Europe had already arrived at the University of Miami in Coral Gables. There, American and British students studied navigation training.<sup>6</sup>

On 12 December 1941, a messenger delivered a telegram at 1658 Ashton Court, Miami. The telegram, signed by Rear Admiral C. W. Nimitz, read, "The navy department deeply regrets to inform you that your son, William Lee Benny, seaman, first class, U.S. Navy, was lost in action in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country. The department extends to you its sincerest sympathy in your great loss. If his body is recovered it will be buried near the place he died and you will be informed." Many other such telegrams arrived, but Miami was stunned to learn of her first casualty. The family of William Lee

Benny staged a symbolic ceremony after receiving the news: they burned an expensive Japanese tablecloth.<sup>7</sup> Accounts of heroic deeds followed. Capt. Colin Kelly, Jr., the war's first great hero, died defending the Philippines, but not before sinking the Japanese destroyer *Haruna*. In 1926, Kelly had lived in Miami with his parents at N.E. 20th Street.<sup>8</sup> Miami received good news when it learned that two former residents, Pan American Airways pilots, flew their planes to safety through Japanese attackers at Honolulu and Wake Island.<sup>9</sup>

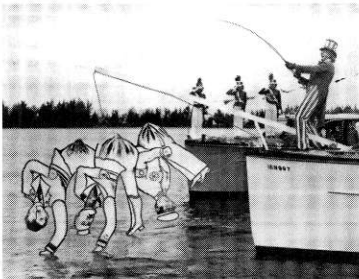
Wartime Miami resembled a combination of Casablanca and Grand Central Station. The city bustled with newcomers bearing strange accents. "At the war's beginnings," reminisced journalist Nixon Smiley, "Miami still had many of the qualities of a small town. As you walked down Miami Avenue or Flagler Street you met person after person you called by their first name . . . the war changed all that."<sup>10</sup>

In 1940 — and the numbers increased dramatically during the war as refugees sought asylum in the Magic City — Miami's foreign-born totalled 12,517 inhabitants, exceeding Tampa's and trebling Jacksonville's immigrant population. Boasting a diverse foreign population, chiefly comprised of small clusters of Canadians, English, Germans, Russians (mostly Jews), and Cubans, Miami had not yet developed any single neighborhood to rival an Ybor City. Neighborhoods such as Riverside and Shenandoah had, by 1940, become identified as Jewish.<sup>11</sup>

Miami's wartime hysteria bore little resemblance to Los Angeles or San Francisco, cities where federal authorities conducted massive round-ups of Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans. Only a handful of Japanese resided in Miami. The remnants of a small Japanese agricultural colony, Yamato, existed near Boca Raton. Authorities arrested a number of Italian and German "enemy aliens" after Italy and Ger-

many declared war against the U.S. on December 10. By June 1942, federal agents had incarcerated 168 Italians in Miami, most of whom were Fascist sympathizers sent to the United States by compliant South American governments, only to be detained and arrested by the FBI in Florida.<sup>12</sup>

Across south Florida, civil and military authorities imposed wartime



**"Uncle Sam" fishes for the enemy during the annual Miami Metropolitan Fishing Tournament, 1942. (HASF 1980-203-22)**

security measures, “for the duration.” Miami Police chief Boatswain announced that no longer would tourists or residents be allowed to take photos of the city’s skyline or waterfront.<sup>13</sup>

In early 1942, “for the duration” took on ominous overtones as Japanese forces advanced victoriously across Asia and the South Pacific. To bolster homefront morale, the Dade County Commission voted to rename County Causeway in honor of the embattled General Douglas MacArthur.<sup>14</sup> Miamians felt the sting of war in a more personal way when Washington imposed regulations and restrictions on everything from new cars to gasoline to sugar. The *Daily News* bade farewell to the disappearing sugar bowl from area diners, urging readers to keep a stiff upper lip while consoling, “Already candied yams are off menus.”<sup>15</sup> But in the spirit that made capitalism flourish in Miami, the Green-Keys-Vanderpool Agency touted the benefits of “War Risk and Bombardment Insurance.”<sup>16</sup> In March 1942, an enterprising but very pessimistic Miamian built the city’s first air raid shelter. His bomb-proof fortress, located on N. Miami Avenue and 71st Street, held space for 150 neighbors.<sup>17</sup>

### By Dawn’s Early Light

In spite of sugarless yams, bald tires, and air raid bunkers, most Americans lived far away from the horror of Guadalcanal or Kasserine Pass. But the sting and smell of war came home in the spring of 1942. German Admiral Karl Donitz was astonished to discover how vulnerable Allied shipping was to enemy submarines. Unleashing a terrifying assault upon Gulf Stream shipping, German U-boats sank twenty-four



**PT Boats plied the waters of Biscayne Bay as sailors trained aboard them. Miami’s boom-era skyline is in the background, with the Dade County Courthouse (to the right) as the tallest building with 28 stories. (HASF 1985-136-105)**

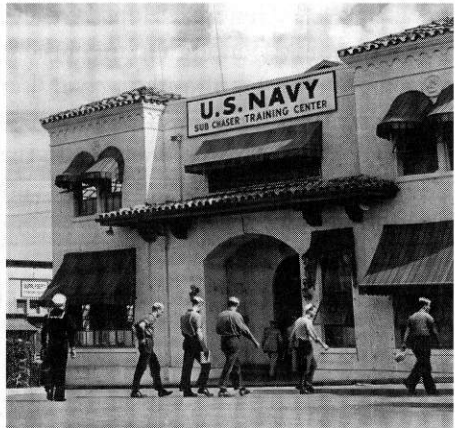
ships off the Florida coast between February and May 1942. In spite of blackout restrictions, German crews claimed that Miami’s glow could be seen thirty-five miles out to sea.<sup>18</sup>

On May 4, 1942, a night

watchman looked out of the window of the Miami News Tower and saw “a vivid red glare,” so strong that at first he thought Bayfront Park was ablaze. He became the first to view the sinking of the 4,500 ton Mexican tanker, *Porto del Llavo*, in the nearby waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Later that day, thousands of shocked Miamians watched the smoldering ship belch smoke and oil. Thirteen crewmen died in that U-boat attack, but twenty-two survived.<sup>19</sup> The *Herald’s* Helen Muir provided an account of that tragedy’s black humor. A young nurse attended to one of the wreck’s survivors, dabbing oil from his body. Embarrassed, she asked politely, “Is this your first visit to Florida?”<sup>20</sup>

In early 1942 German wolfpacks patrolled almost unchecked along the Atlantic. Advances in anti-submarine warfare had not yet hindered German audacity. Floridians volunteered. Yachtsmen, sailors, and fishermen from Key West, Miami, and Palm Beach offered their vessels and nautical skills. Admiral Ernest J. King initially sneered at the suggestion that civilians help patrol the waters of the Caribbean and Atlantic, but German torpedoes and political pressure changed his mind. Altogether, 143 vessels were repainted and outfitted with .50 caliber machine guns, while erstwhile bankers and investors received temporary rank in the Coast Guard Reserves. The *Herald* detailed expensive yachts being refinished with “that dull, indeterminate blue-gray paint which covers once brilliant white topsides and once varnished mahogany.” Called derisively the Cockleshell Fleet and the Hooligan Navy, the Coast Guard Auxiliary received high marks. Historian Michael Gannon credits the civilian coastal patrol with harassing and keeping German U-boats underwater for longer periods and rendering them less dangerous.<sup>21</sup>

The U.S. Navy eventually countered German successes in the Atlantic by



**Much of Miami’s waterfront came under military control during the war. This building was a part of the Port of Miami (near 8th Street and Biscayne Blvd.), and was taken over by the Navy as a U.S. Navy Sub Chaser Training Center. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-24536)**

adopting new tactics, such as the convoy system, and by introducing new weaponry, such as blimps, anti-submarine planes, and effective depth charges. The Navy established in Miami a center described by the *Herald* as “an international postgraduate school in submarine warfare.”<sup>22</sup>

## The Citadel

In 1942 khaki, olive drab, black navy bellbottoms, military dress whites and Santiago blue pilot’s uniforms encountered Bermuda shorts and halter tops. A reporter describing Miami Beach wrote, “On Collins Avenue, where the whisper of scissors cutting dividend coupons used to fill the morning air, you can look up and down as far as you can see, and see nothing but khaki.”<sup>23</sup>

Miami had enjoyed a long but episodic relationship with the military, dating back to nineteenth-century Fort Dallas and Camp Hell. Nothing prepared the city for the tumult of the 1940s. Stern, rigid and tradition-bound, the U.S. military establishment does not enjoy a reputation for flexibility and experimentation, but in World War II, the Miami experience belies that stereotype.

