



Southern Bell Telephone employees hide their faces from photographers while leaving court, circa September 25, 1950.
Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-15362.

Respectable White Ladies, Wayward Girls, and Telephone Thieves in Miami's "Case of the Clinking Brassieres"

Vivien Miller

In her landmark study of gender, family life, and domestic containment in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s, historian Elaine Tyler May noted the importance of the consumer, arms, and space races for Cold War Americans: "Family-centred spending was encouraged as a way of strengthening "the American way of life," and thus fostering traditional, nuclear family and patriarchal values, and patriotism. A "fetishization of commodities" was integral to the new post-war national identity and the "feminine mystique" embodied the resurgence of neo-Victorian domesticity and motherhood.

Sociologist Wini Breines notes that a good life in the 1950s "was defined by a well-equipped house in the suburbs, a new car or two, a good white-collar job for the husband, well-adjusted and successful children taken care of by a full-time wife and mother. Leisure time and consumer goods constituted its centrepieces; abundance was its context. White skin was a criterion for its attainment." The post-war U.S. economy as measured by the purchase and consumption of homes and home appliances, cars and vacations, cosmetics and clothes, and televisions and other forms of entertainment, and the proliferation of shopping centres, expanded dramatically, and gross national product rose by 250 percent between 1945 and 1960. By the end of the 1950s, sixty percent of all Americans owned their own homes, seventy five percent of American families owned a car, seventy five percent owned a washing machine, and eighty-seven percent owned a television set.

However, the virtuous consumerism of the 1950s co-existed with the fraudulent and illegal acquisition of material goods by amateur and professional criminals. The city of Miami presents an interesting case study

here. The FBI *Uniform Crime Report* of 1950 shows that of the 6,309 offenses known to the Miami police department that year, the largest category was for “burglary-breaking or entering” (38.7 percent or 2,447 offenses). Petty larceny, of goods worth less than fifty dollars, accounted for 27.6 percent or 1,742 offenses, and grand larceny for 15.6 percent or 987 offenses (thus, 43.2 percent combined). Auto theft, aggravated assault, and robbery accounted for 8.7 percent, 4.4 percent, and four percent of reported offenses respectively. The twenty-nine reported cases of murder or non-negligent manslaughter accounted for less than one percent. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, convictions for non-violent property offenses, particularly larceny and burglary, generally outstripped those for murder, manslaughter, and assault in Dade County and throughout Florida, but historical knowledge and understanding of property offenses is relatively limited.

One of the 987 grand larceny offenses involved the large scale theft of money from the Miami offices of the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company. On Tuesday, September 26, 1950, Associated and United Press Association reports of the theft of “at least \$100,000” from the Miami telephone company crossed the United States. Verbal confessions by three female employees led police to announce that several women had taken rolls of coins from the company’s counting room over a period of two years. The nature and circumstances of the thefts underlined there were serious shortcomings in Southern Bell’s accounting systems and the possibility that customers were being overcharged as a result. The public utility company was already receiving bad press in Miami because of long-running labor disputes as well as over the number of “slugs” or dud coins in its pay phones. Yet, it was the manner in which the women had removed the coins—in their brassieres—which captured press and public attention. Indeed, newspaper reports of “the case of the silver falsies,” “the case of the clinking brassieres,” “the bra bandits,” and “the brassiere brigade” titillated readers of tabloids and more serious papers alike.

This essay uses the “case of the clinking brassieres” to explore female theft in Miami at mid-century and the ways in which gender, race, class, respectability, and youth offered protections and shaped treatment within Florida’s criminal justice system. It focuses on the illegal activities of three female telephone employees, Betty Corrigan, age 24, Marie Orr, age 21, and Billie Ruth McNabb, age 27, their criminal prosecution, and post-conviction relief. These seemingly respectable coin thieves challenged a familiar image of theft as a lower-class crime associated with

poverty and economic need, while their blonde hair and white skin (and an idealization of the meanings of white beauty standards), complicated public attitudes in a period when true or serious criminals were racketeers and organized crime operatives. Further, one of the lawyers representing the women was Harry W. Prebish, a prominent Florida criminal defence attorney in the second half of the twentieth century. In court, Prebish portrayed Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb—as did much of the media coverage—as wayward “girls” who had engaged in a series of amusing, rather frivolous, and petty actions rather than as “real criminals.”

The 1950 U.S. Census showed that Florida had 2.7 million residents. Dade County, with a population of nearly half a million, was the largest county in the state, and Miami, the county seat, with 247,262 residents, was Florida’s largest city. State investment in roads and bridges, expanding sea travel and port facilities, and the growth of domestic and international air travel to and from Miami in the 1940s and 1950s increased commerce and trade to South Florida and spurred a dramatic rise in post-war tourism and migration. Miami’s population increased by 57.1 percent between 1945 and 1950, and 42.2 percent between 1950 and 1955, as former military personnel, economic migrants and immigrants took up residence. “Plenty of space, warm weather, and proximity to the ocean are among the reasons for the high rate of settlement in Miami. Real estate promoters and speculators have also played an important role in the area’s growth. Tourists too spread the ‘sunshine gospel,’ and many return to settle,” observed one contemporary political scientist.

News commentaries, grand jury reports, and UCR information collectively indicate that South Florida, particularly during the December-April winter tourist season, was plagued by pickpockets, street thieves, and robbers who employed varying levels of aggression and violence. Ease of transportation and the increasing mobility of professional criminals were linked to bank robbery, jewel thefts, and diamond smuggling in Miami in this period. Hotel thieves, prowlers, burglars, and check swindlers were also active in the Miami, Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale resorts. Two white “\$50-a-visit call girls” furnished tips to the five male members of a “sex steal” gang reputed to have stolen more than \$250,000 in a series of robberies of Miami Beach hotel guests during the 1955-1956 tourist season. Male and female accomplices might also pose as (usually white) heterosexual lovers or marriage partners to avoid suspicion during the surveillance of selected targets, the commission of a crime, or in collecting illegally-acquired items. This was not always successful as in the later 1965 case of a male professional burglar and his ex-

Playboy Club bunny female partner caught with \$150,000 worth of jewels taken from Miami's Jordan Marsh department store. Amateur thieves were also active, such as the former maid charged with the grand larceny of \$20,000 from her doctor employer in 1953, and the twenty-seven-year-old black defendant at the Miami Beach Municipal Court who was fined one hundred dollars and sentenced to ten days in the county jail in 1956 for breaking, entering, and stealing one hundred (dead) chickens from the Pickin' Chicken restaurant on Lincoln Road.

In his 1939 study of professional thieves, criminologist Edwin Sutherland argued that prostitutes, waitresses, cashiers, and hotel employees were the most likely groups of women to become "gun molls" or pick-pockets, and traditionally women are deemed to have lacked the intellectual or organizational skills to execute major thefts and crimes of deception. In a satirical article on female embezzlers in the late 1930s, one female inmate of the Florida State Prison declared, "It is, accordingly, unfair that women embezzlers should be regarded by law and society with the same distaste as men who rifle the cash box. The offender in such cases is not the woman but the dolt [idiot] who puts the kale [money] in her way." She suggested that whereas male embezzlers understood the consequences of their crimes, and knew how to play the system, women were "a different breed of cats. They lie, stall, freeze up, sass the judge, crucify their own witnesses, and behave so badly all around that they draw stiff sentences for trifling crime. Women don't understand money, and when they get hurt fiddling around with it they don't want to bare their souls to a bunch of prying cops, bondsmen, lawyers and snoops."

Scholarship on amateur and professional female thieves has tended to focus on the nineteenth century and retail crime, specifically in relation to the drapery shop, bazaar, and department store, and the emergence of the female kleptomaniac as criminal archetype. Women embraced and participated in an emerging culture of consumption as both legitimate shoppers and light-fingered thieves, and made use of feminine clothing such as hoop skirts and muffs as well as pockets to conceal and transport stolen items. Shoplifting was still considered to be a predominately female form of delinquency in the mid-twentieth century when retail theft generally was also linked to the greater freedom of movement for the customer within the retail space, for example, with the early twentieth-century shift from clerk-operated to self-service stores throughout the US and the post-World War II rejuvenation of the department store.

