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An Environmental History of the New Deal in Mississippi and Florida

Robert Edward Krause

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AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE NEW DEAL IN MISSISSIPPI AND FLORIDA

Robert Edward Krause, Junior, Doctoral Candidate in United States History
Dissertation submitted for requirements of Doctorate of Philosophy
The University of Mississippi, Department of History
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ABSTRACT

Keywords: New Deal, Environmental History, United States South, Mississippi, Florida, Gulf Coast, TVA, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, landscape, lumber industry, CCC, WPA, state parks

The 1930s represented a time of distinct and encompassing change in the United States South. In assessing the impact of New Deal agencies and public works, this dissertation examines three distinct southern areas—northeast Mississippi, the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and the Florida Panhandle—highlighting the dynamic and fluid character of federal projects and their impact on landscapes human and natural. In the hilly Tennessee River valley of northeast Mississippi, the federally-funded incorporation of the Tennessee Valley Authority led to an immediate transformation of landscape and the opening of novel possibilities within a newly-anointed “region” for the area’s residents. Public works projects on the Mississippi Gulf Coast likewise reoriented the perspective of place by improving transportation networks and reinvigorating locally (and by the 1930s, globally) significant industries like lumber and seafood products. Federal aid in the fifteen western Florida Panhandle counties created a visibly new world for residents, as well. The construction of new roads and towns out of previously raw coastal timberlands led to a transformation of place and the emergence of not only new commercial and recreational spaces, but the development of a military-industrial complex that remains in place today.

In addition to canvassing secondary historical works, primary sources utilized for this project include a wide range of regional newspapers and journals from Mississippi and Florida,
federal and state agency reports, promotional material and publications, paper collections of New Deal officials, as well as oral histories and quantitative use of census data. Utilizing these previously neglected sources to demonstrate the malleability of post-Depression public works, this dissertation provides a nuanced historical understanding of the New Deal in the South.
To Pam and Bob Krause
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This project has incurred me with more debts than I can ever hope to settle. Any project of history requires the assistance and kind grace of librarians, archivists, and fellow researchers. Staff at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, librarians at the TVA Regional offices in Knoxville, and staff at the JD Williams Library at the University of Mississippi and at the Tupelo Public Library graciously assisted in providing a wealth of information for the section on TVA in Mississippi. Folks at the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, especially Dr. Boyd Murphree and Ms. Holly Cinco, were tremendous to work with and always accommodating. Staff at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, as well as Walton County Libraries, Strozier Library and University Archives at Florida State University, and Mr. Dean Debolt at the University Archives and Special Collections at the University of West Florida in Pensacola all proved instrumental in helping me uncover new sources and meanings for the New Deal in the panhandle. Dr. Jennifer Ford and her staff at the University of Mississippi Special Collections were uncommonly kind in helping through a number of seemingly obscure research requests. I hope my efforts will likewise inform these dedicated public historians.

From my enrollment as an undergraduate student in History and Southern Studies forward through the Doctoral Program in United States History, the University of Mississippi
remains an integral place in my development as a person, professional, and scholar. To study under Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson has been especially instructive and rewarding. The work and examples established by professors Ted Ownby, Charles Ross, Robbie Ethridge, Susan Payne, Adam Gussow, and Douglass-Sullivan Gonzalez have duly informed this project. My master’s thesis director at Oklahoma State University, Dr. Mike Logan, helped initially guide me to Environmental History and continues to inspire. William Andrews and Bill Griffith of the University of Mississippi Museum and Rowan Oak have been incredible mentors in my development as a public historian, as have Tom Chapman at James Madison’s Montpelier in Orange, Virginia and Scott Stroh, former Director of the Florida Division of Historical Resources and State Historic Preservation Office in Tallahassee. Two of my closest graduate colleagues at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Jeffrey Bourdon and Ryan Whittington, provided invaluable friendship and support, as have Clayton and Lauren Leech, and Ross and Anna Beth Thompson.

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Introduction: An Environmental History of the New Deal in Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, 1933-1940

Engaging the interactions between humans and the surrounding natural world in order to determine forms of continuity or change over time, this dissertation offers an examination of the origins, evolution, and impact of New Deal agencies and programs in Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle from 1933 to 1940. Undertaking a comparative analysis approach between two seemingly distant, yet strikingly similar regions of the South, I hope to show how New Deal experiences transformed both the physical and social/cultural landscape while also altering human perceptions of the world around them. My study examines the dynamic and often divergent ways in which New Deal agencies, programs, and social aid created an immediate impact and a substantial legacy in both Mississippi and the panhandle counties of west Florida. This introduction outlines the primary themes and objectives, historiographical context, and structure of the broader project.

Although growing up in an atmosphere of continual environmental transformation on the gulf coast of Florida certainly helped define my consciousness to the natural world, my academic interest in environmental history began in earnest as an undergraduate student at the University of Mississippi, and flourished as a master’s student in U.S. history at Oklahoma State University. There I completed a thesis on the Environmental History of the Illinois River, a politically and economically contested aquatic resource in northeastern Oklahoma and northwestern Arkansas. After completing my M.A., I was accepted into the PhD program at the
University of Mississippi, where I had graduated with a B.A. in History and Southern Studies in 2004. I felt certain that my interests lay in the field of southern environmental history, particularly in the period from 1880 forward through the middle of the twentieth century. In Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson’s research seminar in the fall of 2008, I chose to pursue a topic on the Great Depression and New Deal in Mississippi. Given the abundant secondary literature and close proximity of many primary and previously neglected resources, I chose to examine the Tennessee Valley Authority and its role in reshaping both the physical landscape and the intellectual perception of the southern environment in northeast Mississippi. Along the way, I found that TVA lobbied (in conjunction with state and local politicians, officials, and residents) successfully to recast notions of geographic “region” by incorporating north Mississippi into the broader “Tennessee Valley” region of the South. In this project, I was able to blend interdisciplinary approaches to provide an environmentally-conscious perspective to a New Deal agency in demonstrating its impact on local regionalism.

In the months following Dr. Wilson’s seminar, I considered several different avenues of research on the Great Depression and New Deal in the South. I wondered whether an environmental history of only Mississippi during the New Deal would provide new historical insight, and my initial research uncovered that a comparative analysis between two regions of the South during the New Deal had not been previously undertaken by scholars. Expansion of my project would allow for heightened access to an increased amount of archives and sources. The understudied nature of New Deal environmentalism and experiences of Mississippians and west Floridians in terms of economics, political development, land use patterns, and conflict between public and private ownership of natural resources allows for what I believe to be an
innovative assessment of New Deal agencies, programs, and their impact in both regions through the use and management of aquatic resources and waterways, the creation of national and state forests and parks, as well as the increasingly globalized integration by the 1930s of lumber, agriculture, fisheries, and their connections with the New Deal approach taken in both states.

Using northeast and south Mississippi and the western counties of Florida as windows to historical evolution, I seek to uncover how New Deal experiences in both places transformed the physical and intellectual landscape. One broad conceptual question central to enhancing our understanding of the 1930s lies in assessing whether the New Deal was beneficial, ambivalent, or detrimental in its impact—particularly when viewed through the lens of region in places like Mississippi and west Florida. I trace the origins of, reactions to, and evolution of the New Deal through newspapers, media, and interviews, gauging public reaction as well as the quantitative and qualitative impact of agencies. I assert that the environmental impact of the New Deal can likewise be viewed through the lumber industry, fishing, agriculture, urbanization, commercialization and development of tourist and commercial spaces in both Mississippi and Florida. Throughout the South, changes in the physical landscape often coincided and clashed with transformations of the public’s intellectual perception of the environment, perhaps most acutely in places like Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle where New Deal economic reforms were needed most. This study will highlight the impact, or conversely, negligence of New Deal aid, agencies, and programs toward the dynamic notions and realities of race and gender in both places. Examining the resistance or acceptance of New
Deal programs and legislation in both regions allows my work to trace the evolution of New Deal approaches and experiences.

As is presented in my first section and chapters focusing on the Tennessee Valley Authority, developing an understanding of the dynamics of acceptance, or conversely, resistance to New Deal legislation and programs in local areas proves central to comprehending Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s approach to the South during the New Deal era. I hope to trace the evolution of what has been simplistically and erroneously categorized as a wide-reaching and somehow singular “New Deal experience” and explore whether there were dynamic forms of shared experience or whether programs/aid/legislation were entirely subject to conditions and compliance (primarily in the form of state/local politicians with FDR) at the local level in both Florida and Mississippi. In outlining the dynamic nature of New Deal aid and programs, I maintain that human-environmental interactions prove central to the origins, development, and evolution of New Deal agencies in the South, as exemplified in my case studies of west Florida and northeast and south Mississippi. Throughout the South, land and humans came to be viewed and utilized as a rationalized resource, something to be harnessed as efficiently as possible in light of the economic and social disaster of the 1930s. This is demonstrated in dynamic and frequently divergent ways in all three of the aforementioned regions.

Politically, the approach of New Dealers in Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle was underwritten by the vigor and traditionalism of FDR and his extreme popularity in both places. In addition to assessing agency documents and surveying the contents of local newspapers from 1933 to 1940, my study utilizes demographic data and election results for 1932, 1936, and 1940 for Florida in addition to those I already have analyzed in Mississippi’s TVA counties. I
propose—and it is particularly intriguing that several essays on the southern conservation movement have not previously made this argument—that FDR and the New Deal’s approach to the environment effectively built on the precedent established by Theodore Roosevelt and the Conservation Movement of the Progressive era. Examples can be found in the creation of state and national parklands, forests, wildlife refuges, historic sites and monuments. In the first section of this project, the TVA appears as an agency standing as a testament to the conservation (known then as “wise use”) of natural and human resources and one that had a tremendous impact on the rural South. My study demonstrates that New Deal approaches and experiences in west Florida and Mississippi can best be viewed as not only manifestations and continuities but also as modernized and refined versions of the Progressive-era Conservation movement that largely bypassed the South in favor of its emphasis on the expansive Rocky Mountain and Pacific West and the Great Lakes and Northeast. Furthermore, New Dealers justified the manipulation and rationalization of resources human and natural for the potential benefit of the greater good. In this sense, New Deal agencies in the South proved symbolic of the old school of Progressive era paternalistic liberalism that, by the 1930s, had evolved into a combination of encompassing government and mechanistic neoliberalism. This trajectory will show how FDR was able to successfully strike a balance that manifested itself in avenues like his approach to the nation’s environment.

In addition to bringing widespread economic and political change, New Deal agencies and programs effectively overhauled and transformed the natural environment in places like Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, which remains paradoxical to many contemporary historians viewing the New Deal as representing both a modernizing force of change and a
vehicle for the traditionalistic preservation of continuity in its trajectory toward race and
gender. The New Deal in the South was not a governmental or democratic revolution, as some
have argued, because it sought to create a balance. FDR created a sense of what I will term
“controlled upheaval” with his New Deal agencies and reforms. Economic, social, and political
reform was badly needed in places like Mississippi and west Florida, and the New Deal and its
approach to the physical and intellectual environment created change while at the same time
reinforcing modes of continuity. It would seem important—at least as a closing point to the
study—to ask whether the New Deal in both of my case study areas served as a precursor or
antecedent for the Sun Belt boom of the mid-twentieth century.

The nation viewed Mississippi and west Florida during the 1930s as the “other” America,
a world increasingly forgetful, if not troublesome, for politicians and the general public alike.
Both regions seemed to be backwaters of economic, social, and political stagnation wherein
entrenched local networks ran things, and proudly defended what they perceived as their
divinely inspired and delegated rights. Both Mississippi and Florida remained in the eyes of the
public and politicians as monolithic ecological and social wildernesses even as late as the 1930s.
In terms of public perception of the surrounding natural world, the Florida Panhandle was often
thought to be a world removed from the expanding, urbanizing world of south Florida, just as
northeastern and coastal Mississippi were conceived as a milieu separate from the rest of the
country. Using newspapers and popular media, editorials, and the political legislative record on
the environment to engage public perception of the natural world in both places, my work
highlights the defined sense of “wild” attached to each place that could be corralled only by
means of federal intervention to amass what politicians and officials saw as its full potential.
However, life in both Mississippi and west Florida had, since their settlement in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, been underwritten by neocolonial modes of extracting human and natural resources and the marshalling of waterways. My research shows that New Deal agencies corralled and transformed natural resources in the environment in both regions in ways that helped a much broader segment of society than was previously undertaken by political and economic machinery of the period from 1890 to 1930 in both states. The comparative trajectory of my study compares the reception, emergence, and evolution of New Deal programs and their environmental impact between much of Mississippi and all of west Florida. Arguing that changes in the environment served as a vehicle for broader social, economic, and political change, I compare New Deal aid and reform between Mississippi and west Florida and trace the environmental impact and subsequent social/political/economic transformation in each area. Emphasizing the similarities and differences between regions in order to highlight the nature of environmental change from New Deal agencies and projects allows insight into, for instance, whether or not New Deal legislation and programs created a shift away from agriculture or small-scale shipping to a service economy based on globalized transportation, shipbuilding, and a service economy reaping the reward of southbound tourists.

In engaging the ways in which New Deal aid, programs, and legislation enacted change in the appearance and evolution of the natural landscape, I seek to canvass how humans perceived the world around them intellectually and materially. Understanding how the development and evolution of human relationships and interactions with the environmental manifest themselves can be utilized as a way to help broaden understanding of the New Deal and its environmental impact as vehicles or manifestations of broader cultural, economic, and
political changes in society. I hope to uncover how human interactions with the environment helped to shape the New Deal, and whether that change was felt more or less acutely in the South than other regions, with Florida and Mississippi serving as preeminent, if not understudied, examples.

My study begins by focusing on the origins, evolution, and impact of the New Deal’s preeminent public agency in the South and its impact in northeast Mississippi. The Tennessee Valley Authority in Mississippi proved exemplary of environmental and social transformation through cooperation between local officials and government agencies and drew upon popular support throughout the state and region. In short, the TVA emerged as an encompassing institution only a year after its initial inception and served to transform not only the physical environment of the Tennessee River basin, but also the political, social, and economic realities of life in the northeastern corner of the state.

New Deal changes in Mississippi were not relegated to the northeastern corner of the state and those counties impacted by TVA. The Gulf Coast and Piney Woods sections of the state underwent tremendous environmental, economic, social, and political transformation during the Depression and New Deal era. My work illustrates the environmental (as well as economic, political, and social) transformation of the Piney Woods and Mississippi Gulf Coast under New Deal programs. As demonstrated by the TVA, the success of New Deal agencies and programs was attributable not only to federal, state, and local politicians but to local residents and chambers of commerce, as well. I will engage the role of Coast boosters in Mississippi through their emergence in newspapers, magazines, editorials, and other forms of popular media. The created “nature” of the Mississippi Piney Woods and Gulf Coast allows for a window
into how New Deal agencies like the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and U.S. National Park Service and Forest Service manipulated and transformed southern landscapes. Human creation of the Gulf waterfront and beaches of the Mississippi Gulf Coast speaks to the salience of New Deal agencies in acting to create tourism and recreation spaces for the benefit of tourists and the region’s white population. My section on the Mississippi Gulf Coast offers a broad examination of changes that took place along waterfront communities where the fishing fleets, lumberyards, and shipping installations became increasingly globalized as part of the New Deal experience in Mississippi.

In transitioning from Mississippi to assessing environmental and social change through New Deal agencies and programs in the Florida panhandle, I begin by comparing and contrasting New Deal funding and projects in south Mississippi with those undertaken in the fifteen western counties of Florida. I seek to uncover whether the New Deal transformed the Mississippi Coast in a way similar or divergent from its neighbors some 200 miles to the east. Although it may be more important to the post-World War II atmosphere in both places, this study assesses the creation of military-industrial landscapes alongside those generally reserved for commerce and tourism. Citing examples in the creation of Kessler Air Force Base in Biloxi as well as Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County, Florida, I trace the emergence of a defined military presence in each area and its impact on environment and subsequent social change in both regions.

Sections detailing New Deal and environmental change in west Florida outline perceptions of the natural world and how they changed with the emergence and evolution of New Deal programs across the Panhandle. Like the Mississippi Coast, the built environment of
west Florida was dramatically transformed by the New Deal, with changes like beach dredging and creation of expanded port facilities changing the nature of local economies from localized shipping and fishing to a regional, if not globalized, economy rooted in seafood production and a fisheries industry often acceding to the emergence of a defined service economy based on the commercialization of tourism in the area. Inland concerns in west Florida often differed dramatically from coastal communities and included the harnessing of aquatic resources, revitalization and expansion of the lumber industry and agriculture, and a tick eradication program that was widely accepted in Florida and not systematically resisted as Claire Strom argues in her recent work *Making Catfish Bait out of Government Boys*. Expanded opportunities for employment and enrollment in the WPA, CCC, and Forest Service led to drastic changes in a lumber industry which had long served as west Florida’s economic catalyst. My study will show how the New Deal transformed landscapes as manifested in the creation of state and national forests in west Florida.

In undertaking case studies of Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, I hold that environmental efficiency desired by New Deal agencies and aid drew from the manipulation of natural and human resources, much like on the coast of Mississippi and along TVA waterways in northeastern counties of the Magnolia state. New Deal projects in west Florida transformed several previously “uncontrolled” aquatic resources and harnessed them for what the public and program administrators believed to be the common good.

At its broadest level, the comparative analysis utilized in my dissertation allows for an examination of broader patterns regarding the environment, race, economics, politics, and labor. For both Mississippi and west Florida, I seek to uncover the nature of change associated
with environmental impact of New Deal projects psychologically, intellectually, and physically for people and place. My work contributes another voice to the emergent field of southern environmental history, and will serve as one of the few assessments to undertake a comparative analysis of two locations in the South that demonstrates the salience of New Deal environmentalism in history and through time. This work also speaks to the broader treatment of the historical legacy of FDR and the New Deal. The contemporary argument over the significance or the “value” of the New Deal as democratic legislation is a debate that has generally evolved into a highly politicized, value-driven conflict between conservatives and liberals. My research underscores and verifies the tremendous economic, environmental, and social impact of the New Deal on the South, and perhaps most especially in Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle. My contribution is unique in that this work will focus on all three areas but with an environmental perspective that accounts for material, ground-level, and intellectual approaches to the landscape, as manifested through political and public debate alongside legislative and agency action. One historiographic question I seek to address is whether or not the history of the New Deal in the South fully engages the primary themes associated with southern environmental history. Furthermore, Mississippi and west Florida stand as understudied historical areas, and remain undervalued as critical components of success for both FDR and the New Deal.

This study adds to what historians consider to be unique about the environmental narrative of the South. This includes the region’s comparatively late development of urban areas and the lack of public dissent from degradation of environment. But just how does the New Deal fit in? Put simply, Roosevelt’s legislation represented and allowed for a collective
marshalling of human and natural resources, and an attempt at centralization of those resources. My work illustrates how the federal and state governments of Florida and Mississippi ushered a move away from neo-colonial and provincial survivalist lifestyle modes for rural southerners. As George Ellenberg has shown, this transformation was ushered in by technological advances and mechanization in agriculture and localized industrialization emerging to benefit the public good. I will show that not only were there dynamic and myriad New Deal experiences (rather than a singular “southern” New Deal) but also that FDR’s programs and aid did indeed benefit people, most directly in transitionary rural places like Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle. I utilize an environmental perspective to move away from the monolithic portrayal of both places, and of the New Deal more broadly.

The environment as a constant and overarching presence in the lives of humans stands as precisely the reason why environmental history is significant and unique to the broader field of history, particularly in the United States. Furthermore, southern environmental history has emerged as an important field in the broader realm of southern history, providing an inclusiveness and interdisciplinary approach that engages many dynamic levels in terms of how we perceive race, gender, ethnicity, labor, and culture. In terms of placing this study within the broader historiographic realm of environmental history, I maintain that the most cogent environmental histories, particularly those pertaining to the South, combine views of nature, the economy and politics, and human ideas and images of nature to successfully form the three building blocks of an environmental history. This dissertation engages all three of the broader historiographic avenues of environmental history-Material, Cultural, Political-as described most recently by J.R. McNeill in 2003. One of the goals of this work is to demonstrate that for
Environmental Historians concerned with social impact in a “subfield” thought to sometimes obscure the importance of humans, the evolving nature of research can demonstrate that history from the bottom up might truly begin organically with the soil.

**Note on archives and sources**

Another of the central goals of this work is to exhaustively catalog and document primary and secondary source material pertaining to the New Deal in Mississippi and Florida. The archives and sources used in this project are indeed as varied and wide-ranging as New Deal projects themselves. For my work on the TVA, I gained valuable insight not only from reels of the Tupelo *Journal* and Booneville *Independent* between 1929 and 1939, but also from the extensive oral histories of former TVA employees from the Tennessee Valley Authority Library in Knoxville, Tennessee. In addition to the promotional pamphlets and *Annual Reports* from TVA headquarters in Knoxville, documents on the agency’s role in the state were also utilized at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH) in Jackson. The papers of John Rankin, Pat Harrison, and George McLean, all located at J.D. Williams Library at the University of Mississippi (UM) in Oxford, also provided tremendous insight into the origins and development of TVA in Mississippi. Of course, much of the quantifiable data came from census records on the state and federal level, as well as those available through the state like the *Mississippi Handbook of Agriculture*, published steadfastly every year until the mid 1960s. Vertical and archival files on the TVA in the Tupelo Public Library were particularly instructive in the initial stages of my research, as well.

Research on the New Deal in south Mississippi occurred primarily at the J.D. Williams Library at the University of Mississippi, the McCain Library and Special Collections of the
University of Southern Mississippi (USM) in Hattiesburg, and the MDAH Library in Jackson. Various paper collections of Mississippi New Deal officials, including George Sadka, Ellen Woodward, Paul Daughdrill, and Theodore Bilbo, are at both USM and MDAH. Although of minimal use for the purposes of this project, the papers of James Eastland, Paul B. Johnson, and William H. Whittington at the University of Mississippi Special Collections and University Archive represent an important collection to scholars examining the early twentieth century political history of the Magnolia State. In addition to manuscripts and records of the Mississippi State Park Service, these archives provided statistical data and a wealth of correspondence on the CCC, WPA, and NYA in Mississippi. Individual company paper collections housed at USM proved central to assessing the impact of the New Deal on the lumber industry in south Mississippi. The Mississippi Forestry Collection at McCain Archives in Hattiesburg remains an untapped resource for scholars of silviculture and the southern lumber industry. The second section and subsequent chapters dealing with the transformation of the Mississippi Gulf Coast engage popular perception via the Biloxi/Gulfport Daily Herald and its issues from 1933 to 1939. Still in print and available at many libraries, the WPA Guides to Mississippi and to Florida proved central to the deconstruction of public perceptions of the New Deal and the environment.

Several archives and repositories provided information for researching the roots and evolution of New Deal projects in the Florida Panhandle, including those at the University of West Florida (UWF) in Pensacola, Florida State University (FSU) in Tallahassee, Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC) in Niceville, as well as the State Archives and State Library of Florida in Tallahassee. Florida State Park Service files and WPA maps and reports on economic...
and social conditions in the Pensacola area are at the UWF special collections, as are the paper collections of two important local lumber companies. Special Collections at UWF also provided me with access to reports and files on the expansion of the Port of Pensacola occurring from 1937 to 1939. Reports by and correspondence to the CCC, WPA, NYA, as well extensive files on the Florida State Forest Service and Florida Park Service at the State Archives in Tallahassee proved to be of central importance to the third section of my work. The research division of the Florida Department of Transportation Headquarters also proved vital in providing historic maps and road surveys of the Panhandle from 1930 to 1939.

In addition to examining the papers of Governors Carlton Doyle, Dave Sholtz, and Fred P. Cone at the State Archives in Tallahassee, I also canvassed the House of Representatives and Senatorial section of the Claude Pepper Collection at the Claude Pepper Center on the campus of FSU. A majority of the sources—including complete reels of the Okaloosa News Journal and initial reports on the purchase and development of Eglin Air Force Base—of my localized study on Walton and Okaloosa counties were located at NWFSC Learning Resource Center and at the Fort Walton Beach Public Library, as well as the Northwest Florida Heritage Museum in Valparaiso.
Section I: Pawn in the ‘Great Experiment’: Origins, Development, and Impact of the TVA in Mississippi, 1933-1940

This first section and subsequent chapters to follow examine the foundations and expansion of the Tennessee Valley Authority in Mississippi from the passage of the TVA Act in 1933 through the beginning of World War II and comprehensive implementation of the TVA in Mississippi by the early 1940s. This section attempts to assess how and why the Tennessee Valley Authority in Mississippi was successful in its incorporation and implementation in Mississippi in spite of socioeconomic factors amongst a poverty stricken and desperate population. Rather, the popularity of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (as demonstrated in an assessment of Mississippi election returns in nine county Mississippi TVA area), public promotional campaigns, and unifying notions of region created by TVA projects and social aid cemented public support and overrode fears of socialism and local distaste of federal intrusion. The Tennessee Valley Authority-its institutional framework, programs, and socioeconomic aid-were highly accessible to the public. From its inception in 1933 through the end of World War II, TVA evolved into a body of shared experience for residents, an institutional blanket covering the Tennessee River Valley. In doing so, the Authority took the place of a severe economic depression to serve as a unifying commonality among residents of the Valley.

One of the broadly defined goals of this work is to trace the evolution of the largest public utility in the United States during the period of rapid post-Depression economic
redevelopment while examining and deconstructing the range of public (residents, public officials, politicians) and private (TVA, Mississippi Power Co.) support for the quasi-socialistic “experiment” of TVA. I argue that the TVA-particularly in the first two decades of its inception and development-served as an encompassing social, cultural, political, and economic institution in a state and within a region it actively helped to create, define, and transform.

The success of TVA in Mississippi was not due merely to socioeconomic factors or dire economic need, as has been argued by previous scholars and social critics.¹ Support for and the adoption of TVA in the Magnolia State was directly attributable to unifying notions of region and identity thoroughly imbued in the promotion campaigns for TVA carried out by Authority officials and Mississippi politicians. The creation of a tangible, unified region and the role of mass media (newspapers, radio) as well as the desire for the products and vestiges of consumerism were active and efficient agents in the adoption and success of TVA in the Magnolia State. In assessing the public discourse employed by TVA and state/local political officials, this paper will embrace an analytical deconstruction of the imagery, symbolism, and language presented in both local media and in TVA promotional publications.

Following an overview of the historiography and source material available and utilized in this work, I provide an historical context and examine the process of north Mississippi’s inclusion in the TVA despite its location relatively distant from the Tennessee River watershed. Although less than one percent of Mississippi is located within the bounds of the Tennessee

¹ See North Callahan, TVA: Bridge Over Troubled Waters; Clapp, Gordon Rufus. The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region; Creese, Walter L. TVA’s Public Planning. Daniel Schaffer, Environment and TVA: Toward a regional plan for the Tennessee Valley, 1930s is representative of TVA’s attempts at historical assessment of Authority policies and programs during the period. Ida Harlene Mohn’s 1952 thesis entitled The Tennessee Valley Authority in Northeast Mississippi represents the only previous scholarly examination of the TVA in Mississippi. While lacking an analytical focus, Mohn provides a broad narrative of the Authority focusing primarily on TVA Demonstration Farms in northeast Mississippi.
River watershed, roughly one-third of its citizens continue to receive TVA power.\textsuperscript{2} Utilizing secondary material, TVA reports and literature, along with articles from the Tupelo Journal and oral histories of TVA employees, I summarize Mississippi’s economic situation, as well as the fight over Muscle Shoals power and notions of equitable distribution of resources.\textsuperscript{3} Depression-era economic circumstances among the rural poor in Mississippi were a significant factor in the rapid infusion of TVA programs; however, its status as a federally-designated bureaucratic agency led to the Authority being viewed with substantial skepticism by some Mississippians who saw TVA as representative of or aligned with foreign or “Yankee” interests.

This section and the following chapters assess campaigns for TVA power and the role of vigorous promotion by both TVA officials and politicians on the state and national levels. Using congressional hearings, newspaper articles, and secondary source material, I discuss the role of Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison, Congressman John Rankin, and citizens in electric associations in Alcorn and Lee counties. Analyzing county-wide Mississippi Presidential election returns from 1932 and 1936, I highlight the popularity and importance of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in north Mississippi. I expand on the role of emergent forms of mass-media, as well as popular and consumer culture in the modernization and creation of what the Authority and popular media would refer to as “the electric valley.” In order to demonstrate the influence of state and local officials in the adoption of TVA programs in north Mississippi, I deconstruct the language and symbolism inherent in the appeals of public officials to citizens for their support of TVA.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} C.H. Pritchett, \textit{The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study in Public Administration}. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943. For contemporary power usage statistics for Mississippi, see \textit{Annual Reports of the Tennessee Valley Authority};
\item \textsuperscript{3} As the largest municipality in north Mississippi and first city in the United States to contract power distribution from TVA, the city of Tupelo will play a central role throughout this work. The standard history of Tupelo is Vaughn Grisham’s extensive doctoral dissertation from the University of North Carolina (1975), entitled, \textit{Tupelo, Mississippi: From Settlement to Industrial Community, 1860 to 1970}.\end{itemize}
Often working in close conjunction with state and local politicians, TVA officials played a substantial role in the foundations and development of public power, flood control, and social programs developed by the Authority in Mississippi. Drawing from TVA reports and promotional publications, the journals of former TVA chairman David Lilienthal, oral history interviews with TVA employees, and newspaper articles and editorials, the third section of this work will assess the impact and motivations behind what critics called the “aggressive pandering” of TVA officials for TVA power in Mississippi.\(^4\) Using TVA promotional publications and newspaper articles, I examine TVA power promotion campaigns to determine how the Authority won over residents of north Mississippi. Authority promotional literature (distributed locally) and newspaper editorials and articles from the Tupelo Journal and the Booneville Independent demonstrate that the TVA imparted successful public promotional campaigns and unifying notions of region. In employing a sense of mission in their work, crusading TVA officials sought to bring the South out of its primeval darkness. TVA sought to literally and figuratively enlighten the Tennessee River Valley via electrification, education, and social welfare programs.

This study offers a corrective for the oversimplified argument that cheap electric rates alone attracted residents and show that public promotion and success of promotional campaigns were vitally important factors in the adoption and success of TVA.\(^5\) Judging from newspaper editorials and public advertising by the Authority, it is clear that TVA’s distribution of promotional material left little room for other avenues or voices of dissent. TVA worked in

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cooperation with local newspapers to advertise demonstrations and campaign speeches by Authority officials, which the people of north Mississippi widely attended. Mississippi represented an easily accessible and potentially profitable market for electric power consumption, and the distribution of Authority promotional materialsbuffeted citizens and civic organizations alike.

This section assesses public response to TVA in north Mississippi. On February 7, 1934, Tupelo, Mississippi became the first city to receive electricity from TVA, and this section engages how Mississippians reconciled their distaste for potential socialism and federal intrusion commonly associated with the implementation of TVA. President Roosevelt’s visit to Tupelo in November of 1934 acted as a defining moment in the development of the Authority and its creation of a unified region in the mid-South. Arguing that the Authority played a substantial part in the ideological/psychological creation and economic underpinnings of the newly reoriented and reconstituted post-Depression Tennessee Valley, this section depicts the wildly enthusiastic public response to TVA. From this section, we gain an enhanced understanding of how a seemingly incongruent region became a unified entity with the Tennessee River and Authority as its focal point.

In addition to imparting notions of a unified socioeconomic and geographic region, TVA used a campaign of well-crafted bureaucratic language and public discourse backed by state and federal politicians (as well as TVA officials) to promote public power and social aid. The nearly immediate economic and cultural impact of the TVA has been emphasized in Authority and scholarly literature alike, and the final section of this paper offers an assessment of the economic impact of the TVA in its nine north Mississippi counties drawn from agricultural and
economic census data from 1934 to 1945. Drawing from those data, I examine rates of fertilizer use among farmers, crop and livestock production from 1934 to 1945, the amount of land in farms and acreage in cotton and corn, the number and value of farms, their ownership and tenancy rates, as well as electrification rates and educational levels completed. I engage the limitations of economic impact theories set forth by previous works, especially those directly engaging Mississippi during the post-Depression period. Along with census data, newspaper articles and editorials underscore the economic impact of the TVA after 1934. In concluding this section, I assess whether the perception and promise of TVA as an overarching social, cultural, political, and economic institution met the economic realities of its implementation in Mississippi after 1934.

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Chapter I: Tennessee Valley Authority in Mississippi, 1933-1935

Reviewing the extensive scholarly literature produced on the Tennessee Valley Authority prior to engaging the origins and development of the TVA in Mississippi will provide a contextual foundation for this chapter. Most works have focused primarily on the organizational development of and personalities and motivations within TVA leadership. Assessment of scholarly writing on the TVA provides a window into the polarized and politicized nature of TVA scholarship and the dynamic contrast between material written by and for the Authority and that of outside scholarship.

The historiography of the Tennessee Valley Authority displays a pronounced void in dealing with TVA and human interaction with the environment and the creation of region in the Tennessee River Valley. Despite using more TVA power than any state other than Tennessee, Mississippi plays only a peripheral role in scholarly assessments of the Authority. Although some works have considered rural electrification in mostly state/local level case studies, strikingly few attempts have examined the history of public utilities. Given TVA’s status as the largest public utility corporation in the United States, it is imperative to critique the existing

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7 The foremost works on the environmental history of the South remain Albert Cowdrey, *This land, this South: An Environmental History* and Jack Temple Kirby, *Mockingbird Song: Ecological Landscapes of the South*. Both contain brief sections on the Tennessee Valley Authority.
literature with an eye toward broadening our historical understanding of the Authority and its social, economic, and political influence. This historiographic review provides an assessment of secondary works, arranged topically under areas of general thematic emphasis within the paper. After an evaluation of the primary sources used in the crafting of this report, I conclude by highlighting my contribution to the field of TVA studies.


W.V. Howard examines the constitutionality of the Authority in *Authority in TVA Land* (1948), while Martha Munzer romanticizes the immediate impact of the Authority on rural life.