In 1939, General “Hap” Arnold, fearful that the U.S. could not respond quickly enough to meet the impending crisis, recommended that the government authorize and encourage private companies to prepare pilots and technicians. Six such flight schools opened in Florida. J. Paul Riddle opened the Embry-Riddle School of Aviation on County Causeway. The base inventory was modest: two flight instructors, one mechanic, and one pontoon-rigged plane. Time, however, was on Riddle’s side.<sup>24</sup>

War contracts enriched Riddle and expanded Embry-Riddle’s operations. The firm soon purchased the eight-story Fritz Hotel, previously a chicken ranch and mushroom farm. By the fall of 1940, 500 students enrolled in flight school. Over 2,000 British Royal Air Force fliers received their wings at Embry-Riddle. One historian has estimated that “perhaps a tenth of all American World War II pilots” and “countless airframe and powerplant mechanics” trained at the Embry-Riddle School of Aviation.<sup>25</sup>

Almost every conceivable type of air training could be found in the Miami area, including blimp bases, navigation and flight schools, and coastal patrols.<sup>26</sup> The *Herald* recollected in 1945 that one-fifth of

the entire Army Air Force received some training at Miami Beach.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1941, *Moon Over Miami* became a hit movie, starring Betty Grable and Don Ameche. Quickly, wings over Miami became even more popular, as an extraordinary variety of aircraft crisscrossed south Florida. Residents learned to identify P-51 Mustangs, Navy Hellcats, PBM Avengers, and B-18 “Bolo” bombers by their distinctive markings and the sounds of their engines.

Few residents had trouble identifying the flotilla of blimps circling wartime Miami. In 1942 workers began clearing 2,100 acres of slash pine south of Miami for the new Richmond Naval Air Station. Part of a string of blimp bases stretching from New Jersey to Brazil, the Richmond Station housed scores of massive air dirigibles, designed to locate enemy subs and relay information. Each blimp commanded a wooden hangar over a thousand feet long, 234 feet wide, and 200 feet tall, in total requiring seven million feet of timber.<sup>28</sup>

In the early days of the war, military leaders realized the staggering logistical, training, supply, and manpower problems the U.S. faced. Quite simply, the construction of conventional basic training facilities was costly in time and money. The solution came from an unlikely place — Florida’s resort beaches. Leasing and converting hotels is credited to Under Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson, who conceived of the idea following a visit to Miami Beach. Skeptics ridiculed the notion of



**Soldiers arriving at the Collins Park Hotel on Miami Beach. It was one of hundreds of hotels and apartments taken over by the Armed Forces during World War II. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-18289)**

a four-star resort entertaining eighteen-year-old recruits, but Patterson disarmed critics with a star-spangled riposte: “The best hotel room is none too good for the American soldier.”<sup>29</sup>

In late January 1942 the armed services “asked” Gold Coast hotel owners to consider the leasing idea. Ultimately they liked the financial guarantees more than they disliked the prospects of a military invasion upon their privileged sanctuaries. A growing stream of canceled reservations, tar balls washing ashore, and a ban on pleasure driving sealed the deal. The *Miami Herald* headline exulted, “Pledge By 175 Hotel Owners Revives Hope that Army will Bring Thousands to Miami Beach.” The paper noted that only a half dozen hotels balked at the proposal.<sup>30</sup>

On 20 February 1942, the first of 400 enlisted men — the fabled 90 day wonders — arrived, followed by 500 officer candidates. By that fall, fully 342 hotels in Miami and Miami Beach had been converted into military facilities. Miami Beach claimed one-quarter of Florida’s hotel rooms and housed 78,000 soldiers at one time. “The hotels,” a reporter wrote in 1943, “make good barracks. The baby pink and egg-shell furniture is stored now. Three-decker army bunks jam the pastel-tinted rooms, dance floors, night clubs.”<sup>31</sup>

Journalists frequently chronicled the changing fashions and fortunes along Florida’s Gold Coast. “The Royal Palm is a coast guard barracks,” explained the *San Diego Union*, while the “White House is a cooks and bakers school.” The Whiteman Hotel’s famous sunken bar now stocked magazines.<sup>32</sup> The *Herald’s* Jack Bell detailed the opening of the Army’s first Air Corps officer candidate school at Miami Beach. “So swiftly was the school formed that some Boulevard Hotel guests were left virtually sitting on the curb with their baggage. Patrons on the Beach golf courses . . . [were] ordered to leave.”<sup>33</sup> The Surf Club, once an exclusive retreat for the winter resort set, became a mess hall.<sup>34</sup> Miami’s Columbus Hotel, a fashionable hangout for the international crowd, converted into a bachelor officers’ quarters.<sup>35</sup> The renowned Everglades Hotel on Biscayne Boulevard surrendered to the navy for use as a subchaser school.<sup>36</sup> In 1942 the U.S. government bought the luxurious Biltmore and converted it into the “mother hospital” for the rehabilitation of Army Air Force personnel. The hotel hospital featured 1,200 rooms and housed 700 patients. The Nautilus and Gulf Stream Hotels also became rehabilitation centers for wounded airmen.<sup>37</sup>

The hotel leasing program led a furiously intense but brief life. Beginning in the summer of 1943, after millions of G.I.s had been shipped



overseas, the War Department began informing Miami and Miami Beach hotel owners that leases would soon end. By February 1944 the *Chicago Daily News* reported sardonically, that in Miami, “war-torn veterans of 50 and 100 missions overseas . . . have joined the vacationing rich and the fattening bookies.”<sup>38</sup>

Overall, the hotel leasing arrangement ranked as one of the rarest government programs: the rental bill totaled \$12.5 million, averaging \$175 per recruit; a Senate Investigating Committee concluded that the military should have paid more for the hotels; and most amazingly, no pork-barrel residuals continued to drain the treasury for decades after the war’s ending.

Hundreds of thousands of servicemen and women, most of whom had never left home before, discovered Miami. Most left the Magic City bewitched, vowing to return during better circumstances. Dan Moody arrived for basic training in January 1944. From the Blackstone Hotel he wrote home to Virginia: “Mother, this is the most beautiful place I have ever seen. Green palm trees, green grass, blue ocean and sky . . . it’s like a fairy tale. I really think that when the war is over, I’ll move down here.”<sup>39</sup>

Matinee idol Clark Gable easily qualifies as the region’s most celebrated recruit. After his beloved wife Carole Lombard died in a plane crash, Gable volunteered for the Army in the summer of 1942, enrolling at the Air Force Officer Candidate School in Miami Beach. Offered a major’s commission he scoffed, “Hell, I haven’t got any more military experience than a chorus girl!” Announcing “I just want to carry my share,” he surrendered his moustache and accepted a new salary scale of \$66 a month. A wisecracker posted a sign in the hotel lobby, “Clark Gable Swept Here.” For his valor in combat, Gable won a Distinguished Flying Cross.<sup>40</sup> Other notable veterans of Miami Beach include Robert Preston, Gilbert Roland, Hank Greenberg, and Franklin Roosevelt, Jr.



**Clark Gable (center) at the Air Force Officer Candidate School in Miami Beach, 1942. (HASF 1981-90-4)**

World War II was a popular war, appealing to Americans across class, racial, and ethnic lines. Gable and Greenberg personify the 16 million person army. In July 1942 George A. Smathers resigned his post as U.S. Assistant District Attorney and enlisted in the Marines, eventually seeing duty at Munda and Bougainville in the South Pacific as a Fighting Leatherneck.<sup>41</sup> In 1942 few Miamians knew Paul Tibbets. A former University of Florida student and resident at 1716 S.W. 12th Avenue, Tibbets would become the city's most famous war hero. In October 1942, a portrait of Tibbets along with a feature-length, syndicated story appeared in the *Daily News*. An articulate and sensitive airman, he spoke about his concerns with civilian casualties in the air war over Europe.<sup>42</sup>

During the winters, gossip columnists often remarked that it seemed as if Miami had become Hollywood. In March 1945, Hollywood came to Miami. Director John Ford, serving as Commander in the armed services, brought MGM cameras and glamour to the Magic City for the filming of *They Were Expendable*. Starring John Wayne, Donna Reed, Ward Bond, and Robert Montgomery, the movie depicted the fall of Manila. Biscayne Bay served as a stage set for the Philippine's Sissimo Bay. Fifty Coast Guardsmen and Navy sailors served as extras, while PT boats raced across the smoke-filled bay. Reviewed the *Herald's* critic, "The 'War' with all its flame and fury, came within a bazooka shot of Flagler Street but caused only a ripple of concern."<sup>43</sup>



**Prisoner of war working in a military garage. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-18474)**

Miamians must have thought they had seen every conceivable type of soldier, from British air cadets to Russian submarine crews to Hollywood movie stars. But in mid-1944 a new group arrived: German prisoners-of-war. Over two hundred prisoners settled at an old CCC camp near today's Dadeland Shopping Center in Kendall. During the winter of 1945, another two hundred arrived at a campsite at Mowry Road and Five-Mile Road. Working South Dade's potato fields and sweeping the streets of Miami Beach, the prisoners-of-war symbolized the acute shortage of labor and the crisis in city services gripping Miami.<sup>44</sup>

## Cities Under Siege

In 1940 the editor of the *National Municipal Review* warned that American cities had less to fear from Stuka dive bombers and Japanese Zeros than by mounting crises in public health, housing, and education. American cities fought a rearguard battle throughout the conflict, attempting to put out municipal fires caused by overcrowding, labor shortages, racial tensions, and overtaxed services. The war accelerated rates of mobility and migration, and cities such as Miami received an influx of new residents without warning or planning. The statistics are numbing. During the war over twelve million women and men left their hometowns to enter the armed services, a figure exceeded by the fifteen million civilians who migrated to new jobs and homes. The South and West figured most prominently in this shift of people, a shift which was uneven. In Florida, many rural counties actually lost residents during the war, while cities such as Miami boomed.<sup>45</sup> Pandemonium resulted.