The Miami public and press understood crime and criminals in particular ways in the 1940s and 1950s, as their city was described as hav-

ing fallen prey to racketeers, gamblers, and high-profile mobsters from New York, Chicago and Detroit. "Gambling operations have been one of the chief sources of trouble ever since underworld characters began to follow the wealthy into the Miami area each season," observed *New York Times* correspondent Harris G. Sims in 1947. Syndicate infiltration of South Florida trade unions and ownership of hotels, nightclubs and the liquor business, supposedly encouraged by Dade County sheriff Jimmy Sullivan, spurred formation of a citizens' Crime Commission of Greater Miami in March 1948 to bring public pressure on Sullivan and Governor Fuller Warren to wage war on the rackets. The Dade County Bar Association's Committee on Law Enforcement blamed "lax, inefficient, and inadequate [and underfunded] law enforcement" for making Dade County into "a mecca for criminals." Prior to the creation of a Metropolitan Police Department, residents of the various municipalities in Dade County were served by a collection of different police agencies, including city police departments, the Sheriff's Criminal Department, and parts of the State Highway Patrol, which led to on-going problems of cooperation, coordination, and corruption. The City of Miami Police Department was also the subject of numerous complaints of racial harassment and violence. Grand jurors in the late 1940s declared that a "war on rackets" should be the priority: "We are thoroughly convinced that the organized gambling racket can be destroyed and its sinister influences removed ... [by] a real and sincere desire on the part of those charged with the enforcement of the laws to do so."

In July 1950 U.S. Senator Estes Kefauver opened his investigation into interstate organized crime in Miami, and local residents learned of the extent of syndicate control and political corruption in Dade County, particularly linked to the Miami Beach S & G Syndicate, from television and radio coverage of the hearings. Thomas Kelly replaced Sullivan as sheriff and was expected to crack down on vice. Anxieties over Miami's reputation as a playground for America's gangster class were expressed frequently in the state's newspapers.

Southern Bell had also become embroiled in the controversies. "It has come to our attention that through devious and various means and subterfuges, telephones have been diverted from legal use to bookie operations," declared the Grand Jury Report of winter 1948. In late 1950 the company was indicted for "being an accessory to gambling operations," although all fourteen charges were dismissed in January 1951 by Judge Ben C. Willard of the Dade County Criminal Court of Record.

Throughout 1951 Governor Warren engaged in a series of high-profile disputes and disagreements with the Kefauver Commission following



The accused look over court documents, circa September 26, 1950. Front Row, from left: Marie Orr, Gladys Orr, Billie Ruth McNabb, Betty Corrigan, Rita Orr. Back Row, from left: Cecilia Hay, Jean Nolan, Bonnie Hebert, James S. Rainwater, Harry Prebish. Attorney Harry W. Prebish stands at the right. Kestly, photographer. Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-15358.



“Two telephone company employees [sic] who confessed they stole thousands of dollars from the Southern Bell Telephone co. over a period of eight months stare at three suitcases loaded with change and currency found in an auto parked in front of Marie Orr’s house at 6521 SW 15th st. In the picture are (left to right) Betty Corrigan, 23, and Marie Orr, who confessed to the thefts; Safety Director I. Ray Mills of West Miami, and Miami Det. C. B. Newton.” – Photo caption in the Miami News, September 25, 1950.

Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-15359.

his controversial refusal to testify, and had also reinstated Sullivan as sheriff in April. However, the 1951 Dade County grand jury, newly configured as a more professional "Blue Ribbon" institution, believed that the war on the rackets and more concentrated prevention policies had paid off; thus during the 1951-1952 winter season "for the first time in the history of modern Dade County there was no open and notorious table gambling or bookmaking, except on a brief and sneak basis." The lighter tone of media coverage of the attractive female coin thieves reinforced the differences between them and male racketeers.

Prior to the creation of Metropolitan Miami in 1957, there was "a patchwork" of twenty-six different communities across Dade County. Marie Orr, her sister-in-law Ruth Orr, and Billie Ruth McNabb, and other family members all lived on S. W. 13th Street in the City of West Miami, one of the fastest growing suburban areas of Greater Miami, with a population of nearly four thousand in 1950. Work colleague Betty Corrigan and her husband William lived nearby. Exposure of the telephone theft "ring" began in West Miami, during the early hours of September 24, when Rita Orr reported to police that \$150 was missing from the house that she and Marie shared. West Miami Safety Officer I. Raymond "Ira" Mills investigated, found no signs of forced entry, and promised to return that afternoon with "fingerprint men." Later that day, City of Miami patrolmen had picked up Marine Sergeant William Albert, Billie Ruth McNabb's fiancé, in a car with a strong box containing several thousand dollars which she had asked him to remove from the house after Mills left. A Miami detective directed Mills to another house on S.W. Seventh Street, where he met McNabb. Later in court, Mills stated that in response to his questions McNabb had made a full and voluntary statement in which she admitted removing money from the Southern Bell building and that the money had been taken from the counting room by her sister, Marie. Marie Orr and Betty Corrigan were met at the house by detectives early on the morning of September 25, following their return from an out-of-town visit. They were taken to the larger police station in nearby Coral Gables and also apparently made full and voluntary confessions. The *Miami Daily News* reported, "In the well[-]modulated and courteous tones which telephone company employees [sic] are trained to use, they spilled one name after another." For the reader this was an easily recognizable reference to the telephone industry's white lady image.

Many press reports on Corrigan, Orr, and McNabb drew on the enduring socio-economic and racial characteristics of female telephone



Marie Orr (one of the accused) faces the camera. The others take cover while waiting to be booked.

Bill Saunders, photographer.

Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, 1989-011-15360.

employees that reinforced public perceptions of high moral character, good manners, pleasant voices, tidy and stylish dress; of respectable women. Labor historian Jacqueline Jones highlights the “premium placed on white notions of female attractiveness” that created “highly stylized images of female beauty”—particularly of pale unblemished skin, blonde hair, blue eyes—that “pervaded advertisements in mass-circulation magazines” throughout the early twentieth century, including those of the Bell Telephone Companies, and dominated movie and later television screens. White female beauty standards “extended into the reception offices and stenographic pools of large businesses” and were associated with telephone operators, even though most customers would only ever hear their voices. The Bell System was a leader in both technological development and in female employment; around fifty percent of company employees in the U.S. between 1917 and the early 1970s were women.

In her study of female labor and technological change in the Bell System, Venus Green demonstrates how the telephone industry championed a “white lady identity” which “represented an idealization of white women that entailed demure and ‘ladylike’ behavior, commanding only the highest reverence.” The white lady standard generated employee support for racial exclusivity and inhibited the development of a white feminist working-class consciousness, yet also justified women being paid significantly less than male employees. Green concluded that female Bell employees accepted their inferior economic status because “[t]he value of the ‘white lady’ identity for the operator was that she did not work in a factory like the immigrants, and she was not a domestic like African American women.” Automation diminished the value of operators’ personal skills and heightened fears over loss of status, yet provided continuing support for the white lady standard because “operators relied more on their white exclusivity to maintain what they perceived to be an elite position.” White female telephone operators’ insistence on racial exclusivity and resistance to the employment of black women was reflected in employment patterns in Jim Crow southern cities such as Miami, in which black women were employed mainly as domestic household workers and as waged laborers in hotel, catering and similar service industries rather than in the white-collar workplace.

The view that the “white lady standard” stifled the development of a white feminist working-class consciousness is challenged somewhat by the long-running disputes over pay and working conditions, especially as a result of company pressure to quicken the timescale for switching to automated systems. South Florida industrial action was coordinated first

by the National Federation of Telephone Workers and Miami Local 107 of the Southern Federation of Telephone Workers, then by the CIO-affiliated Communication Workers of America (CWA) after its formation in 1947. The CWA's local Miami chapter was made up entirely of Southern Bell workers in the 1950s (Bell had 550,000 employees in the U.S. by 1950, and they contributed heavily to the CWA national membership rolls). These disputes had resulted in a series of lengthy and costly strikes by Southern Bell employees in the nine southeastern states in which the company operated in the late 1940s, and would continue through the 1950s. There had been significant disruption to telephone services in the Greater Miami area in spring 1947 when 1,400 phone employees walked out, and again in February and May 1950. A recorded message greeted dial calls to "operator" and "long distance" in 1946 and customers were informed that operators were on strike and their calls could not be handled. Supervisory staff and non-union employees took over frontline jobs in the 1947 and 1950 strikes, and handled 6,000 long-distance calls per day rather than the normal 10,000. One journalist observed in 1957: "Strikes of one sort or another are an annual affair with the Southern Bell Telephone and Telegraph Company" and despite the relative weakness of the CWA in Florida, "an open-shop state," the disruption to customers was of local political and gubernatorial concern. There were twenty-one telephone companies operating in Florida at mid-century, but given Southern Bell's monopoly in Dade County, and as it provided long distance services for all telephone companies in the state, it seems very likely that jurors in the subsequent criminal case against Corrigan, Orr, and McNabb were Southern Bell customers.