In addition to scholarly attempts, the research division of TVA has published several important works on the Authority, including *A History of the Tennessee Valley Authority* (1950). This piece is admittedly and expectedly marked by the bias of the Authority, but former chairman David E. Lilienthal’s work entitled *TVA: Democracy on the March* (1953) remains one of the most complete and insightful narratives of the Authority and its development. Written only ten years after the implementation of the TVA Act in 1933, C.H. Pritchett’s *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Study in Public Administration* (1943) reaches beyond its title to examine all facets of the Authority, including its role in flood control, the operation and marketing of power, regional planning and development, as well as the infrastructure of its administration and TVA’s meaning as “symbol,” “instrument,” and “portent”. This paper is particularly informed by Pritchett’s interpretation of TVA as an experiment in regional planning. In addition
to works cited above, several articles and book chapters prove insightful in their treatment of the origins and development of the authority.\(^8\)

The wide-ranging and powerful force of TVA upon the social, cultural, and economic modes of the Tennessee Valley region is reflected in the large amount of scholarship focusing on the Authority and its role in shaping socioeconomic and cultural lifeways. Nancy Grant and Melissa Walker have made significant contributions to understanding the impact of TVA upon African Americans and Women.\(^9\) J.S. Ransmeier’s *The Tennessee Valley Authority: A Case Study in the Economics of Multiple Purpose Stream Planning* (1943), M.H. Satterfield’s *Soil and Sky: The Development and Use of Tennessee Valley Resources* (1950) and Walter L. Creese’s *TVA’s Public Planning* (1955) represent the three earliest attempts at synthesizing facets of planning central to TVA’s mission in the region. All three works, along with R.L. Duffus’s *The Valley and Its People: A Portrait of TVA* (1945), place emphasis on TVA’s successful harnessing of natural and human resources for the benefit of both the Tennessee Valley and the nation as a whole.

W.E. Cole’s 1950 “Impact of the TVA Upon the Southeast” is a succinct assessment of the major tenets of the TVA Act and their impact on the South. Published in 1949, *TVA and Regional Development in the Southeast* by R.M. Howes offers a relatively even-handed account of both the progress achieved and limitations faced by the Authority in its first fifteen years of existence. Works published by TVA’s Division of Regional Studies offer valuable quantitative

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evidence while expanding our understanding; those employed in this study include *Recreation Development of the Tennessee River System* (1940), *Ten Years of TVA power in Homes of Tupelo, Miss. : A Record of the Growth in the Use of Electricity in the Homes of Tupelo from 1934 to 1944* (1945), and *Comparative Data on Farm Income and Employment, 1929-51* (1953).

Contemporary scholarship has centered on the impact of TVA and its role in cultural resource management and answer to the environmental challenge of the 1970s. D.L. DeJarnette and W.S. Webb performed the first cultural resource management survey of the TVA region in 1942, entitled *An Archaeological Survey of Pickwick Basin in the Adjacent Portions of the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee*. With its interpretive focus on northeastern Mississippi, this study provided details on the archaeological impact of the construction of Pickwick Dam in Tishomingo County, Mississippi, as was Sheila and R. Barry Lewis’s *Archaeological Investigations in portions of Tishomingo County, Mississippi*, published in 1972 by the Cobb Institute of Archaeology at Mississippi State University. Both surveys show that the construction and subsequent flooding of TVA projects had a severe impact on the human and cultural geography of northeastern Mississippi. In *The Choices of Power: Utilities Face the Environmental Challenge* (1981), Marc J. Roberts and Jeremy Blum only lightly demonstrate the evolution of TVA from a regional institution into a power-utility company funded by the federal government. TVA researcher and historian Daniel Schaffer effectively, if not romantically, captures the essence of TVA’s conservation and regional planning in *Environment and TVA: Toward a Regional Plan for the Tennessee Valley, 1930s* (1979). In 1983, Schaffer teamed with Leslie Mowitt Headrick to examine cooperative efforts between the Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corps. *A Peace Time Army: The Tennessee Valley*
Authority-Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942 emphasizes the significant, but ultimately short-lived intertwining of New Deal agencies.

Although scholarship directly linking the TVA and Mississippi is relatively scarce, several of the following pieces enlighten our understanding of the relationship between the Authority and the state. The earliest assessment of the TVA in Mississippi appeared prior to the passage of the TVA Act itself. In February 1925, Manufacturers Record published an article entitled, “The Muscle Shoals Situation as Viewed in Mississippi,” wherein the authors make a powerfully concise argument for the equitable distribution of Muscle Shoals power and potential of fertilizer production for the entire Valley region. Eager to attract the attention of Henry Ford (who observed the Muscle Shoals debate from Detroit with an attentive eye), the Record pushed for the development of a new “automobile manufacture hub” in northeastern Mississippi and northwest Alabama. Appearing in the Nation in 1938, “Tupelo: Feudalism and TVA,” (1938), was a scathing indictment by Whitman Wilson equating the TVA with the implementation of modern feudalism and represents the most thorough critique of the Authority and its relationship with Mississippi.

Two other quantitative works focusing on Mississippi and TVA from the 1940s have informed this study. The first, O.T. Osgood’s Land use and income as affected by tenure and size of farm on 113 test-demonstration farms in Alcorn, Prentiss and Tishomingo counties, 1943 (1947), served as a progress report on farm classification and analysis in the Tennessee Valley counties of Mississippi, offering a wealth of farm data and a unique insight into the capabilities of TVA demonstration farms. Osgood’s report was also the only document to be co-authored by Mississippi State Agricultural and Mechanical College and the Authority, despite TVA’s intent to
incorporate land-grant colleges and universities into its research efforts. As mentioned in the previous section, TVA’s report on *Ten years of TVA power in homes of Tupelo, Miss.: a record of the growth in the use of electricity in the homes of Tupelo from 1934 to 1944, the first ten years of distribution of power at TVA rates by the Tupelo electric system* (1946) helps to establish the immediate social and economic impact of in-home electricity in the first TVA city in the United States. Frank E. Cotton’s “Recent Trends in Manufacturing Employment in Mississippi, 1940-1960,” published in the *Journal of Mississippi History* in 1967, offers substantial qualitative and quantitative evidence for the successful implementation of TVA power and programs in the state. Ida Harlene Mohn’s thesis entitled “The Tennessee Valley Authority in Northeast Mississippi”, was published by Mississippi State University in 1952 and remains the only work singularly engaging the Mississippi context of the Authority. Because of limitations on available data and sources, Mohn’s attempt falls short of complete analysis of the Authority and its role in the Magnolia State. The author focuses her work on the test demonstration farms in Tishomingo and Lee counties, and while Mohn provides a general narrative of TVA, she neglects notions of regionalism and falls well short of critical analysis needed of the social, cultural, and economic influence in Mississippi.

Scholarship by Vaughn Grisham, Tom Rankin, Karen Glynn, stand out as contributions within the realm of TVA and Mississippi history. Grisham’s 1978 University of North Carolina dissertation project, *Tupelo, Mississippi: From Settlement to Industrial Community, 1860 to 1970* (1978) is an exhaustive, five-hundred page historical analysis of the “All-America City.” Grisham, a Tupelo native, offers a detailed look at the support for and implementation of TVA in northeast Mississippi. He interprets TVA as wholly beneficial to both the post-Depression and
post-World War II periods in the region, noting the substantial presence of local institutions working in cooperation with Authority officials. Although the author’s assessment of TVA may not be overly incisive or meticulous, Grisham does a solid job of placing Tupelo and the TVA within both a state-level and national focus. In 2000, Karen Glynn and Tom Rankin released a highly informative multi-media resource entitled, *Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1940*. Glynn and Rankin’s project features over 1200 photographs from the FSA, along with photographers’ correspondence from the field and county demographic profiles with population graphs and census data up to 1940. I have utilized Glynn and Rankin’s project (primarily correspondence and county profiles) to demonstrate the enormous impact of the TVA in Mississippi.

Mississippi’s public officials and politicians played a vital role in generating public support for the Tennessee Valley Authority in the state. Senator Pat Harrison and Congressman John Rankin displayed vociferous support of equitable distribution of water resources (including power) and of the implementation of TVA in Mississippi. In establishing the role of Harrison and Rankin, I rely on several biographical scholarly works, including Martha H. Swain’s *Pat Harrison: The New Deal Years* (1978) and Kenneth W. Vickers’ 1984 study of *John Rankin: Democrat and Demagogue*, books which offer balanced interpretations, while Chellis O’Neal Gregory’s University of Mississippi thesis on “Pat Harrison and the New Deal” (1960) demonstrates the economic and personal motivations of Harrison’s involvement with the Authority. Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, John Rankin left no personal papers, thus
necessitating the deconstruction of speeches concerning the TVA and Mississippi.\footnote{See John E. Rankin, “The Tennessee Valley Authority-Muscle Shoals-the ‘yardstick’ for light and power rates,” Speech in the Mississippi House of Representatives, Wednesday, February 7, 1934; see also John E. Rankin, “Power Policies of the Roosevelt Administration: The T.V.A. yardstick rates,” Speech in the Mississippi House of Representatives, Saturday, June 2, 1934. Both documents are housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.} As noted in the section on primary sources, I have consulted the papers of George McLean, community developer and owner of the Tupelo Journal from 1934 to his death in 1981.

In order to provide a historical background of an Authority official largely unresponsive to the TVA as it existed in Mississippi, I have consulted Roy Talbert Jr’s FDR’s Utopian: Arthur Morgan of the TVA (1987). Perhaps more significantly, The Journals of David E. Lilienthal (1983) have provided substantial insight into the thoughts and actions of a man many consider a bureaucratic genius. This seven-volume series served as a valuable secondary and primary source in the construction of this project.

Emphasizing the connection between TVA’s public planning and discourse and its proactive creation of a geographic, social, and economic region in the Tennessee River Valley watershed represents this study’s most salient contribution to the field of TVA scholarship. Therefore, it is obviously necessary to review several works focusing on the creation of region and of regionalism. For this paper, C.H. Pritchett’s The Tennessee Valley Authority (1943) serves as a substantial foundation on which to build notions of regionalism inherent in TVA policies. Published in 1955, former TVA chairman Gordon R. Clapp’s The TVA: An Approach to the Development of a Region, in conjunction with Pritchett’s work, represents the most direct and substantial scholarly connection between the Authority and its regionalistic planning approach inherent in the tenets of the TVA Act of 1933. In her 1985 study of The Public Landscape of the New Deal, Phoebe Cutler offers an analysis of cultural landscapes and geography, emphasizing
the planning techniques, technical advances, and social experiment inherent in the 
implementation of the Authority. Unlike many contemporary TVA scholars, Cutler uses 
photographs to illustrate the evolution and change impacted upon the landscape by Authority 
projects and social welfare.

In the assessment of more broadly-rooted works on region and regionalism, articles by 
Charles Beard and Edwin Lamke have contributed toward a scholarly shaping of our 
understanding of regions and regionalism. Written by one of the earliest and most influential 
planners in American history, Benton MacKaye’s *The New Exploration: A Philosophy of Regional 
Planning* (1928) informed this paper’s sense of regional planning. Equally important is Howard 
Odum’s 1936 opus, *Southern Regions of the United States*, in which he declares the Tennessee 
River Valley to be a “sub-region.” I argue that Odum’s relatively limited definition and sense of 
region had not yet been fully impacted by the institutional weight of the TVA. Essays edited by 
Merrill Jensen and Felix Frankfurter in *Regionalism in America* (1951) offer a broad overview of 
the concept of regionalism along with an assessment of what the various authors consider to be 
historic regions of the United States. In part four, “The Concept of Regionalism as a Practical 
Force,” Gordon Clapp argues for a new approach to the development of human and natural 
resources, while describing the intricate role of regionalism within the sphere of the TVA.

More recent scholarship has broadened historical perceptions and understandings of 
the notions of region and regionalism. Michael Bradshaw’s *Regions and Regionalism in the 
United States* (1988) demonstrates the significance of region and the concerns of regionalism.

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11 For one of the earliest interpretations of public and regional planning, see Charles A. Beard, “Some Aspects of 
Regional Planning,” in *American Political Science Review* 20, 273-83, 1926. For a piece more directly correlating 
TVA, social engineering, and regionalism see Edwin Lamke, “Planning Under the TVA,” in *Plan Age* 3, December 
1935.
Bradshaw effectively elevates scholarly perception of regional variation, as well as the historic basis of contemporary regional difference in the United States. Citing TVA as an example of public policy intertwined with regionalism, Bradshaw argues that the TVA experience has underlined a number of important facets which affect consciously-directed regionalism. In *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1943*, Robert Dorman presents the narrative of a key moment in the modernization of the United States. In his succinct discussion of the TVA, Dorman demonstrates that the Tennessee Valley region offered a richer, more socially just existence and acted as a buttress against the forces of standardization, proletarianization, and centralization. According to Dorman, regionalists attempted to formulate regionalism as a full-fledged national ideology and a form of radical politics that would reverse modernity itself and heal its cultural, psychic and social wounds. Michael O’Brien’s *The Idea of the American South, 1920-41* (1979) engages the work of Howard Odum and interprets the South as an intellectual perception closely tied to the survival of Romantic social theory.

Works that began as symposium talks and evolved into essays edited by Charles Reagan Wilson in *The New Regionalism: Essays and Commentaries* (1998) show that regionalists “emphasized the centrality of place-lived environments as unique, valuable entities,” and while, “The New Deal raised the hopes of many regionalists,” plans for economic redistribution proved politically elusive. Although none of the essays assess the “mid-South” or TVA region, writings by Dorman, Jack Temple Kirby, and Allen Tullos inform our understanding of place, region, and the dynamic, often paradoxical mechanisms of regionalism.
Congress authorized the Tennessee Valley Authority Act on May 18, 1933 during the first 100 days of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration. The TVA Act chartered a federally-owned corporation providing improved navigation, flood control, electricity generation, fertilizer manufacturing, and general improvement of social and economic conditions in the Tennessee River Valley. Although only the northeastern corner of Mississippi lies within the Tennessee River watershed, on February 7, 1934, the city of Tupelo became the first municipality to receive TVA power in the United States. As the nation’s largest producer of electric power, largest user of coal, and the leading investor in nuclear power, TVA has evolved into an encompassing social, political, economic institution. The Authority has persisted through a tumultuous and divisive history in the region and in the Magnolia State.

Several important political, social, and economic precedents appeared in the years prior to the passage of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act in May of 1933 and complete implementation of TVA in Mississippi in November of 1934. Controversy surrounding the equitable regional distribution of hydroelectric power from Wilson Dam in Muscle Shoals, Alabama played a substantial role in public support and development of TVA in Mississippi, as

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did the presidential election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison and Congressman John E. Rankin established a vital basis of legislative and popular support for the distribution of public power in the state, as well. Eagerly seeking solutions to dropping cotton prices and increasingly destitute economic conditions, farmers in north Mississippi received substantial aid from the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the National Recovery Act (NRA), and the Cotton Reduction plan, three important legislative components from the famed first 100 days of the Roosevelt administration. The formation and development of rural cooperative electric associations in Alcorn and Lee (and later, Prentiss) counties demonstrated the centrality of potential home and farm electrification in the minds of many Mississippians while concurrently establishing a market for publicly-owned power. Viewed together, these political, economic, and ideological/philosophical precedents formed the initial basis of Mississippi’s inclusion within the Tennessee Valley Authority and region. Asserting that several concurrent and intertwined factors—the Muscle Shoals experience, political influence of the Democratic Party and its leadership, initial New Deal programs like the NRA, and the saliency of rural electric cooperatives—combined to create a foundation of support for TVA in Mississippi, this study engages an approach that has previously been neglected by historians of the New Deal and TVA. This section will examine these fundamental developments as they relate to the origin and implementation of the Authority in Mississippi.

Creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the spring of 1933 by a New Deal Congress marked a decisive turning point in an important phase of American public policy. However, the genesis of the TVA can be located in the controversy surrounding the post-war impact of

14 Ibid., Hubbard, Origins of the TVA, vii.
the National Defense Act of 1916 and construction of the Wilson Dam in Muscle Shoals, Alabama for the production of fertilizer and ammunition, as well as the control of floodwaters from the Tennessee River. The decade following World War I proved to be one of rapid expansion in the electrical power industry, and government possession of a large hydroelectric dam under the Wilson and Harding administrations was central to the successful development of the water-power resources of the Tennessee Valley. The Federal Water Power Act, approved by Congress and established in June of 1920, determined the abilities and limitations of the federal government in its dealings with public power. Following the rejection of a multi-million dollar contract offered by Henry Ford to the government for the purpose of building additional dams for the creation of automobile factories in the Valley, Senator George Norris of Nebraska helped craft the Norris Bill of 1924, which proposed the inclusion of Wilson Dam and Muscle Shoals power under the guise of the newly-formed Federal Power Corporation. New attempts at federal control over power utilities caused a stir in the House and in the Senate, where Republicans thoroughly vilified the Norris Bill. Private business owners and manufacturers in Mississippi voiced their displeasure with the potential of government intervention, also. In a rebuttal and defense of his pro-Muscle Shoals bill stance in the industrial journal Manufacturers Record, Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison cited the imbalance of resource use and potential opportunity offered by public distribution of hydroelectric power. In the same piece, Harrison argued that the development of automobile industries in north Alabama would have “in all

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probability...depopulated Mississippi.\textsuperscript{18} Harrison went on to maintain that without hydroelectric power, cotton processing and industrial development in Mississippi would cease to be profitable. In his initial posturing for the benefits of public power, Harrison presented the public distribution of Muscle Shoals power as advantageous for farmers, manufacturers, and business owners alike, thereby advancing notions of unity that would manifest themselves in later public promotions by politicians and TVA officials. In Senate debates, the desire of many Mississippians for equitable regional distribution of power was voiced by Harrison, who frequently accused the people and industries of northern Alabama of attempting to selfishly concentrate the use and distribution of Muscle Shoals power to that part of the state.\textsuperscript{19} After spending most of the fall of 1925 vehemently promoting the necessity of equitable regional distribution of hydroelectric power, in January of 1926 Harrison introduced a Joint-Leasing Committee on Muscle Shoals to appease Republicans who sought to limit government intrusion in business.\textsuperscript{20} Harrison’s Joint-Lease program would eventually allow TVA to offer power distribution to cooperatives and citizens in the watershed, including those in Mississippi.\textsuperscript{21} Soon thereafter, Congress turned its attention to the public operation and ownership of Tennessee River power and away from the perception of Muscle Shoals as a local postwar problem and into the realm of a test case involving public control of natural resources.

Following the election of President Herbert Hoover, the equitable and regional distribution of hydroelectric power from Wilson Dam and Muscle Shoals emerged as a significant point of departure between Republicans, Democrats, and the public, whose opinion

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., Hubbard, \textit{Origins of the TVA}, 222.
\textsuperscript{21} King, ibid., 148.
had turned solidly against the power trust and created a national dialogue that made the support of public power a reality. After 30 years of ideological and military warfare, the American public was ready for municipal operation of Muscle Shoals and multipurpose development of the Tennessee River watershed.\(^{22}\) A two-year battle ensued between Hoover and Congress over Muscle Shoals power, with the President ultimately vetoing the Norris Bill proposing government operation of Muscle Shoals on March 3, 1931. Although Hoover would unsuccessfully attempt to turn control of Muscle Shoals power over to the states, his inability to compromise with Congress and the House in viewing the possibilities of public ownership of power represented one of the myriad reasons for his presidential election defeat at the hands of Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932.

With the Norris Bill still floating through the Senate, Harrison continued to promote the benefits of public ownership and equitable regional distribution of Tennessee River power.\(^{23}\) His counterpart in Congress, John E. Rankin of Tupelo, played a significant role in support of public power, as well. Aside from Senator Norris, Rankin was known as the foremost ally to public power and utilities in Washington.\(^{24}\) During the Muscle Shoals congressional hearings, it was Rankin who testified that pro-Ford and anti-public power ownership sentiment in Mississippi was rapidly dissipating as the average citizen became aware that Ford’s offer did not provide for general distribution of Muscle Shoals power.\(^{25}\) Rankin emphasized that Mississippi lacked both coal and water power, and thus, the state’s industrial growth would depend on

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\(^{22}\) King, ibid., 188.

\(^{23}\) King, ibid., 275.

\(^{24}\) Thomas McCraw, *TVA And the Power Fight, 1933-1939* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1971), 63-64.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., Hubbard, *Origins of the TVA*, 130.
equalization of the water-power resources of the South.\textsuperscript{26} Although passage and implementation of Senator Norris’s TVA Bill would have to wait until 1933, Senator Harrison and Congressman Rankin of Mississippi received ample credit for helping inform their political colleagues and expressing the views of the public as to the benefits of public distribution and ownership of hydroelectric power.

That being said, both Harrison and Rankin had much to gain politically from passage of the Norris Bill and what would become the TVA Act. All three were popular Democratic politicians from an overwhelmingly Democratic state, and both considered themselves close to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Harrison and Rankin played crucial roles in the defense of public ownership and distribution of power in congressional and senatorial hearings, thereby establishing a degree of legislative advocacy in support of Muscle Shoals and TVA. Rankin would prove especially significant in his eloquent and extensive defense of the constitutionality of Tennessee Valley Authority before Congress and the House in 1934.\textsuperscript{27} While they defended the attainability of Muscle Shoals power, and then President Roosevelt and his New Deal programs and policies, Harrison and Rankin gained substantial press in Mississippi, only adding to their political prestige and reputations at home. The salience of Rankin’s popularity in north Mississippi is illustrated in the popular press as early as July of 1931, when the Tupelo \textit{Journal} promoted its hometown son as the leading Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate.\textsuperscript{28} The potential of nomination seemingly took Rankin by surprise, as he asked, “Did you ever hear of anyone turning it down?”\textsuperscript{29} In November of 1931, amid continuing rumors of his ascendancy as

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Muscle Shoals}, Senate Hearings, 68 Cong., 1 Sess., 305-324.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Tennessee Valley Authority}, Congressional Record-House, June 2, 1934, 10329-10331.
\textsuperscript{28} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Boom Rankin as Democrat Prospect for V.President”, Tuesday, July 7, 1931, p.1.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., pl.1.
a Vice-Presidential candidate, the man the Booneville *Independent* would call “The father of rural electrification in the South” would help secure Democratic control of the House of Representatives, and was soon thereafter chosen to be floor leader of the House. In February of 1933, the entire Mississippi delegation nominated Rankin Speaker of the House of Representatives, calling him “a foremost supporter of President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt for the Democratic nomination,” adding that, “He is thoroughly progressive and in harmony with the views of the President.” In March of 1933, Pat Harrison became Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Senate, where he would continue to promote the dispersal of New Deal aid, funding, and programs to his home state.

While Harrison and Rankin championed publicly TVA and its socioeconomic benefits, the two officials gained increasing fame and adulation in Mississippi upon inclusion of the state within the TVA. In an interview with TVA researchers in the 1980s, former TVA director of research Edward Falck noted that, “there were many politicians who began finding that associating themselves with the TVA was very good for them,” and that, “Congressman Rankin went around making speeches, both in Mississippi and also in Washington, taking great credit for the fact that Tupelo...was the first municipal contract that had purchased power from the TVA”. Frank Smith, a Democratic representative from Shannon, even served as Chairman of TVA prior to running for Congress. In 1983, former TVA Chairman Brigadier General Herbert

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Vogel noted that “Citizens for TVA” groups commonly organized by local Democratic Party leadership helped rising politicians like Harrison and Rankin use TVA as “a political football” to help their careers. From the political ascendancy of men like Harrison, Rankin, and Smith, it is clear that the success of TVA was instrumental in fostering their appeal to voters in Mississippi.

As Democratic officials in Mississippi who defended racial segregation and nativist politics during the early twentieth century, Harrison and Rankin employed ideologies and racial politics that can be best characterized as demagogic and virulently racist. But as New Deal-era Democrats, the political legacies of Harrison and Rankin are inextricably linked to the origins, development, and implementation of the Tennessee Valley Authority. With powerful Democratic Party machinery already in place in Mississippi, the public stature of Harrison and Rankin only helped popular sentiment for Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Presidential campaign. In 1931, both Harrison and Rankin traveled across the state in support of F.D.R. and Muscle Shoals power, and voters listened. During the 1932 election in the nine-county Mississippi TVA district, Roosevelt averaged 96 percent of the popular vote. In Benton County, Roosevelt secured an astounding 99 percent of the total popular vote, while in Pontotoc County F.D.R.

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35 Frank Smith is mentioned in less flattering terms by veteran TVA hydraulic engineer G.O. Wessenauer in TVA Oral History Collection, employee series, Oral History Interview with G.O. Wessenauer, May 22-24, 1990, p.44.
37 For the purposes of this paper, the most comprehensive biography of Pat Harrison is Martha H. Swain, Pat Harrison: The New Deal Years (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978). Chellis O’Neal Gregory’s thesis on Rankin remains the most extensive work on the Congressman from Tupelo.
38 Serving as the comparative and analytical basis for the assessment of the TVA in Mississippi made in this paper, the nine-county TVA Mississippi district consists of those counties where the Authority made their first purchases of property and distribution rights. These northeastern Mississippi counties include: Alcorn, Benton, Lee, Monroe, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, and Union counties.
gained 98.4 percent of ballots cast. Roosevelt’s lowest tally in the nine-county TVA district was in Tishomingo County, where the Senator from New York garnered 90.2 percent of the vote. In addition to the overwhelming presence of Democratic Party apparatus in Mississippi, Roosevelt’s bid to become president was bolstered by the efforts of Harrison and Rankin, along with the potential for socioeconomic improvement imbued within Roosevelt’s plans for national recovery from the Depression. Much like Harrison and Rankin, TVA strengthened F.D.R.’s already broad base of popular support. After 1933, adoption and support of the Tennessee Valley Authority would be rooted, among other factors, in the widespread appeal and popularity of Roosevelt and his administration. During his first year in office, Roosevelt built upon important social and economic precedents like the Muscle Shoals controversy, the traditional dominance of his own party in the TVA region, and the success of early New Deal programs like the Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan to reinforce the depth of his presidency and potency of his programs that provided social and economic aid to a weary population.

Signed into action by Roosevelt in May of 1933, the Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan of the Agricultural Adjustment Act had a wide-ranging impact on Mississippi, as did the National Industrial Recovery Act created in June of 1933. Enacted concurrently with the TVA Act, both New Deal programs represented important models for the success of Roosevelt’s plan to alleviate the socioeconomic woes of the Depression. Creation of the NRA and passage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act and Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan signaled the end of reliance upon cotton in the state and propelled the tenets of modernization in agriculture for Mississippi farmers. By limiting the acreage grown in cotton, AAA and the NRA effectively reduced

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39 Scammon, ibid., 245.
40 Scammon, ibid., 246.
previously drastic levels of soil erosion. These were the first of the New Deal programs to touch Mississippi, and their adoption came in the wake of increasingly deteriorating socioeconomic conditions in the northern part of the state. Two years earlier, in August of 1931, the Tupelo Journal ran an editorial exclaiming, “Lee County Triumphant: We are on the Right Road-Headed in the Right Direction!” Employing familiar Hoover-era clichés and catch phrases, the article informs citizens that “In Lee County adversity is being converted into a sound, practical, common-sense, high-toned motor which is driving, the energies and ambitions of a noble race toward higher goals and firmer foundations.”41 The piece goes on to praise the benefits of “direct selling” of farm crops, whereby farmers went door-to-door peddling produce. The notion of adversity creating a sense of collective strength rings throughout the piece. Sounding not unlike a speech from the Hoover administration, the sentiment pursued by Journal editors during the height of the Depression failed to accord with the economic realities facing most Mississippians. Two years later, in April of 1933, former Hooverites and the citizens of Tupelo faced unruly mobs of men circling the Lee County courthouse, demanding jobs and answers.42 Working in conjunction with the Tupelo Welfare Board, most of the ninety men applied for and were immediately offered jobs with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), established just one month earlier in March of 1933.43 Simply put, implementation of the AAA, NRA, and CCC was instrumental in averting social upheaval amongst the depressed and frustrated populace of north Mississippi.

With cotton prices plummeting to an all-time low in the fall of 1933, farmers and merchants in the state began to look for new forms of industry to help assuage the impact of what had become a full-fledged crisis on the farm. The desperation of the agricultural sector made its way to the front pages of north Mississippi newspapers, and immediately prior to the passage of the Cotton Reduction plan in May 1933 the *Journal* began to actively promote the development of the tung oil industry. Grasping frantically for any potential opportunity for economic improvement, the *Journal* concurred with C.C. Concannon, chief of the Chemical division of the U.S. Department of Commerce, who exclaimed that, “Your state of Mississippi is ideally suited to the culture of Tung trees...the state board can well afford to stay behind this development as it undoubtedly will be one of your greatest agricultural assets.”\(^4^4\) In terms of its production and application, tung oil is made from the pressed seed from the nut of the tung tree, and would have required extensive planting and cultivation campaigns. With so much acreage already committed to the production of cotton, abruptly replacing cotton with a new and relatively unfamiliar industry would not suffice for Mississippi farmers and cotton brokers simply trying to stay afloat. Luckily, the Roosevelt administration would offer a buoy in the form of the federal Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan, formally approved as a New Deal program on June 30, 1933. In abiding by the terms of the acreage reduction, farmers received leases for their land to remain fallow of cotton, with more than one million acres of Mississippi land included in this program.\(^4^5\) In the first month of its existence, the Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan enrolled 2,301 contracted farmers in 23 Mississippi counties, including all nine TVA

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\(^4^4\) Tupelo *Journal*, “New Industry Seen For Mississippi,” May 9, 1933, p.4.

\(^4^5\) Tupelo *Journal*, “Cotton Acreage Reduction Program to Hold Meetings in this City”, May 12, 1933, p.1.
counties in north Mississippi.\footnote{Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Cotton Plan Meets Approval”, June 30, 1933, p.1.} The plan called for a reduction of thirty percent of the 1929 acreage in cotton per county, and in the summer of 1933 over 106,000 acres of cotton were leased and paid for by the government in the Mississippi TVA counties of Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, and Union.\footnote{Tupelo \textit{Journal}, ibid., “Cotton Plan...”, June 30, 1933, p.1.} In providing tangible economic aid to Mississippi farmers while working in cooperative conjunction with local and state-level agricultural extension agencies, the cotton acreage reduction program represented one of the first widespread and substantial victories of Roosevelt’s New Deal programs in Mississippi.

Accomplishments evidenced in the Cotton Acreage Reduction Plan, the CCC, NRA, and AAA in Mississippi prompted the Roosevelt administration to make significant inroads toward negotiating contracts with the state to provide TVA power and flood control measures. In terms of the TVA and its adoption in north Mississippi, county-based electric associations helped to illustrate the need for centralized and publicly-owned electrical distribution in the state. In Lee County, Congressman John Rankin was central to the formation and organization of a loosely structured association of citizens who sought public power for Tupelo and the county. Twenty founding members of the Lee County Electrical Power Association (LCEPA) put together a large motorcade to travel to Muscle Shoals and “shout greetings to President-Elect Roosevelt,” on his 1933 tour of the South.\footnote{See Vaughn L. Grisham, \textit{Tupelo, Mississippi}, 199. For account of Lee County Electrical Power Association trip to Alabama, see Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Group Travels to Muscle Shoals To Greet Pres.-Elect”, January 20, 1933, p.2.} Those members who made the trip to Muscle Shoals decided to form a permanent organization responsible for gathering support for a power association within each school district in the county. Vociferously supported at rallies by John Rankin, this grass-
roots campaign for public power by the LCEPA would culminate in its official establishment as a state-recognized organization on September 9, 1933.\(^{49}\)

Headquartered in Corinth, Mississippi, the Alcorn County Electric Power Association (ACEPA) was the first organization subsumed by TVA for the purpose of acquiring and operating distribution systems in Mississippi.\(^{50}\) With substantial assistance from local communities, TVA began in the spring of 1934 to form rural cooperatives to branch distribution capabilities to largely rural and previously underserved sections of the TVA counties in northeast Mississippi. ACPEA was the first rural cooperative created by TVA, with Edward Falck, Authority Director of Rates and Research, serving as its founder.\(^{51}\) Successfully paying off its TVA debt within five years of its incorporation, ACPEA was exemplary of the reciprocal relationships forged between TVA and regional political and economic entities. Interested citizens organized private non-profit membership corporations like ACPEA, usually on a county basis, for the purpose of acquiring and operating distribution systems. Members who paid the $100 fee received electricity purchased by their associations from the TVA at wholesale rates.\(^{52}\) ACPEA was the first organization of this type, chartered under Mississippi law as a non-profit, civic improvement corporation on January 17, 1934, less than one month prior to Tupelo becoming the first municipality in the United States to receive publicly owned hydroelectric power. In

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\(^{49}\) Grisham, ibid., 200. Grisham incorrectly cites August of 1933 as the date of organization of the LCEPA. See Tupelo Journal, “Lee A Model Power County”, October 10, 1933, p.3. NRA editorials like this one ran in every issue of the Journal from early 1933 through early 1935. They will be discussed in greater detail in the section dealing with public response to the TVA in Mississippi.


\(^{52}\) Ida Harlene Mohn, The TVA in northeast Mississippi, 102-103.
June of 1934, ACPEA entered into a contract with TVA for the purchase of the electrical properties in the county which had been acquired by the Authority from the Mississippi Power Company. ACEPA also worked with TVA for the purchase and distribution of electric energy at wholesale rates. Agreements between TVA and ACEPA and similar cooperative associations greatly benefited the development of residential electrification in north Mississippi.

Two months after the approval of the TVA Act by President Roosevelt in May of 1933, Congressman John Rankin, TVA Chairman David Lilienthal, and the Tupelo Journal reported that implementation of public power in northeast Mississippi was a distinct possibility as early as the fall of 1933. After successfully contracting connection of the first power line from Wilson Dam to Tupelo in October of 1933 (and a subsequent 68 percent power rate cut for Tupelo residents), a TVA contract extension with the Alabama Power Company signed January 4, 1934 provided for the purchase by TVA of several of the Alabama company’s municipal power distribution systems in Mississippi. Sales from the subsidiaries of Alabama Power Company to TVA included the entire generating, transmission, and distribution properties of the Mississippi Power Company (MPC) in nine counties in northeastern Mississippi for $850,000. This first contract included all the properties of the MPC in Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, and Union counties. These MPC properties were the first to be transferred to the Authority, with the purchase completed on June 1, 1934. In northeast Mississippi the Authority first formally developed its power policy. Residents receiving TVA power functioned as an experimental group for FDR’s “great national experiment.”

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Congressman Rankin was instrumental in supporting the inclusion of northeast Mississippi under the electric distribution of the Authority. Distribution of TVA electricity to the “All America City” proved to be the first step in the Authority’s venture into the power business.  