Not since the effervescent decade of the 1920s had Miami experienced anything like the war years. Reporters and demographers searched for new verbs, having overused “surged,” “buoyed,” “explodes,” and “skyrockets.” Yet an examination of the census count yields a conclu-



**The Miami Air Depot Headquarters was a huge military aviation facility, situated at Pan American Field (36th Street and LeJeune Road) as well as points west and south. Thousands of soldiers came through this facility during the course of the war. (HASF 1982-114-87)**

sion of impressive but not extraordinary growth. In 1940, Miami's population rested at 172,172 residents; by 1945, the city had grown to 192,122, a gain of nine percent.<sup>46</sup> But the census measures a fixed target, and the censuses of 1940 and 1945 attempted to identify a dynamic population on the move. Census takers had photographed a shadow and missed much of the blur. The *Herald*, *Daily News*, and government authorities knew too well what was happening. In December 1943, Miami's "ration book" census stood at 212,000. One month later the *Herald* estimated the city's population at 325,000, which included 115,000 winter visitors, soldiers, and sailors. Each February and March that figure swelled to 400,000.<sup>47</sup>

Whatever the population, Miami was a city in flux, a study in confusion, the result of a conflict between society's need for order and security and individuals' desires for freedom and pleasure. Federal, state, and local governments attempted to control the chaos, but private decisions collided with the best public purpose.

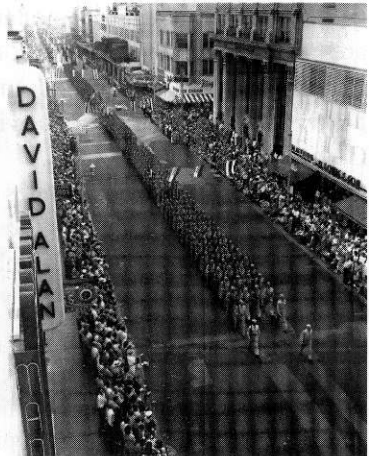
Millions of Americans spent time in Miami between 1940-1945. Some came because of military conscription, patriotism, love, and fortune; others sought the sun, glamour, and betting tracks. Regardless, the newest tourist and oldest natives all encountered frustration marked by delays and shortages. The case of Spearman Lewis encapsulates these tensions. One week after Pearl Harbor, Lewis constructed an air raid shelter at his home on Collins Avenue. By mid-March 1943 he placed an advertisement, hoping to sell his shelter for a "washing machine, Kenmore preferred or a portable typewriter." Had Mr. Lewis waited, he probably could have rented out his shelter as an apartment.<sup>48</sup>

Miami simply ran out of housing during the war. When compared to Tampa and Jacksonville, cities also overwhelmed by new housing demands, Miami seemed relatively prepared for the onslaught. During the prewar period, 1935-1940, the city of Miami experienced a building boom, having constructed 10,950 new homes or apartments. Tampa built 800 new structures during that same period. When one examines Dade County, the growth is even more impressive; over 24,000 new structures appeared, compared to 6,182 new homes in Duval County (Jacksonville).<sup>49</sup> Miami's prewar building spree scarcely met the demand after 1941. The problems were manifold: a shortage of building materials, a scarcity of carpenters, and an influx of soldiers, trailing families, workers, and tourists. A nightclub singer at a Miami Beach bistro rhapsodized about the housing blues:

Ladies and Gentlemen,  
I came to Miami for a vacation  
But where do I live?  
At the railroad station!  
No! no we have no apartment —  
we have no apartment today!<sup>50</sup>

One solution to the housing crunch, and an increasingly popular alternative, even icon of postwar Florida, was the trailer. In August 1943, the *Herald* observed, “The shortage of apartments and houses in this area, along with the influx of war workers, has boomed business at trailer camps until some sections of towns have become individual trailer villages.” Old time Miamians sneered at the appearance of such camps, calling them “trailertowns.”<sup>51</sup> When the Miami Air Depot added 1,600 new positions in 1944, officials obtained 500 government-owned trailers to accommodate the new residents. Renters paid \$20 a month for the trailers.<sup>52</sup> Newspapers warned against overcrowding, especially the “unsanitary conditions,” but each announcement of a new facility, relocation, or program was greeted with hurrahs.<sup>53</sup> Pell-mell growth was good; society will sort it all out after the war, so the philosophy went.

For the city of Opa-locka, the 1940s symbolized unplanned growth and perplexing changes, not Arabian fantasies. On the eve of war, Opa-locka’s population of 497 residents was scarcely greater than during its 1920s heyday. The city, however, enjoyed the luxury of an airbase, and in 1941 the U.S. Navy established a naval air station. Opa-locka grew rapidly during the war, its population spiraling to 1,855 in 1945. Such growth came with steep costs. The U.S. Navy enticed families to the community with the construction of inexpensive concrete-block housing, such as Tishawauka Manor. Residents complained of the project’s “medieval conditions,” and its remoteness. Doctors only reluctantly traveled the twelve-mile trek from



**Military parades along Flagler Street were frequent during the war to build local support. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-18386)**

Miami to Opa-locka. Racial tensions also flared during this period. In the 1930s, urban planners developed Liberty City, a large black housing program northwest of Miami. Thus began a black corridor running northwest from Miami, culminating in the 1930s and 40s with the creation of “second ghettos,” Opa-locka’s population reflected these developments. Hundreds of homes for black families went up in the years after the war. By 1950, Opa-lacka’s population had soared to 5,271, which included 16 percent African American.<sup>54</sup>

The families of servicemen particularly felt the sting of the housing crisis. Conditions could not have been worse for spouses and children desperate to see a husband, perhaps for the last time: high rents, few vacancies, low military pay, a city geographically isolated, and a tourist economy. Rent control, covering 80,000 structures in the Miami area, was imposed in 1943, but did little to alleviate the critical problem of supply.<sup>55</sup>

Newspapers provide a steady account of the worsening problem. Advertisements and headlines urged civic action and responsibility: “Rents Here Out of Control, Military Warns Landlords,” and “Wanted at Once: 100 Houses to Rent For Navy and Army Officers and Their Families.”<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Josine Tompkins of the Miami Chamber of Commerce’s Information/Housing Division spoke to a reporter in frustration, “Wives of servicemen are coming to Miami and bringing their babies with them regardless of any warnings they may receive that there are no accommodations here for them.”<sup>57</sup> Mary Moore, manager of the Coral Gables Chamber of Commerce, explained that she wrote thirty letters a day telling potential visitors, “We advise you not to come to Coral Gables.”<sup>58</sup>

Still, wives and loved ones came, determined to find a house, apartment, or loft. A reporter for the *Daily News* left this poignant composite of a day at the Miami Chamber of Commerce:

Mothers with babies in carriages were there. Mothers with babies in their arms, mothers with toddlers, mothers with babies in their laps . . . tired mothers, footsore and weary mothers, indignant and pitiful mothers. . . . ‘Why did you come here?’ The answer is always the same. ‘This is his port of embarkation . . . he will come back here: we thought we could have just a few more months of life together . . . he may not come back . . . he wanted to see the baby so much. . . .’<sup>59</sup>

Critics savaged a system which allowed tourists to play at the racing tracks while mothers slept on park benches. "It's a disgrace the way servicemen with small children are turned away from homes and apartments," wrote Miss Eleanor Wright.<sup>60</sup> Novelist, social critic, and Miami resident Philip Wylie turned his trenchant pen against the city of Miami and the military in a series of national articles in 1944 and 1945. "Midas has moved to Miami," he wrote, more sardonic than prideful. "This situation has worked excruciating hardship on military personnel. . . . Both the army and the navy seem unable or unwilling to house those myriad families. Women and children walk the streets. They have slept in borrowed automobiles." Wylie, the acclaimed author of *A Generation of Vipers* (1942) concluded his essay with a savage line, "The men who have sacrificed most meet in Miami those who have sacrificed least."<sup>61</sup>

Lengthy recitations of similar housing nightmares in Panama City, Willow Run, and Los Angeles did little to improve Miami's morale. Visionaries carefully reading accounts of record savings accumulated by workers must have contemplated a post-war housing market of staggering potential. Meanwhile, Miamians endured the frustrating combination of government bureaucracy and indulgent capitalism.