Fifty percent of Bell employees were female, but ninety percent of operators were women, thus there was a heavy female presence on many picket lines in Jacksonville and Miami the late 1940s and early 1950s. Newspaper reports and captioned photographs offered a portrait of a disgruntled set of workers who were willing to demonstrate their dissatisfaction in "unladylike" ways. Recent analyses of clerical and business employee theft suggest that lack of company loyalty, an absence of personal job fulfillment, and perceived wage and promotion inequities are more likely causes than economic necessity. Further, women's share of the U.S. labor market had declined from its wartime high of thirty-six percent to twenty-eight percent in 1950 (although this was a temporary interruption to the long-term trend toward rising levels of female waged employment). "In the absence of equal opportunities legislation, post-war employers could hire whom they wished at whatever salary would be

accepted, and they demonstrated a strong preference for male workers,” with the result that female wage earners were trapped within the low-paid domestic service and clerical work categories. It is tempting to propose that significant levels of Bell female employee dissatisfaction, the long-running labor disputes, post-war anger over gender pay inequities, and Bell women’s long history of overt and covert resistance to company rules and regulations may have informed the illegal actions of the Miami counting room employees, but news reports and court testimony do not provide evidence for this. Nonetheless, Orr, Corrigan and McNabb’s illegal removal of company property undermined any claims they might have to the moral character of white *lady* telephone employees.

The scene of the women’s crimes was the white-collar workplace. The counting room was on the first floor of Southern Bell’s main office in downtown Miami (at 36 N. E. 2nd Street). It measured approximately fifteen by twenty feet, and was separated from the rest of the office by a glass partition and a glass panel door. Inside there were a couple of chairs, a table, two safes, and an automated counting machine. There was only one entrance, and only the female counting room employees had keys to the glass panel door, as well as the combinations for the safes (duplicates were kept in a safe in another part of the building). Money which had been deposited in public pay stations for long distance calls was transported by male collectors, who removed and replaced self-sealing coin boxes at pay stations on designated routes, to the counting room each evening. The “receptacles” were placed in the safes overnight. The following morning, the counting room “girls” removed the boxes from the safe, broke the seals, fed the coins through the machine, bagged the money and filled out the deposit slips ready for the bank.

Counting room labor was organized along gender lines where female clerks operated the machines, a task which required little mathematical application and no direct involvement in financial transactions with banks or investors. Despite being under (male) supervision, the women were easily able to divert coins from the machines to their persons as they stood over the machine and with their backs to the glass and supervisors whose desks were on the opposite side of the partition. Betty Corrigan told Officer Mills: “It was so easy. There was no way to get caught so I started taking it too. The girl that was standing up would wait until she got sixty quarters and she would roll it in memo paper and she would put it in her brassiere. We would carry it out [of the room] and put it in our pocket books. My husband left the car parked at the company. I would take it down and put it in the glove compartment.” Counting room

employees' personal items were stored in lockers outside the room and the women either transferred the money from their bras when they went on break or for lunch—as indicated in the women's statements and later company officials' testimony in November 1950—or they passed rolls of quarters to other female employees in the restrooms. As the coin thieves enjoyed legitimate access to the counting room, they were able to perform the dual contradictory roles of faithful employee and common thief. However, the interchangeable nature of these roles undercut the trust that was central to employer-employee relations. Further, Southern Bell hired those women who conformed to and represented the white ladylike ideal, but the appearance and performance of respectability, as well as fidelity and company loyalty, were also essential prerequisites for the successful counting room thief.

The gendered structure of the white-collar workplace enabled the female coin thieves to execute their lucrative and long running crimes, but so did the peculiarities of 1950s women's underwear so that the rolls of coins concealed in the coin thieves' "deceptively snug" brassieres did not "clink" *per se*. Flesh was controlled and molded by undergarments—"a litany of rubber, metal bands, garters, boning, a rosary of spandex and lycra and nylon, a votive candle of elastic"—to create the distinctive hourglass and desired voluptuous female shape of that decade. Stomachs were encased in girdles or "minimizers" that were referred to as "rubber coffins." Extensive padding was used to make bosoms appear as large as possible, while "brassieres were wired or boned in such a manner that the breasts were held rigid or straight, coming to points that accentuated the nipples," thus "[t]hrough the sweater you could see ridges of a brassiere like targets for gunnery practice."

Marie Orr said she and another employee Dottie Peverok had started taking a few quarters for "lunch money" each day over a two-year period also (Dottie allegedly had taken out rolls of quarters in her pockets rather than her brassiere), but the scale of the thefts and of amounts taken had increased during the five months to September 1950. Marie told Mills that she and Corrigan generally took between \$100.00 and \$150.00 each day, and Marie paid Rita Orr five dollars per day to convert the quarters into paper money, although there are no details as to how this was actually done. The strong box with several thousand dollars found in Sergeant Albert's car suggests that Rita was not utilizing the services of "fences" or criminal receivers in the Greater Miami area, and that there was no systematic plan for "laundering" the coins or converting them into bank deposits or consumables.

After Marie Orr and Betty Corrigan implicated other female employees and family members in the counting room thefts, eleven individuals who were either willing accomplices or who had turned a blind eye were arrested: Marie Orr's mother, Gladys Orr, age 47; Rita's husband, John Michael Orr, 21; Rita's father, George Strickland Winters, 43; and Marie Orr's boyfriend, William Matthew Albert, 21; Corrigan's husband, William, 24; former counting room employee, Bonnie Herbert, 22, and her husband, Larry, 23; McNabb's boyfriend, Lennox B. Gaynon, 22; and two other counting room employees, Jean Nolan, 21, and Cecelia Hay, 20. They were collectively referred to as a "ring," a moniker for a criminal gang, or the "Bra Brigade," although this term was also later used to refer to the three main defendants. There is little surviving information on the background of the fourteen ringers but their absence from the 1945 Florida State Census suggests they were fairly recent additions to the rapidly growing population of Greater Miami. William and Betty Corrigan were supposedly originally from Philadelphia. Social historian Melanie Shell-Weiss observes that by "the end of World War II, over two-thirds of Miami residents were born outside of Florida. The largest numbers, by far, hailed from Georgia (more than 80,000), followed by New York (over 26,000), Pennsylvania (roughly 14,300), and Ohio (roughly 12,000)."

However, all were freed almost immediately after their arrests because Southern Bell could not satisfy Dade County Circuit Judge George E. Holt that an offense had been committed. Assistant County Solicitor Michael P. Zarowny was forced to admit, "The only thing we've got is a confession. We can't introduce that until we establish a crime and we can't establish a crime because there is no way to tell if the money was taken, nor how much." A defendant could not be convicted of a crime she had confessed to if that crime had not occurred, and at this stage of the clinking brassieres case, the evidence was presumptive; there were no independent eyewitnesses to the actual thefts, and there was no conclusive proof that the coins in the chest belonged to someone else or had been stolen. Evidence of possession of property whose origin could not be convincingly accounted for was not evidence that it had been stolen. Confessions were therefore left unsigned, everyone denied any wrongdoing, and five female Bell employees returned to work the next morning accompanied by attorney James S. Rainwater, only to be told that they had been fired.

Southern Bell's district manager, J. M. Phillips, along with County Solicitor Taylor, reassured customers of the company's intention to "prosecute to the fullest extent of the law those persons involved directly or

indirectly in the theft of company pay station receipts” to ensure that “justice is done and to protect the good names of the fine people who constitute our Miami employee body, in whom we have the fullest confidence.” Nevertheless, public confidence in the company and the county solicitor’s office seemed in short supply. One enraged citizen asked whether “our courts and our court officials [are] just expensive jokes and screens behind which thieves, murderers, and gambling gangsters can safely hide?” He demanded that Zarowny either act decisively or admit his incompetence and resign, and called for Southern Bell officials to “be sent back to High School or some Kindergarten school and be given a preliminary course in simple accountancy and the proper handling of cash income.”