With roughly 6,000 people residing in the city in 1934, Tupelo had previously owned its distribution system but purchased power from a private company, the Mississippi Power Company (MPC). TVA service began on February 7, 1934, when the city’s franchise with MPC expired. According to then-head TVA researcher Edward Falck, the Authority selected Tupelo as the first city to receive TVA power because of its relatively short distance from generating machinery in Muscle Shoals and from its inquiry into rates and the generation of power in the summer of 1933. In terms of its rate structure, Tupelo had been paying 1.7 cents per kilowatt-hour but under TVA would pay only 7 mills per kilowatt hour. Retail rates began at 10 cents per kilowatt-hour for the first 50 and 7.5 cents per kilowatt hour for consumption of 300 to 500 kilowatt-hours. Experts estimate reductions in domestic rates for the city at a minimum of 67.7 percent, while commercial rates were 50 percent lower. Soon thereafter, TVA announced that the 20 year agreement between it and the City of Tupelo would set a standard for contracts with other cities. The arrangement was to operate strictly as a business enterprise, with TVA finances kept separate from other city accounts and carefully audited. Taxes, interest, and depreciation were to be counted as part of the costs, and consumers were to be charged

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enough to pay all the expenses of distribution and to pay off the indebtedness. In the first six months the city received power from the TVA, there was an increase of 83 percent in the amount of electricity used in Tupelo homes. Families previously unable to afford electricity were now lighting their homes; some even kept their porch lights lit all night, “simply because they could.” During the first two months of TVA distribution, businesses sold $6,000 worth of electrical equipment in Tupelo for an average of $1.00 per inhabitant. In his extensive study of Tupelo, Vaughn Grisham has shown a direct correlation between implementation of TVA power and a rise in population, income, and growth amongst Tupelo residents from 1935 through 1950.

In addition to the benefits offered to Tupelo and other towns and cities of the Tennessee Valley, rural electrification greatly benefited Mississippi farmers. TVA distribution of electricity in the state generated nearly instantaneous improvements in regional economy. The Authority served social and environmental purposes, as well. TVA administrators worked with farmers to eliminate malaria and improve the water quality of aquatic systems in the region. Experimental “test farms” helped conserve soil and forest resources, and social programs built mobile libraries and schools. With celebrations, parades, and other municipal/civic events, it is accurate (if not predictable) to assert that public excitement

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60 Ibid., Hubbard, Origins of the TVA, 310.
61 Tennessee Valley Authority Department of Power Utilization, Ten years of TVA power in homes of Tupelo, Miss.: a record of the growth in the use of electricity in the homes of Tupelo from 1934 to 1944, the first ten years of distribution of power at TVA rates by the Tupelo electric system, (Knoxville, TN: TVA Press, 1946), 1-2.
64 Grisham, Tupelo, Mississippi, 204.
65 A complete assessment of the economic impact of TVA on agriculture and industry will be pursued in the final section of this paper.
surrounding the TVA in northeast Mississippi was high; however, popular reaction and response to the Authority will be examined in full in section four.

The Muscle Shoals experience, the dominating presence of the Democratic Party in Mississippi politics, the success of early New Deal programs, and influence of rural electric cooperatives in the state established important precedents in the battle for public power in Mississippi. Prior to promotional campaigns and creation of a theoretical or symbolic unified region in the Tennessee Valley, Mississippi was a seemingly natural starting point for a New Deal program like the TVA because of the potential for near-immediate success due to retrograde socioeconomic conditions during the Depression. Progress in Mississippi allowed the Roosevelt administration and New Deal supporters to emphasize and justify the significance and impact of their programs. Although public reaction and response to the TVA in Mississippi will be evaluated in an upcoming section, we can safely maintain that the potential of public power was truly a winning proposition for the federal government, for the Authority, and for the citizens of north Mississippi. TVA became a unifying institution, a shared and lived experience for valley residents in Mississippi and beyond. Having outlined the historical background and context of TVA’s institutional evolution in Mississippi, the next chapter will offer insight into the promotional campaigns by Mississippi politicians, Tennessee Valley Authority officials and the popular press for TVA power and social aid in the Magnolia State.
Chapter II: Campaigns for TVA in Mississippi

From 1933 through 1935, public promotional campaigns for TVA power were central to the successful implementation of the Authority in the Mississippi. Congressman John Rankin, President Roosevelt, Tupelo Journal owner George McLean, the north Mississippi media, and TVA officials all worked in conjunction to promote the nation’s “great experiment” to the residents of north Mississippi. In their approach to planning the development of a region, the Tennessee Valley Authority advanced notions of Mississippi’s place within the unified region of the Tennessee River valley in publications and public campaigns. In Washington and across Mississippi, Harrison and Rankin made powerful speeches at campaign stops in support of TVA and its potential social and economic impact. George McLean, a local businessman who purchased the failing Tupelo Journal in 1934, worked in conjunction with the National Recovery Administration (NRA) to actively promote New Deal programs like the TVA in editorials and articles in his newspaper. The NRA-whose distinctive bald eagle logo enlivened the front page of the paper-sponsored at least one editorial piece in the five-page, semi-weekly Journal every day it was published between 1933 and 1936. In speeches, newspaper editorials and articles, and TVA promotional publications, Authority spokesmen like David Lilienthal courted the north Mississippi community by reiterating the idea of public ownership of the region, wherein
citizens played an active role in rebuilding and creating from the socioeconomic ashes of the Great Depression. Although many north Mississippi residents were indeed attracted to TVA solely on account of cheap electricity rates and social aid, many others were made aware of the mission and approach of the Authority through its promotional campaigns that created the ideological foundations of a unified region in the Tennessee Valley.

As alluded to in the previous section, the adoption and implementation of TVA in Mississippi was instrumental in the political success of state officials, most notably John Rankin and Pat Harrison. While Harrison focused his campaigning energies primarily upon Capitol Hill and the halls of the Senate, Rankin was thoroughly active in promoting the Tennessee Valley Authority in the Capitol and in his home state both before and after the implementation of TVA in Tupelo in February of 1934. Through his persuasive and unyielding defense of the Norris Act and distribution of TVA power for the Valley, the Congressman from Tupelo was well-established as the leading southern advocate of public power in the United States.66 His status in Mississippi neared legendary proportions, particularly among farmers and rural citizens. “VOTE FOR RANKIN! THE MAN OF PROVEN RESULTS,” read the headline of an editorial appearing in the Tupelo Journal in August of 1934, and Mississippians did just that.67 Voters elected Rankin to the House of Representatives by a wide margin in the 1935 state election, and he continued his promotion of TVA. After his instrumental role in the passage of the Norris Act, Rankin and the Authority became inextricably linked in the public consciousness of Mississippi. Both the Journal and the Booneville Independent viewed Rankin as “responsible for

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66 The TVA Act, often referred to as the “Norris Bill” was originally termed the “Norris-Rankin Bill” in Congress. Historians have long emphasized Senator George Norris’s contribution and support of TVA, while Rankin’s substantial efforts have tended to be overlooked.
TVA being in Mississippi today,” and it was Rankin who “started the movement to built light and power lines out into the rural districts, to give the people in the country districts the benefit of this great development.”68 In stumping for TVA, he likewise sustained his own political stature, attracting large crowds eager to reap the benefits of Roosevelt’s New Deal. Rankin was influential on the national stage, as well, delivering a powerful speech on the TVA and its potential impact in Mississippi to a nation-wide audience listening on the NBC radio network in January of 1934. Commenting on the ability of TVA to improve rural life, Rankin concluded his speech by noting that, “This is just the beginning. We must continue our efforts until we reach every home in Mississippi”.69 As will be shown, Rankin was instrumental in Roosevelt’s decision to visit Tupelo in November of 1934.

Crediting the TVA with offering rates to Tupelo residents that were “the cheapest in America,” Rankin used his considerable political leverage to steamroll any political obstructions to the distribution of public power to the Tennessee Valley.70 In late February 1934, the Congressman attacked Republic Finance Committee Chairman Harvey C. Couch for opposing Muscle Shoals power, acting in the interests of the power trust, and attempting to “plunder the people of Mississippi.”71 Characterizing the TVA to the House of Representatives as “one of the most valuable and efficient organizations connected with this government,” in referring to the finalizing of a distribution contract between the city of Tupelo and TVA on February 11, 1934, Rankin proclaimed, “this day will stand out as a milestone in the history of American progress-a

68 ibid., p.4 and Booneville Independent, “Rankin to Speak at Tupelo”, August 15, 1934, p.3.
turning point in the development of our civilization.”\textsuperscript{72} In what amounted to promotional speeches in front of the House of Representatives and the South Carolina Legislature, Rankin effectively made the adoption of TVA power a matter of national significance. Predicting that the issue of hydroelectric power would prove to be of seminal importance to all Americans “for the next generation,” Rankin untiringly argued that the approach and framework of TVA represented the only way to protect the American people from the power trust.\textsuperscript{73} His ideological perspective on the role of TVA would resonate with Mississippians in their support of the Authority.

During the spring and summer of 1934, Rankin campaigned ceaselessly in support of public power in Mississippi, all the while noting to his audiences that although he was once “one of those fellows who shied at government ownership of anything,” the benefits of the TVA had transcended traditional Democratic Party ideologies.\textsuperscript{74} Emerging from a “personal conference” with TVA Chairman David Lilienthal, Rankin reported that TVA would actively seek out franchises for the ability to distribute power and provide cheap electricity to all the counties of north Mississippi. “This will be the greatest blessing that has ever come to our people,” Rankin implored, adding that the TVA “will add immeasurably to the comforts and conveniences of every home and lift the burdens of drudgery” while increasing property value and providing affordable rates to its customers.\textsuperscript{75} Throughout the summer of 1934, Rankin would reiterate these sentiments and emphasize the benevolent and accessible nature of the

\textsuperscript{72} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Rankin Tells Congressmen How Cheap Power Will Be Distributed By Authority”, February 15, 1934, p.1.
\textsuperscript{73} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Rankin Tells of New Deal Coming to American People Thru Cheap Electric Power”, March 6, 1934, p.1.
\textsuperscript{74} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, ibid., p.1.
\textsuperscript{75} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Rankin Gives Advice From Washington”, March 9, 1934, p.1.
TVA to crowds attending speeches in Corinth, Booneville, Iuka, Pontotoc, and Amory.\textsuperscript{76}

Attempting to illustrate the unique capabilities of the Authority to alleviate the drudgery of farm life and provide all of its customers a place within the Valley, Rankin made special appeals in his speeches to farm women and families displaced by the construction of TVA dams in north Alabama.\textsuperscript{77}

Into the fall of 1934, Rankin exercised his political influence and personal friendship with Franklin D. Roosevelt to encourage the President to visit Tupelo and witness firsthand the impact of the New Deal and TVA in Mississippi. Announcing the President’s intent to speak in north Mississippi, Rankin commented that the arrival of F.D.R., the New Deal, and the TVA in the state was representative of a changing of the guard, where “the old order is dying, with a new one taking its place.” Promoting the adoption and success of TVA in north Mississippi as a vanguard for the nation, Rankin exclaimed that the TVA represented a crusade against depression, poverty, darkness, and despair.\textsuperscript{78} Perhaps not coincidentally, Rankin’s belief in the missionary capabilities of TVA was a sentiment reinforced by the approach of TVA officials and employees. On November 18, 1934, Rankin and Pat Harrison introduced Franklin D. Roosevelt to a crowd of over 75,000 gathered in Tupelo to hear the most popular Democratic president in modern American history. Emphasizing the cooperative nature of TVA while outlining his ethos of “rugged cooperation” and highlighting the immediate impact of the TVA in Mississippi, F.D.R.’s visit and speech served as a powerful promotional tool for the Authority and

\textsuperscript{76} Boorneville Independent, “John Rankin Will Speak at Boorneville, Saturday, Aug.11, 3 P.M.”, August 10, 1934, p.3.
\textsuperscript{78} Tupelo Journal, “Rankin Says Roosevelt Now Planning to Visit Tupelo During Early Part of Year”, January 5, 1934, p.1.
underscored the potency of public power in the South.\textsuperscript{79} For Rankin, Roosevelt’s visit to Tupelo marked the culmination of a decade promoting the TVA to the public and was a watershed moment that legitimized the Authority and helped to cement its role and legacy in the lives of Mississippians.

The amount of coverage allotted to Rankin and the TVA underscores the substantial role played by the popular press in the promotion of the Authority and its adoption in north Mississippi. With a nearly constant barrage of articles and editorials describing the positive impact and benefits of the TVA, the Tupelo \textit{Journal} acted as a promotional arm for the Authority and its mission. Periodically on the verge of bankruptcy as a provincial, bi-weekly paper in the early twentieth century, the \textit{Journal} flourished under the ownership of George McLean, who purchased the failing paper in 1934 and immediately aligned its trajectory and interests with the Democratic Party and New Deal. As a businessman in the wake of the Depression, McLean viewed TVA as instrumental to the socioeconomic redevelopment of north Mississippi, with his newspaper promoting it as such.\textsuperscript{80} McLean, a positivist who frequently exclaimed to crowds that “the greatest resource is man” and that “there is no Santa Claus in Jackson or Washington to help us,” exemplified the individualism inherent in the rural background of most north Mississippians and gave a voice to their support of the cheap power and social aid afforded by TVA.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “President Maps Program of ‘Rugged Cooperation’ Before 75,000 at Tupelo”, November 19, 1934, p.1.

\textsuperscript{80} Papers of George McLean, box 1, folder 17, card 3-5. Document titled “Speech on TVA”. Collection housed at Special Collections and University Archives, the University of Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{81} Papers of George McLean, box 1, folder 18, cards 11,12,15,19. Document titled “Speech on TVA”. Collection housed at Special Collections and University Archives, the University of Mississippi.
The Journal and the Booneville Independent (also sponsored by the NRA) began promoting Roosevelt’s first New Deal relief programs as early as February and March of 1933. Beginning in the fall of 1933, editorials sponsored by the National Recovery Administration appeared in every issue of the Journal until January of 1936. Tough-minded in their approach and often sanctimonious in their tone, NRA editorials in both papers challenged Mississippians to reclaim possession of their lives by supporting and working in conjunction with New Deal programs like TVA. Several of the pieces projected implementation of the Authority as a collective opportunity for north Mississippi to rebound from the Depression, with citizens urged to resist the rhetoric of private power company agents.1 NRA editorials emphasized the importance of cooperation between local citizens and TVA, attacking public perceptions of communism and socialism attached to the New Deal most commonly by Republican politicians and their supporters (very few of whom lived in Mississippi).\(^2\) NRA editorials served as a daily reminder of the presence of the New Deal in the lives of north Mississippians while also actively promoting the mission of the TVA.

As the only substantial media outlets in the area, McLean’s Journal and the Booneville Independent effectively controlled public discourse on the New Deal and TVA in north

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\(^1\) Booneville Independent, “Our Great Opportunity”, July 6, 1934, p.3. The editor remarks that “The development of Muscle Shoals has brought to Northeast Mississippi the greatest opportunity this section has ever had”. See other examples of NRA editorials in Tupelo Journal, “Here Comes Northeast Mississippi”, July 13, 1935, p.3; and Booneville Independent, “Special TVA Edition” untitled editorial, August 17, 1934, p.3. For the rejection of anti-TVA sentiment among private power interests, see an untitled short-piece urging that residents, “Don’t let the glib-tongued “agent” whose business it is to put our “pison” against the TVA make you believe that you can not afford to install electrical appliances. A Frigidaire, a radio, an electric iron, sewing machine, well pump and other things along the line are needed in your home”, in Booneville Independent, June 7, 1935, p.3.

Mississippi.\textsuperscript{84} This, in turn, worked to the advantage of Authority officials seeking to promote
TVA and solidify its presence in the region. Undertaking a sense of missionary zeal in their
efforts to literally (and figuratively) bring the South out of darkness, TVA officials and
programmers canvassed Mississippi to elicit popular support.\textsuperscript{85} In courting north Mississippi
communities for support of the Authority and its programs, TVA officials and employees
projected a sense of mission that often found its way subtly into public speeches and the pages
of newspapers and promotional publications. Along the way, an unofficial but closely-knit
cooperative relationship existed between TVA officials and north Mississippi newspapers
wherein the activities and campaign speeches of Authority speakers were advertised in the
form of front-page news articles. Authority officials promoted TVA in north Mississippi before
even finalizing contracts to distribute Muscle Shoals power, with TVA spokesmen presenting
their plan for Tupelo and north Mississippi in January of 1934.\textsuperscript{86} In their initial campaigns, TVA
officials provided information to the public on the structure and potential of Authority power
and social aid programs. Hoping to quell local fears of government intrusion, they stressed the
decentralized and locally-operated nature of TVA, as well as its beneficial socioeconomic

\textsuperscript{84} Although there was very little resistance to TVA voiced publicly in Mississippi, when it did appear it was
summarily attacked by \textit{Journal} editors. See Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Talkative TVA Knocker Displays His Ignorance”,

\textsuperscript{85} Often referred to by TVA employees as the “TVA Spirit”, the idea of TVA serving a missionary purpose through
the organization is evidenced in interviews with veteran employees in Ross Spears’ 1983 film \textit{The Electric Valley}
(Johnson City, TN: The James Agee Film Project, 1983) and in oral history interviews with TVA employees. For a
brief description of the “TVA Spirit” and other significant organizational ideologies during the formative years of
the Authority, see TVA Oral History Collection, employee series, \textit{Second Oral History Interview with E. Floyd
(Chattanooga: TVA Library and Research Office, 1983), p.3. For an account of early TVA negotiations with local
officials and its impact on Local-TVA relationships, see TVA Oral History Collection, employee series, \textit{Oral
History Interview with G.O. Wessenauer}, May 22-23, 1990 (Chattanooga: TVA Library and Research Office, 1990),
p.35-36.

\textsuperscript{86} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “TVA Program In County Is Helping Many”, January 12, 1934, p.1.; Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “TVA
Officials Presented At Rotary Meet,” January 19, 1934, p.1.
features of cheap electricity and increased property values, soil conservation and reforestation programs, and increased educational opportunities for citizens.\textsuperscript{87} In May of 1934, TVA Director David Lilienthal addressed a large crowd at Tupelo’s Lyric Theatre, where he outlined the framework of the Authority and told those gathered that, “This is your country. With our programs, we are here to help you and will do everything in our ability to do so”.\textsuperscript{88} According to long-time TVA engineer G.O. Wessenauer, the concept of self-reliance imparted by Lilienthal and the Authority appealed to the cultural lifeways of individualistic southerners in the TVA region.\textsuperscript{89} The ingratiating approach presented by Authority officials would come to typify the first years of TVA’s tenure in Mississippi and place an emphasis on the rebuilding of morale. As Lilienthal put it, “My notion about that (morale) was to seek to raise a feeling of regional pride, in place of the too prevalent feeling of injury, self-pity, and...downright discouragement, a kind of regional nervous breakdown”.\textsuperscript{90} Lilienthal’s speeches to throngs of farmers in north Mississippi would provide a foundation of tangible support while making TVA visible to the people it served.

In the months prior to the completion of contract negotiations between Mississippi Power Company and TVA, Authority officials promoted the use of local labor on TVA projects


involving dam construction and building of power lines and transmitters. In a series of speeches in front of large audiences across north Mississippi, TVA Coordinator John B. Blanford advocated the use of local labor in TVA projects, the more affordable distribution of both power and fertilizer for farmers, and the general increase of electricity in all homes. Nearly one year after his first appearance in north Mississippi, Blanford returned in March of 1935 to emphasize the stability and permanence of TVA at several community organization meetings. Speaking of the Authority, Blanford said, “The program is of tremendous scope, with a multitude of activities that are inter-related.” Emphasizing the long-term stability of TVA, Blanford remarked that, “The Act is permanent, the investment is permanent, and indications are that operation will be permanent.” Rather than dwelling on the production and distribution of power, Blanford stressed the emerging importance of trade, flood control, navigation, and national defense to the Authority program. Appealing to the cultural sensibilities of the civic groups and farmers to whom he spoke, Blanford noted the appreciation of the Authority of the “full cooperation of Valley citizens,” noting that the real strength of the TVA is “rooted back in Valley traditions.” TVA project consultants like electricity expert W.B. Breure addressed crowds in the Mississippi TVA counties, and in doing so projected the image of an accessible organization willing to extend itself to customers and citizens.

Promotional campaigns by TVA officials were by no means relegated to speeches, demonstrations, and civic organization meetings. Electrical equipment and kitchen

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demonstration programs put on by the TVA in Booneville, Tupelo, Corinth, and Iuka attracted housewives and farmers alike.\footnote{Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Many Visit TVA Electric Kitchen”, September 7, 1934, p.1.} In his journal describing campaigns during the formative years of the Authority, David Lilienthal noted that, “I used to make speeches before country crowds with a lot of farm machinery gadgets (grinders for feed, brooders, etc.) set up on a big table in front of me, and would work these into the talk” while demonstrating to farm owners how new technology would increase their personal income.\footnote{David E. Lilienthal, \textit{The Journals of David Lilienthal: Volume I, The TVA Years, 1939-1946} (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p.80.} Electrical equipment demonstrations offered tangible proof to farmers of TVA’s direct impact on their lives. According to Lilienthal, the success of TVA exhibitions was central to the formation of electric cooperatives, and subsequently, the increased distribution of electricity to rural areas.\footnote{Lilienthal, \textit{The Journals of David Lilienthal: Volume I, The TVA Years}, p.80-81.} TVA officials also worked in conjunction with local merchants and business owners who offered to display household luxuries like electric water pumps, Frigidaire refrigerators and iceboxes, along with new electrical farm implements and equipment.\footnote{Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Electric Pumps Shown at TVA”, February 27, 1935, p.3.} Authority promotional films were commonly shown in local theatres, drawing large and wide-ranging audiences eager to hear about TVA and its role in their lives.\footnote{Booneville \textit{Independent}, “See The TVA Pictures At The Prentiss Theatre (their spelling)”, March 22, 1935, p.1.; Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Free Picture on TVA Work To Be Shown”, April 26, 1935, p.1.} Extolling the virtues of the Authority’s soil conservation and reforestation programs, TVA test demonstration farms across north Mississippi attracted farmers and their families. The following chapter examines how the Authority actively used notions of geographic identity to reshape the public perception of its collective place within the Tennessee River Valley.
Chapter III: TVA and the Creation of Region

The success of public campaigns by Authority officials speaks to the almost immediate resonance of TVA in north Mississippi. Publication and mass-distribution of Authority promotional literature acted as another arm of promotion and illustrates the desire on the part of the Authority to create a unified region in the Tennessee Valley, a region of which Mississippi was a part and whose citizens shared in the commonality of the TVA experience. Teeming with what veteran employees called the “positive spirit of the TVA,” promotional materials and organizational reports supplied to residents by the Authority were imbued with the symbolism and imagery of an organization actively attempting to recast and reconstitute a geographic region and the socioeconomic lives of its citizens. The Authority’s promotional material served as an instrument for the endorsement of the organization and its mission and demonstrated the desire of TVA to create a sense of ideological affiliation and regional unity amongst citizens of the Tennessee Valley. The imagery, symbolism, and language of Authority-published promotional materials and reports shows that the ideological creation of a unified region in the Tennessee River Valley proved essential to the long-term success and stability of TVA in north Mississippi.
Emboldened with the logo of a clenched fist clutching a bolt of lightning and asserting “TVA: Power For All,” the Authority’s promotional piece entitled “TVA: Toward An Electrified America” was distributed to residents and community organizations in north Mississippi in the spring of 1934 only a few months after Authority power distribution to the city of Tupelo had commenced. With pictures and maps placing Tupelo within what the Authority called “an integrated Valley region,” the pamphlet equated the implementation of TVA in Tupelo with instant domestic and economic benefits. In harnessing hydroelectrical resources that had been previously “untamed,” TVA presented itself as an agency charged with “opening the door to modern life.”

In connecting residents who read promotional material to the larger process and framework of TVA, the Authority acted as a promoter of regional unity while garnering continued support for its mission in north Mississippi.

In 1938, the Authority’s Department of Regional Studies and Planning published a work entitled *The Scenic Resources of the Tennessee Valley: A Descriptive and Pictorial Inventory.* Seeking to encourage tourism while promoting a defined sense of region and cultural ownership of resources, this promotional piece depicted the environmental recreational resources of the Tennessee Valley and provided residents with a new perspective on the capabilities and opportunities inherent within the region. TVA completed its inventory of scenic resources in 1936 and designated recreation areas for watershed tributary areas and creeks, lakes, forests, trails, and parks across the 46,000 miles of drainage basin in the valley. In advocating a sense of environmental and civic unity through the development of outdoor

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102 Tennessee Valley Authority, “The Scenic Resources of the Tennessee Valley: A Descriptive and Pictorial Inventory” (TVA Department of Regional Planning Studies, Knoxville, 1938), p.3-5.
recreational opportunities in the Valley, the Authority attempted to “open wilderness to use by man” while providing practical but detailed information blended with a sense of boosterism for TVA. It is striking that in promoting “nonurban outdoor recreation,” TVA engaged the prevalent social gospel of the period and attempted to expand public thinking and discourse on outdoor recreation while at the same time promoting the aims and goals of the Authority.103

Annual reports and documents published by the Authority illustrate the instantaneous appearance of bureaucratic machinery in the TVA also highlight its promotional functions. These publications also established the creation of a unified region as one of the primary aims of the TVA. The 1934 Annual Report provided information on the Authority and its projects, and laid out its “Unified Plan for the Tennessee River and Valley.”104 Describing its potential to restore and develop agriculture, forestry, and “human resources,” the 1934 report outlined its power policy by highlighting the immediate impact on “citizens of the Valley region.”105 The 1935 Annual Report included a map of the reconstituted region of the Tennessee River Valley while depicting the removal of malaria in Mississippi with a sense of missionary zeal.106 Noting the “quick realization of advantages” in farm families who received TVA power, the 1935 Report stressed the inclusion of rural cooperatives in Mississippi. By that year every county seat in the nine-county TVA region had formed an electric cooperative for receipt of Authority power.107

The Annual Report issued by the Authority in 1936 emphasized “The Unified Development of the Tennessee River System” and region, stressing the importance of “local self reliance” and

105 TVA, ibid., p.24.
107 TVA, ibid., 1935, p.29-30. By the end of 1935, every county seat in the nine-county TVA region had formed an electric cooperative for receipt of Authority power.
the Authority’s “integrated plan of control.”\textsuperscript{108} Reports from 1937 to 1940 accentuate similar themes of regionalism and regional development, all projecting a sense of increasing unity in the region and success of the Authority in Mississippi and throughout the Valley. The 1937 Report noted the benefits from TVA power within the “economy of integrated development,” wherein the Authority had transformed the Tennessee River into an economic asset.\textsuperscript{109}

Demonstrating through charts and data that the TVA had “proven to be a favorable experience” for the region’s residents, the Authority published its 1939 Annual Report in conjunction with then-Director of Research Victor Roterus’s report entitled Towards a Unified Regional Development Program for the Tennessee Valley. Depicting the TVA as a redeemer and liberator of the Valley and its citizens, Roterus summarized Authority plans to improve public education, stimulate regional economic and personal financial growth, provide assistance to farmers, and “generate a feeling of unity” and association for Valley residents.\textsuperscript{110} Reports and documents sponsored and published by the Authority represented the epoch of TVA’s desire to create a unified region within the Tennessee River Valley.

Regional planning, while it had advocates in all parts of the country, was particularly popular in the South. In his book TVA: Democracy on the March, Authority Chairman David Lilienthal remarked that, “TVA was created for the job of developing the resources of a single region as a whole (author’s italics)” and as William Cole noted in his 1949 study of the impact of the TVA upon the southeast, regional identification with the TVA was particularly strong after

Attempts by the Authority to create a sense of region and promote notions of regional unity were instrumental in the development and stability of the TVA during its formative years. Promotional campaigns by Authority officials and TVA promotional and organizational publications made this objective clear. The writings of southern regionalists and their response to the origins, development, and implementation of TVA did, as well. Contemporary scholars of the Authority have neglected to examine closely the language, imagery, and promotionalism imbued within TVA promotional literature and reports. One scholar employed by TVA has simplistically attempted to discount the Authority’s attempts at the creation of a unified region by emphasizing the lack of physiographic conformity throughout the region. In advocating the conception of a Tennessee River Valley divided into isolated “sub-regions,” this minimalist

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viewpoint in effect returns us to the provincial and isolated nature of the Valley prior to the adoption of TVA within its boundaries.

Promotional campaigns and organizational literature bore powerful witness to the facets of regionalism utilized by TVA. The power of promotion and TVA’s unifying notions of region can be seen in the continued publication of promotional materials some twenty years after the full implementation of the Authority in north Mississippi. Working in cooperation with local institutions, organizations, and industries, TVA has continued its campaigns of promotion and advocacy of the notions of region in the face of critics who believe the Authority to be simply a power company. Efforts to extend itself to the community cemented the Authority’s historical legacy, and in terms of the TVA and its development in Mississippi, promotional campaigns that underscored a sense of regional unity were highly effective, as noticed by the groundswell of support for TVA in the state. These initial promotional campaigns on the ground and in Authority literature entrenched the experience and commonality of TVA among residents across the Tennessee Valley region. The next section of this work will examine the public response to TVA in north Mississippi.

In assessing public reaction to the adoption of the TVA in north Mississippi, it is clear that residents quickly approved of and connected with campaigning and attempts by the Authority to reconstitute and unify the area under the broader guise of the TVA or Tennessee River Valley region. Thousands of local citizens attended parades and celebrations commemorating TVA, while newspapers repressed resistance to the Authority in favor of cultivating a collective ideology of triumph over both nature and the Great Depression.

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wildly enthusiastic response of the public to TVA can be most visibly noticed in parades and celebrations, as well as the massive crowd that greeted President Franklin D. Roosevelt upon his arrival in Tupelo in November of 1934.

As has been demonstrated, promotional campaigns by politicians and Authority officials were vital in the attempts to implement TVA programs and gain electrical distribution rights to north Mississippi. Even in light of the potential economic benefits of TVA and successful promotional campaigns carried out by the Authority, the response of citizens and press to the adoption and implementation of the TVA in Mississippi was remarkably enthusiastic. Across north Mississippi, local merchants invited customers to take part in NRA “recovery sales” while anticipatory public celebrations were held prior to the first TVA-municipality contract being signed.\textsuperscript{116} At a rally commemorating TVA in Tupelo in October of 1933, Senator Pat Harrison and Congressman John Rankin greeted an overflow crowd, thanking them for their loyalty to the principles of TVA and Franklin D. Roosevelt\textsuperscript{117} Just a week later, a carnival-like atmosphere accompanied a parade and “daylight show” in honor of TVA and Roosevelt in Tupelo, with Harrison taking another opportunity to address the masses and promote the virtues of New Deal Democracy.\textsuperscript{118}

Within this atmosphere of excitement and anticipation, a new day seemed to be dawning for northeast Mississippi. In Booneville, Corinth, Iuka, and Tupelo, officials organized

\textsuperscript{116}The process of organizing TVA parades and public celebrations and their impact on public reaction in the press is noted by former TVA Director of Research Edward Falck, who in a 1983 oral history interview said: “As soon as the town had TVA power turned on there was kind of a celebration, like a fair, lots of publicity, and then there were stories, follow-up stories, that would appear from time to time as to how the town was benefiting from the low-cost power and how it was rejuvenated”, in Tennessee Valley Authority Oral History Collection, Oral History Interview with Edward Falck, May 5, 1983, (Chattanooga: TVA Library, 1983), p.16.
celebrations and parades in honor of the TVA and Roosevelt in the fall of 1933 and spring of 1934, with huge crowds gathering to commemorate the arrival of the Authority and all of its purported benefits. Anxiously anticipating the finalization of a contract between TVA and Tupelo, civic organizations in the city unveiled plans in November of 1933 outlining the biggest celebration in Tupelo’s history.\(^\text{119}\) On November 14, 1933, the Tupelo \textit{Journal} remarked upon the “thousands” attending the “biggest and by far the most colorful parade” ever staged in Tupelo, which lasted from 7:30 am to “well after midnight” and included speeches from TVA chairman David Lilienthal and director Arthur Harcourt Morgan, Congressman John Rankin, and Tupelo Mayor J.P. Nanney.\(^\text{120}\) Subconsciously projecting the collective anticipation of the community for TVA, children from a rural Lee County school marched in the parade carrying banners that read, “When the moon shines over the cowshed there will be a light inside!”\(^\text{121}\)

From November of 1933 through August of 1934, public celebrations marked the finalization of contracts for TVA power and social aid in Booneville, Corinth, and Iuka.\(^\text{122}\)

Orchestrated by John Rankin in the early spring of 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s visit to Tupelo in November of 1934 marked the high point of demonstrable public support for the TVA in north Mississippi. News of the President’s visit spread quickly throughout Tupelo and the surrounding counties, with “Roosevelt Day” celebrated by the city’s


\[122\] Booneville Independent, “TVA Celebration set for Tomorrow”, February 23, 1934, p.1.; Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Citizens go to Iuka For Celebration”, August 8, 1934, p.1. Commemorations were held as late as the summer of 1935, with the Tupelo \textit{Journal} reporting on an “appreciation jubilee” held at Wilson Dam and attended by the Tupelo High School band. Lilienthal, A.H. Morgan, and Mississippi Governor Mike Conner were keynote speakers for this Fourth of July event; Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Officials Go to TVA Dam”, July 5, 1934, p.1.
residents in March of 1934.\textsuperscript{123} In the fall of 1934, the President’s upcoming visit enraptured north Mississippians. One quick-witted Tupelo \textit{Journal} news writer commented on an “air of electricity” surrounding Roosevelt’s appearance.\textsuperscript{124} Clear expressions of the public consciousness of north Mississippi’s place within what Authority officials were calling the “TVA region” can be seen in advertisements welcoming the President to a newly-unified Tennessee Valley.\textsuperscript{125}

Following their arrival in Tupelo and prior to the president’s address on November 18, 1934, he and Mrs. Roosevelt met with TVA officials at the Authority’s headquarters in downtown Tupelo, where they visited TVA test demonstration farms near the Natchez Trace Parkway. At every stop along the way, the throngs of cheerful residents greeted the President and First Lady.\textsuperscript{126} With bands from Mississippi College, Ole Miss, the Tupelo American Legion, and Mississippi State College trumpeting the entrance of the President, an estimated 75,000 people overflowed Robins Field in Tupelo, hoping to catch a glimpse of F.D.R. and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Only a year after the city of Tupelo signed a contract to buy electricity through TVA, Roosevelt’s fourteen-minute speech extolling the virtues of TVA and praising the people of north Mississippi was front page news across the nation.\textsuperscript{127} For many residents of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Roosevelt Day Will Be Celebrated”, March 5, 1934, p.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “Air Electric With Expectancy”, November 18, 1934, p.4.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} A November 18, 1934 advertisement on page 3 of the Tupelo \textit{Journal} reads: “To President Franklin D. Roosevelt, To Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, To the Senators, Congressmen, Governors, Mayors and Other Dignitaries Who Have Honored Us With Their Presence…We Join Hands with Every Citizen of Tupelo and of This Entire Tennessee Valley to Bid You Welcome!”; Tupelo was depicted as the “first city in the TVA District” in a local weekly paper entitled \textit{The Weekly Guide}, vol.4.no.29, November 14, 1934, p.1.
  \item It is also instructive to note the regionalist perspective of the state of Mississippi during this period, with the State Secretary of Agriculture delineating the Tennessee Valley as a distinct region of the South in a state report entitled, \textit{Partnership for Plenty: Serial A, Mississippi’s Natural Resources} (State College: Mississippi State College bulletin, 1949), p.9-10.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “FDR’s Visit and TVA’s Impact Recalled By Those Who Were There”, November 19, 1994, p.1A and 4A.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “FDR’s visit to Tupelo spotlighted TVA’s arrival”, May 18, 2008, p.2E.
\end{itemize}
north Mississippi, the arrival of the TVA and President Roosevelt symbolized their collective victory over the forces of the Great Depression.