Shortages plagued other public and private sectors. The first anniversary of Pearl Harbor brought the news that one half of Miami's physicians were gone, claimed by the armed services.<sup>62</sup> Municipal salaries were so low and defense work so lucrative, that cities found it impossible to recruit and retain policemen, clerks, and teachers. The military allowed Navy firemen stationed at the Subchaser Training Center to work for the Miami Fire Department on their off hours.<sup>63</sup> Miami Beach, unable to hire new garbagemen, lobbied the British Consulate for the importation of twenty to thirty Bahamian workers. Admitted the City Manager, "About one-third of our trucks here have been kept in the garage due to absenteeism and a shortage of men." Military police supplemented Miami Beach's overwhelmed staff by as many as 300 officers.<sup>64</sup>

In January 1945, Governor Millard Caldwell wrote Dade County's sheriff, urging him to take vigilant action to prevent loitering, loafing, and absenteeism. Miami and other Dade County municipalities enacted "Work or Fight" laws, which arrested idlers who were not at work or in uniform. Predictably, the law came down hardest on African Americans.<sup>65</sup>

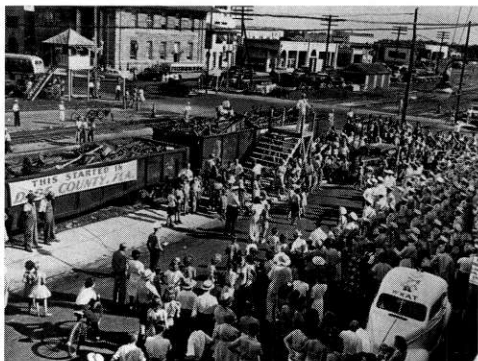
Persistent wartime rationing and shortages prompted nostalgic stories about what one writer called "B. R. Miami," Before Rationing

Miami. The *Herald* printed a 1940 hotel menu which touted nine different meats; by 1944, some Miami hotels offered meatless menus twice a week. Butchers complained they could not even stock horsemeat. Some restaurants closed their doors, frustrated in trying to keep supplies of meat.<sup>66</sup> To ameliorate the situation, the City of Miami relaxed its ordinance on raising chickens within city limits.<sup>67</sup> And since alarm clocks were almost impossible to find, roosters bolstered the patriotic front.

Patriotism, however, often created problems. So many Miamians, eager to save precious petrol, pedaled their bicycles to work that police reported menacing traffic jams caused by cyclists.<sup>68</sup> For obvious reasons, many Miamians felt bicycles were more reliable than public transportation. On New Year's day 1943, the *Herald* reported that 88 of the city's 327 buses lacked tires or had broken down.<sup>69</sup>

Black markets flourished and disconsolate brides cursed Florida for its callousness, but World War II also created a sense of community in Miami, a shared feeling of sacrifice and goal, one of the last genuine moments of national unity. World War II was our great patriotic war. In schools, in factories, in neighborhoods, Miamians offered gestures of help and inspiration, relief and comfort.

Neighbors and strangers shared mutual pride, anxiety, and too often, grief. Symbols pervaded Miami. A window bearing a colored star signified a son or daughter in the military; a gold star marked a family's ultimate sacrifice. Miamians learned of the sacrifice of the area's "First Gold Star Mother of the Year," in a *Herald* column written by that mother, Mrs. Abraham Kram.<sup>70</sup>



**Dade County's scrap metal drive, centered around the FEC Railway tracks near Flagler Street and NW 1st Avenue, brought hundreds of people out to contribute to the war effort. (HASF 1980-189-43)**

Miamians, like Americans everywhere, volunteered to collect aluminum, bundle newspapers, roll bandages, and dance with lonely soldiers. By the end of the war Miamians had purchased over \$300 million in war bonds, which averaged about \$1,000 per county resident.<sup>71</sup> War bond rallies and sales crossed ethnic and racial lines. The



Miami Chamber of Commerce's J. Kennard Johnson lashed out at criticism that the Magic City had shirked its duty; rather, he pointed to evidence that Miami had oversubscribed every bond drive. During 1943 and 1944, citizens donated over one million dollars to the War Chest and half as much to the Red Cross.<sup>72</sup>

In December 1943, the *Herald's* publisher John Knight made a startling announcement. Due to a surge in newspaper readership and a shortage of newsprint, the *Herald* would henceforth eliminate most advertising from the paper. The *Herald* suffered financially, but reader confidence and respect soared.<sup>73</sup>

Readers lived the war through the experiences of trusted *Herald* and *News* reporters. In June 1944 the *Herald* announced that Jack Bell, the beloved "Town Crier, is going to cover the India Burma campaign for the Knight chain." In May 1945 the peripatetic journalist sent back a remarkable interview: "Gen. Von Rundstedt Tells Jack Bell How Germans Were Defeated By U.S."<sup>74</sup>

## The Arsenal

World War II, not the New Deal, ended the Great Depression. The war, ignited by unimagined levels of federal spending, harnessed the awesome creative powers and industry of America. During the years 1940-45, the number of federal employees quadrupled while federal expenditures soared tenfold.<sup>75</sup>

The South in general and Florida in particular were beneficiaries of the federal largesse. The war brought prosperity to a region Franklin Roosevelt had only recently labeled "America's number one economic problem." In 1933, the earnings of Floridians totalled \$423 million; a decade later that figure reached \$2 billion.<sup>76</sup> In a stunning announcement in 1944, the *Herald* reported that "Greater Miami residents will have accumulated savings estimated at \$284 million [at war's end]."<sup>77</sup>

Miami's pre-war economy, based largely on tourism, service, construction, and trade with the



Float used by the Miami Air Depot in the parade which opened the 6th War Loan Drive in Miami, November 20, 1944. (HASF 1980-56-179)

Caribbean, rebounded in the mid-1930s. But Miami faced the demands of war with a woefully underdeveloped and uneven economy: in 1940 Miami held the distinction of being the least industrialized metropolitan area in the United States.<sup>78</sup> Writing in 1943, the *Daily News*' Carl Ogle analyzed what this war had wrought. "The arrival of war made Miami over. Whether folks like it or not, it is generally accepted that the Miami area will never be the same again." The old Miami, "a playground for a nation," died December 7, 1941. Ogle envisioned the new Miami as "an industrial city, a city of light and semi-heavy industry, of ballooning payrolls, with uniformed men marching its streets, ships of war in its harbors, and warplanes flying over head."<sup>79</sup>

Miami remained more campground and playground than the arsenal Ogle envisioned, but the war profoundly altered the city's economic rhythms and patterns. Miami acquired a modest industrial base. By December 1942, fifty local firms with 7,500 employees had received \$50 million in war contracts.<sup>80</sup> By 1944 the *Herald* exulted, "Greater Miami has become much more of an industrial center. . . . For instance, the Smaller War Plants Corporation has channeled \$16 million worth of contracts to 112 plants in the last 23 months."<sup>81</sup>

Creativity and pluck characterized entrepreneurs, such as L. P. Evans. Once the largest dealer in used cars in America, Evans backpeddled after Pearl Harbor. Left with rusting hulks of worn-out Studebakers and Hudsons, Evans formed a company to make 32-passenger Victory Buses. Fashioned from discarded cars, the buses helped ease the traffic gridlock.<sup>82</sup>

Miami businessmen came up with ingenious ideas to recruit and retain workers. The problem of labor shortages was endemic and epidemic. "Miami Needs 10,000 More Workers" the *Herald* announced in

August 1943.<sup>83</sup> J. W. Strong, foreman for Miami's Seminole Rock and Sand Company, recruited fourteen "draft-exempt" workers—Seminole Indians.<sup>84</sup>



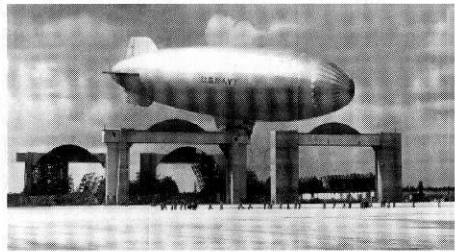
**Military planes flying over downtown underlined the vital role that Greater Miami played as a training center in World War II. (HASF 1985-136-162)**

Miami's most notable wartime business triumphs occurred on the water and in the air. Paul Prigg, called by one commentator the A.J.

Higgins of Miami, organized the Miami Ship Building Company, constructing sub-hunters for the navy. Earlier Prigg had designed and built pleasure boats, but the wartime emergency created new opportunities. He converted the old Clyde Docks into a subchaser facility. Miami also served as an important repair base for merchant and naval vessels.<sup>85</sup> “The *Herald’s* Jeanne Bellamy observed these changes, noting, “Blue sparks began to fly into the Miami River as welders and riveters did their work on war vessels.”<sup>86</sup>

When the Navy commandeered Miami’s commercial docks, naysayers feared it would doom the thriving trade with the Caribbean. Instead, vessels in increasing numbers came up the Miami River to develop and take advantage of new docking facilities. In August 1943 the *Herald* surveyed the maritime work, “Commercial dock facilities were started last January with bulk-heading of most of the 1,500 feet of river frontage by concrete walls six feet wide at the base and tapering to a four-foot walkway.”<sup>87</sup>

Miami’s reputation as an aviation center began in the 1920s but solidified in the 1940s. The war endowed Miami with the expertise, infrastructure, and capital to claim status as a leading air hub. The region benefited tremendously but also seized the advantages of its geographic location. This was literally a world war, and Miami emerged as a vital transportation center for delivering passengers and cargos to the southern hemisphere. Early in the war the Army Air Force’s Air Transport Command established a base in Miami. In its first great test, the Air Transport Command dispatched desperately needed anti-tank ammunition to besieged British forces in North Africa. In a single month, the Air Transport Command flew four and one-half million pounds of cargo and eight thousand troops out of Miami.<sup>88</sup> In 1943 the Army Air Forces built a massive 1,100 acre supply depot near the 36th Street airport.<sup>89</sup> Near the end of the war, the city became a major port of embarkation for soldiers returning from the



**Richmond Naval Air Station contained the largest aircraft hangars in the world in order to house these large dirigibles that patrolled the Atlantic Ocean. It was said that its three hangars reached so high that rain clouds formed inside of them. (HASF 1982-141-3)**

European and African fronts. Daily, thousands poured into Miami.<sup>90</sup>

In 1944, a *Chicago Daily News* reporter toured Miami's Pan American Airway's facility. Astonished by the bustle and international tone, Pan American received daily streams of dignitaries and visitors from Rio de Janeiro, Barranquilla, Havana, and San Juan.<sup>91</sup> Increasingly, wealthy Latin Americans envisioned Miami as a place to vacation, invest, and in case of revolution, exile.