Company auditors in Southern Bell’s Jacksonville offices quickly identified a shortfall in the accounts for August 22-23, 1950, and thus provided crucial evidence for prosecutors. Long distance operators’ receipts confirmed there should have been \$1,300 in quarters in the coin boxes collected from five routes on that date, but Corrigan and Orr’s initialled bank deposit slips showed they had reported and accounted for \$835.25 in quarters. Corrigan, Orr, and McNabb were re-arrested and formally charged with the theft of \$464.75. The value of the goods stolen determined whether a defendant was charged with petty larceny (a misdemeanor) or grand larceny (a felony), which involved taking money, property, or merchandise of more than fifty dollars in value and carried a maximum prison term of fifteen years. At their arraignment at the Criminal Court on September 27, 1950, Orr and Corrigan entered pleas of not guilty to charges of grand larceny, and McNabb also pled not guilty to being a “principal in the second degree” or with aiding and abetting the others. Zarnoway was quoted as declaring he would prove that rolls of quarters had been exchanged in the women’s washroom and transferred to McNabb’s brassiere so she could carry the money out of the Southern Bell building. After “a mild tongue lashing” from Judge Ben C. Willard, the three women were free on bail. Southern Bell now claimed that it had lost \$18,880 rather than the \$100,000 reported earlier.

As noted, the women were represented at their arraignment by local attorneys Harry W. Prebish and James Rainwater. Astute and ambitious, thirty-year-old Prebish was one of the state’s notable criminal lawyers, defending a series of high profile clients mainly in Dade County. James Rainwater became a respected County Court Judge.

Prebish and Rainwater petitioned unsuccessfully for a change of venue in early November. The main trial opened on November 13, 1950, in the Criminal Court of Record with Rainwater and Prebish for the

defense and prosecutors Zarowny and Samuel O. Carson. The case was heard by Judge Willard, who presided over a myriad of cases from non-capital murders to abortion, theft, bigamy, and gambling during his twenty eight years as Criminal Court judge, and was known for his “waspish sense of humor.” He was also cantankerous and frequently exasperated at defendants and lawyers alike. Yet, Judge Willard approved of restitution as an alternative to imprisonment for select offenders.

In many states, women were systematically excluded from jury service until the later twentieth century. Women in Florida were allowed to volunteer for jury service in 1949, and the state’s volunteer jury law was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in November 1961, in the *Hoyt v. Florida* ruling which confirmed that serving on a jury was not a right or duty of citizenship, but a *privilege* and thus could be restricted. Four women were included in the jury pool for the clinking brassieres case, but Rainwater and Prebish exercised their challenges to ensure none survived *voir dire* so their clients faced an all-male, all-white jury, and Prebish and Rainwater cultivated jurors’ paternalistic sympathies as they sought favorable outcomes for their blonde, white-skinned, and fashionably-dressed female clients.

Testimony from the six main state witnesses took up most of the afternoon of November 13. The State offered a reasonably convincing case linking the defendants to the missing \$464.75, but clearly there were discrepancies in the evidence and paperwork which Prebish sought to highlight. Prebish sought also to show that there were other explanations for the missing money. However, the amount in question was not interrogated by either state or defense lawyers. Orr and Corrigan had supposedly removed \$464.75 in their bras on August 23 when they were the only women working in the counting room, but Orr had told Mills that she and Corrigan generally took between \$100.00 and \$150.00 each day; the physical weight of the coins and the length of the women’s working day meant that it was virtually impossible to remove more. The possible discrepancy of two hundred dollars between the usual amount taken and the amount missing according to company receipts was not discussed in court. Willard dismissed most of Prebish’s objections, including the women’s unsigned confessions being read to the jury by Ira Mills, and ensured that the case moved swiftly along so that by 5 pm the State rested. The defense team offered no witnesses of its own while Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb exercised their right to silence, thus none publicly refuted the charges or offered an explanation for their actions.

Yet, from the confessions read out in court, jurors learned that Corrigan had started taking coins in September 1949 and had stolen

between \$6,000 and \$7,000 over a two-year period. Marie Orr admitted to taking \$6,500 during the three years she had worked in the pay station department and accounting room. As a consequence, while the defendants might initially have appeared to be impulsive or opportunistic amateurs, the duration of the thefts together with the systematic removal of the coins from the company building meant that they could be categorized as quasi-professional thieves who regularly supplemented their legitimate incomes with monies taken illegally (albeit from the same employer). At the trial, Mills confirmed that he had recovered \$5,786.90 in paper money and coins from the defendants' homes and cars.

The Criminal Court reconvened at 10 am on November 14 for Willard to instruct the jurors, who deliberated for twenty-four minutes and returned at 10:40 am to pronounce all three defendants guilty as charged, but recommended also that the judge exercise leniency. Prebish ordered jurors to be polled; all had voted for conviction. As a civil suit, brought by Southern Bell, was pending against his clients, Prebish requested that pronouncement of sentence be delayed; thus, on November 20 Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb returned to the criminal court. Previously, Rainwater had announced to the press that the offenders would make "full and complete restitution of all money belonging to the telephone company," and Judge Holt had ordered all the defendants' assets to be seized. Prebish reminded Judge Willard that this had happened. He also suggested that Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb were guilty merely of youthful mistakes rather than being grasping and materialistic thieves who had fallen prey to the temptations of consumerism: "They have given up all their worldly possessions. All they have left is their clothing," he said. "They are just kids and didn't realize the seriousness of what they were doing." He further reminded Willard and reporters that Orr and McNabb were engaged to be married, Corrigan was a young wife, and implied that the women's wayward habits would be better reformed through marriage and domestic containment rather than through unsuitable confinement at the state prison.

The attorneys for the defendants explained their actions not in terms of what the women were doing—stealing—but in the language of naïveté, waywardness, and youthful errors of judgement; thus, Orr, Corrigan and McNabb were not clever adult criminals but intellectually inferior "girls." This language of youthful naïveté and innocence served not only as an interpretation of the women's behavior but as a justification for leniency. However, Willard declared that "a case of this magnitude cannot be tolerated without punishment" and sentenced the defendants each to one year at hard labor. Most of the commentaries on the bra

brigade reflected a male voice, and three main defendants' demeanor and actions were usually portrayed in familiar and formulaic ways; they either tearfully denied any wrong-doing or appeared "doleful." When Willard passed judgement, "Miss Orr clasped her hands tightly together and bit her lip as the sentence was read. Mrs. Corrigan tugged at her handkerchief while Mrs. McNabb appeared calm with a half-smile on her lips."

Prebish presented "without argument a motion for a new trial" but this was denied, so he and Rainwater immediately gave notice of their intention to appeal to the state supreme court, and this was submitted on February 16, 1951. Meanwhile, all three women remained free on bond. On July 31, 1951, the Florida Supreme Court affirmed the convictions and sentences, and Corrigan, Orr, and McNabb seemed destined for transportation to state prison at Raiford. The hub of Florida's state prison system remained the old, remote, and rural prison farm in Union County, over 300 miles north of Miami, where 2,500 inmates were employed mainly in agricultural work and some remaining industrial operations (a further 1,000 male prisoners were housed in smaller road prisons located in counties throughout the state). Raiford was increasingly volatile, unpredictable, and unstable by the early 1950s. Florida prison officials routinely considered female inmates to be inconveniences and a security threat to the main male cell houses, but legislators were slow to approve the necessary appropriations to equip a specialist women's facility. Thus there was no separate women's prison in Florida when the bra brigade members were sentenced, and the thirty-eight white women and 104 "colored" female inmates lived in "disordered" and "drab" women's quarters in "an enclosed compound a few hundred yards from the men's quarters."

After the state supreme court denied their appeal, Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb were rescued from a year at hard labor at Raiford by Florida's embattled governor. In early September 1951, early November 1951, and again on January 3, 1952, Governor Warren signed sixty-day reprieves that kept all three offenders out of prison. A further thirty-day reprieve was issued with effect from March 1, 1952. Then, a few days later, the governor and fellow state pardon board members granted conditional pardons to all three women, which in effect freed them from the threat of imprisonment. There is no record of these offenders ever being processed or recorded by the prison division even though they were convicted felons; they were kept out of the state prison system altogether. It was reported that the State Parole Commission, which would have been responsible for their supervision if released under parole, had opposed executive clemency in all three cases.