Public ceremonies of commemoration expressed the impact of TVA’s attempts at forging regional unity and demonstrate the amount of public support for the Authority. FDR’s visit to Tupelo only served to galvanize the court of public opinion on TVA, with newspaper editorials praising the benefits and responding swiftly and unfavorably to criticism of the Authority. Newspapers in the Delta and in Jackson voiced opposition to state ownership and the Authority, as did Mississippi’s relatively small industrial and economic elite scattered throughout the state.

A May 10, 1935, NRA-sponsored op-ed piece in the Tupelo Journal took notice of editorials in the West Point Times-Leader, the Indianola Tocain, the Winona Times, and Jackson Daily News criticizing the state ownership and costly projects of the TVA. Tupelo editors struck by with replies to each of the papers that bordered on virulent in their defense of the TVA, Roosevelt, and hydroelectric power. News editors in northeast Mississippi countered what little public resistance there was to TVA by employing a language of folksy machismo and a seemingly relentless discourse praising the collective triumph of man over both environmental and economic forces. Anticipating what were sure to be instant benefits of the TVA, a piece in the Booneville Independent boasted that, “When we get our TVA going full blast the honey bees

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128 For examples of the media opposition to TVA, see Tupelo Journal, “From Other Newspapers” (NRA Editorial Section), May 10, 1935, p.4.
In a 1980 interview with Charles Crawford, Brigadier General and veteran TVA engineer Herbert Vogel remarked that “Twenty years after I arrived (with TVA), there was still a general feeling that TVA had been an interloper…it was not greatly different in Mississippi”, and that the Authority and its programs “upset the comfortable economy of those at the top”. In Charles Crawford, ed., Oral History of the Tennessee Valley Authority: Interviews with Herbert Vogel. Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, (Memphis: Oral History Research Office, Memphis State University, 1980), p.9.
will put on a night shift and the hens will lay twice a day.” Similar perspectives in area newspapers viewed Roosevelt as a man who had given up his “life, ability, and energy” to serve the Tennessee Valley of which northeast Mississippi was now a part, and noted how it was the responsibility of citizens to defend the Authority. Other editorials in the Journal and Independent emphasized the powerful and successful attempts of man to control wilderness and gain fruitful bounty from nature. Connecting Senator George Norris and President Roosevelt to “a new army of fighting democrats,” the Tupelo Journal swore by “the eternals and living spirit of Andrew Jackson that the Tennessee Valley should rise, reign, and rule in a majestic sweep over this region of the country,” concluding that “the flag of victory was planted upon the banks of the restless Tennessee river…it was the triumph of right and will mean a development that our country is entitled to enjoy and our people will appreciate”.  

With newspapers dominating the rhetoric of public opinion on TVA in north Mississippi, local resistance to the Authority and its programs was ineffectual and relegated to scholarly works published outside the region. Through the lens of the public eye, to oppose TVA would have not only been to counter a majority sentiment, but would also have displayed an unacceptable sense of disregard for the toil of American Democracy and the rugged capabilities of man to marshal the natural resources around him for the benefit of the entire community or region. Promotional campaigns by politicians and officials, newspaper editorials and articles, Authority promotional literature, and huge crowds celebrating the arrival of TVA served to reinforce the popularity and permanence of the Authority soon after its initial adoption in north Mississippi.

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129 Booneville Independent, untitled piece, July 20, 1934, p.4.
130 On Roosevelt, see Booneville Independent, “We Believe President Roosevelt…”, September 28, 1934, p.3; Booneville Independent, untitled piece “Booneville will have a record crowd….”, October 18, 1934, p.3. On “triumph” see, Tupelo Journal, “Senator George Norris”, November 29, 1935, p.3; and Booneville Independent, “Resources of the TVA”, November 15, 1935, p.3.
Mississippi. Through these avenues of public discourse and engagement, TVA was acknowledged as a success by residents, politicians, and journalists alike. Moreover, residents quickly subscribed to unifying notions of region promoted by the Authority and came to view the Authority as a shared regional commonality. However, it is necessary to revisit the actual impact of the Authority to fully determine if TVA was the generator of socioeconomic improvement it touted itself to be for north Mississippi.

The most substantial critical assessments of the TVA emerged not from the Tennessee Valley region itself, but from scholarly critiques of the Authority. Broadly addressing the TVA, critics of the Authority centered their commentary on the cost of TVA social aid and programs, and what they viewed to be the heavy-handed approach of the Authority towards cooperation with state and local institutions. Only one historian has confronted TVA’s multifaceted failures to enhance economic and social development among African Americans in the Valley. Perhaps predictably, none of the critical analyses of the Authority take on scrutiny of the TVA power and social aid programs. Both the successes and failures of the TVA in north Mississippi escape the simplistic assessments of scholars who viewed TVA as a drain on the national economy or as an instrument of socialistic state enterprise.

The economic impact of the implementation of TVA in north Mississippi is perhaps best initially witnessed in the immediate decrease in power rates for residential and commercial customers and subsequent increase in accessibility of electricity. In Tupelo, residential power

users experienced a rate decrease on average between 118 to 216 percent in their first month’s bill in March of 1934.\textsuperscript{133} Residents who had paid between three and four dollars per month under Mississippi Power Company rates paid between 95 cents and $1.10 per month for power under TVA.\textsuperscript{134} In accordance with the drastic increase in affordability of electricity, domestic power consumption in Tupelo doubled between 1934 and 1935.\textsuperscript{135} In January of 1934, only 931 residents of Tupelo had electricity; ten years later, that number had climbed to 2,141 citizens with electricity, while Kilowatt Hours used increased from 44,000 to over 470,000 and the estimated population of Tupelo increased from 6,500 in 1934 to 8,700 in January of 1944.\textsuperscript{136} In Tupelo and across north Mississippi, the implementation of the TVA power program and distribution of electricity had an instantaneous and dynamic effect on improving the local economy and standard of living.

TVA programs directed toward providing social and economic aid to north Mississippians proved short-lived, but were largely successful between 1933 and 1945. By 1935, there were over 200 demonstration farms across twenty counties in the state. Activities in cooperation with TVA and the Soil Conservation Service on these farms literally demonstrated the importance of flood and erosion control, responsible fertilizer use, and reforestation as viable methods toward rejuvenating the often broken landscape.\textsuperscript{137} In its efforts to improve the standard of living in rural Mississippi, the TVA undertook malaria control projects, stream sanitation activities, and conducted DDT research. In a 1990 interview, TVA hydraulic engineer

\textsuperscript{134} TVA Department of Power Utilization, Ten years of TVA power in homes of Tupelo, Miss.: a record of the growth in the use of electricity in the homes of Tupelo from 1934 to 1944, the first ten years of distribution of power at TVA rates by the Tupelo electric system (Knoxville: TVA, 1946), p.23.
\textsuperscript{136} TVA Department of Power Utilization, Ten years of TVA power in homes of Tupelo, Miss. (Knoxville: TVA, 1946), p.7.
\textsuperscript{137} Mohn, ibid., “The Tennessee Valley Authority in Northeast Mississippi”, p.70-75.
and program manager G.O. Wessenauer described his experience working with the Mississippi Department of Public Health on malaria removal and stream cleaning projects in northeast Mississippi. Wessenauer noted that, “In Mississippi they were having trouble with well water sickness because the wells were polluted,” adding, “That’s the only way the rural people had to get their water.” The arrival of TVA electricity in rural Mississippi established a foundation of cooperation between the Authority and county and state Health Departments, thereby enhancing the standard of living for rural citizens.\textsuperscript{138} The Authority remained involved in community and regional planning projects in Mississippi until the onset of World War II in 1941, and through the thirties and forties TVA continued to expand its power distribution market in the state until one-third of Mississippians were receiving TVA power by 1945.\textsuperscript{139} From 1933 to 1942, the TVA and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) offered employment for males in north Mississippi, who canvassed the state in locally-formed companies building dams and roads, planting trees, creating parks and trails, and stemming the tide of erosion.\textsuperscript{140} The Authority proved instrumental in providing the CCC with technical assistance and materials that were vital to reforestation programs in the state.\textsuperscript{141}

In aiming a specific critique toward the TVA’s activities in Mississippi, it is clear that the Authority could have done far more to enhance the social and economic development of African Americans. As Nancy Grant has noted, the Roosevelt administration refused attempts to

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\item \textsuperscript{139} Tennessee Valley Authority, \textit{Annual Report of the Tennessee Valley Authority}, 1945 (Knoxville: TVA, 1945), p.2-5, 119-121.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Tupelo \textit{Journal}, “County Boys Assigned to C.C.C. Camps”, January 11, 1935, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Leslie Mowitt Headrick, \textit{A Peace Time Army: The Tennessee Valley Authority-Civil Conservation Corps 1933-1942} (Knoxville: TVA Division of Land and Forest Resources, Office of Natural Resources, 1993), p.2, 4, 19.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
enforce social change that would damage the visibility or popularity of New Deal programs. In its approach to regional planning and community development, efforts by supposedly progressive and liberal TVA leadership to enhance the standard of living for blacks were often hindered by the racist ideology of “enlightened segregation” that conformed to local racial customs and etiquette.\(^{142}\) The failure of the TVA to improve the socioeconomic situation confronting African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s takes on a heightened significance in Mississippi, a state with the highest percentage of black population in the TVA region.

In addition to its inattention toward African Americans in Mississippi, debate continues as to TVA’s overarching and long-term economic impact on industrial and agricultural development in the state. Assessments of manufacturing and industrial employment in Mississippi show that the workforce declined a little over eight percent between 1930 and 1940 and continued to deteriorate until 1960. Very little change has occurred in the degree of specialized manufacturing and labor after the implementation of TVA. In Mississippi, the Authority and its programs for economic planning and development failed to improve the lot of industrial manufacturing and labor.\(^{143}\)

TVA’s biggest socioeconomic impact occurred on Mississippi farms, a fact unsurprising considering its status as a predominantly rural state in the early twentieth century. But was the

\(^{142}\) Nancy Grant, ibid., *TVA and Black Americans*, p.147-148. The importance placed by TVA on keeping accord with local “institutions” like segregation is noted in a 1988 interview with long-time TVA Public Safety Officer Mancil Milligan. When asked to tell about the attitude of the people in this area (TVA region) toward blacks, Milligan (who worked most of his career on the Pickwick Dam in southwestern Tennessee) remarked, “There had never been any blacks in this area. People around Counce and Pickwick, they just did not like them. So TVA did not want to muddy things up between themselves and the local folks here”. In TVA Oral History Collection, employee series, *Oral History Interview with Mancil A. Milligan*, July 7, 1988 (Chattanooga: TVA Library and Research Office, 1988), p.14.

Authority a catalyst for economic improvement and agricultural development in the nine-county TVA area of the state? In its *Annual Reports*, the Authority stressed the importance of improved agricultural production, but did adoption of the TVA lead to increased crop yields or farm income? In terms of farm income growth and employment in Mississippi, the nine-county TVA area of the state noticed an upward increase in income and employment on the farm in the six years immediately following the implementation of TVA. However, long-term growth slowed dramatically after 1939, with Mississippi suffering a lower percent change of growth in farm income and employment than any of the other seven TVA states. Moreover, farm growth and levels of income from 1929 to 1951 were consistently lower in Mississippi’s TVA counties than in the rest of the state’s counties.\(^{144}\)

Taking a closer look at Mississippi agricultural statistics from 1930 to 1950 demonstrates the varied impact of TVA in its nine-county (Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Union) area of the state. While TVA and other New Deal agricultural readjustment programs generated growth in receipts from crops and livestock throughout the state from 1930 to 1937, the purchase and use of fertilizers by farmers increased thirty percent in the aforementioned TVA counties between 1933 and 1945.\(^{145}\) Between 1935 and 1945, the total amount of farmland in the TVA counties decreased, as did the total number of farms.\(^{146}\) During that same decade, the overall value of farms in the TVA counties increased, often dramatically (thanks to hydroelectric capabilities and property value estimations by TVA), as did


\(^{146}\) State of Mississippi, ibid., *Basebook of Mississippi Agriculture*, p.92 table 64; p.94 table 65.
the number of farm owners, while the number of farm tenants decreased.\textsuperscript{147} Still, the rural farm population of the Mississippi TVA counties continued to decline from 1935 through 1950, with a majority of those staying on the farm never completing their high school education.\textsuperscript{148} A drastic increase in the number of farms in Mississippi TVA counties with electricity and telephone service between 1930 and 1950 underscores the direct impact of the Authority’s power program.\textsuperscript{149} While TVA county farmers may have enjoyed new technological trappings from their interaction and cooperation with the Authority, their collective output in cotton and corn suffered a dramatic decrease between 1932 and 1945.\textsuperscript{150} Cattle and swine husbandry, along with poultry production, noticed a steady and at times prolific expansion among TVA-county farmers from 1932 to 1950.\textsuperscript{151} Judging from the agricultural statistics of the nine Mississippi TVA counties during the initial implementation and development of TVA, it is evident that the Authority found its goals of wide-sweeping socioeconomic improvement of rural life difficult to achieve in Mississippi. Adoption of TVA power and programs was truly a mixed endeavor for the state’s farmers. Enhanced cash flow from the sale of crops and livestock was negated by the increasing amount of money spent on nitrate fertilizers. Likewise, the declining number of TVA-county farmers (most of whom by 1940 were increasingly turning to livestock and flock husbandry) actually experienced increased property values and technological benefits but still largely lacked advanced education. These paradoxical results exemplify the long-term socioeconomic impact of the Tennessee Valley Authority in north Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{147} State of Mississippi, ibid., \textit{Basebook of Mississippi Agriculture}, p.96 table 66; p.98 table 67; p.100 table 68.
\textsuperscript{148} State of Mississippi, ibid., \textit{Basebook}, p.102 table 69; p.108 table 70.
\textsuperscript{149} State of Mississippi, ibid., \textit{Basebook}, p.112, table 72.
\textsuperscript{150} State of Mississippi, ibid., \textit{Basebook}, p.122 table 75-a; p.124 table 75-a; p.134 table 76-a;
\textsuperscript{151} State of Mississippi, ibid., \textit{Basebook}, p.158 table 84; p.164 table 88; p.168 table 90.
Successful political and promotional campaigns, well-designed and widely distributed concepts of a unified region, and vast public support allowed for the emergence of TVA as an encompassing social, political, and economic institution in north Mississippi and throughout the Tennessee Valley region. The Authority served as an instrument for modernization, and in tracing its ideological and historical legacy, it is evident that the TVA promoted concepts of personal and regional ownership that allowed citizens to develop greater autonomy over their lives. As evidenced by its rapid implementation and enthusiastic backing in north Mississippi, TVA effectively applied unifying themes of regionalism in its courting of the community. The Tennessee Valley Authority—its institutional framework, programs, and socioeconomic aid—were highly accessible to the public and from its inception in 1933 through the end of World War II, TVA evolved into a body of shared experience for Valley residents. In doing so, the Authority countered a severe economic depression, serving as a unifying commonality among residents of the Valley. The Authority promoted a sense of local cooperation that has remained salient, in spite of changes in TVA’s public image and perception.\textsuperscript{152}

In terms of its practical achievements and historical legacy in north Mississippi, TVA propelled the economy and culture of the area away from subsistence-level agrarianism to mass-consumerism and out of modes of provincialism exemplified by private power companies. Connecting once-isolated citizens to a broader regional realm, the Authority and its programs proved progressive and valuable, but disappointingly abrupt. In its more recent history, TVA has struggled in the face of change wrought by globalization, imposing almost yearly rate hikes on

customers and battling negative perceptions of its image both in and outside of the Tennessee River Valley. In order to compete most effectively in the global marketplace and serve the greatest good within its own region, TVA would do well to reconsider seemingly archaic notions of planning and development in order to reconnect with local residents who increasingly view the Authority as solely a power company. While ceaseless institutional budget cuts and the current economic recession make the possibility of change cumbersome, TVA’s legacy of local cooperation and socioeconomic development may yet prove to be its most valuable resource.

Section II: The Mississippi Gulf Coast and the New Deal

The second section of this work marks a contextual move away from the northeastern corner of Mississippi southward some 300 miles to the state’s coastal counties, with the goal of examining New Deal approaches, agencies and programs and their subsequent impact on life and the natural world. This chapter contends that the New Deal in south Mississippi represented a distinct (if not unique) re-creation and improvement of resources within an already existing socioeconomic and political structure in the Magnolia State. Utilizing an already extant foundation of industry and natural resource use, New Deal programs in the coastal counties of Mississippi fundamentally reshaped and transformed the lives of residents there, and can be evidenced by the works of not only individual agencies, but in the creation and implementation of statewide programs and the history of traditionally important industries like the lumber and maritime trades.

In order to provide fresh perspective and insightful nuance to historical assessments of the New Deal in the South, it is necessary to review existing scholarship while assessing the theoretical position of this specific region within both the broader United States and global world. The myriad experiences offered by New Deal agencies and aid in south Mississippi engage many of the critical components and central themes of southern environmental history.
In engaging (and in some cases, deconstructing) historiographical precedents associated with New Deal experiences in both the broader South and in coastal Mississippi, it is one of the goals of this section to move beyond the persistent foxholes of southern history in terms of previously simplistic categorizations and assessments of human interaction with nature and its cultural, economic, political, and social impact over time.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{154} The next chapter will examine sources specifically pertaining to the New Deal period in Mississippi. For broad overviews of 20\textsuperscript{th} century Mississippi History, see: Westley Busbee, \textit{Mississippi: A History} (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson Press, 2005); Stephen Cresswell, \textit{Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi After Reconstruction, 1877-1917} (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2006); Ted Ownby, \textit{American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). The aforementioned represent the most significant historiographical shifts away from earlier works like McLemore’s ‘\textit{A History of Mississippi}’ (1973), Garner’s \textit{Reconstruction in Mississippi} (1901), Kirwan’s \textit{Revolt of the Rednecks} (1965), and even V.O. Key, Jr’s encompassing \textit{Southern Politics in State and Nation} (1949).
Chapter I: Background Historiographic Context

The historical context of the Mississippi Gulf Coast region has been traditionally posited as “the other,” drawing on a peripheralization and marginalization from the rest of the state in terms of its racial, cultural, ethnic, political, economic, environmental, and social milieu. These factors manifest themselves in both popular and historical literature. This introduction will examine the limited secondary sources and scholarship as well as notions perpetuated by authors from the 1940s onward. New Deal historiography and treatments of the region indeed prove especially lacking after 1950. Even during the period from 1939 to 1950, most historical works focused on the institutional narratives of individual agencies while completely forsaking the local impact of New Deal programs and agencies.

In its departure from the persistent themes of Mississippi history—the antebellum period, slavery, civil war, and civil rights—one notices that the period from Reconstruction through the Depression in Mississippi (and perhaps the broader South) is neglected by historians. In order to comprehend changes or stasis engendered by the New Deal, it is indeed significant to trace the origins, development, impact, and legacy of the New Deal in Mississippi via the projects undertaken using federal money in the Magnolia State. How do they speak to human relationships with the environment? Were they inclusive? Who did they exclude, and
why? Aside from simplistic categorization of “poverty,” why did Mississippians so readily embrace federally-legislated New Deal? This chapter will demonstrate that the New Deal in Mississippi can be viewed as exemplary of the development, impact, and legacy of the New Deal in the broader South. The New Deal in Mississippi signaled a social, cultural, political, or economic transformation, and in projecting this hypothesis over the course of thirty years after the New Deal, it is at least important to ponder whether the New Deal in Mississippi served as a precursor or antecedent for the Sun Belt boom of the mid-twentieth century, as well.

In this section, I attempt to demonstrate that not only was the New Deal primarily a white reform movement in Mississippi (as it was in the rest of the South), but that Federal activity upheld the principles of the Jim Crow system in the state.155 New Deal agencies and the works undertaken in Mississippi also physically reshaped the land while concurrently reshaping man’s consciousness toward it. The distinct creation of nature on the Mississippi Gulf Coast coincided with public interests and development of both real and potential economic ones. The New Deal in Mississippi also forces smaller landowners and farmers off property or out of farming all together. Whether forced or legislated, this economic evolution allowed for development and emergence of large-scale, industrialized agriculture on both the state and regional levels. That being said, New Deal programs and agencies, particularly in the South, sought to reintegrate the region back into national consciousness while also creating a novel sense of “region” for residents, as was demonstrated in the previous section focusing on the

TVA. Understanding the convergence of environment, race, and class proves vital to the process of uncoding the historical legacy of the New Deal in both Mississippi and west Florida.¹⁵⁶

In undertaking a broad view of society, themes and patterns emerge when examining a region over time. When engaging New Deal experiences on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, perceptions and constructs of region, space, place, and identity speak to how nature shaped each of these before, during, and after the New Deal. The impact of the physical reshaping of natural landscape by New Deal agencies frequently symbolized how humans interacted with nature as well as the historical impact and legacy of that interaction. Newspaper articles and reports from federal agencies show that New Deal agencies and the myriad of experiences under them during the 1930s engaged issues of class, race, labor and the perception of environment, along with the role of recreation and conservation and use of natural resources. Notions of region and their impact on public or popular conceptions of “the environment” speak to broader theoretical strains involved in engaging the central themes of Environmental history of the South from 1877 forward. These factors and themes include conflict, change (conservation/protection) versus order and continuity (white economic interests and racial supremacy); the Local vs. the Outside, the influence and the use of resources as an evolution of neocolonialism; a heightened exploitation of resources creating a white financial elite that effectively keeps working class and poor whites and blacks “in place” and thoroughly ignores symbiotic and ecological relationships. The soil itself becomes an exploited resource by the late 19th century, along with timber, minerals, water, all creating distinct conflict between the rural

¹⁵⁶ My work will extend on some of the notions of an integrated and interconnected perspective on these social themes briefly touched upon by Eudora Welty in her 1971 work One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression (New York: Random House, 1971).
and the urban, thusly providing a foundation for uneven and contrasting forms of urban and rural development. Finally, a Sun Belt urban South emerges by the 1970s and is privileged in its economic development while perpetuating a continual degradation of the environment and natural resources.

Factors that comprise exactly what is unique about the environmental narrative of the South should be addressed. Most notably, two strains come to mind when looking at the South: its comparatively late development of urban areas, and the decided lack of public dissent from the aforementioned degradation of environment. The 1930s and New Deal experiences represented a collective marshalling of human and natural resources, and an attempt at centralization of those resources. The New Deal in both Mississippi and Florida also ushered a move away from neocolonial and provincial survivalist lifestyle modes for rural southerners, brought about by technological advances and mechanization in agriculture. This localized industrialization emerged under the guise of benefiting the “public good” in much the same way tourism and recreation blossomed as central pastimes of the region. Through the twentieth century, the selling of an “authentic” southern experience included-and sometimes revolved around-human interaction with the natural environment.

In undertaking a localized view of these broader sociological and historical patterns, it is clear that from its initial settlement by French in 1600s, environmental extraction and manipulation (e.g. fishing, shipping, oil and petroleum, and tourism after 1890s) has played a central role in the economic, social, and political development of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. These neocolonial patterns persist until, and sometimes beyond, the New Deal 1930s. Judging from the experience and approach taken by politicians, federal agencies, and even citizens
during the 1930s, the Mississippi Gulf Coast can be viewed (much like their neighbors to the east in the Florida Panhandle) as a case-study for the development, impact, and legacy of the New Deal in the South. The New Deal on the Mississippi Gulf Coast helped engender a novel sense of interconnected regionalism for residents, and for many whites helped to reorient notions of identity and cultural ownership. Meanwhile, for African Americans and a sizeable number of foreign immigrants on the Coast, the New Deal and its programs, agencies, perpetuated exclusion from the benefits of federal involvement during the 1930s.

Despite existing within a state that has proven to be fertile ground in the research of historians and social scientists, the Mississippi Gulf Coast has been the subject of few academic works of history exploring it as a unique region. Perhaps due to the traditional narrative focus on the region’s scenic beauty, most works merely offer illustrated or pictorial histories, with the few works available focusing on the destruction wrought by Hurricanes Camille and Katrina. Furthermore, no scholarly works directly engage or analyze the dynamic complexities of race, politics, culture, and the environment during the twentieth century on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The Great Depression and 1930s represent the most commonly overlooked, if not downright ignored, period in Mississippi’s historical consciousness. Outside of published academic studies, the popular “Know Your State” editorials by Jackson Ledger reporter Ray M. Thompson were featured weekly for three decades but focused on virtually every decade aside from the apparently not-so romantic 1930s.\textsuperscript{157} This gap in examined time ignored has served to effectively limit the historiography of the Gulf Coast, demonstrating that the 1930s were not

\textsuperscript{157}Paper collection of Ray M. Thompson, housed at McCain Special Collections and University Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS. Papers contain all editorials by Thompson appearing in the Jackson Ledger from 1942-1965.
perceived as in keeping with romantic notions of life linked with the perpetually evolving
boosterism and promotionalism of the Mississippi Coast. Historiographical precedents of
studies focusing on the 1930s and New Deal in Mississippi will now be examined in order to not
only provide a foundation for further study, but to offer a point of departure for expanded
understanding of this era in south Mississippi.

For over three decades, the historical experiences of the Mississippi Gulf Coast during
the New Deal period remained an underutilized example of the localized impact of New Deal
agencies and aid. A distinctly regional and national perspective, in addition to relatively
straightforward explanations, mark earlier scholarship, as noted by Holley’s argument that
simply “too many people were trying to earn a living from the land,” thus creating a rural crisis
of poverty. Nevertheless, Holley’s work *The New Deal and Farm Tenancy: Rural Resettlement in
Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi* (1969) still offers contemporary scholars some insight into
the power of the New Deal in the rural South. According to Holley, the CCC, WPA, NYA all
attempted to define and limit the overuse of soil and natural resources. Due in part to
mechanization and market-price fluctuation, farm tenancy had reached a point of collapse, with
500,000 families no longer needed as cotton tenants throughout the South. This area included
all ten south Mississippi counties under investigation here. The New Deal Resettlement Act
took submarginal lands out of cultivation and resettled farm families on supposedly “better,”
and under the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the FERA, and the Resettlement
Administration established 30 resettlements projects across coastal Mississippi. Holley
maintains that rather than tracing the cause of collapse of tenancy and potential solutions, the
government and the New Deal (by proxy) utilized familiar and mythical notions of private
property ownership and citizenship.\textsuperscript{158} In reality, the New Deal resettlement program barely scratched the surface of rural poverty: Mississippi in 1930 had the highest rate of farm tenancy in the country, with nearly 73 percent of all farmers on state qualifying as tenants who did not own land they cultivated. Holley points out that the Resettlement Administration was the proverbial umbrella in a hurricane, and furthermore, the agency completely neglected African American farmers, who per capita were the largest group of farm tenants in every southern state, not just Mississippi. No experimental communities emerged when they were most needed in Mississippi, where the federal government toed the line between giving up on tenant farmers and simply tossing them piecemeal relief.

Holley argues persuasively that regional overuse of lands in pursuit of Jeffersonian, agrarian ideals which were unattainable in the twentieth century US South fostered the collapse of the cotton market. However, subsistence homesteads in McComb, Laurel, Tupelo, Meridian, and Richton contained 20-25 homesteads on five acre tracts designed to give families an opportunity to farm and work part-time in new factory jobs.\textsuperscript{159} Despite a program like subsistence homesteads that engendered broad regional appeal, there was no comprehensive community planning program undertaken by the FERA in Mississippi, and both the Resettlement Administration and the FSA were unsuccessful in their attempts with Mississippi Subsistence Homesteads. It is clear, as Holley demonstrates but chooses not to expand upon, that the New Deal resettlement administration program in Mississippi rested on the myth of the independent, white small landowner who attempted to create a sense of agrarian

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., Holley, 29.
Jeffersonian Democracy without accounting for the increasingly dynamic and cumbersome financial complexities of agriculture in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The CCC, WPA, and other New Deal agencies in Mississippi were underwritten by the precedent set by extreme deforestation and the often destructive approach taken by commercial lumber and timber enterprises in the state from 1890 through 1920s. New Deal agency projects and the emergence of a defense industry during World War II resuscitated the lumber industry in Mississippi. As a means to create jobs and balance lumber harvest with modest conservation, on April 8 1935 FDR approved the ERA Act, appropriating over four billion dollars into public works programs. The founding vision of the WPA defined its responsibility as the “honest, efficient, speedy, and coordinated execution of the work relief program as a whole,” with Mississippi initially receiving six districts within its borders. In Mississippi, only nine months after the beginning of the WPA, a total of 39,401 people were on the WPA rolls. Of that number, some 24,000 were men and 15,000 women. As Larry Whatley demonstrates in his work on “The Works Progress Administration in Mississippi,” the CWA, NYA, CWA, PWA, and Reconstruction Finance Corporation all provided substantial aid to Mississippi. A total of over 30 million dollars was spent in Mississippi through such Federal programs by March 1935. Newspaper editors and most citizens across the state, but especially in south Mississippi, were in favor of getting as much money from the government as possible, and Whatley describes what he perceives to be an attitude of “Don’t want too much, but ask for all you can get” prevalent in communities across the state. Whatley remains fundamentally correct in his assertion that the Great Depression would indeed have been more disastrous to the people of

Mississippi without the relief programs of the WPA. That being said, the importance of local funding and its impact on the federal works, also remains a point which has been traditionally overlooked by scholars. Once again, Mississippi makes for a good example: local divisions covered approximately one-fourth of the cost of each project, much in the same way officials in the Florida Panhandle distributed funding for projects.\textsuperscript{161} Meanwhile, the Mississippi legislature met in special session in 1935 and passed a bill which allowed supervisors of counties and governmental authorities of cities to donate funds, lands, building materials, and aid in the WPA erection of agricultural buildings, cold storage plants, syrup blending plants and warehouses, and in the building and repairing of roads, bridges, streets, and rural recreation centers.\textsuperscript{162} State officials added canning plants to the list in 1936, especially important for coastal communities dependent upon export of canned products from ports in Biloxi, Gulfport, and Pascagoula. Nativism (or at the very least provincialism) manifested itself in laws passed that public works employees must have lived in the state for two years.

In his work, Whatley does make clear that the WPA faced strong opposition to the program, most notably from Delta newspaper editor Frederick Sullens wanted the state to secure federal funds. Mississippi Senator Pat Harrison’s main objection was that the WPA would not hire anyone unless that person was already on the relief roll. The most severe objections to the relief agency came after or during strikes that protested some aspect of WPA policy. In late 1935, 100 WPA workers in Harrison County struck after not having been paid for a month. This, as the author points out, falls in line with a pattern of unrest evolving across the

\textsuperscript{161} Larry Whatley, “The Works Progress Administration in Mississippi,” \textit{Journal of Mississippi History} (Spring 1983); 173-197.

region and state, most notably the Jackson Central Labor Union strike of 1935. Despite opposition, WPA began, operated, and finished hundreds of projects across the state. The WPA in Mississippi proved similar to its counterpart in Florida because of similar social and economic needs-which were not merely circumstantial geographical, or economic differences-rather, there existed substantial similarities between the two states in terms of their infrastructure, economy, politics, and forces that determined reform and New Deal agency projects.

Whatley concurs with the potentially tremendous amount of improvement public works could achieve. The WPA built or repaired principally farm-to-market roads, all of which were badly needed and permanent. The agency provided seasonal employment, and helped galvanize communities by assisting church, school, and business interests on a localized level. By 1943 in Mississippi, 15,770 miles of roads and over eight thousand bridges and viaducts had been built, rebuilt, or improved. It proved the single most expansive development and construction of the public infrastructure in the history of both Mississippi and the United States at that time.\(^{163}\) The WPA in Mississippi was active in environmental conservation, as well. Tung trees planted across the coast swayed alongside soil reclamation and dredging projects undertaken in a comprehensive three million dollar conservation project for the state. From 1935 to 1944, WPA built or improved 13 airfields in Mississippi, laying the groundwork for the defense industry boom concurrent with the Second World War. The WPA directly transformed most of its relief positions and contracts into defense projects. However, in a state as poor as Mississippi, general relief composed a substantial portion of the agency’s work, with 15 million pounds of food and 8 million pounds of garments distributed to the poor in Mississippi. In an

\(^{163}\) Ibid., Whatley, 189-190.
immediate and localized sense, the Works Progress Administration helped to at least temporarily alleviate the crisis of poverty then encumbering Mississippi. The “Health and Sanitation” division drained ditches to eradicate mosquitoes and built outdoor toilets under guise of non-classified works. Whatley shows how Mississippi spent over eight percent of its WPA funds on sanitation projects, where only one other state had spent a larger percent for that purpose. Whatley demonstrates but does not expound upon is the clear proof that roads, bridges, infrastructure, commerce and public health projects all coalesced to uniquely and completely reshape and transform the natural environment in Mississippi.