The war also caused businessmen to consider the endless possibilities of postwar expansion and investment. The *Daily News* noted 7 February 1943, "The war which already has produced the startling paradox of a banner winter season sans great numbers of rich Northern Tourists, may still make a further contribution to the economy of south Florida—a balanced year-round sales curve. Already plans are afoot to make something more of the coming spring and summer months than the dull, fruitless periods they have long been. . . ."<sup>92</sup>

In summarizing Miami's wartime economic experience, caution should be used while analyzing the fulsome conclusions made by contemporaries. Miami did *not* become an industrial arsenal. Miami benefitted little from the new industries and institutions which prospered during the war: chemicals, plastics, electronics, aviation, scientific research, and the emerging military-industrial-educational complex. Miami capitalized on its strengths — tourism, air travel, and trade with Latin America — and developed a military presence and infrastructure which benefitted the region in the postwar era. Most importantly, Miami accumulated capital, investment, and exposure.

Miami became the Magic City, not because of blast furnaces or assembly lines. Miami produced and cultivated an image, embodying the American Dream, a sun-loving, easy-going paradise where one could escape and indulge. It miraculously maintained this image throughout World War II. Dream sellers discovered, however, that images bear consequences, that fun and guns did not always mix.

### **Playgrounds Amidst Campgrounds**

The Roman poet Juvenal understood the sins of the flesh when he wrote, "Luxury is more ruthless than war." That ancient truth bit Miami hard in 1944 and 1945. Americans had always been ambivalent about the idea of pleasure in January, and Florida's metamorphosis as the American Babylon grated many who still drank deeply from the cup

of John Calvin and Billy Sunday. The twentieth century, with its economy of abundance, made commercialized leisure available to millions. But the war raised old and new questions. Just how much fun and profit should be consumed and enjoyed during a war which preached sacrifice? Subscriptions to war-bond drives appealed to the old-fashioned American virtues of patriotism, order, generosity, and sacrifice. Miami appealed to new fashions and values: leisure, pleasure, individualism, and profits.

The Magic City had become a synonym for leisure. In the 1890s Biscayne Bay offered tubercular Yankees and high-living Robber Barons rejuvenation; in the 1920s Coral Gables and Miami Beach allowed the middle class and the nouveaux riches the chance to buy into the Florida version of the American dream with sunshine and moonshine; and in the 1940s the Magic City wrapped its Mediterranean pleasures around patriotism, encouraging dollar-a-year men and defense workers to bring their war-shattered nerves to Hialeah or the Surf Club.

Tourism remained vital to a war-charged Miami economy. "There are no boll weevils in the tourist crop," the chamber of commerce preached.<sup>93</sup> The *Herald* dressed up the old saying, suggesting "Come wars, booms, or depressions, there will always be a Greater Miami tourist crop, and a pretty lusty one."<sup>94</sup>

The spectre of Japanese Zeros and German U-boats threatened life and liberty, not the American pursuit of happiness. Pearl Harbor and Operation Drumbeat soon seemed as distant as Iwo Jima and Normandy. Only the U.S. among the great powers was "fighting the war on imagination alone."<sup>95</sup> The U.S. government was unwilling to impose Draconian restrictions upon leisure and relaxation. Symbols sufficed.

In the 1940s, few symbols commanded the emotional pull of baseball. In 1941, Joe DiMaggio captivated America with his



**Soldiers enjoying lunch in the Main Dining Room of the Club House at Hialeah Park, November 2, 1943. (HASF 1982-114-78)**

fifty-six game hitting streak while Ted Williams became the last player to hit .400. Days after Pearl Harbor, major league owners offered to shut the game down, but President Roosevelt replied, "I honestly feel that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going." Baseball transcended its status as a mere game; indeed baseball represented one of the reasons we were fighting to preserve democracy. Moreover, baseball provided workers and soldiers a valuable safety valve in times of crisis and stress.<sup>96</sup>

While the game endured, the same could not be said of the Grapefruit League. Since the 1920s, major league baseball had enjoyed a salubrious and profitable relationship with Miami and other Florida communities during spring training. Miamians and tourists had become accustomed to cheering the New York Giants and Philadelphia Phillies. In a symbolic sacrifice, baseball deserted Florida in 1943, "for the duration." Teams practiced north of the so-called Landis-Eastman Line (named after baseball commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis and transportation czar Joseph B. Eastman). The Giants and Phillies, who once enjoyed the springtime warmth of Flamingo Park at Miami Beach and Miami Field (N.W. 3rd Street and 16th Avenue) encountered instead the chillier turf of Lakewood, New Jersey, and Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>97</sup>

It is said of Dr. Samuel Johnson's Amazing Dancing Dog, the amazing thing was not that it danced so well, but that it danced at all. Might not the same be said of Miami tourism in World War II? Florida politicians lobbied furiously to save the Sunshine State from total travel bans, the equivalent of a nuclear winter. Governor Spessard Holland helped secure more trains on the popular East Coast - Florida route. Helen Muir aptly summarized the phenomenon, "The predictions of pessimists that



**The Miami Air Depot Band performing at the Employees Association dance and beauty contest, June 1944. (HASF 1980-56-73)**

Miami would become a deserted playground for the duration were lost in the ring of the cash register, the beat of the rhumba, and the splash of the surf off Miami Beach."<sup>98</sup> Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes promoted travel "as an aid in the promotion for national health and morale." Ickes even cited studies suggesting that German productivity suffered because of wartime stress.<sup>99</sup>

At the state level, officials maintained that a Florida vacation was not a luxury, but rather a necessity in these troubled times, rationalizing that rest and relaxation improved morale and productivity. "Sunshine is not being rationed," proclaimed *Florida Highways*. The Atlantic Coast Line ran advertisements suggesting, "Civilians need furloughs too!" Press agents, in perhaps one of the war's worst advertisements, decreed a "blitzkrieg of joy" for civilian morale.<sup>100</sup>

Florida tourism attracted the attention of the national press. Critics generally ignored small pleasures enjoyed by defense workers, but concentrated their fury upon three areas of concern: the black markets, profligate gambling at the race tracks, and conspicuous consumption.

In every economy of scarcity, injustices prevail. So it was in World War II. For the right price, T-bone steaks, tires, Pullman berths, and gasoline could easily be obtained. Housewives were furious at the breakdown in the distribution and fairness in the rationing system. By April 1945, chickens were sold at a stunning \$3 a pound.<sup>101</sup> "It was no problem to obtain scarce and rationed goods at black markets," declared John Blum.<sup>102</sup> Such a system, especially in a national crisis, violated the American sense of fair play.

In the winter of 1944, thousands of tourists became stranded in Florida, unable to purchase return bus or rail tickets to the north. The final "Refugee special" left with stranded tourists in late March. The Rhode Island State Senate passed a resolution condemning Florida for withholding gasoline to return trips. "War is Hell!" commented *Time*. The Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested sixteen Miami ticket agents, thirteen hotel "flunkies," and one Miami cab driver for ticket scalping.<sup>103</sup>

Florida's parimutuel gaming business — horse and dog racing and Jai Alai — barely a decade old when the war began, fluctuated wildly depending upon the national mood, the length of the seasons, and the opportunities for travel. The 1943 season ended prematurely because of a national ban on pleasure driving. The *Daily News* proclaimed Miami a "deserted village" in January 1943.<sup>104</sup> Hialeah and Tropical Tracks felt the blow, as did state and local revenues, heavily dependent upon south Florida betting receipts. Hialeah Park, for example, levied a ten-cent municipal tax for each admission, which contributed about \$50,000 a year to the city of Hialeah. In 1942, each county in Florida received about \$33,000 in racing revenues. For counties such as Okeechobee and Martin, this meant a windfall of about \$8 per resident.<sup>105</sup>

Attendance for the 1942-43 season (854,256) fell drastically from the 1941-42 crowds of 2,195,080.<sup>106</sup> With heaping doses of sarcasm, *New York Post* columnist Stanley Frank wrote, "Sounds very harrowing indeed until you stop and consider that the citizens of other states do not educate their children on tourist, sucker and gambling money."<sup>107</sup>

If the 1942-43 racing season suffered because of national self doubt and pleasure bans, Hialeah and Tropical swelled with fans and profits in 1944-45. Hialeah's 1944 season debut attracted 12,726 fans who wagered a record \$635,758; at the Tropical, 10,900 fans crowded the grandstands. On New Year's Day 1944, almost 3,500 fans bet \$100,000 at Miami's West Flagler Kennel Club [dog track]. A *Time* correspondent disdainfully observed that most racegoers drove their cars to the track.<sup>108</sup>