Corrigan, Orr, and McNabb were first-time offenders with no previous criminal records. Prebish had also demonstrated there were significant procedural and evidentiary holes in the state attorneys' original case, and had asked Judge Willard for a directed verdict on five grounds in November 1950 because the requisite evidentiary burden should have resulted in acquittal rather than conviction, but this was denied. These grounds were the variance between the allegations of larceny and the proof offered; the existence of evidence that suggested there were other explanations for the counting room shortfalls than theft by Orr and Corrigan; that the State had failed to show that the defendants were guilty of grand larceny; thus the charge should have been reduced to petty larceny following the admission of the unsigned confessions into evidence; and that the charges against McNabb should have been reduced "because all the assets in her possession had been returned to the rightful owner." Such legal arguments may have resonated with Governor Warren, who was a well-known Jacksonville criminal lawyer prior to the time he entered the gubernatorial race in 1948. Further, there were no independent witnesses to the counting room thefts, and much of the evidence against the defendants remained presumptive rather than circumstantial. Prebish had highlighted Southern Bell's inept supervisory, accounting, and auditing procedures during his questioning of the company auditor and District Communications Supervisor. Just as the coin thieves could not properly account for the thousands of dollars of coins in their possession, the company could not definitively say that this money had been stolen or that Orr, Corrigan, and McNabb were responsible, thus the overtones of poor working girl being unfairly targeted by a big corporation were certainly evident to press and public.

Orr and Corrigan admitted to spending approximately \$1,000 each on clothes and were reputed to be "saving" the rest of the money for down payments on houses, cars, and weddings, all of which were emblems of virtuous consumption, thus their crimes were linked to gender, commodity culture, and consumerism in post-war South Florida. However, Orr's assertion that she and Peverok had taken "lunch money" echoed an older idea that still resonated at mid-century that women in the labor force were covered by a male breadwinner and thus did not need to work, but did so to pay for extras or personal luxuries or for "pin money." Orr's "lunch money" comment reinforced the notion that the counting room women did not need to steal, thus they were different from lower-class shoplifters or common thieves. In their comments to the press and in court, Prebish and Rainwater had used "white lady" tropes and emphasized the youth, naiveté, and waywardness of their clients to

underscore their innocence and the unfairness of their convictions. Yet, the counting room thefts by these previously reputable waged employees meant they could have no claims to be respectable white ladies between September 1950 and March 1952, but at the same time the reprieves and subsequent pardons meant they escaped the terms of imprisonment that would have stigmatized them as common thieves.

Endnotes

- 1 Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), especially Chapter 7: The Commodity Gap: Consumerism and the Modern Home, 162-182.
- 2 Mary Louise Roberts, "Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture," *American Historical Review* 103/3 (June 1998): 826 [817-844]; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1963).
- 3 Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1992), 2. There is a substantial literature on "whiteness," particularly following David R. Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York: Verso, 1991). For discussions that are useful to examination of women, class, and "whiteness" in the 1950s, see also Hilary Harris, "Failing 'White Woman': Interrogating the Performance of Respectability," *Theatre Journal* 52/2 (May 2000): 183-209; Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of American History* 89/1 (June 2002): 154-173; Steven Hoelscher, "Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93/3 (Sept 2003): 657-686; Lois W. Banner, "The Creature from the Black Lagoon: Marilyn Monroe and Whiteness," *Cinema Journal* 47/4 (Summer 2008): 4-29.
- 4 Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 3; Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 154. See also Jan Logemann, "Different Paths to Mass Consumption: Consumer Credit in the United States and West Germany During the 1950s and '60s," *Journal of Social History* 41/3 (Spring 2008): 525-559.
- 5 Lawrence M. Friedman, *Crime and Punishment in American History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 451. See also David Cantor and Kenneth C. Land, "Unemployment and Crime Rates in the Post-World War II United States: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis," *American Sociological Review* 50/3 (June 1985): 317-332. For information on Florida's post-war crime

- rates, see Biennial Reports of the Prison Division of the Department of Agriculture of the State of Florida, especially the reports for 1941-1954, State Library and Archives, Tallahassee, Florida.
- 6 Table 12: Number of Offenses Known to the Police, 1950, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports*, 1950, 98. By comparison, there were 1,728 offenses known to Miami Beach police: 760 for grand larceny (43.9 percent), 453 for petty larceny (26.2 percent), 381 for burglary and breaking and entering (22 percent) and 100 for auto theft (6 percent). Robbery and aggravated assault together accounted for less than two percent of all reported offenses. There were no reported murders or non-negligent manslaughters in Miami Beach in 1950.
- 7 See for example, James M. Denham, "*A Rogue's Paradise*": *Crime and Punishment in Antebellum Florida, 1821- 1861*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Pippa C. Holloway, "A Chicken Stealer Shall Lose His Vote: Disenfranchisement for Larceny in the South, 1874-1890," *Journal of Southern History* 75/4 (November 2009): 931-962; Vivien Miller, "The Life and Crimes of Harry Sitamore, New York 'Prince of Thieves' and the 'Raffles' of Miami," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 87/3 (Winter 2009): 378-403.
- 8 \$100,000 in Silver Stolen," *New York Times* September 26, 1950, 22.
- 9 "Miami Pay Phones Reap Harvest in 'Phony' coins," *New York Times* May 1, 1950, 32.
- 10 Reporters competed over puns and clever turns of expression. The *Charleston Gazette's* photo caption on September 27 read: "BIG WEIGHT off their chests. Mrs. Betty Corrigan, 23, (left), and Marie Orr, 21, were released with 12 other persons after confessing carrying away possibly as much as \$100,000 in coin-box change from the Southern Bell Telephone Co. counting room in Miami in their brassieres. Hardly abreast of the case, officers continued to search yesterday for a legal angle on which to prosecute the 'Case of the Silver Falsies.'" *Charleston (SC) Gazette* September 27, 1950, 8.
- 11 A short chapter on the case is included in Stuart McIver, *Murder in the Tropics (Florida Chronicles Vol. 2)*, (Sarasota: Pineapple Press, 2008), 115-119.
- 12 "Dade County Total Is Put At 489,838," *Miami Daily News* June 18, 1950, 1. Political scientist and associate professor of government at the University of Miami Edward Sofen used more complete census information to provide a figure of 495,084 for the total population in Metropolitan Dade County in 1950, rising to 703,777 in 1955. See Edward Sofen, "A Report on Politics in Greater Miami," Unpublished Report, Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, 1961, 4.

- 13 Melanie Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami: A Social History*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 125-126; Aurora E. Davis, "The Development of the Major Commercial Airlines in Dade County, Florida: 1945-1970," *Tequesta* 32 (1972): 3-16; Raymond A. Mohl, "Changing Economic Patterns in the Miami Metropolitan Area, 1940-1980," *Tequesta* 42 (1982): 63-73.
- 14 Sofen, "A Report on Politics in Greater Miami," 1:1, 3.
- 15 Grand Jury Report, Fall Term 1953, 7 [filed May 11, 1954]; "How Miami Beach Police Prepare To Fight Winter Season Thieves," *Miami Daily News* December 4, 1955, F1; "Light-Fingered Gentry Plague Beach," *Miami Herald* May 2, 1961; Mohl, "Shadows in the Sunshine," 64.
- 16 For example, Al Topel, "\$25,000 Jewel Robbery Echoes in Miami Trial," *Miami Daily News* November 4, 1947, B1; "Jeweler And 2 Others Held In \$45,000 Theft," *New York Times* November 8, 1947, 30; Woman Here, Man in Miami Seized With \$619,346 Diamonds in Shoes," *New York Times* January 24, 1951, 1; "High-Caliber Crime Detection Unit Urged By Grand Jurors," *Miami News* November 4, 1950, 1;
- 17 See Pinkerton's National Detective Agency, *Administrative File, 1857-1999*, Box 26, Folder 4: Criminal Rosters; Hotel prowlers and thieves, No. H-89, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
- 18 "Warrants On Way For Robbery Trio," *Miami Daily News* May 31, 1956, 8A; "Blonde, Pal Arraigned In Sex-and-Steal Case," *Miami Daily News* June 12, 1956, 4A; "'Sex And Steal' Case is Delayed," *Miami Daily News* July 18, 1956, 8A; "'Sex-Steal' Ring Suspect Jailed," *Miami Daily News* June 20, 1958, 1A. News reports nearly always mentioned that one of the female defendants was a platinum blonde.
- 19 A tip off to police led to their arrest outside the downtown Miami Greyhound Bus Terminal. The stolen jewels had been stored in one of the bus station lockers. A team of burglars had taken \$150,000 of jewels from the Jordan Marsh store in January 1965 but it was unclear whether they had been in the locker for all seven months. After a two-hour trial, Pearson was sentenced to five years for receiving and concealing stolen property, and Dennison was acquitted. Pearson was also wanted by police in New York and Georgia in connections with burglaries in those states. See "Pair Jailed in Miami Jewel Theft," *Rome News-Tribune* July 23, 1965, 1 ; "Stolen Gems Trial Opens For Pearson and Ex-Bunny," *Miami News* November 29, 1965, 1B; Milt Sosin, "Five Years For Pearson; Girl Freed In Jewel Case," *Miami News* November 29, 1965 (later edition), 1B.
- 20 "New Trial Date Set By Willard," *Miami Daily News* June 30, 1953, 4A; "Mistrial Ends Theft Hearing," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* October 10, 1953,