More recent scholarship like Roger Biles’s, *The South and the New Deal* (1994) shows that there was no singular or blanket New Deal “experience” affecting all communities, states, or regions. Rather, the collision between national laws and local conditions determined the degree of change applicable in predominantly rural areas of the South like the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Biles argues that the South’s experience was similar to the Western United States in some ways but very different in others, and he highlights the interplay between the federal government and the South during the Roosevelt administration. Biles emphasizes the shift from sharecropping to agribusiness; however, 77 percent of black farmers worked on other people’s land, and 70 percent of farmers in Mississippi were tenants. This shift led to land consolidation, mechanization, the introduction of new crops, and rapid and widespread displacement of a large segment of the rural work force leading to a distinct enclosure

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164 See Whatley, ibid., 178-79; also see final *Works Progress Administration Annual Report: Mississippi* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1937)
movement in the South, but it could be argued that this occurred continuously from 1890 through 1950.

Biles cites as one of his primary examples the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, an agency that both operated independently and reported directly to FDR. The election of Mississippians in the federal formation of committees proved important, especially with the AAA where Oscar Johnston, manager of the Delta and Pine Land plantation, also served as the agency’s finance director. Biles argues that the AAA served to diversify agriculture in south Mississippi, signaling a shift away from only siviculture and piecemeal cotton production toward truck farming and mixed livestock husbandry. Furthermore, the AAA provided an important precedent for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), created in 1935 and almost immediately vital in the coastal South. SCS allowed for heightened diversification, with soybeans, sorghum, livestock forage, kudzu, trees for turpentine and pulpwood, and a host of other plants emerging as viable cash crops in the South and in Mississippi particularly. As Biles points out, southern farmers who survived the Depression generally owned larger holdings, grew a greater variety of crops, employed fewer workers but more machinery, incorporated more scientific knowledge, and looked to government for subsidies in their quest for parity.  

According to Biles, the New Deal served as a vehicle for the gradual destruction of sharecropping, an exploitative system that had plagued the South socially, economically, and agriculturally since Reconstruction. In doing so, he connects the New Deal and its programs and agencies as contributing toward legislated racial equality in the South. Conversely, New Deal programs and the AAA uprooted over 200,000 black sharecroppers and tenant farmers and

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166 Ibid., Biles, 196-198.
caused rapid depopulation of southern farmers while paying scant attention to the suddenly landless black masses. Biles demonstrates that while the New Deal may have provided a substantial precedent for later Civil Rights activities, the reality of the New Deal remained submerged in racial segregation and reinforced inequality through its training programs and agency activities. Perhaps most importantly, New Deal agencies effectively inserted the federal government into the tenuous dynamic between black and white southerners, with dramatic consequences in future years, if not immediately. The New Deal in the South highlights the importance of expanding historical consciousness of the possibilities of New Deal programs across the South, specifically in very rural and poor parts of the South like Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle.

Despite the seemingly transformative approach undertaken by New Deal agencies, change came often at a begrudging pace, and though it was frequently not immediately evident, the New Deal marked the beginning of the end of agriculturally, economically, and socially rooted notions of southern exceptionalism. Federal intervention on the local level disrupted, challenged, catalyzed social and political dynamics within communities. In places like Pascagoula, Mississippi, New Deal agencies created a proliferation of economic opportunities and industry, as evidenced by the emergence of Ingalls Shipbuilding, which began operations in Pascagoula in 1938, as well as the opening of Keesler Army Base in June of 1941. These entities signaled the coast’s entry into the mainstream of military-industrial complex prior to World War II. The challenges to traditional order and community stasis or continuity are expressed in Cobb’s The New Deal and the South (1984), which posited the New Deal as a challenge to

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167 McMillen, Dark Journey, 288.
southern white dominion. Cobb and his contributing author assert that in light of recent scholarship, the New Deal era was a crucial period in southern history, a time when the foundations of social and political stagnation began to crumble. According to this work, the New Deal, when coupled with the reinforcing influences of global warfare, was the most powerful force for change in the South since the Civil War.\textsuperscript{168}

In \textit{The Emergence of the New South} (1967), George B. Tindall concluded that the New Deal shook “the social and economic power structure” of the South, with 27 federal agencies comprising the New Deal at its height in 1935.\textsuperscript{169} Tindall asserts that the primary beneficiaries of AAA policies were large landholders and corporations rather than the beleaguered small farmers struggling to avoid tenancy or tenants themselves. Although Tindall’s examination is akin to others on the New Deal in its neglect of the powerful transformation of the natural world and environment of the South, an incisive introductory essay by the author points out that white resistance to the New Deal would prove a molding force for the Citizens Council/Massive Resistance movement of the 1950s, and to some extent, the growth of a Republican base in the South, both key elements of Sun Belt development after World War II.

Conversely, Pete Daniel’s essay on “The New Deal, Southern Agriculture, and Economic Change” perpetuates a limited vision of the New Deal in which the author asserts that the New Deal only proved truly beneficial to agriculture, a notion that has been systematically

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{168} James C. Cobb, \textit{The New Deal and the South} (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984).
  \item \textsuperscript{169} George B. Tindall, \textit{The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1967), 30-31.
\end{itemize}
deconstructed and found, especially in the case of black southern sharecroppers and farm tenants, to be questionable at best.  

Alan Brinkley in “The New Deal and Southern Politics” argues that Roosevelt not only failed to challenge the prevailing power structure, but often reinforced it. That being said (and often persuasively argued), Brinkley tends to oversimplify the New Deal when he writes that it “has in retrospect come to represent a modern, welfare-state liberalism committed to a major expansion of federal power through the creation of a great national bureaucracy; it has become a symbol of the shift of authority away from the state and localities and toward Washington.” Brinkley treads tricky intellectual ground when historians recall just how careful Roosevelt was to place control of virtually all New Deal programs as much in the hands of local officials and institutions as in Washington. Therefore, the tendency of those agencies and programs was often less to challenge than to perpetuate existing structures of local power. The New Deal indeed strengthened dominant political factions in state capitols, but not necessarily as a “perpetuating mechanism” but rather as a manifestation or consequence of those political interests actively supporting and promoting the New Deal and its works. In Florida, Brinkley points out, one of the shining lights of depression-era liberalism in the South was the “Little New Deal” Dave Sholtz constructed as governor. However, Brinkley minimalizes the motives of New Deal politicians like Sholtz when he simplistically categorizes the rise of

Sholtz to the liberal pantheon as attributed to “little more than his willingness to permit the federal government to spend money in his state”. 172

While helpful for a broad overview of racial dynamics at play on the federal level during the Depression and New Deal periods, Sitkoff’s essay on “The Impact of the New Deal on Black Southerners” also tends to categorize, if not essentialize, a kind of singular black New Deal experience. Although caution and timidity marked the New Deal’s central approach to racial matters in the South, Sitkoff does recognize that (primarily due to the insistence of PWA director Harold Ickes) blacks received almost 60 percent of federally subsidized PWA and USHA housing in the South, and 40 million dollars in PWA funds went into the construction or renovation of over 800 hospitals, school buildings, and libraries for southern blacks. 173 The short-view offered by Sitkoff contrasts with Paul Mertz’s New Deal Policy and Southern Rural Poverty, wherein the author shows that the 1930s were not only years of economic distress in the South, but also the beginning of another great period of readjustment and development that have characterized its past. Mertz’s work is instructive in helping scholars view rural southern poverty as part of a longer precedent, especially in south Mississippi and west Florida. As Mertz writes, “a Florida administrator told of wretched conditions of life which had prevailed in the northwestern part of the state for ten years, since the decline of its lumber industry, and concluded, ‘This district has been little affected by the current depression’.” 174 As Mertz shows, the New Deal served as a mechanism to juxtapose New South boosterism of the late nineteenth century with the realities of the region’s lingering economic neocolonialism. Mertz

172 Ibid., Brinkley, 111.
shows that the salient legacy and impact of the New Deal helped landowning farmers, unionized workers, businessmen, women, and other groups to attain a sense of economic sufficiency that had become “normal” for most Americans; however, economic sufficiency was decidedly not a usual condition in the South during the 1930s. New Deal agencies and works alleviated drastic destitution in the South, but never undertook a completely effective policy for the South’s rural poor, according to Mertz, who attempts to show that the rehabilitative services provided by FDR’s programs were not sufficiently comprehensive.

As Anthony J. Badger points out in *New Deal/New South* (1997), intervention on the part of the Federal government—via New Deal agencies and programs—overhauled and transformed the infrastructure of the South, most notably in its more rural spaces like coastal Mississippi and west Florida. Badger’s work shows that federal New Dealers had to defer to state power, rely on state officials, and tailor their programs to local community norms. Somewhat incomprehensibly, Badger argues that despite the salient impact of the New Deal, “it left the basic economic, social, racial, and political structure of the region largely untouched.”175 This is clearly not what the historical evidence and record shows, and not what subsequent post-World War II Sun Belt development showed. And what of the contemporary and salient impact of modernization exemplified in the transformation of west Florida and Mississippi Gulf Coast? Furthermore, the principle of matching funds meant that poor southern states like Mississippi and Florida received less per capita from New Deal spending than any other region. How exactly, as Badger asserts, was the impact of the New Deal’s welfare revolution “severely restricted by local poverty?” Within his overarching approach, Badger argues that World War II,

not the New Deal, brought long-lasting and significant change to the South, but his work neglects the social, political, and economic foundation developed during the New Deal era.

Most recently, *Nature’s New Deal* by Neil M. Maher (2008) examines the CCC and the origins of American Environmental Movement, engaging the relationship between conservation and politics, while emphasizing the transformation of public space by the federal government. Maher shows that the WPA, PWA, TVA, AAA, SCS, Resettlement Administration, and CCC all dramatically transformed the natural environment of most of the United States, but also that their work was most pronounced in the South due to the linkages between environmental change and social, economic, and political change. Arguably the most important contribution of Maher’s work might be the evidence he provides to demonstrate that the CCC democratized and redefined conservation during the New Deal years.\(^{176}\)

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Chapter II: New Deal Public Works, Promotionalism, and the Natural World of the Mississippi Gulf Coast

The next section of this work examines the origins and construction of New Deal environmentalism imbued within literature examining public works projects, along with an assessment of the theoretical and publicly perceived notions of the natural environment on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The ideological perspective of WPA-produced guides, the development of a tourist-based economy, and commercial promotionalism all underscore the historically exploitative relationship between humans and the natural world on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Works Progress Administration guides and literature served as both manifestations and expressions of the New Deal approach to the environment, as did promotional tracts from industrial companies and organizations attempting to lure visitors and settlers to the Gulf Coast in the early twentieth century.

The historical context of the New Deal on the Mississippi Gulf Coast can also be at least partially witnessed through the pages of the Biloxi/Gulfport Sun-Herald. Distinct forms of promotionalism and boosterism served to obscure the myriad realities of New Deal commercial and environmental development. The coalescence of a defined conservation ethic established by New Dealers upon the foundation of the Progressive period combined with contemporary
scientific, rationalistic engineering and a desire to control and manipulate the natural world for the best possible use and fullest realization of potential for humans effectively blends the practical with the theoretical, culminating in a large-scale experiment in the South most clearly viewed in coastal Mississippi. Furthermore, New Deal “public works” were indeed just that; nearly every federally funded project occurring on the Mississippi Coast from 1933 to 1936 was front page news courtesy of the Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald. Agencies worked in conjunction with the sole media outlet on the Mississippi Coast to heighten public awareness and visibility of federal works.

The 1933 Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald provides tremendous insight into the first year of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration, with the January 2, 1933 paper highlighting discussions with the state and the Army Corps of Engineers regarding harnessing of the Pearl River in and south of Jackson that would have a direct impact on the coastal counties of the state. Near-daily offerings from the “Port Activity” section of the Daily Herald demonstrate that shipping and commerce increased every month leaving the Port of Biloxi-Gulfport during 1933, and help illuminate the ways in which the New Deal on the Mississippi Gulf Coast focused more on the utilization of existing infrastructure than on the development of existing resources, as it was on the Florida Panhandle. Projects like the paving of Highway 49 from Gulfport to Hattiesburg (WPA project that began on January 15, 1933) remain as salient testament to the impact of the New Deal and FERA on the Gulf Coast. The paving of Highway 49 represented a vital step for New Deal projects on the Coast, including promotional programs and events like the “Good Roads Motorcade from Coast to Hattiesburg,” highlighting an integrated effort to
“bring about the paving of highways 49 and 51.” Publicity events coincided with an 11.5 million dollar road program proposed for Mississippi in May 1933, and demonstrated how road paving and reforestation proved to be the most significant early New Deal developments on the Coast, providing a foundation for later works and projects. Much like the development and paving of connector highways in the Florida Panhandle, *Daily Herald* news editors viewed the completion of Highway 49 from Gulfport to Hattiesburg as an essential facet of both economic recovery and future development.  

As most clearly demonstrated by the appeals of the Gulfport City Commission to the RFC for National Recovery Act funds, the paving of Highway 49 effectively connected the Mississippi coast with the rest of the state, north to south and south to north, whereas previously highway 90 (the future route of contemporary Interstate 10) connected the coast only to an east-west corridor. This New Deal development proved exemplary of the transformation of transportation infrastructure that would only increase after 1933 and which allowed for a geographic reorientation of industry and commercial development. Perhaps more broadly, the completion of a north-south highway leading out of the Gulf Coast allowed for citizens an encompassing re-integration politically, culturally, economically to the rest of state and world. Road paving and modernization of transportation infrastructure in Mississippi was essential and not developmental, but rather rooted in improvement and reform. This stands in contrast to bridge and road building in Florida, which was often a manifestation of innovative development rooted in the need for commercial and residential expansion.

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177 “Good Roads Motorcade from Coast to Hattiesburg Begins Today”, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, January 17, 1933, 1.
In coastal Mississippi, the first highly publicized New Deal agency move centered on the creation of the Soil Conservation Service in late March 1933 with the Daily Herald favoring what it termed “colonization” of cutover south Mississippi lands.\(^{179}\) As predicted by Roosevelt’s pundits, restoration of former forest lands in south Mississippi played a major role in early New Deal agency programming. Civilian Conservation Corps and its “Forest Camps” represented by far the most widely publicized facet of the early New Deal period in south Mississippi.\(^{180}\) Forestry camp enrollment began in earnest in late April of 1933. The buildup of CCC forest camps in south Mississippi culminated in the construction of Camp Ramsay some twenty five miles north of Biloxi, with a second CCC camp in south Mississippi established on June 20, 1933.

In addition to New Deal agencies’ eagerness to replenish forest resources of the region, the Port of Gulfport celebrated a “Port and Progress Celebration” from April 21-22 1933.\(^{181}\) The entire Mississippi Gulf Coast came to a standstill in recognition of FERA development of Port facilities in Gulfport during this promotional attempt at building community morale that effectively heightened the awareness of a shipping infrastructure both among local and industrial officials and residents alike. A new four million dollar seawall was constructed soon thereafter, an edifice believed to be among the longest in the world at its completion.

The 1934 establishment of the United States Coast Guard base in Pascagoula represented the first step in establishment of what would emerge as Ingalls Shipyard five years later. Passage of the TVA Act through Congress in the same month was big news on the


\(^{180}\) “Reforestation Outlook For South Mississippi Good”, Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald, April 3 1933, 1;
“Forestation Camp Sought at Camp McClellan” (later Camp Shelby), Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald, April 11 1933, 3

\(^{181}\) “Port Celebration Held Here Today”, Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald, April 21, 1933, 1.
Mississippi Coast, seeing the Authority as the first step in intervention of government to provide relief to Coast residents. Despite the relatively swift movement of federal New Deal resources in providing relief and new construction along the Coast, vast disparities of resources persisted within the state’s borders. A September 22, 1933 report highlighted $49 million dollars sought for flood control in Mississippi.\(^{182}\) In part due to the efforts of Congressman Will Whittington, the government distributed little of that money to the Coast, with most relegated to northern Delta counties, the northeastern Tennessee River corridor, and the Jackson/Pearl River Basin.

While a fishermen and shrimp worker strike (dubbed the “Shrimp War” by *Daily Herald* editors) and unrest and war in Cuba dominated the front pages of the Coast’s only newspaper in the fall and winter of 1933, the *Daily Herald* illuminated how New Deal projects centered around activity in the northern Delta and eastern prairie counties of Mississippi, thus perpetuating the political and economic peripheralization of the Mississippi Coast. However, the *Daily Herald* endorsed the NRA and New Deal just as thoroughly and forcefully as papers in the Tennessee Valley region did. The construction of an enormous seafood manufacturing plant in Gulfport from NRA and NIRA funds proved vital to the decline of labor unrest in late fall of 1933, a move that began as part of a compromise between shrimpers and local officials to plant oyster beds in the Mississippi Sound.\(^{183}\) In November of that same year, FERA used funds to overhaul a canning factory on the Gulfport Municipal Pier, a direct result of demands from shrimpers and fishermen on strike. In this historic (if not short-lived) compromise, labor won results with the same federal funding and influence that allowed the Biloxi shipping channel to

\(^{182}\) “Flood Control Measures Approved”, Jackson (Miss.) Ledger, September 22, 1933, 1.

\(^{183}\) “Oyster and Shrimp Packing Plant to Open Soon”, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, November 13, 1933, 1.
be dredged by a private company. The company dredged 200,000 yards of fill dirt for a channel ten feet deep with a two-foot overdepth to allow for shoaling on October 20, 1933.  

Only three days later, the City of Gulfport announced its intent to contract the Bissow Towing Company of New Orleans to dredge its shipping channel from its port facilities through the Mississippi Sound to the Gulf of Mexico. The *Sun Herald* noted quizzically that the “entire basin will be dredged to a depth of 27 feet.” PWA funded a 1.1 million dollar project in November 1933 for construction and finance of a new Gulfport Dock facility. In November, federal authorities approved an additional $375,000 dollar loan for PWA construction of an inner harbor in Gulfport, including “a small yacht basin, golf link, tennis court, baseball diamond, and park fare among the features embraced in the inner harbor project.” The *Daily Herald* reported that the Gulfport Chamber of Commerce was, perhaps unsurprisingly, vital to the raising of matching funds and general promotion of the Gulfport Inner Harbor project.

Dredge development for enhanced shipping and port facilities ran concurrent with the clearing of lands in rural areas of Harrison and Picayune counties for the development of CCC camps, and also coincided with near-constant bidding on highway projects across south Mississippi in late October 1933. That being said, efforts across the state were not necessarily even. In a statewide 10 million dollar road program, only one project out of nine—the paving of US Highway 49 in Stone and Harrison counties, with 10,137 miles grading and drainage at a total estimated cost of almost $180,000 dollars—was a fully federally funded project in south Mississippi through the fall and winter of 1933.

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184 “FERA Funds Used to Overhaul Canning Factory”, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, October 20, 1933, 1.
As a precursor to the Works Progress Administration, the Civil Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps frequently worked in conjunction and proved vital in late 1933, if the front pages of the *Daily Herald* are any indication. The CWA was especially influential in Pascagoula and Jackson counties in late fall 1933, particularly with its work on planting and harvesting of new oyster beds. However, CWA work and funding was highly fluid in nature and especially susceptible to local conditions. While work projects creating oyster aquaculture in Jackson County and to repair roads, bridges in Pascagoula in November 1933 continued, road work in Stone County slowed to a halt that winter, primarily due to county spending and budget restraints established by FERA. From 1933 forward until the end of the decade, unpredictable fluidity became a central characteristic of New Deal works in the developing coastal South.

A total of 1,000 men primarily from the coastal counties of Mississippi and Alabama worked in the first malaria control project funded and under direction of CWA and FERA in early December of 1933. This short-term project proved vital to the long-term public health and development of the Mississippi Coast. The December 5, 1933 edition of the *Daily Herald* announced that “95 New CWA Projects to Be Started,” but none of the counties included were on the Gulf Coast. In fact, the only CWA work outside of Jackson County on the Coast centered on rebuilding and improvement of facilities at Gulfport High School. However, in a move foreshadowing later New Deal public works projects, local officials and chambers of commerce in Harrison and Hancock counties began to publicly implore the importance of a locally funded and constructed “new beach road” in December 1933, primarily for the purposes of tourism.

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188 “Federal Emergency Relief Programs in Mississippi, 1933” file in Papers of George S. Sadka, FERA Administrator for Mississippi, 1933. Sadka papers housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS.
and commercial development. The first edition after Christmas Day, 1933 of the *Daily Herald* brought good news to coast residents, with front pages declaring that “1,000 Men to Be Employed on CWA Oyster Planting Project.” Six hundred of the men alone hailed from Harrison County, with the rest from Hancock and Jackson counties. Along the way, the CWA worked in conjunction with the Mississippi Seafood Commission and stated publicly that oyster bed work had to be completed by February 15. This illustrated the short-lived duration of most CWA projects in early New Deal.

In examining the *Daily Herald* just three years later, a distinctly transformed social, political, and economic landscape had emerged on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In the winter of 1936 the *Daily Herald* noted finding “No Dissension among WPA Workers,” with school projects and repairs funded by PWA throughout the Coast. High levels of public approval and New Deal sentiment apparently included workers on the Mississippi Coast, where no strikes or walkouts occurred over a seven year period. Public officials likewise gladly accepted New Deal aid, unlike in Memphis where city officials in early spring 1936 opted to construct their own city-wide power lines rather than be included within TVA contracts. The only protests against New Deal agencies or projects on the Mississippi Coast occurred when WPA funds and jobs diminished in the spring of 1936.

Aside from mostly positive public sentiment, another significant continuation of PWA work on the Coast included the continued paving of Highway 49 (in a seemingly 10 mile stretch by 10 mile stretch pace), with the surfacing of the road between Saucier and Perkinston occurring in late January 1936. New and existing roads were also moved or relocated for future

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189 “Beach Road Near Completion, To be Open Soon”, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, December 27, 1933, 1.
190 “No Dissention Among WPA Workers”, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, January 17, 1936, 2.
The coast was not alone in its experience of explosive road building and development, with over two million dollars of state road construction projects placed under contract with the PWA in January 1936. In addition to proposed (if not promised) commercial and residential development concurrent with road creation, a report in the February 6, 1936 edition of the *Daily Herald* noted that the relocation of Highway 49 “will eliminate 43 curves” and make road and driving conditions much more safe. Governor Hugh White proved central to the successful passage of the State Highway Paving program supported by the FDR’s administration. This massive and expensive ($40 million project dollars) statewide road project allowed for 28 miles of Highway 49 to be paved in May 1936, finally linking northern Harrison County with Hattiesburg and the Piney Woods. After three years of planning, New Deal road construction on the coast allowed for the emergence of commercial and residential development on the new Beach Road, as advocated by local officials in each coast town and city within reach of Highway 90.

A Republican Congress’ elimination funding and programs for the AAA in early 1936 created some comment—but certainly not an overwhelming amount—in the pages of the *Daily Herald*. A bigger story in January 1936 may have been PWA’s approval of $350,000 funding for development of the inner harbor in Gulfport. This project provided a harbor for small craft and a recreation beach, and created a social and economic impact exemplary of the encompassing approach of New Deal projects transforming an existing environment on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. On Wednesday, January 23, 1936, the Mayor of Gulfport and Port Commission

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welcomed the first vessel to dock at the new Gulfport Pier, the Norwegian Motorship *Terceto* carrying 5,000 tons of Chilean nitrate.\(^{193}\) In addition to increased trade of nitrate from South America, construction of the new harbor facility in Gulfport allowed for the emergence of importation of bananas and other tropical fruit soon thereafter. The *Daily Herald* commented on the increase in shipbuilding industry in late August 1936, especially in Biloxi, as well, while multiple weekly deliveries of South American bananas reported on the front pages of *Daily Herald*. Diversified and expanded port facilities on the Mississippi Coast allowed not only for increased trade with emergent South American-based U.S. banana firms like Dole and Chiquita, but also witnessed expanded imports of lumber, nitrate and salt cake to the new port of Gulfport by May 1936. The emergence of globalized commerce, trade, and shipping had a tangible localized impact too, with the paper’s February 28, 1936 edition noting the new shipping of syrup from Stone County trees. The Gulfport port improvement project effectively served as a domino reaction for the rest of the Mississippi Coast, with the town of Pass Christian applying for and granted PWA funds for a new port in January 1936, and Long Beach improving its marina soon thereafter. In addition to their nearly immediate economic impact on shipping and commerce, port projects on the Mississippi Coast commenced the creation of distinct recreational spaces, as well. Small craft harbor, road, and seawall construction in Gulfport literally paved the way for similar projects in Biloxi Beach and Pass Christian funded by WPA in late April 1936. In Long Beach a petition signed by 175 citizens and town officials sought to create a beach similar to the one being built in Biloxi. The February 28 1936 *Daily Herald* edition noted an increase of tourists and “their activities,” and coincided with a proposal for a

new Yacht Harbor and Recreational Park for Gulfport in early March 1936. One month later, the *Daily Herald* on March 4 highlighted how Senator Theodore Bilbo successfully lobbied for a 35-foot channel through Gulfport Harbor. In late May 1936, the paper discussed the Gulfport recreation project ongoing between WPA and NYA, noting the construction of playgrounds and recreational facilities throughout the Mississippi Coast. Dividends were immediate for local businesses and individuals looking to lure visitors to the Coast: on July 4, 1936-10,000 visitors to Biloxi alone, a number thought to be largest crowd in the history of the Mississippi Coast.\(^{194}\)

In conjunction with Roosevelt’s request to Congress for over 1.5 billion dollars of relief dollars (a majority of which went to the WPA) in March of 1936, Senator Pat Harrison proved instrumental to the placement of aquaculture projects on the Coast and location of WPA projects therein. Along with a majority of state officials, the *Daily Herald* unabashedly supported an oyster planting program so mightily resisted by fishermen and their individual companies.\(^{195}\) Oyster reefs continued to open across the Mississippi Sound with the help of PWA and FERA in the winter and early spring of 1936.\(^{196}\) Despite the objection of shrimpers and fishermen throughout the Mississippi Gulf Coast three years earlier, federal planting of Oyster beds created jobs and helped expand a diversified seafood industry that continues to have a tangible economic and social impact on the Coast. In much the same way that the seafood industry emerged as a globalized economic activity during the New Deal era, forestry and silviculture in coastal Mississippi blossomed after the concurrent work of local and federal works agencies during the 1930s. The June 20, 1936 *Daily Herald* announced creation of the Desoto

\(^{194}\)*Thousands Gather on Coast for Holiday*, Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, July 5 1936, 1.

\(^{195}\)*“Oysters’ Romantic Season Past and Bivalve Becomes Food Again; Could Have Been Eaten All Year”,* Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, September 2 1936, 1.

\(^{196}\)*“WPA Oyster Planting Project Scheduled to Begin As Soon as Possible”,* Biloxi-Gulfport *Daily Herald*, March 25 1936, 1.

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National Forest, formed by consolidation of two purchase units, the Leaf River and the Chickasawhay, and inclusive of 800,000 acres in Wayne, Perry, Greene, Pearl River, Stone, Marion, Lamar, Forrest, George, Jackson and Harrison counties. The federal designation and protection of forest lands in these coastal counties carried an immediate economic and social impact in south Mississippi.

With a significantly diversified building sector (if not entire economy), the New Deal on the Mississippi Coast fostered expansion of industrial and commercial infrastructure. During the summer of 1936, dredging projects and creation of beaches in Biloxi and Long Beach dominated headlines in the *Daily Herald*. A $200,000 dollar seawall repair project buffeted “new” beaches constructed using matching city funds with FERA, PWA, and WPA funds in a move that demonstrated the importance of local cooperation in making New Deal projects successful on the Coast. The Harrison County Seawall Commission worked in conjunction with FERA, PWA, and WPA and served as a catalyst for seawall creation and road protection along the beach. Creation of new water works infrastructure for Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, and Long Beach was announced on Saturday, August 8, 1936, another project indicative of the desired improvement of already existing infrastructures on the Coast.197 The improvement, and in some cases creation of, new commercial and residential infrastructures, shipping harbor and seafood facilities, recreational spaces like marinas and beaches, all led to an increased workforce and improvement of roads, which were in turn successfully integrated into the distinct and unique network of New Deal development on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. In this sense, New Deal public

works extend beyond mere reform to emerge as a form of modern community management
that sought to utilize cooperation with local governments, industries, and workers.

Along similar yet divergent lines from the Biloxi/Gulfport Daily Herald, the WPA Guide to
Mississippi effectively demonstrated the power and prevalence of boosterism in both the
physical and intellectual or perceptive/theoretical improvement of the Mississippi Gulf Coast
and the perceived public image of its natural environment. This guide remains an important
historical resource, and provides a unique, if not time-locked, insight into the approach and
impact of Public Works agencies in coastal Mississippi during the New Deal era.

Mississippi: The WPA Guide to the Magnolia State

Literary critiques and peripheral examination by cultural and social historians
demonstrates the cultural consciousness heightened by WPA programs like the federal writers
program, state guides, and historical records survey. In much the same way as programs
dealing with natural resources, guidebooks and literature had a direct, localized, and immediate
impact on areas surveyed, particularly regions like the Gulf Coast and Piney Woods of
Mississippi where residents lived marginalized existences outside of the mainstream of
American, and even southern, society. With its first publication in 1937, The WPA Guide to the
Magnolia State was vital to the development of tourism on the Mississippi Coast and became a
reference guide for millions of car-owning Americans traveling on newly constructed WPA and
CCC roadways.

Often posited as “the other,” the Mississippi Coast was described by the Guide as in
contrast to the hectic activity and “periodic tension” of the Delta, as “a lazy halcyon
atmosphere” where the soil was too sandy for agriculture and “worry and tautness are
vanquished by a conspiracy of summer breezes, winter greenery, blue waters, and foreign gaiety.” While the Coast became viewed as a sort of pleasure resort, the Guide posited the Piney Woods area as a pioneer society driven by the extraction of resources. Categorizations made in the Guide serve to perpetuate one view of place, identity, and landscape, and they often persisted through time to influence both popular readers and scholarship alike. Descriptions provided by the WPA Guide to Mississippi established a perception and precedent that would resonate with the broader public and determine trajectory of the Mississippi Coast as “the other” through the New Deal era.

The earliest attempts at defining region and New Deal environmentalism came through the efforts of the Educational Division of the WPA, who initiated an Historical Records Survey in 1936. This kind of WPA for white-collar workers attempted to compile source material, research techniques while contributing to home defense as a justification politically and economically, according to William McCain, then director of MDAH. In Mississippi, the Historical Records survey project operated in 67 of 82 counties, and consisted of county, state, municipal, church, newspaper inventories. South Mississippi counties like Forrest, Lamar, and Pearl River had archives inventories published. Some seven decades after its initial compilation and publication in 1937, the WPA Guide to Mississippi remains valuable, both for providing a thoroughly detailed look at the state’s past, and for the language and discourse the guide utilizes in its description of both the natural world and human activities within that sphere. Within the scope of WPA Guides, the Florida panhandle, Piney Woods, Mississippi Coast, and

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199 Paper Collection of William S. McCain, Box 23, folder 15 (Collection Housed at Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS).
TVA counties all share the perception of wilderness regions with seemingly abundant resources in need of marshalling, harnessing, extracting, and perfecting. The shared experiment in the refining and improvement of environment, under the directed guise of New Deal reform takes varied shapes and forms, as guides to each place make clear. Mississippi’s *WPA Guide* remains significant in its inclusiveness, blending history and promotionalism in a salient way that be used as a primary source document to reinterpret the New Deal-era history of south Mississippi.