Miami vice flourished during the war, if one is to believe reports of illegal gambling and bookmaking. The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover, had been concerned about such activities for some time. In 1940 he wrote the Attorney General: "It is a fact that the Miami area has been and is at the present time a mecca for criminals, gangsters, racketeers and federal fugitives from justice during the winter season because . . . of the wide open manner in which various illegal enterprises are operated."<sup>109</sup> The *Arcadia Arcadian* quipped, "To stop gambling in Miami is almost equivalent to stopping Miami."<sup>110</sup>

The sensational series of arrests in 1944 must have shocked the most jaded Miamians. Authorities raided a notorious night spot called, suggestively, Tobacco Road. When the evidence reached the bench of Judge Cecil C. Curry, the senior jurist closed down Tobacco Road. An exposé revealed that the club routinely hired male strippers, prompting the *Herald* to speculate that "prosecuting attorneys [were] thumbing their dictionaries for new words to describe the sexy, lewd and lascivious shows." In March 1944, Miami's vice squad began a sweep, hitting bookie joints and gambling dens. In one raid police arrested U.S. Rep. A. Pat Cannon. The congressman, a former policeman, explained he was "politicking for votes."<sup>111</sup>

Robber barons, baseball stars, and movie queens had been spending winters at Miami for half a century. Americans, in spite of declarations of a classless society, vicariously admired freespending lifestyles of the rich and famous. The press covered the misdeeds with *paparazzi* zeal. In *The Rise of the Leisure Class*, Thorstein Veblen observed that the rich indulged in extravagant behavior, in large part to revel in "con-



spicuous consumption.” Conspicuous consumption collided with the earnest warning, “Don’t you know there’s a war going on?”

In 1944, south Florida was the place to be and be seen. A new confidence, borne by the success of the indomitable Red Army and the U.S. army in Europe and the Pacific, buoyed civilian morale. Staggering wartime profits bankrolled winters of contentment and extravagance.

New Year’s Eve 1943 was as Babylonian as New Year’s Eve 1942 was Spartan. The *Herald’s* society columnist wistfully recalled the past when describing December 31, 1942. “Gay, rowdy Miami, which looks upon a party with the tender affection of a southern planter for a mint julep was just a whisper of the soaring rejoicing of old.” The reporter explained, “with fewer than a dozen full-fledged night clubs in operation where more than 50 had operated in past years. . . .”<sup>112</sup>

By New Year’s Eve 1943, *Time* proclaimed, “Simply everybody was in Florida, it seemed,” Society reporters and national correspondents converging on Miami Beach announced, “It was like old times.” The fashionable casinos and watering holes, only months earlier serving hash and Spam, now presented Persian caviar and Canadian whiskey. *Ciro’s* and *Lou Walter’s* Latin Quarter sparkled as “the places-one-must-be-seen-in.” The exclusive, million-dollar Surf Club also reopened.<sup>113</sup> Helen Muir recollected, “Miami Beach never had it so gay as titled European ‘refugees,’ wartime manufacturers, and government big wigs crowded the night spots, attended the horse races, and brunched in cabanas.”<sup>114</sup> Sally Rand and her exotic fan dance opened at Al Berlin’s Hurricane Club in Miami, while the Latin Quarter required a \$15 minimum. Reportedly, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr., paid \$4 for a pony of Bisquit brandy. Star spotters soon identified Paulette



**One of the tanks on parade on Flagler Street to rally patriotic support. In the background, the Olympia Theater (today’s Gusman Center) is on the left and the DuPont Building, which served as headquarters for Seventh Naval District, is to the right, behind the soldier. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-18456)**

Goddard, Joel McCrae, Noel Coward, Al Jolson, Orson Welles — “carefully attended by his wife, Rita Hayworth,” Jeanette MacDonald, Ann Sheridan, Chico Marx, Leo Durocher, Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague, Drew Pearson, Walter Winchell, and President Alfonso Lopez of Columbia.<sup>115</sup>

The lifestyles of the *glitterati* became subject of a national jeremiad. *Life* magazine opined, “It’s not entirely Florida’s fault that it seems to fiddle while the rest of the world burns.”<sup>116</sup> Philip Wylie angrily wrote, “Only the very ill and war-connected had a right to drive here from the rest of the U.S.A.” His essay in *New Republic* concluded with an indignant flourish, “It is a disgraceful panorama of selfishness — of wishful, witless self indulgence — of the failure not merely of a city but a great cross-section of the American people to understand even vaguely the meaning of these days.”<sup>117</sup> The *Herald* replied frostily, “All the snipers are not confined to the trees of the battle fronts of the Pacific or Italy.”<sup>118</sup>

Tourism paralleled America’s alternating moods of anxiety and confidence. In 1945, 2° million tourists flocked to Florida, matching the pre-war record of 1940.<sup>119</sup>

The war reinforced Miami’s image as Florida’s and America’s most important tourist center. Countless servicemen encountered palm trees, the surf, and the Gold Coast for the first time. The reportage helped glamorize Miami’s image as a naughty but respectable place to visit; no postwar trip to South Florida was complete without dinner and dancing at a nightclub.



**Senator Claude Pepper (right) tells Colonel Guttenberger (left) and civilian employees why it is necessary to buy more War Bonds during the Second War Loan Drive, September 17, 1943. (HASF 1982-114-81)**

Tourism also defined Miami as a southern city which followed the strictures of a Jim Crow society. But Miami and Miami Beach were no ordinary Deep South towns. When Jews arrived in the 1930s they encountered anti-Semitic signs and statutes. But Jewish residents realized new opportunities in south

Florida during the 1940s and 50s, especially in business and politics. Throughout the war, Governor Spessard Holland maintained a warm correspondence with Miami Beach city councilman and Army Major Mitch Wolfson.<sup>120</sup> Would the war bring new freedom and respect for Miami's African Americans?

## The Race War

World War II was a war of contrasts: incredible bursts of exhilaration and joy punctuated by bouts of despair and gloom. Like a Caravaggio painting, the history of civil rights during the war also suggests chiaroscuro, intense frames of sunshine and shadows.<sup>121</sup>

When the war began, African-American leaders faced a dilemma. During the First World War, blacks had enthusiastically supported the war, assured that common sacrifice would result in new respect and rights. Instead, race riots, a revived Ku Klux Klan, and angry editorials greeted returning veterans. In December 1941, African-American leaders unfurled the "Double V" campaign: victory abroad against Fascism and Totalitarianism, but also victory against racism at home.<sup>122</sup>

Black America discovered Miami during the war. Northern-born blacks, northern-raised blacks, rural southern blacks, and urban blacks encountered Miami as soldiers and civilians. They found a city rigidly divided along racial and class lines. Racial restrictive covenants and social policy proscribed blacks to segregated neighborhoods in Colored Town, Coconut Grove, and Liberty City. Attempts to defy the status quo — moving into a white neighborhood, swimming at a white beach, or attempting to register as a Democrat — met swift resistance and occasional violence. Blacks were expected, in the vernacular of the period, to know their place. Place meant low-skill, service jobs: "Colored Woman, kitchen work . . .," "Colored Maid," "Colored Girl, general housekeeping," and "Colored Woman to Iron." When the war began, no African Americans served on the Miami police force. The *Daily News* in February 1942 touted military service as an excellent opportunity for blacks "to qualify as caterers, stewards or waiters or hotel workers when they return to civilian life."<sup>123</sup>

Miami, at least when compared with Tampa, Pensacola, and Jacksonville, offered black servicemen an environment largely free of physical intimidation and explosive racial incidents. African American personnel migrated to Colored Town, which offered a wide variety of enter-

tainment. In Miami, the armed services conducted a radical experiment, one orchestrated without publicity or fanfare. In spite of staunch resistance — from Congressman Pat Cannon, from officials in Miami Beach, from the tourist industry — the Army Air Force proceeded with plans to accept blacks in an integrated officers candidate school. Judge William Hastie, aide to the Secretary of War, fought hard for this experiment. The school operated smoothly without noteworthy incident. Eldridge Williams, a graduate of Xavier University, was one of several airmen to train in white units. He arrived at Miami Beach in 1942 to attend the Army Air Corps Officer Training School.<sup>124</sup>

When Eleanor Roosevelt visited Miami, the First Lady made a special point to visit the Negro USO Center at 535 N.W. Third Ave. The *Herald* editorialized in the aftermath of the Detroit race riots, “The Eleanor Roosevelt School of Thought has been feeding the Negro a heady mixture of social equality that provokes such tragic incidents as Detroit’s bloody battle.”<sup>125</sup>

In 1943, anxious over deteriorating conditions and potentially explosive incidents, the FBI embarked on a massive examination of America’s race problem. “A Survey of Racial Conditions in the United States” included agents’ reports from Florida. The FBI report from Miami concluded, “Excellent recreational facilities have been provided for white soldiers and sailors but those available for Negroes have been seriously neglected. This fact has caused resentment and some racial tensions.” Yet they characterized the degree of racial tensions in Miami as “Class D,” a category “in which undercurrents of racial tension may result in minor conflicts and may interfere with war production.” The FBI considered the likelihood of rioting and protest far more serious in Pensacola, Panama City, Jacksonville, and Tampa.<sup>126</sup>