- 2; "Man Found Guilty of 'Pickin' Chicken," *Miami Daily News* October 5, 1956, 2A.
- 21 Edwin H. Sutherland, *The Professional Thief*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1937), 23. See also Allan Pinkerton, *Professional Thieves and the Detective*, (Amsterdam: Fredonia Books, 2001, orig. 1881); Jerome Hall, *Theft, Law, & Society*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1952).
- 22 "The Feminine Touch: Women Go Gaga in the Rarefied Ether of Finance," *Periscope* 1/7 (September 1939): 13, State Library and Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, Florida.
- 23 See for example, Darrell J. Steffensmeister, "Crime and the Contemporary Woman: An Analysis of Changing Levels of Female Property Crime, 1960-1975," *Social Forces* 57/2 (December 1978): 566-584; Candace Kruttschnitt, "Respectable Women and the Law," *Sociological Quarterly* 23/2 (Spring 1982): 221-234; Meda Chesney-Lind, "'Women and Crime': The Female Offender," *Signs* 12/1 (Autumn 1986): 78-96; Patricia O'Brien, "The Kleptomania Diagnosis: Bourgeois Women and Theft in Late Nineteenth-Century France," *Journal of Social History* 17/1 (Autumn 1983): 65-77; Elaine S. Abelson, "The Invention of Kleptomania," *Signs* 15/1 (Autumn 1989): 123-143; Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Tammy Whitlock, "Gender, Medicine, and Consumer Culture in Victorian England: Creating the Kleptomaniac," *Albion* 31/3 (Autumn 1999): 413-437; Barry Godfrey and Paul Lawrence, *Crime and Justice, 1750-1950*, (Willan Publishing, 2005), 150-166; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "Street Rats and Gutter Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900," *Journal of Social History* 37/4 (Summer 2004): 853-882; Tammy C. Whitlock, *Crime, Gender and Consumer Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*, (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005).
- 24 Richard W. Longstreth, *The Drive-in, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Andrew Buxton, *Cash Carriers in Shops*, (Buckingham: Shire Publications, Ltd., 2004), 4; Lisa C. Tolbert, "The Aristocracy of the Market Basket: Self-Service Food Shopping in the New South," and Catherine Grand Clément, "Wheeling One's Groceries around the Store: The Invention of the Shopping Cart, 1936-1953," in Warren Belasco and Roger Horowitz, eds., *Food Chains: From Farmyard to Shopping Cart*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 179-195, 233-252; Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century*, (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 183-218.

- 25 Dade County Grand Jury Report, Winter Term, 1948 [filed May 10, 1948], 6; "Gaming Charge Quashed," *New York Times* January 5, 1951, 21.
- 26 "Senators Warn Florida Governor To Talk On Crime or 'Face Action'," *New York Times* June 21, 1950, 1 and 17; "Senators Assail Florida Governor," *New York Times* June 22, 1951, 4; "Florida Sheriff Reinstated," *New York Times* April 10, 1951, 18. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 3rd edition (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1991): 426, 430. Warren's campaign funds were also the subject of state investigation.
- 27 Dade County Grand Jury Report, Fall 1951, 7 [filed May 12, 1952].
- 28 Sofen, "A Report on Politics in Greater Miami," 1:5-7, Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 131, 134; Howard M. Rose, "Metropolitan Miami's Changing Negro Population, 1950-1960," *Economic Geography* 40/3 (July 1964): 221-238; Dade County Grand Jury Report, Spring Term, 1954 [filed November 9, 1954], 15. West Miami's population is listed as 3,892 along with 19,668 for Coral Gables in "Dade County Total Is Put At 489,838," *Miami Daily News* June 18, 1950, 1.
- 29 Testimony of I. Ray Mills, 78-80 in *Marie Orr and Betty Corrigan and Billie Ruth McNabb v. State of Florida*, Florida Supreme Court Records, Series 44, Box 2190, File 21978, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida, hereafter referred to by the docket number SC21978. Formerly a special investigator for State Attorney Glenn C. Mincer, Mills was one of West Miami's three uniformed patrolmen in West Miami. See Dade County Grand Jury Report, Winter Term 1947, 20; Dade County Grand Jury Report, Spring 1954, 14.
- 30 Statement of Billie Ruth McNabb, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC 21978, 86-90.
- 31 Testimony of I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 82-83.
- 32 Statement of Betty Corrigan, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 92; Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 96.
- 33 Clipping from *Miami Daily News*, no date, but probably September 26, 1950, in Miami News Files, Crime and Criminals—Dade County, History Miami Archives & Research Center, Miami, Florida. Corrigan implicated Bonnie Herbert and Marie Orr. See Statement of Betty Corrigan, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 94-95.
- 34 Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 324, Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 80, 97.
- 35 John Sheahan, "Integration and Exclusion in the Telephone Equipment Industry," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 70/2 (May 1956): 249-269;

- John N. Schacht, "Toward Industrial Unionism: Bell telephone workers and company unions, 1919-1937," *Labor History* 16/1 (1975): 5-36; Claude S. Fischer, "'Touch Someone': The Telephone Industry Discovers Sociability," *Technology and Culture* 29/1 (January 1988): 32-61; Claude S. Fischer, *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1992); David F. Weiman and Richard C. Levin, "Preying for Monopoly? The Case of Southern Bell Telephone Company, 1894-1912," *Journal of Political Economy* 102/1 (February 1994): 103-126; Kenneth Lipartito, "When Women Were Switches: Technology, Work, and Gender in the Telephone Industry, 1890-1920," *American Historical Review* 99/4 (October 1994): 1075-1111; Venus Green, "Goodbye Central: Automation and the Decline of 'Personal Service' in the Bell System, 1878-1921," *Technology and Culture* 36/4 (October 1995): 912-949; Venus Green, *Race On The Line: Gender, Labor, & Technology In The Bell System, 1880-1980*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, Jamie J. Fader, "Women and the Paradox of Economic Inequality in the Twentieth-Century," *Journal of Social History* 39/1 (Fall 2005): 65-88.
- 36 Green, *Race on the Line*, 62.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 134.
- 38 Sofen, "A Report on Politics in Greater Miami," I:11-12; Gary Mormino, "Midas Returns: Miami Goes To War, 1941-1945," *Tequesta* 57 (1997): 35-36 [5-51].
- 39 CWA demands included a thirty-five hour week, better pension and vacation benefits, and shorter apprenticeship periods. Complaints of damage to company property, harassment and assault of non-strikers were reported in the 1950s. During a seventy-two day strike in spring 1955, on at least one occasion, Miami police and fire officers used fire hoses to overwhelm and disperse union demonstrators in front of the downtown Southern Bell offices. See "Federal Pressure Averts Telephone Nationwide Strike," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* March 7, 1946, 1; "Strike Holds Up Work On Miami Phone Building," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* April 8, 1947, 4; "Hope Fades Here For Phone Return; Workers Refuse To Cross Picket Lines," *Miami Daily News* May 10, 1947, 1A; "Phone Service Still Functioning Here," *Miami Daily News* April 14, 1947, 4A; "Phone workers Set To Strike Here Sept. 17," *Miami Daily News* September 8, 1948, 1; "U.S. Moves To Avert Phone Strike After Walkout Is Called For Feb. 8," *Miami Daily News* January 31, 1950, 1A; "1,600 In Miami Await Deadline," *Miami Daily News* April 25, 1950, 6A, 7A; "Philadelphia Hearing On Pickets Continued," *St. Petersburg Times* November 18, 1950,