In its introductory sections on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the *WPA Guide to the Magnolia State* highlights the cyclical reinvention of landscape in south Mississippi built upon the extraction of resources. The pattern of lumber boom to settlement to deforestation led to a reemergence of what the guide termed, “pioneer country once more.” As The Guide notes, “Again not so sharply defined geographically, and gradually less defined economically, are the Piney Woods, lying east of the truck farming section and north of the Coast. This is a rather haphazard and regular triangle, whose scenery of stumps, “ghost” lumber towns, and hastily reforested areas tells its saga. Strong men and women have been reared here, but the earth has been neither fecund enough to facilitate their getting away from it nor sterile enough to drive them away. Until lumbering built a few fair-sized towns out of the wilderness, it was pioneer country; and now that the forests have been ravished, and cheaply built mill houses are rotting, as the unused mill machinery is about them, it is pioneer country once more. Like all pioneers, the Piney Woods people are economically poor, politically unpredictable, and in a constant state of economic transition. Evidences of recent change are new textile mills at Hattiesburg, Laurel, and Picayune, the new Tung orchards to the south, and the DeSoto
National Forest in the center of the area.”\textsuperscript{200} The Guide’s view of the Piney Woods proves instructive in its ideological approach: “The Prairie farmer, like all good farmers, loves his land, but he is not afraid of the machine.”\textsuperscript{201}

Described as foreign, separate, and distinct in terms of their culture and natural setting, both the Piney Woods and the coastal region continued to be polarized by the Guide. Positing the establishment of DeSoto National Forest as a positive and new development, the Guide demonstrates that during New Deal period, agricultural and natural resources had to be exploited for the benefit of improvement, both of personal and domestic economics and for the betterment of the state and its citizens. In Mississippi, as in other surveyed states, \textit{WPA Guides} often worked in conjunction with projects on the ground undertaken by New Deal agencies. Examples in the Mississippi Coast include the Leaf River State Forest off US 49 near Brooklyn, the Biloxi Forest near Saucier on US 49, the Bienville Forest near Forest off State Hwy 35. The Guide depicts an aura of “the wild,” like “Bear, wildcat, bobcats in dense canebrakes in south Mississippi.”\textsuperscript{202}

In promoting New Deal notions of equilibrium between conservation and economic development, the Balance Agriculture With Industry program began as a wide reaching, encompassing attempt to enhance industrialization in the state and build a stronger proletariat while helping individual, local communities. As noted by The Guide, “Thus Mississippi, for the first time in its history, has a planned program for industrial development. Under the “Balance Agriculture with Industry” (BAWI) plan, Mississippi communities can offer land and factory

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\item \textsuperscript{200} \textit{Mississippi: The WPA Guide to the Magnolia State}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Ibid., \textit{WPA Guide to the Magnolia State}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ibid., \textit{WPA Guide to the Magnolia State}, 44.
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buildings, together with tax exemption for a period of five years, in return for the ability and business experience of the incoming industrialists.” 203 While described by the *WPA Guide* as a planned program for industrial development, the BAWI program exploited poor, unskilled, and uneducated labor in conjunction with the raw and unimproved natural environment of places like the Piney Woods of Mississippi. The *WPA Guide* proved especially instructive in assessing attitudes toward urban development in south Mississippi. While the *Guide* noted broadly patterns of resource use in the countryside, it was on the coast where the book’s promotional value was most clearly demonstrated. Much like promotional tracts and newspapers accounts before it, the *WPA Guide* imbued the coast with a sense of commercial promotionalism centered on the development of a beachside tourist industry. Biloxi was a city of less than 15,000 at the time the *Guide* appeared, but the beachfront constructed in the early 1930s with New Deal funding and labor not only fundamentally reshaped the landscape, but also created new of avenues of recreation, tourism, and creation of regional identity. Works like the *Guide* described the “coastal character” as enveloped in notions of exoticism and romanticism. According to the *Guide*, Biloxi had by the 1930s become a city based on tourism, recreation, and the fledgling (if not volatile) seafood industry. The seafood industry on the Mississippi Coast proved both extractive and vital to coastal development in the 1890s through the late 1930s. 204

In its description of the Piney Woods region of south Mississippi, the *WPA Guide* perpetuated an understanding of south Mississippi as rooted economically, socially, and culturally in the extraction of natural resources. The *Guide* described the town of Laurel as a

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204 Ibid., *WPA Guide to the Magnolia State*, 123.
pioneer lumber town, built for extraction within a climate and natural setting that offered a sense of impermanence. *The Guide* notes “the exhaustion of timber” as the seminal event in the history of the Piney Woods, with the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad as the primary vehicle and mechanism for exploitation and deforestation of the land itself. The *Guide* noted the emergence of the DeSoto National Forest situated within land purchased by government in 1933 for purposes of conservation, and demonstrated the increased environmental consciousness inherent within New Deal programs, agencies, aid. A 3,850 acre portion of the Biloxi Purchase unit of the DeSoto National Forest, located near Saucier, and deemed to be representative of over 3 million acres of clear-cut and second growth forests in Mississippi, was set aside for research in fall of 1933 and renamed the Harrison Experimental Forest. Within DeSoto National Forest, two wilderness areas also emerge: Black Creek and Leaf River, both established in 1940. DeSoto National Forest remains both a testament to the New Deal experience and a central feature of life in south Mississippi today, stretching across sections of (in descending land order): Perry, Wayne, Harrison, Forrest, Stone, Greene, Jones, Jackson, George, and Pearl River counties. Only four years after the establishment of the forest, the *WPA Guide*’s description of the DeSoto unit highlights the understood importance of conservation. The *Guide* describes “extensive construction” of roads as central to growth and evolution of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, with the underlying landscape and forest viewed as a commodity much in the same way as the beach and oceanfront further south.\(^2\)

Conservation of the region’s forest lands coincided with WPA works and improvements in recreation areas that included the construction of fair grounds, National Forests/Recreation

\(^2\) Ibid., *WPA Guide to the Magnolia State*, 225.
Centers, state parks, organized fire protection areas, watering places, golf courses, skeet and rifle ranges, as well new spaces for hunting, fishing, and boating. Construction of these new spaces was most clearly noted in the individual portraits of towns and cities within the WPA Guide to Mississippi. The work described Biloxi as “Developed primarily as a recreational center, Beach Boulevard (a part of US 90) stretches for approximately six miles between the sound, with its stepped concrete sea wall, artificial beaches, and lean, wooden piers, and a line of resort hotels, summer cottages, and amusement parks.” The promotional trajectory of the Guide noted that “the atmosphere is the gayety of people out for a holiday.” The perceived “foreign” nature of the Gulf Coast is highlighted by the Guide’s description of “the ‘point’ at the eastern end of Howard Avenue is a clearly defined section, strange in a State whose white population is 99 percent anglo saxon.” The guide goes on to describe “the cabin-like houses inhabited by these Poles, Austrians, Czechoslovakians, and Yugoslavs built as temporary structures in 1925...yet the new fisherfolk, with strange customs and heavy accents, have imparted to the section a romantic atmosphere that almost hides its poverty.” Guide writers used racial and population demographics to promote the Gulf Coast as another world, but safely within the realm of whiteness, noting that “although Biloxi has the largest foreign-born population (3.3 percent) in the state, it has the lowest percentage of urban Negro population.”

Points of interest noted by The Guide include the “Naval Reserve Park, Biloxi; established by the Government to preserve the trees for making knees for wooden ships. Now owned by the city, the park is noteworthy for its vistas of the bay seen through moss-draped oaks.”

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206 Ibid., WPA Guide to the Magnolia State, 57; see map of new recreation areas on p.41-42.
207 Ibid., WPA Guide to the Magnolia State, 220-225.
As the commercial and industrial sibling to Biloxi, Gulfport stood in stark contrast as a "planned city"; conceived by the Gulf and Ship Island Company as a model of unobstructed expansiveness, where the live-oaks and indigenous shrubs were sacrificed to an atmosphere of wide, airy streets and narrow, formally planted parkways. The WPA Guide posits Gulfport as evidence of the success of planning and industrialism combined with boosterism and romanticism of Mississippi and the Old South. The Guide lauded completion of a million-dollar pier and warehouse that gave "the city shipping facilities unexcelled by any port on the Gulf."\(^{208}\) The Gulfport Harbor and Ship Canal pointed to by WPA Guide as a tourist attraction, and writers noted that, "in the northwestern corner of the U of the basin is a seafood packing plant, and adjoining it, a small municipally-owned wharf, with the newest piers constructed with PWA aid." In this sense, the WPA Guide to Mississippi not only provided insight into perceptions of geography and history within the region, but also served to effectively promote the public works of New Deal agencies.\(^{209}\)

Sections of the Guide offering tour routes and itineraries are also vitally important, as they literally guided the traveler through what writers considered to be attractions and points of importance within the Piney Woods and Mississippi Gulf Coast. The first tour took visitors from Mobile to New Orleans via U.S. 90. The Guide notes that here, "US 90 breaks in upon a section of Mississippi that combines scenic and recreational attractions with legendary interests. Here in 88 miles of Coast country are the color and tone of the Old World and the Old South." Remarkining upon the otherness of the Mississippi Coast, the Guide remarks that, "While the Coast is covered by many separate communities, there is a geographical and spiritual unity

\(^{208}\) Ibid., WPA Guide to the Magnolia State, 227.
\(^{209}\) Ibid., WPA Guide to the Magnolia State, 231-35.
that makes the Mississippi sobriquet, “the Coast,” understandable. It has been a resort center for years.” To the east, the *Guide* connects deforestation in Pascagoula with “missionary” saving of the Coast by the federal government via New Deal and defense industry by the mid 1930s. In Fontainbleau, the *Guide* notes, “Virgin Pine Forest, 3,000 acres, of which part belongs to the Government. The drive through the forest extends to the point where the virgin pines go down to meet the waters of the Gulf.”

Moving northward, Piney Woods tours from Jackson to Gulfport via the newly paved and completed Highway 49, connote “a long series of rolling red clay hills that were once covered with tremendous growths of longleaf yellow pine, but are now scattered with new trees, the skeletons of formers mills, and mill towns.” The *Guide* emphasized a short-term vision of the economy and extractive industry as negative facets of development and human existence in south Mississippi. The *Guide* described the Brooklyn and Seed Nursery as “the center of a dairying, poultry, and truck-farming section. Ashe Nursery is one of the agencies converting thousands of acres of cut-over lands in the State into future revenue producing areas.” This nursery, under the USDA, operated with the aid of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and contained growing space for what the CCC termed “the four Southern pines—longleaf, slash, loblolly, and shortleaf.” Writers promoting the new-fangled nursery highlighted its innovative conservation practices and ability to expand for future endeavors, remarking that the Brooklyn nursery, “covers a total of 300 acres of land. At present 75 acres are under cultivation. Although only 30,000,000 seedlings are now being grown, the capacity is 50,000,000. More than six miles of water pipe are used in the irrigation system, which is of the

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211 Ibid., *WPA Guide to the Magnolia State*, 345-47.
overhead sprinkler type. The seeds are extracted from pine cones collected in September and October, dried for three weeks in the curing sheds and then run through a kiln. After the cones open in the kiln, the seeds are extracted, cleaned, and stored until planting time....more and more the cut-over land is being used for dairy farming in this area, and with cattle and sheep nibbling grasses in the rolling meadows, the landscape is becoming pastoral.” The serene nature of the coastal pinewoods is remarked upon by the authors who note, “At Perkinston the highway enters the Biloxi unit of De Soto National Forest, extending for several miles through an aisle of pines. The gloom of the dense woods, its majesty, and its clean odor, are a reminder of what the Piney Woods formerly were.”

Tour 8 from Livingston, Alabama to New Orleans via Meridian, Laurel, Hattiesburg, Picayune, and Santa Rosa highlights the Piney Woods landscape as both culturally resourceful and botanically innovative. The development of tung tree orchards in south Mississippi stood as one of the foremost ways to overcome years of deforestation and economic instability.

“Southwest of Laurel and Hattiesburg the people have realistically faced the problem of cut-over pines, finding an answer in other products. Here, fat, low swells once dominated by the pines, are orchards of pecan, Tung, and Satsuma trees in long, regular, parallel rows,” note the writers. “Between Poplarville and Picayune is a concentrated area of Tung trees, where in the spring, when he waxy white blossoms stretch mile after mile, the landscape resembles a Chinese countryside rather than southern Mississippi.”212 Writers utilized the historical experience of Poplarville as exemplary of assistance provided by the Federal Government, wherein “a former saw mill town now concentrating its energies on Tung-tree culture and the

212 Ibid., *WPA Guide to Mississippi*, 347.
production of naval stores.” The Guide goes on to describe the history of Tung orchards in the region, describing the stretch “Between Poplarville and Picayune lies Mississippi’s “Tung-oil frontier,” with Picayune serving as the tung tree capital. This important new crop was introduced largely through the intense enthusiasm of Lamont Rowlands. Rowlands, a lifetime lumberman, sold his sawmill interest after the decline of the lumber industry in the latter 1920s and turned his attention to developing the cut-over timberland of the section into tung orchards. Short before this time, as a result of the destruction of some of the best tung plantations in China, the oil of the tung nut was scarce and prices had risen. Tung oil has many uses, the most important of which is in the manufacture of paint; the hulls of the nut are used as fertilizer. Rowlands saw that it was a product in great demand, and of limited supply.

Agricultural innovation and economic diversification were clearly valued by New Deal agencies, and the WPA Guide to Mississippi served as a manifestation of those beliefs while also acting as a promotional and informational piece for travelers and residents alike. The Guide to Mississippi highlighted the interconnected nature of not only New Deal public works and their impact on local society, but also the determinative role of place, environment, and perceived identity in a way that remains salient.213

In addition to newspaper reports and federally-funded and sponsored guidebooks, official WPA accounts and promotional tracts speak to the transformative impact of New Deal agencies in south Mississippi. Imbued with an undertone of boosterism and agency praise for the newly constructed pier, park, and marina in that city, the WPA Report on Gulfport issued in 1937 demonstrated how Gulfport represented a planned, rationalized city before bricks were

ever laid in its streets. It was to be a twentieth century model for urban planning and development, and yet, WPA reports contain no mention of African Americans, labor activism, or area dependence upon fishing or timber industries. Biloxi’s Annual WPA Reports highlight the Harrison County seawall built as a WPA project to the tune of $3.5 million dollars, while reports on Hattiesburg emphasize the “diversification and reforestation of area” in light of cut-over landscape surrounding the city.214

Promotional publicity at the state level played a central role in the success of agency activity and the historical legacy of the New Deal in south Mississippi. Under the supervision of regional director Ellen Woodward, WPA published a separate travel guide to the Mississippi Gulf Coast in 1939. Imbued with promotional language, the new guide was essentially an expanded version of the Guide to the Magnolia State but contained no mention of the destructive nature of hurricanes so vividly demonstrated on the Gulf Coast in the fall of 1936.215 Implementation and success of the WPA originated in the promotion of the Gulf Coast by industrial leadership of the Midwest decades earlier. In 1926 the Illinois Central Railroad issued a promotional tract entitled “The Beautiful Mississippi Gulf Coast,” that demonstrated the shared experience of prolonged boosterism through the 1920s. Acting as a precedent for both coastal development and federal WPA Guides, promotional tracts showed how the environment was perceived both in and outside of Gulf Coast region, often posited as a carefree atmosphere, aimed toward northerners which in reality served as merely another way of simplifying the cultural, social, and environmental dynamics of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. As

215 In the fall of 1936, one of the most fierce hurricanes in United States History first hit the southwest coast of Florida, then made landfall near Pascagoula on October 20, 1936.
the “nearest of the Great Winter playgrounds” for snowbirds from the Great Lakes and with the Gulf of Mexico as an “endless expanse of sapphire with its romance of buccaneer days,” tracts from industrial magnates described an endless bounty of opportunity and aimed toward both resort visitors and commercial and residential developers. These tracts asserted a distinct and unique precedent for New Deal development and the Sun Belt post-World War II boom that was dependent upon both the use of environment as central to development.

Railroad writers described the Gulf Hills resort, just north of Ocean Springs, as “developed to provide a perfect park and residential playground with 18 hole course set in natural surroundings.” With golf gaining popularity in the U.S. by the 1920s, the sport symbolized what Americans thought to be the perfect blend of outdoor recreation and environmental use and determinism. Railroaders sought to combine attractiveness of Gulf Coast scenery, weather with improved infrastructure and rail lines like the “Panama Limited,” which offered the fastest passenger train travel of its time with service from Chicago to the railhead in Biloxi in a little under 21 hours. The Illinois Central was not the only railroad to offer a vision of development and use of environment in Mississippi Gulf Coast in attempts to lure both visitors and relocating northerners, either. In 1930, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad released a tract entitled, “Mississippi Gulf Coast: A Good Place to Live,” in which it promoted the Mississippi Coast and was the first tract to aim directly at retirees:

“the man facing retirement often as a problem of what to do with his time. Many men have no interests outside their business and no facilities for developing one. The Gulf Coast offers a fine

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opportunity to the retired businessman to live economically and to develop outside interests—farming, cattle raising, gardening, fishing, boating, craftsmanship.  

In addition to capitalizing upon the emergent possibility of retirement in the lives of working Americans, the Louisville and Nashville touted itself as a “partner in progress” for development and industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. While all promotionalism and development of the Mississippi Coast during New Deal period was directly underwritten by federal and state cooperation, it was also built upon the foundation of possibilities within industry. International Paper Company was an important partner as well, with its bleached craft and bag manufacturing plant and planned community at Kreola near Moss Point. Promotional materials from Gulf Coast Orchards and Products Company, specifically focusing on a planned agricultural community at “Kre-o-la Beach” established an important precedent in outlining perceptions of the south Mississippi coastal environment as early as 1900. From its origins forward, Kreola was perceived and understood as a reserved outdoor recreation and planned residential community, with industry relegated to mostly African American Moss Point and the fledgling port town of Pascagoula. This multifaceted and decidedly planned residential community under direction of Gulf Coast Orchards and Products Company, was completed with drainage canals, parks, lakes, docks, golf course and gulf access. Satsuma oranges and paper shell pecans were exported from lands surrounding the development, with Gulf Coast Orchards positing Kreola as an idyllic place, “one of the last of the earth’s eden-spots, unspoiled by exploitation and untouched by the hand of opulence.”

This idyllic working man’s paradise

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218 “Kre-o-La Beach”, promotional piece from International Paper Company in conjunction with Gulf Coast Orchards and Products Company, 1931.
stood as an experimental blend of residential community and fruit farms that ultimately could not sustain itself. The Kre-o-la colony established a short-lived but important precedent for balance between human life and promotion of community development on coast that would last through the New Deal and War years, and culminate in rise of the Sun Belt phenomena from 1960 to 1980 that was underwritten by small local industry and government defense and military installations across the Gulf South.

International Paper Company also attempted to connect the emergent pulpwood industry with reforestation programs, and worked in conjunction with Louisville and Nashville Railroad to establish an immigration and land office in Biloxi in 1945 to respond to the supposed waves of immigrants and northerners moving to the Mississippi Gulf Coast after New Deal improvements. With the emergence of new seafood facilities, expanded commerce and trade capabilities, and Ingalls shipbuilding in Pascagoula, the Mississippi Gulf Coast became increasingly multinational following the New Deal.

In 1933 the Gulfport Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with Rotary, Kiwanis, and Motor Club, released a promotional tract entitled, “Gulfport, Heart of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.” In the face of the Great Depression, this tract and others like it represent headstrong, relentless promotionalism driving development on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. The tract posits Gulfport as a “modern city” and one “destined to become the leading manufacturing and shipping point for the entire coast section.” This deterministic approach was informed by purportedly unparalleled advantages of “natural surroundings”. “Biloxi on the Mississippi Gulf Coast,” published in 1931 by the Biloxi Chamber of Commerce, was a series of vignettes on life in the region. This tract highlighted the “exotic” nature of community in terms of social,
cultural, environmental facets, while Nola Nance Oliver’s “The Gulf Coast of Mississippi” (1941), represents promotional literature capturing the supposed “aristocracy of beauty” which the Gulf Coast symbolized. On the Mississippi Gulf Coast, boosterism from 1920 to 1940 was often presented in vividly racial terms. One tract noted that, “this coastal country is the motherland of the white race in the lower Mississippi Valley.” Promotional information and tracts promoted notions of exotic culture and environment, with the Mississippi Gulf Coast presented as “white” enough to be accessible to a broad range of tourists, southerners, northerners, and foreign visitors, willing to spend their tourist dollars there. The natural and cultural environment of the Mississippi Gulf Coast was, put simply, just exotic enough to be palatable for promoters, developers, and visitors alike.

219 “Come to the Mississippi Coast,” tract published by Chicago and St. Louis Railroad, 1939.
Chapter III: New Deal landscapes on the Coast

Engaging the role of newspapers, literature, and promotional pieces that operated in conjunction with transformations created by the New Deal offers a window not only into corporate and public perceptions of post-Depression realities, but also of the actual on-the-ground impact of frequently interconnected agencies and their works. In south and coastal Mississippi, the Civilian Conservation Corps, National Youth Administration, Works Progress Administration, the Mississippi State Park Service, and the Mississippi State Planning Commission often worked in conjunction and had the broadest impact in their approach and execution of public works. The encompassing cultural, economic, and environmental transformation these agencies exerted from the mid-1930s through the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War II led to the creation of a military-industrial landscape on the Mississippi Coast that included development of several military bases and a NASA installation, and would eventually facilitate the rise of the Sun Belt boom/phenomena that lasted from the early 1960s through the 1980s. New Deal public works created tremendous overhaul while perpetuating social and cultural continuity. Efforts by public works agencies in the post-Depression period helped places like the Mississippi Coast enter the national mainstream and
become increasingly integrated within the state and nation because of the region’s perceived value within the broader realm of the Cold War United States military-industrial complex.

One of the earliest public works agencies to have a significant social and economic impact in Mississippi was the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA), which would later merge with the Works Progress Administration (WPA). From 1933 through the fall of 1936, the work of Mississippi native and director Ellen Woodward proved instrumental in the early success of not only the ERA, but later agencies within the state, as well. The complexity and dynamic nature of New Deal programs on the Mississippi Gulf Coast came to be exemplified through the work of Woodward, who would later serve as National Director of the ERA in Washington under Roosevelt. Under Woodward’s leadership of the ERA, and then the state WPA, construction of public library facilities in Walthall County, Mississippi from 1934-1935 was the first ERA/WPA project in south Mississippi. The ERA and WPA were responsible for building the first libraries in Walthall County, including the main library in Tylertown and rural WPA branch libraries in Enon and Lexie. Later, National Youth Administration library branches in Enon, Lexie, Tylertown, and Mesa, Mississippi were widely utilized by a previously marginalized rural population that noticed an increase in library circulation from 8,526 in 1934 to 52,423 in 1937. WPA depended on local gifts and supplies from the Board of Alderman, Superintendent of Education, and private benefactors. An example of the functionality of the built WPA environment located the library in the old Mayor’s office in Tylertown. The city paid

220 Notes from Ellen Woodward Paper Collection, housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, MS; Box 1, folders 14-17 used. The Walthall County library project was administered under the direction of the ERA from May 21-1934 to September 30, 1935, then under the direction of the WPA from October 1, 1935 to December 31, 1937.
221 Ibid., Woodward Papers, Box 1, folder 15 entitled “Early joint WPA/ERA Projects”.
222 Ibid., Woodward Papers, Box 1, folder 16, notes in “NYA Library Projects”.

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the rent, symbolizing the cooperative nature of agencies and programs under Roosevelt at the state and local level.

As assistant administrator of the WPA in Mississippi, Woodward was a vanguard in her own right, as were the programs she administered. Woodward successfully expanded notions of gender expectations in light of the crippling effects of the Great Depression, and eventually moved on to become an official with the federal Social Security Board in January 1939. This move began a 30 year career in public service in Washington, DC. In addition to the rise of efficient administrators within agencies, promotionalism continued to be an important facet of all New Deal programs in Mississippi and along the Gulf Coast. Woodward and Mississippi State CCC Director George Sadka worked in conjunction to develop and implement a “Make the Most of Mississippi” campaign under the direction of the State Board of Development. Goals of the campaign included the full utilization of natural and human resources of the state, and more specifically sought enhanced development of the dairy industry, establishment of new industries, new packing and canning plants along Gulf Coast and a subsequent increase in trade, commerce, shipping that would allow for oil, gas, and mineral development in south Mississippi. The “Use More Cotton” and “Made in Mississippi” campaigns began during New Deal years as part of statewide promotional effort and were underwritten by a distinct sense of regionalism, if not exceptionalism.223

Woodward and WPA proved successful in alleviating relief rolls in south Mississippi. Of 15,394 relief cases in and around Hattiesburg in 1934, only 2,000 relief cases remained two years later. The ERA, then WPA, emerged in Mississippi as not only centralizing agencies, but

223 Sadka Papers, housed at MDAH in Jackson, MS; Box 59, folders 1-3 utilized during research
also highly localized, as noticed in its involvement in the coastal counties. Officials placed sixteen “operations divisions” throughout the state, with Woodward’s approach and proposed programs specifically geared toward rural white women. Under the scope of the broader state program, WPA, along with CCC, proved central to the missionary approach of the Federal Government and New Deal agencies in Mississippi. Works performed by these agencies reshaped the physical environment, along with public and political perceptions of the natural world. In efforts to improve education, commerce, navigation, and infrastructure, the New Deal as an interconnected series of social programs, promoted a new sense of belonging for poverty-stricken, almost disparate rural people in the state. Agencies and programs offered new connections to the world, and like TVA in the northern half of the state, New Deal agencies in south Mississippi serve to effectively reorient human connections to place, identity, region. But at the same time, agencies and programs reinforced the racist limitations of Jim Crow for black and ethnic Mississippians.  

Woodward’s programs continued under the Civil Works Administration and in 1935 she became an assistant administrator of the WPA in Mississippi. She helped develop the State Board of Public Welfare created by Governor Hugh White in November 1932, sending persistent reminders to her directors to concentrate on placing women in civil works projects such as sanitation surveys, highway and park beautification, public building renovation, public

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224 Woodward Papers, MDAH, Jackson, MS; Box 62, folder 9 under “ERA Relief Cases”. The salient work by Woodward is highlighted in Martha Swain’s look at The Forgotten Woman: Ellen S. Woodward and Women’s Relief in the New Deal, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983). Swain astutely points out that New Deal historians have made little reference to the work relief activities for women under the programs administered by Henry L. Hopkins and the woman who devised or supervised the projects that provided income for at least 500,000 women under WPA.
records surveys, and museum development. She later helped to maintain women’s relief work rolls and was deeply committed to economic equality and social progress for more than the women for whom she found emergency employment. While Woodward certainly deserves recognition as one of the effective human engineers of the New Deal, those same New Deal projects perpetuated, rather than alleviated, racial and social iniquities. Women’s place within public works agencies and projects was generally limited in most outdoor work projects. Officials segregated sewing rooms, just as were all CCC and WPA camps.

Like Woodward, Marie L. Hoffman was a visionary leader for the implementation of New Deal programs and aid for Mississippi. After finishing her master’s degree in Social Work from Tulane in 1933, Hoffman became district supervisor for the Mississippi Chapter of Emergence Relief Agency and district supervisor for the coastal region of the state. She soon thereafter rose to rank of assistant state director of the ERA in Jackson and remained there until the federal government liquidated ERA in June 1943. Beyond their mere necessity and through the work of officials like Hoffman, public welfare programs in Mississippi were generally effective and almost always well-received. It was only in 1937 that the state of Mississippi created a state board of public welfare, some 40 years after the first Progressive-era antecedents. Work by women like Woodward and Hoffman shows that the labor of social workers proved integral to the success of the ERA/FERA in Mississippi. Social work and social aid programs, emphasized democracy, sensitivity, and the doctrine of equality. Highlighted by an undercurrent of New Deal Liberalism, organizations like TVA used notions imbued within the

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field of social work in attempting to repair or improve morale. This approach paralleled that of the development of professional ethics of social work emphasized by Hoffman.  

Created by FDR and Congress in the summer of 1934, the Works Progress Administration would subsume the ERA and take a central place within the scope of New Deal relief throughout the South. Mississippi was no different, and in a map showing the percent of population enrolled on general relief in Mississippi, the northeastern TVA counties and Piney Woods and coastal counties contained the highest percentage of citizens on general relief in April of 1934. All counties examined in this work were home to between 10 and 25 percent of residents on relief in the entire state of Mississippi. In 1935, Harrison, Hancock, Perry, George counties contained the highest percentage of citizens on the federal dole, and held 20-25% of relief population in the state. Dependence upon localities remained central to the WPA mission throughout the New Deal period; agency employment manuals issued in 1937 continued to emphasize the “need for local labor/residents on local projects.” Some four years after the agency’s initial implementation, approaches to WPA public works programs continued to be informed by precedents in the form of state Guides, as well as extensive historical studies and research conducted by employees within the Federal Writers Program.

WPA and CCC offices and camps in Homochitto, Perry, Saucier, Perkinston, Forest, Richton, Wiggins, Kiln, and Ocean Springs, Mississippi contained the largest number of enrollees of any camps within the state, and were home to 79 percent of all New Deal relief workers in

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226 See Personal Paper Collection of Marie L. Hoffman, housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS; Box 1-4 and inclusive folders pertain to New Deal agency work on local level in Mississippi.
228 Hoffman Papers, MDAH, box 42, folder 4, file 1-3 on “WPA status in MS”.

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the WPA and CCC in Mississippi. CCC camp selection and implementation fell under the direction of Ellen Woodward, and FERA established the precedent for camp placement in Mississippi, with coastal counties established under the “3rd District of WPA.” The Mississippi Conservation program spent $3 million on projects like airfields and other works classified as “white collar projects.” However, this amount constituted a little less than two percent of overall spending in Mississippi New Deal projects, and underscores the same neglect and peripheralization experienced in the Panhandle of Florida that will be discussed in the concluding section. Considering the relatively small percentage of funding it received, the WPA conducted a tremendous amount of work. The entire state agency had only 14 staff social workers to canvass the state’s 82 counties. WPA helped to reorganize and transform the state department of public welfare, and by 1939 the agency had created 120 new positions for social workers and electrical workers in the Greenwood, Tupelo, Brookhaven, and Hattiesburg districts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of the District Supervisory and executive positions were filled by men, with the one notable exception being Hoffman’s assistant director post. However, the encompassing nature of work by the Emergency Relief Administration and WPA in Mississippi can be evidenced by the activities undertaken by the women’s division in community planning and improvements, public service, health, and education.

In conjunction with the expansion of relief services and addition of women to the bureaucratic and administrative fabric of labor, the visionary and perhaps even revolutionary nature of the New Deal can be witnessed in the experience of the Civil Works Administration

229 Sadka Paper Collection, MDAH, box 13, folder 4, files 10-11 with notes on “Camps”.
230 Ibid., Sadka Papers, MDAH, box 12, folder 9, files 1-2.
231 Woodward Paper Collection, MDAH, box 4, folder 7, “Misc Notes”.
and Civilian Conservation Corps on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. One of the earliest Depression-era programs undertaken by the state and federal government in Mississippi was the Civil Works Administration, established in early 1934.\footnote{Program of the Civil Works Administration in Mississippi, July 1934 (Washington, D.C.: Emergency Relief Administration, 1934).} The mission and works of the CWA initially divided the state into familiar physiographic provinces—“Delta,” “Hills,” “Appalachia,” “Coastal Plain”—all with their own separate perception, ideological underpinnings, and socioeconomic realities. In November 17, 1933, CWA state administrators for Mississippi transferred all able-bodied persons working on relief projects to CWA rolls, a majority of whom lived in the ten coastal Mississippi counties. The mild winter of 1933-34 allowed CWA work to commence rapidly. George B. Power was administrator of CWA in the state, and took a deterministic approach to environment and transformation of place for the benefit of the common good. Local CWA boards were soon thereafter established in each of the state’s 82 counties, with projects originated by local boards and sent to Washington for (usually rapid) federal approval.

Combined with workers culled from the ranks of the unemployed, CWA laborers numbered over 115,000 in Mississippi in 1934, and repaired, expanded, and built new schools throughout Mississippi, spending over two million dollars on schools and school planning.\footnote{Annual Report: The CWA in Mississippi (Washington, D.C.: Emergency Relief Administration, 1934), 7-8.} The CWA repaired the state’s infrastructure to the tune of over $580,000 dollars over two years.\footnote{Ibid., The CWA in Mississippi, 8.} Massive indoor plumbing projects were conducted alongside the construction of airports and airparks in Gulfport and Biloxi. CWA laborers improved conditions in local jails and assisted with the modernization of Keesler Army Air Base and other fledgling military installations in south Mississippi. CWA demonstration projects in 1934 included Forest Fire
prevention campaigns that effectively served to redirect and reorient human interaction with
nature while providing a new foundation for principles of ecological stewardship and
sustainability. The CWA worked with remarkable efficiency and at the end of its efforts as an
agency, only seven of its over 300 projects were left in “unusable” condition in Mississippi.\footnote{Ibid., *The CWA in Mississippi*, 22.} CWA actually increased the relief load in the state and served as an awakening agent to the
potential and tangible power of the federal government to transform the lives of local citizens.
CWA projects helped relief cases decline from 1933-34, and established a successful precedent
for CCC in the state when duties and rolls of the CWA were transferred to the Civilian
Conservation Corps in late 1934.

As highlighted in the pages of Mississippi newspapers in Jackson and on the Coast, the
public viewed CCC and Soil Conservation Service as protectors of nature from industrial
expansion and capitalistic greed of the post-gilded age. While contemporary gardeners and
land managers lament CCC camps for planting kudzu across Mississippi as an early erosion
control method, the CCC itself was the brainchild of lumberman Fred A. Anderson of Gloster,
Mississippi. The CCC became imbued, particularly in the rural South, with notions of
masculinity and dominion of landscape and nature within its broader mission to transform boys
into men. The first CCC camp opened on April 7, 1933 in Luray, Virginia. Early camps often had
libraries, music, sporting competitions. In its attempts to maintain racial and social continuity
within the camp setting, camps were segregated, but formed locally. They were also
exceedingly white, with 95 percent Caucasian enrollment in Mississippi, despite the state’s nearly forty percent African American population in 1930.²³⁶

In Mississippi, the CCC sought as its goals the improvement and protection of the state’s timber and the implementation of soil conservation practices in rich farmlands of the state. The Corps would prove especially vital in south Mississippi, where the highest grade and most lucrative timber extraction practices took place. Wildlife and recreational facilities were also constructed, along with flood control projects and flood relief work. In all, 57,900 Civilian Conservation Corpsmen were enrolled from Mississippi in a 33 camps per year with state’s financial obligation at over sixty million. Within Mississippi, the Corps introduced contour farming, diversion ditches for drainage and disease prevention, and was responsible for an encompassing overhaul of formerly abandoned agricultural landscapes. The CCC was tremendously influential as a shaping force in physical and mental environment of the Mississippi Piney Woods and Gulf Coast. Furthermore, residents believed in the transformative power of the agency: men from the coastal counties of south Mississippi were nearly one and a half times more likely to join the CCC than their statewide contemporaries.²³⁷

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²³⁷ CCC enrollment by county, Mississippi (1940); Source: University of Virginia, Historical Census Data Browser online. [http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/](http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/).

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The Civilian Conservation Corps reshaped the natural world and human approaches to the natural environment with its work in camps and in the creation of state parks. George Sadka served state director of the CCC in Mississippi, and his papers focus on enrollment procedures and guidelines for establishing CCC camps. Sadka, who wrote his social work thesis at Tulane on the Selection Process for Youths in the Mississippi Civilian Conservation Corps, provided a distinct level of leadership that emphasized the interconnected nature of New Deal relief evidenced in cooperation between CCC, WPA, TVA, and various private entities across the state. Under Sadka’s 29 CCC camps operated in the state, as well as eight National Forests, five Private Forests, eleven Soil Conservation Service camps, three National Parks, and two State Parks. No other New Deal administrator had as broad of an impact in reshaping the natural environment as did Sadka. The bureaucratic structure of agencies like the CCC within Mississippi had an interconnected and overarching linkage with the broader centralizing vision of Roosevelt’s New Deal relief mission.