War spared Miami any violent racial demonstrations, although state and federal officials prepared for that eventuality. In August 1944 Florida’s State Defense Council and the Army service forces prepared top secret plans in the event of race riots at Miami and other cities. The report indicated that Miami’s “Negro dives and joints” produced “Negroes of the trouble-maker type,” but officials maintained that Miami was not an urban volcano. “The racial tension in this city is related as ‘Medium.’”<sup>127</sup>

The war provided new energy for the swelling civil rights movement. In Miami, black leaders pressed for change along several lines: the appointment of black policemen, educational equality, and a more

equitable share of municipal services. For decades, Miami blacks had complained of police brutality in their neighborhoods. By 1945, a significant breakthrough had occurred: Miami's police force included eighteen African Americans, more than all of the other Florida cities combined.<sup>128</sup>

African Americans also achieved a milestone in public education. For decades, area blacks took special pride in their schools. Elry Taylor Sands, class of 1942, reminisced, "Booker T. [Washington] was the hub of our life. Anything of significance, it was held in our auditorium."<sup>129</sup> But black pride did not translate to equal educational funding. In 1941, Dade County schools were considered the finest in Florida, but black teachers earned on the average one half the salary of their white counterparts, \$829 to \$1,687. Galvanized by the war and the irrepressible leadership of Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP, African-American teachers sued Dade County. Marshall won this and other landmark cases in Florida. By 1945, Dade County had equalized the pay for black and white teachers.<sup>130</sup>

In 1945, African Americans tested their right to use county-owned bathing beaches, a right previously denied. Leaders of the Negro Citizens Service League informed Sheriff Jimmy Sullivan of the bathe-in at Baker's Haulover. White officers encountered the protesting bathers,



Eleanor Roosevelt visiting members of Miami's black community. She visited many military installations in the Greater Miami area during the war. (HASF 1975-34-5)

but chose to leave them alone. This marked a signal victory in Florida's civil rights history. In 1945, Virginia Beach on Biscayne Bay's Virginian Key became Miami's "colored beach."<sup>131</sup>

Events on the national stage also brought a new sense of rising expectations. In April 1944, the U.S. Supreme court ruled in a landmark decision, *Smith v. Allwright*, that the white primary was unconstitutional. The Smith decision was hailed by blacks, but bitterly resented by whites. In Miami, "liberal" Senator Claude Pepper thundered, "Southerners will not allow matters peculiar to us to be determined by those who do not know and understand our problem. The South will allow nothing to impair white supremacy."<sup>132</sup>

World War II marked a turning point in the history of Miami's black communities, a seed time for the modern civil rights movement. Energized, African Americans prepared to assault other barriers blocking the American dream. One should note that the achievements wrested during the war were quite moderate. Equalization of teacher salaries, the creation of a black beach, the hiring of black police to patrol black neighborhoods—none of these victories shook or even challenged the foundations of a segregated society. In 1945, African-American leaders simply sought respect and equality *within* a segregated Miami. Yet the war had brought change. Never again would blacks accept discrimination without protest. Ironically, days before the end of the war, a resurgent Ku Klux Klan, also energized by the conflict, erected a ten-foot burning cross as a warning to blacks who sought homes in white neighborhoods.<sup>133</sup> The war had graduated future leaders and prepared a generation to resist inequity.

## Women

Another group of Miamians also witnessed a new order. Miami women discovered and created brave new worlds of opportunity and achievement during the 1940s.

Within days after Pearl harbor, it was evident that America suffered from an acute shortage of manpower. The solution seemed simple. "The first thing to do to win the war," columnist Dorothy Parker challenged American women, "is to lose your amateur standing."<sup>134</sup> A Florida newspaper explained, "Womanpower is available everywhere. Women are eager to give it wherever and whenever they can. Why

does not the government take steps to organize, recognize and use this valuable asset?"<sup>135</sup>

In Miami, a crazyquilt pattern of government incentives, private initiative, and individual will brought women into the workplace. Women had always worked in Miami. The war brought large numbers of white married women into the wage market. In the past, black women and working-class women had worked the service trades; increasingly the 1920s and 30s introduced single women into the city's department stores and offices as secretaries and clerks. The war accelerated these patterns.

Rosie the Riveter and Joan of Arc embody the prototypical female employee during the war, but in Miami she was more likely working as a clerk, typist, maid, flight technician, or in a seemingly endless variety of new occupations. Such stories became common newspaper fare. "Several hotels are employing women clerks and hotel elevator operators now are almost all women," reported the *Herald* in 1943.<sup>136</sup> Florida Power and Light hired six pole painters in 1945.<sup>137</sup> During the conflict, milkmen became milkmaids at Miami's Southern Dairies, while lumberjacks became lumberjills at area mill sites.<sup>138</sup> Women could also be found as truck drivers, and freight handlers, and aircraft workers.<sup>139</sup> The *Herald's* Jeanne Bellamy wrote early in 1942, "Ladies, are you

really seeking war jobs? Then you'll find they're easy to get."<sup>140</sup>

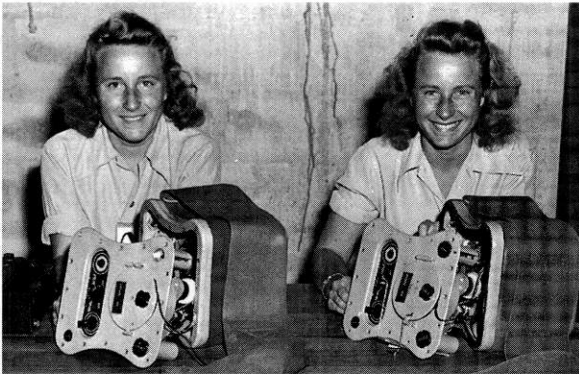
News accounts often linked the compatibility of work, domesticity, and femininity. Mrs. Inez Kennedy, for instance, "goes through the same motions at a drill press that she uses to squeeze the morning orange juice for her family."<sup>141</sup> The *Herald* saluted Miss Genevieve Mary Boehm, a former beautician and now "the only welder at the Army Post Engineers Shop." Miss Boehm also volunteered for the Molly Pitcher day war stamp and bond drive.<sup>142</sup> In Miami facto-



An original "Rosie the Riveter" in action as an airplane mechanic assistant, November 1943. (HASF, 1980-56-7)

ries, offices, and barracks, beauty and popularity contests were commonplace. Wartime restrictions and new freedoms generated fashion change at the workplace and elsewhere. Women's dresses became tighter and shorter and the light feather cut took advantage of the bobby pin shortage. Girdles were cast away. Some businesses responded to the problem of child care. Tycoon Tackle Inc. opened a twenty-four hour nursery staffed by seven registered nurses.<sup>143</sup>

Black women responded to the new opportunities, but documentation is lacking. When the war began, no black woman in Miami worked as an actress, artist, professor, dentist, or physician. White collars on black women were rare: in 1940 Miami, 176 black women taught school and thirty served as nurses. Another 115 black women worked as beauticians. Two-thirds of black women — 6,297 — worked as domestics (laundress, maid, housekeeper). By 1950, changes had occurred. Almost 350 black women worked as school teachers and 97 as nurses. While the largest number of black women continued to work as unskilled or semi-skilled laborers, some progress had been made.<sup>144</sup> The war, albeit slowly, opened opportunities in defense work, factories, and the military.



**Twin sisters employed as radio mechanics at the Miami Air Depot, shown here testing sea rescue equipment. (HASF 1980-56-42)**

Over 16 million Americans served in the military during the Second World War, and women represented 350,000 of those veterans. On the eve of Pearl Harbor, only registered nurses qualified for military service.<sup>145</sup> The war expanded opportunities for women in the military. Co-eds at Barry College met with recruiters in March 1942 for the topic, "Physical Fitness for Victory." The *Herald* called it the "Petticoat Army."<sup>146</sup>



By the summer of 1943, Miami's Robert Clay Hotel had been taken over by 165 WAVES and SPARS. The WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) had been created in June 1942, and the SPARS (Women's Reserve of the U.S. Coast Guard; the name Spars is taken from the Coast Guard motto, *Semper Paratus*) was formed in November 1942.<sup>147</sup> "As the war became more devastating, and as my three brothers entered military service," reminisced Ruth Elsasser, a native of Cocoa, "I became restless in my job as social worker . . . [then] became a home service worker for the American Red Cross. . . . Suddenly there I was, pictured in the *Miami Herald* of Sept. 2, 1942, taking the aptitude test [for the WAVES]." Elsasser fondly recalls her experience in Miami:

For young people in the military, Miami was a great place to be stationed. . . . For the WAVES, the hospitality was endless. Since there were so few of us in the beginning, we were a distinct curiosity. To start with, our uniforms were smart looking, having been designed by a top fashion designer. Even the officer's hat was famous, having been styled by Mainbocher. . . .<sup>148</sup>



**Three Women's Army Corps (WAC) officers assigned to the Miami Air Depot, November 18, 1943. (HASF 1980-56-8)**

Women could aid the military without donning a uniform. Norma Pennoyer, a Miami student at Florida State College for Women, became a cartographer, training at the Army Mapping Service.<sup>149</sup> Women excelled in the meritocratic environment established at Miami's Embry-Riddle School of Aviation. When the war began, only 160 women in the United States had earned a commercial pilot's license. Two of them, Helen Cavis and Nancy Batson, taught at Embry-Riddle. By

1943, twenty-five women served as flight instructors at the Miami headquarters.<sup>150</sup>

Wartime Miami witnessed a kaleidoscope of change: women flying airplanes, driving trucks, delivering milk. The presence of women in the workforce touched off a national debate with local echoes. J. Edgar Hoover, who had already stigmatized Miami as a din of iniquity, pontificated that the “new woman” posed “a national scandal.”<sup>151</sup> Commentators expressed special concern over the war’s effects upon young women. For whatever reason, young women seemed especially vulnerable to young men in uniforms. The words “Khaki Wacky” or “Victory Girl” described this phenomenon.