- 2; "Bell Crews Halt Brief Strike Here," *Miami Daily News* April 8, 1952 (evening edition), 1; "17,000 Phone Men Strike, 300 Here," *Miami Daily News* July 1, 1954, 1. One report noted that Florida experienced seventy-three strikes in 1958 involving 95,557 workers and including 58,000 telephone company employees, and suggested that one reason for increased strike activity in the late 1950s was a new attitude among labor organizers who traditionally had paid little attention to the "thinly-settled state with an economy based mostly on tourism and agriculture." See "Florida Can't Ignore Activities Of Unions As Strikes Multiply," *Ocala Star-Banner* August 9, 1959, 11. There was also a twenty-month hotel strike in Miami Beach in 1955-1957. See Frank Fox, "Hotel Strike Fails To Stop Musicians," *Miami Daily News* April 13, 1955, 11A; Edwin B. Dean, "The Miami Beach Hotel Strike," *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly* 2/4 (February 1962): 80-86. Labor disputes between CWA and Southern Bell and other parts of the AT&T "family" continued in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, see "500,000 Phone Workers Go on Strike," *Miami Daily News* July 13, 1971, 1A, 6A.
- 40 For example, "No Fun, But Worth It, Say Strikers," *Miami Daily News* May 24, 1955, 3A.
- 41 Richard C. Hollinger and John P. Clark, *Theft by Employees*, (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1983); Richard Hawkins, "Employee Theft in the Restaurant Trade: Forms of Ripping Off By Waiters at Work," *Deviant Behaviour* 5/1 (1984): 47-68; Mark Lipman and W. R. McGraw, "Employee Theft: A \$40 Billion Industry," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 498 (July 1988): 51-59; James Tucker, "Employee Theft As Social Control," *Deviant Behaviour* 10/4 (1989): 319-334; Jerald Greenberg, "Employee Theft as a Reaction to Underpayment Inequality: The Hidden Cost of Pay Cuts," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75/5 (1990): 561-568; Brian K. Payne and Randy R. Gainey, "Ancillary consequences of employee theft," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 32 (2004): 63-73; Clara Xiaoling Chen and Tatiana Sandino, "Can Wages Buy Honesty? The Relationship Between Relative Wages and Employee Theft," *Journal of Accounting Research* 50/4 (September 2012): 967-1000.
- 42 Kleinberg, *Women in the United States*, 305-306, 310-315. The contraction of work opportunities and declining wages were discussed in many contemporary news reports and historical studies. See for example, "Many Women Like Working At Night," *New York Times* February 6, 1950, 3; "Equality In Wages for Women Urged," *New York Times* May 18, 1950, 44; "Why Twenty Million Women Work," *New York Times* September 9, 1951, SM7 and 33; Nedra Bartlett Belloc, "Labor-force Participation and Employment Opportunities for Women," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 45/251 (September 1950): 400-410.

- 43 See for example, "CIO Phone Victory Spurs New Drive," *New York Times* May 10, 1949, 14; "Phone Strike Put Off 15 Days in Midwest," *New York Times* January 1, 1950, 22; "Telephone Strike Postponed 16 Days," *New York Times* February 8, 1950, 1 and 18; "'Wildcat' Strike Begun," *New York Times* March 22, 1950, 10; "Phone Strike Off; Disputants Near Formula For Peace," *New York Times* April 26, 1950, 1 and 25; "No Jersey Phone Strike," *New York Times* August 5, 1950, 8; "4,000 Idle Toll Operators Lose Please For Immediate Benefits From State," *New York Times* November 18, 1950, 1 and 8; "Phone Strike Ended In South," *New York Times* September 30, 1953, 28.
- 44 "White collar crime" is a term which refers to a range of criminal acts (such as bribery, embezzlement, and fraud) that would include employee theft, which is a multi-billion dollar problem in the early twenty-first century.
- 45 Testimony of George H. Melvin, SC21978, 56-59. For another description of these procedures, see Ranjan Maitra and Siddhartha R. Dalal, "Pay Phones, Parking Meters, Vending Machines, and Optimal Bayesian Decisions on Collection Times," *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 96/454 (June 2001): [476-487], 476-479.
- 46 Testimony of George H. Melvin, SC21978, 63-64; Statement of Betty Corrigan, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 93.
- 47 Testimony of George H. Melvin, SC21978, 62-64.
- 48 Stephen Trumbull, "Hocus-Pocus In Bra Case Ends With Arrests," *Miami Herald* September 29, 1950, 1A.
- 49 Marge Piercy, "Through the Cracks: Growing Up in the Fifties," in *Parti-Colored Blocks for a Quilt*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982), 120-122; Lois Banner, *American Beauty*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 283-285; Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 99-100. Old-fashioned steel corset stays were "part of an alleged kit of burglar's tools" and their effectiveness in opening spring locks was remarked upon by a local detective in a May 1945 court case. See "Corset Stays Termed Fine Burglar Tools," *Miami Daily News* May 29, 1945, 3B.
- 50 Orr implicated Cecilla Hay, Corrigan, Bonnie Herbert, Jean Nolan and Dottie Peverok. See Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 99-101.
- 51 Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 97-98.
- 52 The relationship between the professional thief and the criminal receiver was crucial to the successful career of the professional. See Carl B. Klockars, *The Professional Fence*, (New York: The Free Press, 1974).
- 53 Stephen Trumbull, "Hocus-Pocus In Bra Case Ends With Arrests," *Miami Herald* September 29, 1950, 1A, 10A; "Salty Sentence Imposed Upon

- Telephone Girls," *Altoona (PN) Mirror* November 21, 1950, 8; "12 Deny Phone Coin Thefts," *New York Times* October 6, 1950, 8.
- 54 "Dade County Total Is Put At 489,838," *Miami Daily News* June 18, 1950, 1; Shell-Weiss, *Coming to Miami*, 129.
- 55 "Technicalities Block Phone Theft Action," *New York Times* September 26, 1950, 1; "Phone Theft Case Balked, Eight Suspects win Freedom," *Miami Daily News*, 1 and Stephen Trumbull, "Legal Ringer Balks Phone Theft Charges; Eight Freed," *Miami Herald*, September 26, 1950, clippings in *Miami News Files*.
- 56 Bruce P. Smith, "The Presumption of Guilty and English Law of Theft, 1750-1850," *Law & History Review* 23/1 (Spring 2005): 144-146 [133-171]; Objection by Harry Prebish, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 83.
- 57 "Firing Repulses 'Bra Brigade'," *Miami Daily News* September 27, 1950, 1; "Phone Company Won't Re-Hire Brassiere Brigade," *Ellensburg (WA) Daily Record* September 27, 1950, 6.
- 58 *Charleston (SC) Gazette*, September 27, 1950, 1, 8.
- 59 Ansel R. Brown to Asst. Dade County Prosecutor Michael F. Zarowny, September 26, 1950, Office of the Governor, Governors: 1929-1971, *Administrative Correspondence of Governor Fuller Warren, 1949-1953*, Record Group 102, Series 235, Box 21, File 8, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee Florida. Unfortunately, there are very limited records on this case in the administrative and correspondence files of Governor Fuller Warren.
- 60 Brief of Appellee (State), SC 21978, 4; Testimony of W. H. Bailey, SC21978, 36-51; "'Bra Girls', 2 Men Surrender At Jail," *Miami Daily News* September 28, 1950, 1A and 6A; Stephen Trumbull, "Hocus-Pocus In Bra Case Ends With Arrests," *Miami Herald* September 29, 1950, 1A, 10A.
- 61 This reflects a common law approach that over time had produced a diversity of different offenses and punishments for different methods of stealing and good stolen, that would eventually be replaced in the later twentieth century by a more unitary offense of theft with degrees of seriousness and a more rationalized range of punishments. See Stuart P. Green and Matthew B. Kugler, "Community Perceptions of Theft Seriousness: A Challenge to Model Penal Code and English Theft Act Consolidation," *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 7/3 (September 2010): 511-537. For a useful summary of the history of larceny as well as contemporary definitions (which include pickpocketing, theft of items in public buildings, shoplifting, and "theft from coin-operated devices or machines"), see Elizabeth Rholetter Purdy, "Larceny," in Wilbur R. Miller, ed., *The Social History of Crime and Punishment in America: An Encyclopedia*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2012), 978-984.