Samuel Lauderdale was director of safety for the CCC in Mississippi, and led a publicity effort that emphasized safety and leadership in the Corps’ printed material. In publications and pamphlets, safety became viewed as a part of the mission of efficiency espoused by the New Deal. “A cripple is of little use to the Nation and its rush job of the day,” one poster read, while another noted that, “As we enter this New Year with the nation fighting for its freedom and safety against aggression (both internal AND external), the safety of CCC enrollees from accidents is more vital than ever before”. Another noted that, “An injured worker IS as much as

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</table>
casualty to Industry (and the CCC) as a wounded soldier is to an Army.” The spirit of innovative efficiency emerged in the broader public and organizational appeal of agencies like the CCC. 238

In examining the agency’s works on the ground, CCC camps were located within five miles of an incorporated community. In south Mississippi, these included camps in Ocean Springs, Philadelphia, Brookhaven, Mendenhall, McComb, New Augusta, Richton, Brooklyn, and Bay Springs. CCC enrollment reached well over 2,000 by 1937239 Their wide-reaching and often innovative efforts to fight erosion in south Mississippi, CCC corpsmen planted kudzu vine, built dams, and planted non-native and invasive species like Black locust, Bermuda grass, and Himalayan blackberries. Corpsmen also developed nurseries and were commonly assisted with the “cooperation from citizens of community doing good,” according to George Sadka’s personal notes on several projects throughout the Piney Woods region. 240

Beyond administrative leadership, the impact of the Civilian Conservation Corps in south Mississippi can be noticed in the example of Paul Daughdrill. Born on July 26, 1915 in Brookhaven, Daughdrill enrolled in the CCC on August 7, 1935 after repeated unsuccessful attempts to find work in and around Copiah and Lincoln counties. Daughdrill worked in camps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Pop.(1930)</th>
<th>CCC Enrollment (1937-1940)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>30,115</td>
<td>220 (177w,43c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>7,523</td>
<td>246 (226w,20c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene</td>
<td>10,644</td>
<td>259 (240w,19c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hancock</td>
<td>11,415</td>
<td>122 (97w,25c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td>44,143</td>
<td>266 (223w,43c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>15,973</td>
<td>176 (154w,22c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamar</td>
<td>12,848</td>
<td>263 (240w,23c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl River</td>
<td>19,405</td>
<td>249 (230w,19c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>8,197</td>
<td>243 (218w,25c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone</td>
<td>5,704</td>
<td>118 (104w,14c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>165,967</td>
<td>2,162 CCC enrollees from south Mississippi (avg. 216/county)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

238 Personal papers of Samuel Lauderdale, housed at Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS; box 1, folders 1-3.
239 CCC Enrollment in Mississippi. In George Sadka papers, MDAH, box 2, folder 13, file entitled “CCC Enrollment by County, MS 1930-1940”
240 Sadka papers, box 2, folder 3, file 1, speech entitled “Recollections of Public Works in MS”.
at Canton, Richon, Brookhaven, and at Fort Barrancas, Florida as a “laborer,” the most common title for a CCC enrollee to carry. Like a majority of Mississippi men enrolled on CCC rosters, Daughdrill assisted in the “Tree Army’s” myriad forestry projects and the construction of state parks across south Mississippi. After being discharged from the CCC in 1937, he later worked in McComb in the railroad industry. Daughdrill’s personal recollections of the CCC convey a sense of the progressive (but not necessarily inclusive) missionary approach of the CCC, and more broadly, New Deal agencies in Mississippi during the 1930s. He helped gain recognition from then-Governor William Winter for “CCC Week” in Mississippi, beginning April 1983. Daughdrill’s experience with the CCC was transformative, but his time with the Tree Army was also representative of the transformation provided for thousands of other men and families impacted by the Great Depression.241

Yearbooks of individual CCC companies extend ever further beyond one enrollee’s perspective and demonstrate not only the activities, but the differences between camps on a more localized level. Because of the amount of information on works projects and enrollees within individual camps, these yearbooks are especially important in examining the CCC at a state level. While Roosevelt enacted the CCC on March 21, 1933, the first “Official Annual of District E, 4th Corps Area” yearbook of the CCC was published in 1935.242 The first CCC Camp in Mississippi was Company 4423 in Bude, with Captain H.K. Gardner serving as Commanding Officer. This camp was primarily engaged in road building, firefighting, and construction of fire lanes and telephone lines. Their purpose was multifaceted and not only engendered modern

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241 Personal Papers of Paul W. Daughdrill, housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS; boxes 1-3, folders 1-5 in each utilized above.
242 “Official Annual of District E, 4th Corps Area” yearbook, housed at Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS. Annual included Companies 4423, 471, 466 mentioned above.
economic and infrastructural development, but also conserved green space in an attempt to preserve natural resources. Company 471 in Brookhaven built bridges, roads, telephone lines, fire towers, as did Company 466 in Gloster, a camp that also assisted in disaster relief efforts after a tornado hit Gloster on April 6, 1935. Company 471’s annual report noted repeatedly the “spirit of conservation” guiding their work, and shows how the surrounding environment impacted and moulded the CCC’s work. Inexplicably, this notion remains neglected by scholars but evident in contemporary materials available on camps like Company 1486 of Perkinston, Mississippi.\(^{243}\)

Within the annual CCC Yearbook for District E, the summary of Company 1486 proves especially revealing. The book begins with a mildly anti-war perspective on the Camp’s existence, noting that, “Two great wars have been declared in the last two decades: one for the purpose of killing and destroying, the other for the purpose of protecting and creating. In the first young men shouldered rifles and marched into the foreign fields of battle and killed and were killed with a beastly passion. In the other declared only recently, young men are marching daily into God-given expanses of our \textit{native} land, with picks and shovels on their shoulders, with smiles on their faces, with the divine love of creation radiating from their very being, determined that our native land shall be preserved.”\(^{244}\) Although termed “the other war,” CCC’s work in fighting deforestation and the Great Depression presented to contemporaries as religiosity blended with civic purpose, and as noble of a cause as the First World War. Company 1486 also played a significant role in building telephone lines, roads, bridges, watch towers,

\(^{243}\text{Ibid., “Annual for District E”, MDAH, 14.}\)
boundary surveys, and fighting fires on land owned by the University of Mississippi that would eventually be sold to the federal government for expansion of Pearl River National Forest and Recreation Area near Picayune. The yearbook noted that, “one does not have to be a close observer to note that with all these improvements made in the forests there has been a vastly greater improvement made within the lives of individual members.”

245 Most enrollees in Company 1486, one of the most decorated CCC camps in existence at time, were from south Mississippi and Alabama. They helped transform and “enhance the value of land” held that would later be purchased by the United States Forest Service and transferred into annexation for location of the DeSoto National Forest.

The experiences of Company 1486 may have proved exemplary (or even exceptional), but it remains important to demonstrate the centrality of environmental conservation in both the practical and ideological approach of the CCC toward their work in the forests of south Mississippi. Company 1430 in Vicksburg primarily focused on work within Vicksburg National Battlefield, while Company 2422 (Hollandale and Holly Springs) assisted with erosion control, built dams, and helped build Leroy Percy State Park. Company 4426 in Lexington served as an internal service camp, wherein men were educated in High School and elementary academic subjects and trained in athletics, while CCC Camps in Durant, Canton, and Mendenhall worked in conjunction with state and federal forest service agencies in the construction of fire lanes, timber management practices, and turpentine distillery.

As revolutionary as the CCC may have been, it also served as a force of continuity in the upholding of rigid racial etiquette within and around camps in Mississippi. African American

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245 Ibid., “Annual for District E”, MDAH, 57.
camps in south Mississippi were decidedly different than their white counterparts; blacks were often left to construct their own camps, building upon arrival from segregated trains and transport with supplies merely dropped off in designated areas. This institutional neglect was symbolic of the approach of a state government that would not allow for blacks to be helped in completion of actual camps. Yearbooks canvassing the history of African American camps carried a condescending tone in stark contrast to their treatment of white camps, which were often viewed as “exceptional,” and “honorable,” while blacks in their camps were only lauded for their “ability to obey orders.” This is most evidently noticed in company yearbooks of Company 2442 (McComb), Company 4425 (Belzoni), Company 4427 (Utica), Company 3489 (Crosby). Black CCC enrollees always constructed their own camps and permanent structures after arriving at the camp site, and were commonly forced to endure the natural environment of the Mississippi woods for weeks while permanent structures and housing were constructed. 246 Like their white counterparts, African American Corpsmen worked to improve roads, built fire lanes, fire towers, bridges, and telephone lines. Black CCC camps in Stone and Harrison counties were central to the improvement of military facilities in the region including Camp Shelby, which would expand by the World War II period to serve as a permanent Army installation and headquarters of the Mississippi National Guard. Black CCC labor established the foundation for defense infrastructure within south Mississippi, work that would carry a wide reaching contemporary economic and social impact with the emergence of the Sun Belt boom by the mid-1960s.

246 “Official Annual of CCC District 4, 3rd Corps Area”, housed at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.
Company 231 consisted of men from New York assigned from Fort Dix, New Jersey and headquartered in Laurel. This company constructed 40 miles of truck trails, four vehicle bridges, sixteen miles of fire lanes, in addition to a 70,000 acre survey for planting, as well as assisting the Soil Conservation Service with a sheep damage survey, hog damage survey, and experimental plots in long leaf pine. Company 1255 in Camp Colmer, Richton, consisted of men primarily from New Jersey, but also included 16 experienced lumbermen from Mississippi who helped to develop and improve roads in the Chicksawhay National Forest north and east of Richton. Company 1254 from New Augusta shared characteristics and experience with Company 1255. These groups of former sawmill hands helped establish boundary lines for 40,000 acres of the Choctawhatchee National Forest, and constructed bridges, telephone lines, fire lanes, truck trails, and stump clearing service. Seed collection, erosion control, reduction of fire hazards, and fire fighting were regular duties for the members of Company 1484 from Kiln, one of the largest in the state with 105 members. This company consisted of enrollees from Forrest, Jones, and Stone counties who specialized in firefighting. Company 1484 completed 276 miles of linear survey work, and their annual meticulously notes the “1,736 man-days expended and 167 miles of fire breaks constructed” alongside two lookout towers, five miles of telephone lines, and 2,640 acres of forest stand improved within the 30,000 timber acres under their survey.\footnote{\textit{Official Annual of CCC District 5, 4th Corps Area}, housed at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.}

In addition to its development of natural resources and work in conjunction with private sector lumber businesses, the transformative (but often inconsistent) impact of the Civilian Conservation Corps presence in south Mississippi could also be demonstrated by the
establishment and development of the Mississippi State Park Service. Enacted under the Emergency Conservation Work Act (ECW) by FDR on March 31, 1933, the joint efforts of CCC and the State Park Service from April 1934 through January of 1937 relied on $500,000 of federal emergency funds.\textsuperscript{248} Officials in Greenville, Tupelo, Meridian, Morton, and Quitman were among the first to request the establishment of CCC camps for developing state parks. The first three State Parks were Leroy Percy in Hollandale, Tombigbee at Tupelo, and Clarkco at Quitman. Louisville State Park was the fourth site, with the fifth site located at Tishomingo State Park in the northeastern corner of the state. Roosevelt State Park, Wall Doxey, and Percy Quinn State Park were all established before any sites in south Mississippi Piney Woods or Gulf Coast were even considered, in spite of the fact that more relief dollars were allotted and more men per capita enrolled in New Deal agencies from south Mississippi pineywoods and Gulf Coast than anywhere else in the state. Magnolia State Park in Ocean Springs was the tenth and final CCC State Park created in Mississippi, and would emerge as a perennially underfunded, underpublicized park until its closing after Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Civilian Conservation Corps works combined with federal funding and early Sun Belt boosterism to create the “Pat Harrison Waterway District,” named in honor of south Mississippi’s foremost proponent of public works and encompassing the watersheds of all south Mississippi coastal counties. Resource development works completed by CCC crews at Big Creek, Dry Creek, Maynor Creek, Flint Creek, and Little Black Creek led to the creation of a federally designated Wild and Scenic River area at Black Creek in the DeSoto National Forest

\textsuperscript{248} Vertical File Collection on “New Deal”, housed at University of Mississippi Special Collections, University, MS.
and represented the genesis of conservation within coastal Mississippi. The establishment of DeSoto National Forest and protection of Black Creek Recreational area allowed for not only an ecological balance to emerge within the region, but also signaled a distinct shift of south Mississippi's economy away from extractive lumber industry toward multiple use conservation. Black Creek and Desoto National Forest signify the contemporary and salient impact of New Deal environmental conservation efforts. With a 140-mile, six-county watershed region that in 1986 was included within the National Wild and Scenic River Program, Black Creek remains a significant area for tourists, residents, and conservationists in south Mississippi. New Deal agency works and projects allowed for the newly-created Mississippi State Forestry commission and state park division to assume control of park-building duties following World War II, and emerged from the work and principles of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Also built on the foundation of efforts by the Civilian Conservation Corps in Mississippi were the National Youth Administration (NYA) and Mississippi State Planning Commission (MSPC). The NYA was especially welcomed in Mississippi, with 1 in 5 youths in Mississippi on the federal dole in 1935. Almost 6,000 total persons gained employment in the Mississippi NYA from 1936 to 43. Despite an average national monthly salary for NYA employees as $144.32, the monthly average of $15.63 in Mississippi was the second lowest in the country behind only Missouri. Despite their low pay and continued marginalization within broader national relief efforts, NYA employees in south Mississippi played an active role in the development of a

249 Vertical File Collection, “Black Creek” and “Desoto Forest”, McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.
250 Mississippi State Park Service, “A History of Mississippi State Parks”, housed at Vertical File Collection, “State Parks” at the University of Mississippi Special Collections at JD Williams Library, University. The development of individual state parks was largely initiated by the passage of the Emergency Conservation Works Act by FDR on March 31, 1933.
251 Vertical File Collection, The University of Mississippi Special Collections at JD Williams Library, “National Youth Administration, Publications and printed material (1936-43)”.

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military-industrial sector that would literally pave the way for the Sun Belt boom from 1960 to 1980. Official reports denote that the NYA assisted in the transformation of Camp Shelby.\textsuperscript{252} The camp, which initially opened in 1917, served as a training camp during World War I and was closed soon thereafter. Potential of the site and environmental qualities of the Gulf Coastal Plain led it to being selected in 1928 by the Mississippi National Guard for use as its headquarters. With help of the NYA in reconstructing facilities and overhauling the site’s land management, Camp Shelby emerged in 1938 as a NYA Youth Center and a centralizing point for the U.S. Army in the southeastern United States. Surrounded by second growth pine, Camp Shelby remains representative of conservation efforts being used and land reclaimed for purposes of government and what FDR termed and New Dealers believed was “the greater good.”

Created by the Mississippi legislature in 1936, the Mississippi State Planning Commission (MSPC) symbolized the planned social and economic engineering inherent in the approach of New Deal agencies nationally. Following the precedent established by Florida Governor Dave Sholtz’s plan for his state, the MSPC was dedicated to promoting tourism alongside paper and pulp manufacturing in coastal Mississippi. The Commission worked in conjunction and cooperation with local lumber businesses, railroad companies, and sawmills, representing a kind of government sponsorship of extractive industry, buffered by the potential of much lower wages for southern (and not coincidentally, African American) labor. The MSPC operated in conjunction with emergence of Rural Electrification Administration (REA). In 1935, less than one percent of Mississippi farms had electricity. Despite having 308,877 farms without electricity,

\textsuperscript{252} National Youth Administration, “Feasibility Report on the Use of Camp Shelby Facilities for an NYA Youth Center, 1938”, housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.
Mississippi was still allotted the least amount of REA funding ($829,200) of all southern states by nearly a half-million dollars. Seeking an “increased and integrated income,” the MSPC effectively emerged as a legislative arm for New Deal agencies to promote projects within the state and on the local level.\textsuperscript{253} MSPC efforts helped to increase federal funding available to the state’s farmers for soil reclamation and erosion control, as well as increasing program support for crop diversification and silviculture training for south Mississippi landholders. As demonstrated in its reports and publications, the MSPC became an intermediary liaison between New Deal agencies, local officials and businesses, and the federal government. The MSPC also conducted waterway surveys that examined the Pearl-Pascagoula drainage basin and Big Black-Yazoo drainage districts that helped determine and effectively limit flooding capabilities of the Pearl, Pascagoula, and Yellow Leaf rivers in south Mississippi. The MSPC noted that the Pascagoula River, which drains all coastal counties beside Harrison and Hancock, had been adversely impacted by erosion and environmental degradation from pulp mills, and increased population in basin that had all contributed to “deficiencies” outlined in reports by the Commission. The documentation of environmental and ecological impact of the lumber industry would play a central role in the establishment of DeSoto National Forest across much of south Mississippi’s “cut-over” lands.\textsuperscript{254}

In statewide reports issued in 1940, the MSPC effectively provided a county-by-county survey of Mississippi and suggested innovative and dynamic approach to land use and environmental rehabilitation. MSPC waterway and county reports emphasized the need for

\textsuperscript{253} Mississippi State Planning Commission Files, housed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, MS. See also vertical file on “MSPC” at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.

\textsuperscript{254} Drainage Basin and Waterway Reports of the Mississippi State Planning Commission, 1937; housed at MDAH, Jackson, MS, 23-26.
reforestation and to maximize potential resources like Camp Shelby in Forest County. It was in George County, which had fewer than 10,000 residents in 1939, that the MSPC noted that while the county’s “lakes have very little recreational value,” and its “Satsuma groves, farms, and pastures constitute economic status.” In its survey of south Mississippi, MSPC recommended over sixty percent of county lands in the ten coastal counties for reforestation. In Hancock county (pop.12,460 in 1940), MSPC’s emphasis centered on recreational capabilities of the area’s climate, location, scenic value, and “historic background.” In Jackson and Lamar counties, MSPC highlighted the importance of federal management of forests as a way to improve economy and lives of its residents. “The conclusion of federal forest purchase areas in this region points the way toward the modern era of silviculture,” noted the survey’s report on Jackson County lands, while in Lamar County (12,827 pop.), while the “development of areas near rural schools would be a major consideration by the counties that could afford such development, however, Lamar County cannot meet the recreational needs of its population.” In all, MSPC suggested reforestation of 362,000 acres out of 419,800 total acreage of state and federally owned forest lands in ten coastal counties.255

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255 MSPC Report: Coastal Counties of Mississippi (Jackson: Mississippi State Planning Commission, 1940), 3-38. MSPC also provided detailed census data for Mississippi counties to determine population gain/loss from 1920-30 Pop.loss/gain in south Mississippi, 1920-30:

-Forrest Co. gains 22.5 percent
-George Co. gains 11.7
-Harrison gains 16.7
-Pearl River gains 7.3
Meanwhile
-Hancock loses 6.1
-Jackson loses 26.2
-Perry loses 23.4
-Stone loses 26.2
-Lamar loses 17.3
-George loses 15.4

As throughout the rural South, the least previously populated coastal counties of Mississippi noticed a near-exodus of residents, particularly those between the ages of 18-30, to more urban and increasingly suburban counties. In the case of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, many residents of Perry, Stone, Lamar, and George counties left for expanded employment opportunities in Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson counties on the Gulf.
Development of distinct public space for recreation (and commercial development) emerged as one of the foremost legacies of New Deal public works in south Mississippi. Extensive surveying by federal agencies led to transformation of the landscape, a process that attempted to reverse the wide-reaching impact of timber deforestation in the coastal region. To attain the goals and mission of New Deal directives, federal and state officials in Mississippi often worked in close conjunction with powerful timber companies. The next section will outline the role of lumber companies in the environmental transformation of the New Deal landscape in south Mississippi.
Chapter IV: The Lumber Industry and New Deal conservation in south Mississippi

On the Mississippi Gulf Coast, New Deal agencies providing social services, environmental conservation, and economic relief worked on a local level to cooperatively execute the sometimes successful, sometimes mythical vision of Roosevelt’s reforming mission. New Deal experiences on the Mississippi Gulf Coast were made especially significant by the presence of a multi-national, globally significant lumber industry built on the extraction of both human labor and natural resources. New Deal agencies on the state and federal level worked in cooperation with the largest lumber and logging companies in coastal Mississippi to ensure mutually beneficial economic and political success. In conjunction with aforementioned port and harbor development in coastal cities, New Deal reforestation programs and experimental tree agriculture (sliviculture) established the foundation for emergence of a global lumber economy from Gulf Coast. Innovative approaches to timber harvesting and management, as well as the addition and improvement of cut-over lands purchased by the federal government and works projects undertaken by the CCC in forest camps had the potential to transform the lumber culture and economy of south Mississippi in a profound and lasting manner. The conjunction of private enterprise and government assistance was exemplified in the myriad
connections between the lumber industry and forest conservation works undertaken by New Deal agencies in south Mississippi.

New Deal works overhauled local economies, with this perhaps nowhere more evident than on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, where public works projects generated a period of economic diversification and development signaled by a distinct shift away from massive lumber extraction toward emergence of a military-defense industry during the Sun Belt boom of the mid twentieth century. Coastal Mississippi evolved from a lumber and timber economy to more diverse economic conditions rooted in the salvation of private business while at the same time government aid helped to create a distinct sense of recreational and tourist-space development. Underwritten by notions of development at odds with conservation and the dichotomy of the New Deal on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the conjunction and cooperation between private business and government aid allowed for a unique transformation. This is evidenced in federal and local uses of landscape through New Deal agencies and projects on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Development during the late 1930s of the Mississippi Forestry Service and establishment of Harrison Experimental Forest Station were innovative approaches in the face of the economic challenges of the Great Depression. The transformation of Mississippi’s lumber economy came only with the help of both federal and state level New Deal programs and aid. The historical experience of the lumber industry is instructive in determining the broader social, economic, and environmental impact of New Deal agencies and works in south Mississippi.

The inherently limiting and alternately nurturing interplay between industry and conservation presented itself most vividly in places most dependent upon natural resources like
south Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle. Judging from the experience of large lumber companies on the Coast, lumber firms often worked both in conjunction with and in opposition to New Deal agencies and programs, aid. Mississippi’s New Deal experience in forest management paved the way for future conservation and preservation of arboreal resources while also allowing for expansion of commercial forest products industry, particularly, with money primarily generated by activities of the State and National Forest Services. The dynamic nature of the lumber industry and its involvement in the New Deal in south Mississippi can be evidenced in a closer look at three substantial lumber companies in the area: the L.N. Dantzler Lumber Company, the H. Weston Lumber Company, and the Newman Lumber Co. The genesis of the Dantzler Lumber Company traces its roots back to the marriage of Lorenzo Nolley Dantzler to Erin Griffin, daughter of William Griffin, a proprietor of an antebellum Mississippi lumber mill. In 1880, Dantzler established the L.N. Dantzler Lumber Company which included two saw mills and a single mill along the Pascagoula River in Jackson County. By 1900, the Dantzlers’ shop produced 90 million board feet annually and soon exercised a virtual monopoly control over raw materials in the area. Yet this quick rise was inevitably accompanied by a quick fall, primarily due to deforestation of holdings in south Mississippi and fierce hurricanes that tore through the region in the first two decades of the 20th century.256

By 1913, the Dantzlers saw clearly the approaching end of virgin timber in Mississippi and moved to acquire timber holdings elsewhere, most notably in Oregon and Nicaragua. Eventually the company would begin a reforestation program but were hesitant early in the twentieth century to move firmly toward conservation of company lands. Dantzler was severely

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256 Personal Paper Collection of the Dantzler Lumber Company, housed at the University of Mississippi Special Collections, JD Williams Library, University, MS.
affected by the Depression and suspended all manufacturing operations in 1933. American entry into World War II helped resuscitate the logging and manufacturing operations, but after 1949 the company was reduced to a tree farming enterprise, selling timber on a selective basis in the form of saw logs, piling, poles, pulpwood, and other finished products. Dantzler and other Mississippi logging companies sold massive land acreages to the federal government in 1930s to offset effects of the Great Depression. The government transformed cut-over lands on Dantzler Company (and Weston Company, a rival competitor of Dantzler’s in Moss Point) land in Stone, Perry, and northern Harrison counties to create Desoto National Forest and Black Creek National Recreation Areas in south Mississippi.

Financial records of the Dantzler Company show rapidly declining profits in late 1920s, especially from 1930 to 1932.257 The company was obviously impacted by the global economic difficulties of the early 30s, but also by the nearly complete deforestation of Piney Woods holdings in south Mississippi by that time. Firmly entrenched within an increasingly globalized marketplace, the Dantzler Company reflected regional, national, and international developments, as it supplied nearly all local commercial and private businesses, as well. Business records of the Dantzler Company provide insight into the encompassing nature of lumber extraction and how it transformed both the natural and commercial environment of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. As early as 1901, Dantzler had mills at Moss Point, Howiston, and Van Cleave, in addition to shipping points in Pascagoula, Ship Island, and Gulfport. Dantzler Lumber Company was active in transformation of land and economy, increasingly globalized by 1930s, with mills working in conjunction with the Southern Pine Association in New Orleans, which

257 Dantzler Lumber Company Papers, Box 46, folders 3-5.
established minimum prices for worldwide southern lumber market. By the 1930s, southern pine emerged as the top-selling wood product in Europe.  

Depletion of forest resources reached a crescendo by the mid 1930s, after years of massive cyclical deforestation engulfing coastal Mississippi forest lands from the 1880s forward. The production of linear board feet declined in Mississippi every year during the 1930s, and unlike slightly more stable counterparts at Weston Lumber Company, the Dantzler Co. did not actively engage in reforestation of its lands until 1937, after the company had shut down operations for two years from 1932 to 1934. Following two decades of profit, timber purchases by the company fluctuate from the primary Dantzler logging areas and distribution points in Moss Point, Red Creek, and Black Creek. The firm’s Black Creek purchases and sales began to decline as early as 1926. As early as 1932, Dantzler and Black Creek Lumber Company sold foreclosed land and cut-over property in Stone and Greene counties to the federal government and United States Forest Service (USFS) for its expansion and incorporation within DeSoto National Forest. The CCC, USFS, WPA, NYA, Soil Conservation Services worked in concert with private industry to establish and ensure New Deal patterns of conservation without sacrificing an environmental consciousness for profit and industrial development, as was the case during the Progressive era. These agencies fostered a New Deal environmentalism that manifested itself in different ways nationally, but in Mississippi (and west Florida, as the next section will show), government agencies acted in accord with private, often extractive, industry in its attempts to transform and manage the landscape and human interactions with the natural world. This distinct blending of private and public spheres represented an encompassing social,
economic, political, and cultural change. The experience of firms on the Mississippi Gulf Coast differed from lumber companies in the Florida Panhandle, who were more or less inclined toward conservation and acting in cooperation with Washington to transform the surrounding landscape as a means of economic resuscitation. The Dantzler Company was only modestly interested in reforestation and planting of tung tree orchards, two methods widely promoted and utilize effectively by the federal government as a way of saving southern forests, sylviculture, and the lumber industry as a whole. After barely surviving the Depression and only hesitantly involving themselves in New Deal forestry works, the Dantzler Company failed to effectively utilize agency aid and sold the last of its remaining forest lands in Jackson County in 1947, closing as a company one year later.259

The experience of the Newman Company also speaks to the broader decline of the lumber industry in south Mississippi. The J.J. Newman Lumber Company—founded by Judson Jones Newman, a veteran lumberman who had been involved in the hemlock manufacturing business in Pennsylvania prior to his arrival in the Piney Woods of south Mississippi-operated in Hattiesburg from 1894 until its liquidation in 1943. Newman Company became the largest lumber company in Mississippi by 1903, and had emerged as one of the largest in the South. With its rapid ascension and equally rapid decline, the Newman Lumber Company exemplified the continually expanding Lumber mill industry of the early twentieth century in the Gulf South. In 1880, the company owned 400,000 acres of timberlands in south Mississippi, producing 75 million board feet of lumber per year. Ten years later, the federal government bestowed land grants of 22,000 acres to each of Mississippi’s public Institutions of Higher Learning, all of

259 Ibid., Dantzler Lumber Company Paper Collection, University of Mississippi Special Collections, JD Williams Library, University, MS. Box 41, folder 5 contains record ledgers that cease abruptly in mid March, 1947.
whom (with the exception of the University of Mississippi) sold their lands to Newman between 1895 and 1902. Like those of Dantzler Company, products of the Newman Company were widely distributed to both domestic and foreign markets and had a local impact as well. Newman Lumber Company was central to the socioeconomic modernization of Lamar and Forrest counties. At its height, the company employed 1,200 people and had the capacity to produce 200,000 board feet of lumber per day. And like Dantzler, Newman’s business prospered until the 1930s, when the timber supply began to dwindle and by 1935, Newman’s timberlands had become completely exhausted.260

The Newman Company traced itself to the earliest history of south Mississippi, having in 1910 donated land for the site of what would become the University of Southern Mississippi. Newman also donated the site for Camp Shelby, built in 1916. The 1920s proved to be difficult years for the company, with Newman journals from March 1928 depicting a declining income and payroll.261 Despite being one of the largest lumber companies in Mississippi, an air of mismanagement marks the account. Having made no attempts at product or industrial diversification (as evidenced in Newman ledgers), by the 1930s company timber supply had dwindled to 200,000 acres and by 1935 holdings were completely exhausted. Losing money even in niche products like turpentine pitch, the Newman Company stopped purchasing land by the end of 1928, and began to sell lots to the US Forest Service in 193. Federal agencies arrived in Stone County for the creation of DeSoto National Forest as early as November 1928. The Newman Company accumulated almost $320,000 of debt by January 1930, with no

260 Papers of the Newman Lumber Company, housed at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS. Box 2, folders 5-11, primarily financial documents and letter briefings on company background.
261 Ibid., Newman Lumber Company papers, record ledgers located in Box 3, folders 1-3.
reforestation costs listed and no federal unemployment rolls listed. By May 1930 the company had sold land to churches in rural Lamar County. Company records end abruptly in August of 1930, with a swift decline caused by economic depression but also (and perhaps primarily) because of deforestation and lack of financial oversight and willingness to accept federal aid beyond land purchases. Newman would subsist a decade longer as a sawmill and board planing firm, but would eventually close in 1943.

Other lumber firms in south Mississippi worked with the federal government to not only ensure their own economic survival, but to transform the forestry products marketplace and landscape. Like the Dantzler Company, H. Weston Lumber Company grew out of a sawmill operation purchased in 1854 in Pearl River County. In 1856, Henry Carre and WW Carre of Logtown opened their sawmill and in 1874 began to invest in timber lands in the surrounding coastal counties of south Mississippi. After purchase by J. Roland Weston, the H. Weston Lumber Company officially incorporated in 1889, and was especially active in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century. Most of the Weston’s lumber produced was sold to buyers in South America, allowing the company to open subsidiaries like the Weston Sand and Gravel Co. and the Riviera Land and Improvement Company, both founded in the 1920s. This establishment stood as an attempt by the company to diversify operations as company timber holdings became depleted. Partly as a reaction to demands of economy, the diversification of activities included the increased production of pine tar, aqua stores, creosoting, and paper production and was evidenced in

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262 Personal Papers of J. Roland Weston and the Weston Lumber Company, housed at the University of Mississippi Special Collections, JD Williams Library, University, MS. Boxes 1-4, folders include record ledgers and correspondence. Bulk of box 5 contains transaction receipts.
increased Weston investments by the mid-1930s in its Sand and Gravel Company and Riviera Land Company. Deforestation forced the expansion and diversification of Weston, and the development of newsprint paper production was symbolic of the shift in approach by the company as well. Chemical pulp from southern gumwoods and pines were used almost exclusively in newsprint and sent to Childersburg, Alabama for processing. Companies like Weston, through the aid of New Deal reforestation works, built a regional economy that grew to attain globalized significance and economic stature by the mid-1950s.

With timber estimates and sales and mill cut receipts steadily declining from 1920 to 1930, the H. Weston Lumber Company became a pioneer in the private reforestation of cutover lands, using CCC labor from camps in Stone County. Weston Lumber was a family operation, with papers of the Company covering the later period of the company’s operations documenting its decline despite sometimes successful attempts at diversification. J. Roland Weston, patriarch of the twentieth century Weston family and Company worked in conjunction with local officials in Pearl River County in attempts to resuscitate his failing lumber business with the help of federal funding and labor from federal agency projects. CCC reforestation camps in Harrison and Stone counties built fire lanes, planted seedlings, constructed new fire towers, and built wellheads for fire prevention on Weston lands, a move that allowed the company to globalize its harvested product through World War II and into the 1950s. Other activities carried out by CCC on Weston-held lands included construction and operation of a federal forest service nursery in Brooklyn which-located in the heart of Stone County-may have been the most heavily deforested region in the state, if not the entire nation. Correspondence from the Mississippi State Soil Conservation Service director to co-founder and company
principal Henry Weston in 1935 highlights the firm’s interest in expanding conservation and reforestation work taking place throughout the state during the height of the Great Depression. Cooperative works between the CCC, WPA, NYA, and Weston Company led to one of the largest forest conservation jobs in the U.S. occurring in Mississippi, with over 2 million acres of land in the boundaries of newly-acquired state and national forests across the state being conserved. In 1937, new national forests in Bienville, Biloxi, Pearl River were all designated in south Mississippi, consisting in 32 counties of the state.

Weston’s involvement in New Deal agencies did not stop at work done on the company’s land holdings, either. According to the firm’s business ledgers, Weston placed at least ten employees on federal unemployment and CCC roles by 1935. Despite-or perhaps because of-its smaller landholding and assets, Weston Company never ceased operations during the 1930s, unlike their counterparts at Dantzler. The firm’s accounting noted firm attention to detail and book keeping. By the early 1940s, Weston was even able to subcontract timber felling out to several local shops, including Goodyear Yellow Pine of Picayune. Building on a foundation of Weston established during the New Deal and through the help of forestry works, the firm became an integrated and globalized market component further exemplified in the expansion and purchasing of private property in south Mississippi for express purpose of oil, gas, and mineral rights. The firm enlisted the help of CCC, PWA, and WPA (as well as the help of the newly-founded Mississippi Forestry Commission) to clear land and lots for development of Riviera Land and Co. project, a move that allowed Weston to become single

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263 Ibid., Weston Lumber Company Papers, box 2, folder 17-18 describe agreements for timber sales between Weston and the state of Mississippi, along with conservation assistance coordination from U.S. Forest Service.
264 Weston Lumber Company Papers, box 4, folder 1-2.
largest landholder in the state, with even more acreage than the infamous Delta Pine and Land Co. The most significant difference between the Weston Company and its counterparts at Dantzler and most lumber firms in west Florida lies in Weston’s readiness to commence with reforestation work as early as the late 1910s. The Weston Company was truly progressive in its approach to conservation of the natural world in south Mississippi, and helped its business survive until the early 1990s when the company’s assets and land were sold to global lumber magnate Louisiana Pacific.