Far more serious problems existed than teen age infatuations. During the war, commentators observed a disturbing, but predictable rise in the divorce rate. By 1944, 17 percent of Dade county divorce petitions cited wartime stress; the percentage would rise even more dramatically.<sup>152</sup>

Prostitution posed an alarming social health problem for cities such as Miami. No sociologist is needed to understand behavioral patterns of eighteen-year-old men on leave for the first time in Miami. On a typical month in the early 1940s, thirty-thousand sailors passed through Bayfront Park.<sup>153</sup> Nor does one need an economist to understand why some women migrated to Miami to become prostitutes. One is hard pressed to pin labels on victims and villains in the wartime milieu. What concerns historians are the consequences of such events. In 1944, the U.S. Public Health Service Venereal Disease Control Division singled out Miami for its “high and still rising” rates of infection among naval personnel.<sup>154</sup> Such problems plagued many U.S. cities during this period. Only the widescale application of penicillin, truly the war’s wonder drug, saved America from a postwar social catastrophe.

Miami officials, embarrassed by the stigma of social disease, cooperated with the military, but prostitution was not a centralized industry which could be easily regulated. Helen Muir remembers,

The military closed all houses of prostitution, among them Gertie Walsh’s . . . [her] bordello with a berth for yachts. . . . The military closed the houses of prostitution and Miami teenagers turned prostitute in Bayfront Park . . . Early park closings and extra policing failed to stop this mass prostitution until all shrubbery was ordered trimmed and thinned from the bottom.<sup>155</sup>

Lost between the more sensational histories of Khaki Wackers and Rosie the Riveter is the volunteer. Historically, women had left their mark on Miami through selfless efforts to create voluntary associations. Women's clubs, improvement societies, garden associations, and educational programs made Miami a better place. So it was in World War II. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, the *Herald* printed a headline, "Wanted Immediately: 500 Patriotic Women!"<sup>156</sup> In one year alone, Red Cross volunteers prepared two million surgical dressings.<sup>157</sup> Countless women volunteered at USO canteens and military recreation centers.

In Miami Beach, a group of women led by Zel P. Renshaw volunteered and refurbished Minsky Pier so military recruits might have a gathering spot. The women organized the Miami Beach Pier Assoc., elected Kay Pancoast president, and entertained 235,000 soldiers the first year. Fully 18,000 local women volunteered in this endeavor.<sup>158</sup>

## V-J Day

The date was 5 August 1945. On the Pacific island of Tinian, technicians and crew had carefully loaded the most single important bomb of World War II. Col. Paul Tibbets stood by the bomb bay of his B-29 Superfortress and called for a sign painter. The painter inscribed the name *Enola Gay* in foot-high letters beneath the pilot's window. The next day Miami's Enola Gay, the mother of Paul Tibbets, became the most famous woman in America.

The news of V-J day, 15 August 1945, rocked Miami. V-J day marked the greatest single concentration of joy ever witnessed in Miami history. According to accounts, 30,000 people flocked to downtown Miami to celebrate the moment. The crowd "carpeted the town in confetti and ticker tape, tied down their auto horns and blasted gloom to the winds..." The *Herald* noted that it "looked like Rio at carnival."<sup>159</sup> Firecrackers, which had disappeared since Pearl Harbor, exploded until late in the night. Flagler Street served as the symbolic center of the celebration, a recognition of the role of downtown Miami in the lives of citizens. A reporter wrote that "Flagler Street, before it was blocked off, became a race track within seconds. Cars were traveling 65 mph on both sides of the street. Strangely enough the drivers were obeying the traffic lights."<sup>160</sup>



V-J Day celebration on Flagler Street in downtown Miami on August 15, 1945. The crowd “carpeted the town in confetti and ticker tape,” reported the *Miami Herald*. (HASF, MNC, 1989-011-18446)

The *Herald's* Jack Bell had just returned from his war odyssey. His reportorial eye caught an elderly woman entering a church. She walked toward a statue of the Virgin Mary.

She raised her head and the tears rolled unheeded down her cheeks. . . . A giant master sergeant who was kneeling beside her rose awkwardly and took the taper from her hands. She said to him, 'This one is for Edgar, my youngest. He was killed in Germany. . . . Edgar was my favorite son, my baby, And he doesn't know.'<sup>161</sup>

## Epilogue

The war had caused many people to rethink the future of Miami. Few Miamians have ever offered such a vision for the Magic City as did Philip Wylie in a breathtaking 1943 *Herald* essay. The acerbic Wylie had taken up residence in Coral Gables in the 1930s. Friends questioned his sanity. He reminisced, "I am sick of the surprise and the chuckles — sick of the perpetual implication that my wife and I, for some incomprehensible reason, have chosen to reside in a honky-tonk — sick of the blank universal belief that Greater Miami is a third-rate city, garish, vulgar and trivial — sick of the assumption that because I live in this area I am somehow a social parasite."<sup>162</sup>

In this essay, Wylie chose not to caustically attack Miami's leaders for past errors, but laid out a searing prophecy for postwar Miami. Wylie understood Miami was poised for a dramatic takeoff as soon as the swords were turned into automobiles and refrigerators. "Universal cheap air-conditioning after the war," Wylie wrote, "plus the knowledge of tropical living we have gained during the war is going to end every problem of comfortable year-round living in south Florida. It is going to open this area potentially to millions of people . . ."<sup>163</sup>

Wylie pleaded for Miamians to take a new fork in the postwar road. "We should be a cultural center of the continent," he contended. "Painters like Winslow Homer have put our seascapes and landscapes in the Metropolitan Museum — but we Floridians let our artists struggle, starve, and even commit suicide for want of attention and victuals." He added, "We could and should be the center in the western world for those architects and engineers who are experimenting with designs in

housing, public buildings, materials, lighting, solar energy, heat control, ventilation, and a hundred other problems of tropical living . . .”<sup>164</sup>

Wylie challenged Miamians, “We ought to have the greatest university in the nation, here. Perhaps we should have several great universities. Florida, not California, should be the focal point for the study of applied aerodynamics. . . . [W]e are richer by five times in marine life than any other place in the United States. . . . This follows that our university — our putative universities — should lead the world in the study of marine biology.”<sup>165</sup>

A new Miami pondered Philip Wylie’s brandishments and dreamscape. Many must have asked the Dickensian question Ebenezer Scrooge beseeched the Spirit of a hundred years earlier: “Are these the shadows of things that will be or are they the shadow of things that may be, only?”

World War II officially commenced a new gold rush for Miami, an experience more *Odyssey* than *Iliad*. By war’s end, hundreds of thousands of servicemen, bureaucrats, tourists, celebrities, gamblers, prostitutes, and workers had descended upon Miami. Miami expounded simultaneous exhilaration and horror, a communal experience shared by citizen and soldier, black and white, rich and poor.

Unlike the deeds of Julia Tuttle, Henry Flagler, or George Merrick, no single individual stamped his or her identity on Miami in the 1940s or 1950s; rather Pearl Harbor set off a chain reaction of events, unleashing vast forces which shaped and reshaped south Florida. The military-industrial complex, anti-communism, the leisure revolution, air travel, year round tourism, federal grants to housing and education, the G.I. Bill, the Interstate Highway Program, shopping malls, air conditioning and DDT, all have their roots in or were greatly enhanced by World War II.



V-J Day celebration on Flagler Street. (HASF 1981-91-16)

## Notes

*Note on Sources:* Miami is a lodestar for scholars interested in Florida history, and this writer has been especially fortunate to have been encouraged and assisted by many generous Miamians. Anyone interested in researching Miami in the 1940s must make a point to visit the Charlton Tebeau Library at the Historical Association of South Florida. Rebecca Smith serves as one of the helpful archivists. Paul George is a walking goldmine of Miami's past, and has generously shared his love for the city. Across the plaza stands the Miami-Dade Public Library, where Sam Bolderick heads the Special Collections. The Library holds some especially valuable scrapbooks, the Agnew Welsh Collection, containing a rich number of wartime clippings. The State Archives in Tallahassee contain government reports dealing with wartime Florida, as well as the papers of Governors Spessard Holland and Millard Caldwell. Readers will find the most useful single source in day by day study of *Miami Herald* and *Miami Daily News*. Sadly, no issues of Miami's black newspapers, the *Miami Times* and the *Miami Whip*, survive for this period.

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