- 62 Statement of Information, SC 21978, 4-5; "Phone Girls Reaccused," *New York Times* September 28, 1950, 28; "Warrants for 8 in Brassiere Phone Thefts," *San Mateo Times* September 28, 1950, 8.
- 63 Stephen Trumbull, "Hocus-Pocus In Bra Case Ends With Arrests," *Miami Herald* September 29, 1950, 10A.
- 64 "'Brassiere' Case Many Affect Telephone Rates," *Daytona Beach Morning Journal* September 29, 1950, 6; "Miami's Bra Brigade Asks Change of Venue," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* November 3, 1950, 8. Two weeks previously, another female defendant had been reprimanded by Willard. The assertion of a twenty-eight-year-old painter's wife and mother of two found with more than \$100 worth of bets in her purse that she was able to spend one hundred dollars each week on horse racing bets led Willard to retort, "That explanation is an insult to my intelligence." See "A Question of Mathematics," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* September 13, 1950, 1.
- 65 See "Town Changed, But The Judge Would Not," *Miami Herald* September 2, 1986, 1D; "Three Judicial Races Produce Some Fever-Pitch Campaigning," *Miami Herald* November 2, 1986, 13P.
- 66 "Miami's Bra Brigade Asks Change of Venue," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* November 3, 1950, 8.
- 67 "Three 'Bra Brigade' Members Go On Trial at Miami Today," *Panama City News-Herald* November 13, 1950, 1.
- 68 See for example, "Deputies Raid Books," *Daytona Beach News Journal* January 28, 1937, 5; "Miami Bookmakers Fined \$13,000," *New York Times* April 24, 1941, 23; "Asks Annullment," *Miami Daily News* November 29, 1941, 7; "Court Orders Guards for Phantom Burglar," *Miami Daily News* March 22, 1949, 1A; "Man Arrested In Nine Months Old Shooting," *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* September 14, 1949, 21; "Judge Frees Youth After Talk On Importance of Education," *Miami Daily News* December 1, 1953, 6A; "Obituary: Judge Ben C. Willard," *New York Times* July 10, 1963, 29 [quote]; "Memorial to Judge Sought," *Miami News* April 4, 1964, 7A. On the work of the Criminal Court of Record, see Paul S. George, "The Evolution of Miami and Dade County's Judiciary, 1896-1930," *Tequesta* 36 (1976): 28-42.
- 69 "Check Artist Gets One Year," *Miami Daily News* June 16, 1948, 9A, contrasts the differential treatment afforded two men convicted of passing bad checks. Restitution was approved by Willard for the sailor but the older defendant who had obtained two cars with bad checks was sentenced to one year.
- 70 *Hoyt v. Florida*, 119 So. 2d, 691, *Hoyt v. Florida*, 368 U.S. 57; Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 132-133; Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*, (New York: Hill

- and Wang, 1998); Chung Huang Hoon, "Who Are My Peers? Women, Men, and the American Jury," *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 21/1 (July 2002): 46-62; Joanna L. Grossman, "Women's Jury Service: Right of Citizenship or Privilege of Difference?" *Stanford Law Review* 46/5 (2004): 1115-1160.
- 71 The six male jurors were Paul Usher, Sam E. Rivers, Duglad M. Barr, Harry Nathan, J. L. Springer, Meyer Schwartz. See Minutes of the Clerk of Court, SC 21978, 8-9.
- 72 Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 97, and confirmed in Statement of Betty Corrigan, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 94.
- 73 "3 Brassiere Girls Found Guilty Of Stealing From Telephone Co.," *Miami News* November 14, 1950, 1; "Trial Nears End Of Bra Brigade," *St. Petersburg Times* November 14, 1950, 1A.
- 74 Statement of Betty Corrigan, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 93; Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 97.
- 75 Testimony of I. Ray Mills, under re-direct from State Attorney Carson, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 104.
- 76 See Minutes of the Clerk of Court, SC 21978, 12; "3 Brassiere Girls Found Guilty Of Stealing From Telephone Co.," *Miami Daily News* November 14, 1950, 1.
- 77 On November 17, eleven members of the "ring" (Betty and William Corrigan; Rita, Marie, Gladys and John Orr; Billie Ruth McNabb, Mr. and Mrs. Bonnie Herbert, William M. Albert and Jean Nolan) were ordered to repay \$24,116 to Southern Bell as restitution for the thefts. See "Phone Girls Must Pay; Court Orders \$24,116 Returned in Brassiere Theft Case," *New York Times* November 18, 1950, 18; "'Brassiere Brigade' Must Pay \$24,116," *Long Beach (CA) Press-Telegram* November 18, 1950, 2; "'Bra Brigade' Must Dig Up Cash for Bell," *Abilene (TX) Reporter-News* November 20, 1950, 10. Following on from this, at a hearing on December 20, 1950, the defendants were determined to be insolvent. See Minutes of the Clerk of Court, SC 21978, 13-14.
- 78 "3 Brassiere Girls Found Guilty Of Stealing From Telephone Co.," *Miami Daily News* November 14, 1950, 1; "Phone Girls Must Pay; Court Orders \$24,116 Returned in Brassiere Theft Case," *New York Times* November 18, 1950, 18.
- 79 Quoted in "Three 'Bra Brigade' Members Handed One-Year Prison Terms," *Charleston (SC) Gazette* November 21, 1950, 24.
- 80 Record of Sentence, SC21978, 123-124. See also "Bra Trio Given Year in Prison for \$25,000 Theft," *Wisconsin State Journal* November 21, 1950, 9;

- “Three ‘Bra’ Thieves Given Year In Jail,” *Kingsport (TN) News* November 21, 1950, 1; “Salty Sentence Imposed Upon Telephone Girls,” *Altoona (PA) Mirror* November 21, 1950, 8; “‘Bra Brigade’ Sentenced To One Year of Hard Labor,” *Mansfield (OH) News-Journal* November 23, 1950, 46.
- 81 “Three ‘Bra Brigade’ Members Handed One-Year Prison Terms,” *Charleston (SC) Gazette* November 21, 1950, 24.
- 82 See Minutes of the Clerk of Court, SC 21978, 12-13.
- 83 “Phone Girls Lose Theft Appeal,” *New York Times* August 1, 1951, 13.
- 84 See “Series no. 2: The Prison,” in Sam Stickney, *Florida’s Forgotten Women*, essays originally published in the *St. Petersburg Times*, 1952, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida; “Women’s Prison Proposal Continues to Gain Ground in Florida Legislature,” *St. Petersburg Times* April 18, 1953, 1.
- 85 Florida State Board of Pardons, Pardon Registers, Series 13, Vol. 17, 53-55, 94-96, 121-123, 170, 172, 175, in Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida; “Trio of ‘Brassiere Brigade’ Reprieved,” *San Antonio (TX) Express* November 6, 1951, 9; “Reputed Bolita King And Others Granted Reprieves,” *Fort Pierce News-Tribune* Thursday March 6, 1952, 1; “Girl Bra Brigade Given Reprieves,” *Panama City News-Herald* March 6, 1952, 2.
- 86 In theory, the women remained under court and state parole board supervision, and any violation of their pardon conditions would mean automatic transfer to Raiford or Lowell. They would then have to apply to the pardon board for a full restoration of their civil rights via an application for full pardon. There is no record of this. See “‘Bra Brigade’ Given Pardons,” *Fort Pierce News-Tribune* March 13, 1952, 1; “Brassiere Girls Will Not Have To Go To Prison,” *Panama City News-Herald* March 13, 1952, 5; “3 Florida Telephone Workers Are Pardoned,” *Joplin (MO) Globe* March 13, 1952, 2A; “Bra-Thieves Pardoned Before Serving Sentence,” *The Logansport (IN) Press* March 15, 1952, 8; “Brassiere Bandits Granted Pardons,” *Anderson (IN) Sunday Herald* March 16, 1952.
- 87 Statement by Harry Prebish, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 109-110.
- 88 Statement of Marie Orr, read by I. Ray Mills, 13 November 1950, SC21978, 99; Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 136.