The exchange between private enterprise and public works entities helped government conservation efforts save 2 million acres in Mississippi, while the State Forest Service helped reforest and refurbish over 4 million acres in the state. The Harrison Experimental Federal forest service nursery in Brooklyn remains the second largest pine nursery in the U.S. with annual production of 30 million trees. From 1933 through 1937, the CCC planted one million black locust trees across south Mississippi’s privately owned forestlands. Even the most hesitant and provincial of residents, farmers, and business owners took advantage of federal aid, and those who did not failed to survive economically. Following feigned resistance in 1930-31 to what was often considered federal intrusion into local affairs via New Deal agencies and programs, Weston Company became decidedly pro-conservation upon seeing what windfall could be potentially created by New Deal projects. Weston became intimately linked with the Mississippi Forest Service, especially after January 1935 when the company sold a majority of its deforested holdings in Mississippi to the State Forest Service for purposes of “conservation and protection,” as outlined in the contract in which Weston leased land to the state for $1.00

\footnote{Report on the Establishment of the Harrison Experimental Forest (New Orleans: Southern Forest Institute, 1938), 13.}
and transferred taxation and property construction rights to the Mississippi State Forest Service. In a style perhaps a tribute to his southern evangelical roots, Company founder and chairman J. Roland Weston invoked spiritual justification for environmental conservation in promoting “faithful stewardship” during the 1936 annual meeting of the Mississippi Foresters Association in Jackson.266

Frequently converging with private entities like the Weston Company, the Mississippi State Forest Service was vitally important to the success of New Deal agencies and projects in the state’s coastal counties, with owned property to the total of $546,109.65, consisting of land fire towers, tower houses, telephone lines, and fire lanes.267 In Pearl River County alone, the Mississippi Forest Service constructed 196 miles of road, 100 miles of telephone lines, and 600 miles of plow fire breaks. In addition to public works agencies carrying out on-the-ground stewardship of forest land and development of resources, standards for conservation and environmental consciousness were established on the local level during the 1920s with mass-media circulation of information and pamphlets accessible across the Gulf South. The Mississippi Forest Service proved largely responsible for establishing a precedent of elevating

266 Weston Lumber Company Papers, box 3, folders 22, 24.
267 First Annual Report of the Mississippi State Forest Service (Jackson, MS: MSFS Printing Office), 1936, 20. Breakdown of ownership by MSFS, 1936:
-Land=$5,000
-Towers= $65,900
-Towerhouses= $36,600
-Ranger HQ= $5,000
-Storage Buildings= $10,450
-Water system= $8,496
-Roads= $223,360
-Telephone lines= $164,355
-Telephones= $6,785
-Misc.property= $257.00
-Physical property= $29,040
-Personal property= $17,069
Total personal and physical property= $564,109
public awareness of the natural world. As was evidenced throughout New Deal programs and their trajectory, campaigns for public awareness were thoroughly developed and generally successful. A 1928 Educational Department of Mississippi Forest Service pamphlet promoted Forestry Education in schools throughout the state, largely focusing on the state’s most forested (per/acre) regions—the northeastern Hills and Piney Woods of south Mississippi and coastal counties. Surprisingly insightful documents like this one engaged an awareness of depletion of forest resources as well as the growing disparity between consumption and export. Mississippi Forest Service cites its goal as to put “idle land to work” while also conserving natural resources. Emphasizing notions of “field AND forest” as vital to the success of Mississippi farmers, this publicly manifested combination of pragmatism and experimental reforestation established a distinct precedent for New Deal approach to environment. New Deal environmentalism, in turn, set a distinct precedent for passage of the 1944 Forest Harvesting Act in Mississippi, which denoted that no trees less than 10 inches in diameter should be used for naval stores production. This act would lead to the expansion of a mature and modernized silviculture throughout the state, as well as to the conservation of hundreds of thousands of trees and acres of once-deforested land on the Mississippi Coast alone. Reforestation and protection of timber becomes law and policy after World War II, built on a foundation rooted in conjunction of business interests and New Deal forestry works.

Beyond the work of well-known and well-documented agencies and some visionary private entities, federal effort at reforestation in coastal Mississippi was diverse and encompassing and often enlisted the help of state agencies like the Mississippi Forest Service,

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268 Vertical File on the “Mississippi Forestry Commission”, housed at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.
as well. In 1930 the first seedling production in the Brooklyn nursery rose from 3 million
protected acres in 1930 to 6.3 million protected acres by 1940. Successful passage of the
Forest Acreage Tax in 1932, as well as the federally-assisted creation of the Mississippi Forestry
Association six years later, demonstrated that New Deal had protection and conservation
methods operated effectively with goals of private and community-wide economic
redevelopment. Likewise, modernized forestry methods and increased environmental
awareness worked in conjunction with New Deal social and educational programming on state
level in Mississippi. Reforestation programs undertaken by agencies like the Mississippi Forestry
Service were central to the evolution of forestry to forest products industry becoming
globalized, internationalized by 1960s. The example of both stewardship and use of resources
for economic growth, redevelopment stands as a testament to work by the Mississippi Forestry
Service conducted at the Harrison Experimental Forest and Station in northern Harrison County.
Officials announced the site for the Forest and Station on April 1, 1939, and the project was to
be one of last substantial public works in Mississippi. The Harrison Forest and Station consisted
of 4,000 acres in Harrison County (Harrison Division) and the (McNeill Division), another 1,200
acres to the northwest in Pearl River County. With its proposal for an experimental station
noting the locally “favorable sentiment,” the Harrison complex stood as a foremost attempt at
complete restoration of forest that had been grazed and hunted over, partially deforested, and
prior to federal involvement, previously lacking in recreational opportunities and facilities. The
proposal report noted that “local residents very much interested in reestablishing game,”
attesting to not only the economic and cultural importance of fishing and hunting in rural

269 Report on the Southern Forest Institute and Harrison Experimental Forest (Washington, D.C.: United States
Forest Service, 1941).
Mississippi. The Harrison site emerged in part because of its accessibility to roads, railroads, the Mississippi Coast, and the ports and headquarters of the Southern Forest Association in New Orleans. Over two million dollars’ worth of buildings, storage sites, labs, greenhouses, and offices was constructed on the Harrison site acreage, completed in late 1939.270

The area around what would become the Harrison Station was part of three separate land zones: the DeSoto Forest, privately owned and mixed forestland, and the optimal area for longleaf pine. With forestry problems of south Mississippi cited by federal government as “of extreme importance,” activities at the Harrison Station included seed production, distribution, seedling planting and development of second-growth stands. The Harrison experiment station worked in conjunction with the USFS nursery in Brooklyn to help create a pine seedling nursery. The Harrison Station’s CCC and WPA crews were active in fire suppression and a distinct “multiple use” ethos emerges from Harrison Forest and Station. One of the primary motives of scientists at the Harrison Station was to improve methodology driving or underwriting emergent pine silviculture in region, as evidenced by establishment of 1959 “Southern Institute of Forest Genetics” on-site.271 This New Deal environmentalism offered a key precedent in establishment of later science and research at other southern forest experiment stations in Alexandria, Louisiana, Monticello, Arkansas, Nacogdoches, Texas, New Orleans, and Oxford, Mississippi and later in, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, and Starkville, Mississippi. As testament to the work of the Station on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, the next survey taken of Harrison in 1963 denoted improvement in soil and biota, as well as expansion of tree species. This encompassing

270 Harrison Experimental Forest and Station Files, housed at the University of Mississippi Special Collections, JD Williams Library, University, MS; series 3, box 27, folders 1-14, and series 4, box 27, folders 15-19.
271 Ibid., Harrison Experimental Forest and Station Files, series 5, box 33, folders 1-2, University of Mississippi Special Collection, JD Williams Library, University, MS.
mission to integrate agricultural, lumber, and human resources proved symbolic of broader New Deal activities in south Mississippi, with the culmination of activities at least partially fostering a stable forest economy in coastal Mississippi after the 1930s.\textsuperscript{272}

In addition to the reshaping of south Mississippi’s lumber industry caused by cooperation between receptive lumber companies and federal and state agencies, The Brooklyn Nursery, Harrison Experimental Station, and the Mississippi Forest Service remain as salient examples of the success of New Deal federal and state works in coastal Mississippi. These extant resources continue to build upon a foundation of scientific and social experimentalism blended with tenets of New Deal reforming spirit. As has been demonstrated by examining public perception and promotionalism, projects undertaken by a myriad of agencies, and cooperation between private business and a very publicly-minded government, New Deal works on the Mississippi Gulf Coast had both an immediate impact and enduring historical legacy.

In accepting the notion of “legacy” as a lasting and significant impact, tangible results of the New Deal in south Mississippi serve to uncover what made that experience of federal intervention and local cooperation unique. From 1933 through the beginning of World War II, public works by federal and state agencies created the foundation for a military-defense industry and emergence of outdoor recreational and tourist space in south Mississippi. In the early 1950s, federal authorities purchased land in Hancock and Pearl River counties for $750 million dollars in exchange for the agreement to develop Stennis Air Force Base, which would later become a second headquarters for the National Aeronautical and Space Administration.

\textsuperscript{272} \textit{Survey of Southern Forest Institute and Harrison Experimental Forest} (New Orleans: Southern Forest Institute, 1963), 19-21.
NASA’s regional presence and the boom engendered by New Deal programs three decades earlier created an encompassing overhaul of landscape and lifestyle of Hancock County, much in the same way of similar transformations in places like Panama City and Walton County, Florida. As part of a planned residential community for workers, the federal government in 1940 purchased 13,000 acres with subsequent near-immediate population growth in Bay St. Louis, Waveland, Pass Christian, Pearlington, Kiln, and Diamondhead. On land adjacent to the cities of Gulfport and Biloxi, Keesler Air Force Base used local NYA and WPA work to overhaul its facilities and expand into a training center for radar systems management and the Air Force’s AWACS unit. The Navy’s Construction Battalions were also transferred to Keesler, and continue to have a significant impact on various American warfronts. Post-New Deal and post-World War II development in Hancock County development (exemplified by NASA and Diamondhead) was symbolic of the New Deal agenda and a product of its aid, but had by the 1970s become significant on a national and even global level. In Harrison County, a civic emphasis on commercial, industrial, and residential development led to the dynamic development of the Port of Gulfport, various casinos, a tourist beach front, and scenic Back Bay rooted in New Deal approach to community engineering. Tourist space became especially important in Gulfport and Biloxi, where unfettered development with regard to

casinos was rampant and nine out of the ten original casino applications were accepted in 1992, despite several having code violations listed within their initial permits.

Development of the Harrison Industrial Seaway emerged symbolic of “Sun Belt” approach to commercial and industrial development, as well. The Seaway found its roots in the Balance Agriculture With Industry (BAWI) program. Soon after its incorporation in 1936, BAWI immediately expanded the oil industry’s permanent presence on the Mississippi Coast, particularly in Jackson County and Pascagoula. Operating under the guises of the Mississippi Industrial Act, BAWI afforded small towns a chance to build plants and sell or lease them to firms guaranteeing employment for local populace. In addition to supporting crop diversification and modernization of local infrastructures, BAWI projected a promotionalism and boosterism that helped to foment local support for projects like the Harrison Industrial Seaway. Expansion of the seaway allowed for increased maritime industry in the Back Bays of Gulfport and Biloxi, and helped keep private shipbuilding, repair, docking, and fishing competitive economically and socially viable for residents who did not want to work within the emergent military-defense industry like Ingalls shipbuilding in Pascagoula, a company responsible for the construction of nearly all nuclear submarines in the U.S. Navy’s fleet. BAWI represented another overlooked, salient New Deal program that lasted through the 1960s.

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274 See vertical file on “BAWI” and “Jackson County” housed at McCain Library and Special Collections, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.
Section III: The New Deal in the Florida Panhandle: A Comparative Conclusion

Having outlined the origins, evolution, and impact of New Deal public works in the Tennessee Valley and Gulf Coast of Mississippi, the final section of this work will contrast the aforementioned experiences in Mississippi with some of those in a comparable region in terms of its natural environment and social demographic- the Florida Panhandle. This conclusionary section will investigate differences and similarities between these two regions, and examines the public perception of New Deal works and the environment, the work of on-the-ground agencies, and the broader impact and legacy of public works in west Florida as they compare to those in Mississippi.

While federal funding for New Deal aid and programs was consistently higher in Mississippi than in Florida, it could be argued that federal projects had an even more demonstrative and transformative character in the fifteen western counties of Florida. New Deal works in Mississippi served to resuscitate cut-over land and rejuvenate an already existing economic and industrial infrastructure on the Gulf Coast. In contrast, public works projects and federal aid created an entirely new landscape on Florida’s west coast and inland Panhandle counties.
Chapter I: Historiographical context for the New Deal in the Florida panhandle, 1932-1940

Having examined the impact of New Deal public works agencies in northeast and coastal Mississippi, this final section will offer a comparative analysis of the shaping forces of change and continuity in a seemingly divergent, but also comparably similar natural and social environment in the Florida Panhandle. Public works under the Resettlement Administration, Tick and Hog Cholera Programs, the Florida State Conservation Board, and FERA from 1933-1940 in the Florida Panhandle demonstrate the dynamic and fluid character of the New Deal across the South. Contrary to what some students of the state’s history have argued, federal aid and public works projects in Florida were far from limited in scope and philosophy, and wide-reaching in their impact. Dynamic and transformative New Deal works in the Florida Panhandle stood as testament to the effectiveness of Roosevelt’s relief policies and programs.²⁷⁵

While public works on the Mississippi Gulf Coast represented the re-creation of an already existing infrastructure and setting that subsequently required larger amounts of federal relief funding, New Deal public works agencies and their projects in western Florida helped to

²⁷⁵ Charlton W. Tabeau and William Marina, A History of Florida (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1999, 3rd Ed.). In chapter 25, the authors state on pages 384-385 that, “The New Deal, which had begun in Florida before it did in the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, which began in March 1933, was limited in scope and philosophy.” Tabeau and Martin assert on page 389 that “To assess the contribution of the New Deal to recovery in Florida is difficult,” a point which will be challenged in this section.
shape an entirely new world by planning, developing, and implementing new infrastructures and spaces. Despite their geographic proximity, New Deal experiences differed greatly in both places while sharing some characteristics in terms of the federal trajectory of programs and works. As in Mississippi, forestry and conservation programs under the CCC and WPA engendered environmental and social transformation in western Florida. Two counties in particular—Okaloosa and Walton—will be briefly investigated as case studies into the impact of New Deal agencies in the region. As will be shown, New Deal works in the Panhandle served to actively create a new world for citizens within the fifteen western Florida counties.

As in the case of Mississippi, contemporary historical scholarship on the New Deal in western Florida remains relatively limited. Most works take a broader view of the Sunshine State, with some engaging the New Deal on a localized level in more populous south Florida. R. Lyn Rainard’s piece entitled, “Ready Cash on Easy Terms: Local Responses to the Depression in Lee County” offers an analysis and case study of the Depression’s impact and local responses to a prolonged emergency. The precedent for success of New Deal projects and agencies in Florida was underwritten by the shared experiences of the Great Depression and responses to economic crisis on local level. Rainard demonstrates that the people of Lee County united in an effort to use local, public, and private resources to alleviate want. Only massive federal aid would alleviate the Depression, and while New Deal programs did reduce economic trauma, they also fundamentally altered attitudes about the causes of poverty and about the purpose of federal assistance. The pronounced financial difficulties of the Florida economic bust of the late

1920s compounded the impact of the Depression on a local scale, in a way very similar to the collapse of the lumber industry in south Mississippi during the late 1920s.

Rainard shows that the local response to the Depression allowed for a transformation of physical environment under New Deal-era programs and agencies. Her case study of Lee County and the city of Fort Myers emphasizes the cooperative abilities of public and private sectors and their ability to alleviate hardships on a localized scale. As Rainard points out, “federal aid completed the obliteration of private benevolence in the county,” while in the winter of 1933-34, the Civil Works Administration was widely praised for hiring all idle (presumably only white) men in the county. In December of 1933, CWA money continued to trickle into Lee County, with FERA contributing large amounts of funds alongside WPA initiation a massive flood-control and channel-deepening project of the Caloosahatchee River. Rainard’s work on Lee County highlights how the New Deal won more public acclaim than any previous program or combination of programs, with CWA funds providing employment for every relief case and removing a tremendous burden from local government and charitable organizations, and at the same time providing a payroll which gave income to people who had not any in a long time. Along the way, CWA projects and transformation of the social environment created a shared consciousness among people by both reinforcing localized identity and self sustainability. An important distinction made by Rainard’s piece is that under the administration of the WPA, local governments sought approval for construction projects intended primarily to enhance the physical and aesthetic appeal of the community rather than combating unemployment.
As in Mississippi and throughout the South, persistent local boosterism served as the foundation for New Deal projects in southwest Florida. Rainard’s example of Fort Myers and Lee County emphasizes the profound shift in federal funding purposes moving from relief to commercial and economic redevelopment undertaken by the mid 1930s. As Rainard points out, neither local governmental nor private funds sufficed in ameliorating the effects of economic disaster. Only the vast resources of the federal government managed to blunt the hardships resulting from the Depression. That being said, federal aid and funding did not prevent Fort Myers from declaring bankruptcy during the 1940s, largely as a result of debts incurred during the Depression that had been piled atop earlier debts.

In *New Deal in South Florida* (2008), essays examine the process of community and construction of federally-funded buildings in south Florida, while managing to somehow neglect the more far-reaching impact of federal agencies and aid in the northern half of the state. Marginalization of the Panhandle and north Florida in their work is indicative of a trend in both Florida historiography and New Deal historiography. The impact of the New Deal in the Panhandle was much more complex and nuanced than in south Florida, where buildings and edifices constructed during the period stand as obvious physical testament to the role of federal aid and works. Stuart and Stack are correct to assert that the New Deal focused on national transformations through attempts to find more human and positive approaches to solving problems at the *local* level by rethinking relationships between federal and state governments, but fail to follow through with this linear progression with examples in south Florida. The authors focus on attempts to fit in with recent contributions to New Deal studies.

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277 Ibid., Rainard, “Ready Cash on Easy Terms”, 347.
wherein investigations of the built environment often coincide with studies of political history of New Deal in the state. By its nature, this approach is exclusive of rural (or even unpaved) areas, and is symbolic of the exclusivity of New Deal studies that neglect to realize the wide-reaching impact of programs and aid outside of developing urban areas. Rather, the authors tend to simplistically categorize the Panhandle and assign race as the only complexity involved in New Deal transformation of the environment in more rural or “southern” regions.\textsuperscript{278}

Despite its distance over 500 miles from the pinewoods of the Panhandle, local responses to Depression and New Deal projects in Key West prove instructive, as well. Durward Long’s piece on “Key West and the New Deal, 1934-36” shows not only that the Depression started much earlier in Florida than the rest of the nation, but also that isolated and rural were most severely impacted by Depression. The physical and social foundations of communities had always been tenuous across Florida, but like Key West, had usually managed to survive.\textsuperscript{279} By 1932, Key West-like many of its northward neighbors who were closer to the Deep South than Cuba-was unable to sustain its fiscal responsibilities and had no viable economic base to combat the shared experience of the economic bust prevalent across the state. Blending promotionalism with commercial appeal, Key West city officials used federal funds and relief programs to reinvent their city as a tourist town with residential and recreational developments. On July 15, 1934, FERA helped inaugurate Florida Emergency Relief Administrator Julius F. Stone’s program for Key West. Emphasizing local cooperation and

\textsuperscript{278} John A. Stuart and John F. Stack, \textit{The New Deal in South Florida} (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2008), 201-210.
\textsuperscript{279} Durward Long, “Key West and the New Deal”, in \textit{Florida Historical Quarterly} vol.46, issue 3, January 1968, 209-218
activity, the local Key West FERA Administration consisted of departments of social service, housing, art, research and statistics, engineering, beautification, recreation, and publicity.

Long highlights the cultural and social differences between native “Conchs” and the goals and trajectory of some federal projects on the islands. A similar reaction fomented in the Panhandle, where a clash between traditionalism (stasis) and modernism (change) occurred during the New Deal period. Like Ellen Woodward’s work with the Mississippi FERA, Florida had its own vanguards working amongst federal agencies in attempts to elevate the state out of the depths of poverty in the 1930s, as Robert E. Snyder points out in his piece on “Marion Post and the Farm Security Administration in Florida.” To show the needs of the ill-housed, ill-fed and ill-clothes during the Great Depression, and to record the progress made by the New Deal, a documentary photography project was established in 1935 in the Resettlement Administration (RA) and became in 1937 part of the newly-created Farm Security Administration (FSA). The RA emerged as a program of national significance, much in the same way that Farm Photographs by the WPA in Mississippi did. Under the direction of Roy Stryker, the Historical Section employed over 20 photographers in Florida. Stryker persevered in the face of public and federal criticism to spend nearly one million dollars and along the way, compiled a file of over a quarter-million images emphasizing the transformation of the natural environment of the Sunshine State. One Farm Security Administration photographer who benefited most from the change in direction under Stryker in Florida was Marion Post. Post’s photos highlight the desperate economic and social situation occurring throughout Florida; however, as Snyder fails to point out, her experience paralleled that of the approach taken by the Resettlement
Administration within the state. More frequently, photography projects neglected the distant reaches of the Panhandle in order to focus on large-scale, commercial agriculture enterprises (such as the emergence of Big Sugar) in south Florida.

That being said, Marion’s assignments were generally directed toward the short subject and sampler variety, rather than the comparatively large mosaics undertaken by FERA and RA photographers elsewhere throughout the South. Like her counterpart Woodward in Mississippi, Post transcended traditional gender expectations by applying her artwork to a nationally significant undertaking and earned fame and respect (if not notoriety) along the way, another point missed by Snyder’s cursory glance at her career. The life and career of Marion Post was also examined in essays in *New Deal in South Florida* by Mary N. Woods, who makes clear the connections that New Deal programs helped to create the Sun Belt of the postwar era, at least in Florida. Both FSA photographs and Woods’s own essay denotes the competing visions and perceptions of Florida as rooted in tourism, transience as compared to agriculturally inclined, traditionally southern ways of life. Michael Earlibach’s *FSA Photographs of Florida* (1993) demonstrates the salient power of FSA photos of the Sunshine State as government-sponsored fine art, in Florida as in Mississippi. Earlibach demonstrates the political value of this work was initially more important than its aesthetic value or appeal. FSA photos continue to serve as historical and cultural artifacts. The work of FSA photographers was one of the many arms of an organization that carried a tremendous impact on New Deal-era Florida, beginning with its outgrowth from the Resettlement Administration in 1937.

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Only one manuscript-length piece has been written on the impact of the New Deal on Florida politics: James W. Dunn’s *New Deal and Florida Politics*. Dunn shows that the Soil Conservation Service and the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture were of considerable help to Florida’s farmers through their programs of soil erosion control, fire prevention, and reforestation. The Civilian Conservation Corps provided work for more than 42,000 young men in Florida, and operated seventeen camps that carried out projects such as reforestation, forest maintenance, fighting forest fires, and constructing fire trails, truck trails, and rural roads. Dunn points out that New Deal rural programs were of assistance, too, in upgrading the general quality of farm life in the state. The Rural Electrification Administration provided electric power to rural people who had previously been forced to rely on kerosene lamps and wax candles. In all, the REA loaned the funds to rural electric cooperatives for the stringing of 624 miles of electric line to serve 2,337 farm families in the state.  

The author highlights how the Resettlement Administration and its successor, the Farm Security Administration, helped tenants and unemployed agricultural workers of north Florida and the migrants of south Florida not only subsist at above-poverty levels, but gain a better appreciation of their collective worth in modern society. Dunn argues that the New Deal maintained and broadened democratic traditions in the country by involving farm tenants, unemployed agricultural workers, and the urban unemployment in a direct grass-roots participation with a federal government that was interested in the welfare of the people. However, Dunn overstates the importance and supposedly wide-reaching arm of the New Deal in urban areas and neglects that higher than average number of citizens in rural counties who

received social welfare relief from New Deal programs. The author succeeds in presenting a broader view of New Deal works in Florida. By 1938, the PWA had completed 137 projects in Florida that included the construction of forty-two new schools, the building of various university structures, courthouses, libraries, auditoriums, recreational centers, school gymnasiums, and the completion of municipal projects that included twenty-seven waterworks systems, six sewer systems, a number of bridges, and street pavings.  

*Outposts on the Gulf* by William Warren Rogers examines the history of Apalachicola and Port St. Joe as distinct and removed from the rest of Florida, if not the rest of the surrounding Panhandle region. Rogers argues that because of the extreme geographic isolation partially caused by the area’s natural physiography, 1930s notions of the Panhandle as an “outpost” region and its inherent (if not intrinsic) “wilderness” limited development and contact with the outside/developed world in Apalachicola and St. Vincent Sound. It was not until the New Deal that Franklin and Bay counties became connected to rest of the world via new roads, railroads, airstrips, shipping channels, and canals, and this infrastructure development would have a wide-reaching impact on the western counties of the Florida Panhandle. The town of Apalachicola and Franklin County represent smaller microcosms of historical development more broadly in the region, largely rooted in the extraction of resources. Rogers does, however, demonstrate the immediate and localized impact of federal funding in the most rural and isolated parts of the Sunshine State. FERA funds built a mattress factory in Carrabelle and built an airport in Apalachicola in 1934, alongside money from WPA and PWA accounts that served to boost local economies. Forty six Franklin County men served

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283 Ibid, Dunn, 291.
in 1937 in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and one year later, the county had 125 residents working on federal projects and another 281 who were part-time employees.\textsuperscript{284}

The most significant work on the historical transformation of the panhandle environment is *Green Empire: The St. Joe Company and the Remaking of Florida’s Panhandle* (2004) by Kathryn Ziewitz and June Wiaz. Although it does include some valuable historical analysis, the work is primarily aimed at a contemporary, post-1980 treatment of the St. Joe Paper (and later, real estate/land) Company of northwest Florida and its wide-reaching impact on the natural world. Although it fails to successfully fill historiographical gaps between the Great Depression and World War II in the Florida Panhandle, the book successfully examines what authors call the “increasingly fuzzy lines” between public and private investment. Ziewitz and Wiaz show that St. Joe Company, through its forest products and (more recently) land and real estate development, has actively attempted to remake the Panhandle on its way to creating a “Green Empire” without consideration to the company’s tremendous environmental and socio-cultural impact on the region. As the authors point out, The Green Empire story is important because the newest wave of change sweeping across the Panhandle will leave a more permanent mark than any land use that has come before, even the wholesale timbering of a century ago. Although St. Joe Company is not the only agent of environmental change, it is, because of the scope of its plans and its political and fiscal power, the leader. The remaking of the Green Empire (referring to both the land owned by St. Joe Co. and its corporate empire) is

occurring during a time of increasingly fuzzy differentiation between public and private spheres of influence, decision making, and funding.285

Built on the foundation of post-New Deal and World War II economic revitalization and development of local infrastructures, real estate development and New Urbanist resorts like Seaside have paved the way for St. Joe’s economic machine to perpetuate its influence. The authors thoroughly demonstrate that St. Joe Company stands to shape the region’s future as keenly as it has its past and as thoroughly as Disney has shaped central Florida. St. Joe Company and their machine-like efficiency are exemplary of the grasp of private industry and its role in the transformation of land and environment in the twentieth century South that is historically tied to exploitation of natural resources beginning as early as the 1820s. As Ziewitz and Wiaz point out, St. Joe Company was merely the most efficient company to extract wealth from miles of flatwood piney forests, beginning with the DuPont family and reaching its zenith under Edward Ball from 1930 to 1980. Wood products and commercial and residential development continue to drive St. Joe’s economic machine and as the authors state, “to developers, nature is an attraction, but one that needs to be controlled and shaped to suit the needs of their customers, the home buyers.”286 As a result, entire communities, even regions like the Panhandle, become historically linked to resource exploitation, and, as the vehicles of production, propelled the company’s economic interests of development.

From its genesis as an organization, St. Joe has maximized a profit-driven efficiency evident in all aspects of the company. St. Joe Paper was single-minded in its attempts to

286 Ibid., Ziewitz and Wiaz,
maximize pulp production from its lands. Whereas other paper companies sought integrated use of their land—with a portfolio of products from turpentine, saw timber, pilings, poles and more. Ziewitz and Wiaz show that from the beginning, St. Joe focused primarily on pulp milling, a heavily and efficiently extractive method of production. Furthermore, clear-cutting and fire-suppression techniques symbolize St. Joe’s historical disregard for the natural environment and company’s willingness to transform the landscape to meet its increasingly globalized economic demands. One example of this approach is highlighted by the demise of the Torreya Pine, an extremely rare species found only in the panhandle of Florida, that was decimated by clear-cutting by the St. Joe Company in the 1930s and 40s.

Leadership at all levels of the company integrated a profit-first trajectory. The activities of former director Edward Ball epitomized this approach, as well. Ball often claimed to be America’s foremost “conservationist” as a way to literally confuse his enemies and for political expediency. In truth, Ball was the most steadfast developer in Florida’s twentieth century history, and his growth-minded leadership drove St. Joe Company to move from lumber to real-estate development during the early 1900s. Meanwhile, St. Joe utilized notions of supposed population growth in the Panhandle to justify its callous approach. However, counties in south Florida experienced ten-fold increases in in-migration compared to those in the Panhandle did from 1930 to 1990. As the authors demonstrate, the St. Joe Company effectively created chaos from stasis. Furthermore, St. Joe mills have left an enormous environmental legacy in the Panhandle, primarily in terms of lingering toxins and dioxins in the region’s aquatic resources. The interconnected nature of industrial exploitation shows that waste discharged into canals makes its way toward intercoastal waterway, then to St. Joe Bay, and on to the Gulf
and along the way destroys recreational opportunities, fishing, and beaches while leaving a trail of ecological destruction in its wake. Dioxins released by St. Joe Company were particularly acute in the Panhandle, where they were generated in various ways, most commonly in municipal and medical waste incineration, power plant production, plastics manufacturing, and petroleum processing. The poisons produced at paper mills are created by the interaction of chlorine used for bleaching wood pulp with carbon-containing compounds in wood pulp, and are found mainly in the sludge from the resulting wastewater effluent historically produced by St. Joe Company.\(^{287}\)

*Green Empire* demonstrates most clearly that St. Joe’s has perpetuated a continual and linear legacy of environmental degradation in the name of economic profit. Although this fact does not make it unique as a company, its ability to so thoroughly transform the landscape and the natural environment alongside those profit-making mechanisms and structures does. While Ziewitz and Wiaz exhaustively demonstrate the contemporary impact of St. Joe, the authors fail to fully engage historical circumstances of the emergence of the Company, especially during the Great Depression and New Deal eras. The authors also fail to demonstrate that by 1938, federal aid in the form of New Deal legislation and programs and agencies led to the emergence of St. Joe Company as a multi-national, globalized entity by time World War II approaches. St. Joe could not have flourished without labor from WPA/CCC alongside financial investments from the National Recovery Act and compliance of the state with federal interests in regard to industrial development. With the help of New Deal agencies and federal aid, St. Joe becomes

\(^{287}\) Ibid., Ziewitz and Wiaz, 103, 116.
exemplary of the power of private industry and its role in exploitation of land and environment throughout the South.

Despite the stature of Florida’s Panhandle region within the mainstream historical consciousness, scholars have recognized the importance of examining public perceptions of the New Deal through agencies like the Works Progress Administration. Altogether 32,000 Floridians had jobs with WPA by 1936, compared to 15,000 in all other agencies combined. The WPA proved incredibly important in both Mississippi and Florida, and allowed for redevelopment and as a nexus for the Sun Belt phenomena. WPA works helped engender a new, if not intrinsically unique, trajectory toward land use and infrastructure development in Florida.  

In Noll and Tegeder’s *Ditch of Dreams: the Cross Florida Canal*, the authors show that the proposed “Cross Florida Canal” (CFC) stood as symbolic of the desire of Florida developers, business interests, and politicians to control and harness natural resources for the sake of potential profit. The CFC project was first proposed because of the need for jobs during the Great Depression, with construction beginning in earnest in the 1930s as part of Roosevelt’s New Deal. Construction of the CFC continued slowly through the 1950s and 60s, but ultimately halted for the last time in 1970, thanks to efforts of environmentalists and a grassroots movement led by activists like Marjorie Carr. Officially canceled in 1991, the project speaks to competing visions of progress, economic growth, and environmental preservation within a fragile ecosystem. With its New Deal origins, the Cross Florida Canal and the fight over it also became symbolic of the broader transformation of landscape and dilemma of development.  

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The prolific growth of the Sun Belt era in Florida was largely made possible by the expansion of local economies and infrastructures following the New Deal period and World War II. In order to gain a more complete understanding of the impact or change wrought by federal public works in Florida, it is necessary to first look at the earliest incorporation and implementation of New Deal agencies within the most rural and economically troubled section of the state. Having established the historical context and canvassed scholarly examinations of New Deal works in Florida, the next chapter will highlight public works and aid projects occurring in the state’s western counties that would foster further environmental and social transformation in the region through the 1930s.
Chapter II: Setting a Precedent: Early New Deal Works in the Panhandle

The earliest New Deal agency works in Florida extended beyond the well-known folklife and federal writers projects in the state, programs that have been most commonly canvassed by scholars. The extraordinary documentary folklife program undertaken in the state during the 1930s historically overshadows other agency works in the state, with Florida New Deal environmentalism and the transformation of landscapes social, cultural, economic, and political remaining understudied and underutilized as resources to gain a broader understanding of the past. Works undertaken by the Resettlement Administration (RA), Farm Security Administration (FSA), as well as the Florida State Board of Conservation and Park Service, were equally significant to extracting rural Florida from the depths of the Great Depression.

As early as 1932, the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration emerged as significant federal entities within the Florida Panhandle. Widespread collapse of commercial and residential development throughout the state, along with the exhaustion of timber resources in more rural areas, signaled the beginning of the Great Depression in Florida. Throughout the 1920s, Florida’s economic profile was similar to states like Alabama and Mississippi which had limited manufacturing capabilities and a rural population. The economic consequences of real-estate and development collapse were exacerbated by drought in 1927
and invasion of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly in the spring of that same year, as well. Floridians’ income declined steadily in the early 1930s and by 1933, 26 percent of state was receiving public assistance from either state or federal sources primarily channeled through the RA and FSA.  

Certain areas of Florida’s agricultural economy improved under the direction of the RA and FSA during the early 1930s, but were largely limited to entrepreneurs who established industrial vegetable and fruit farms in south Florida, benefitting from a discovery in 1928 wherein farmers added copper sulphate to previously unproductive soil to enhance fertility. This agricultural innovation occurred some 400 miles-but in reality, a world away-from the chronic rural poverty that engulfed much of the state’s western counties. There was in the Florida Panhandle counties a cyclical rural economy built upon the backs of inexpensive migratory labor that created boomtowns and change in the landscape while increasing disparities of wealth between landowners and laborers and furthering the divide socially and economically between north Floridians and residents of the southeastern third of the state. Meanwhile, expanded economic opportunity for south Florida left northwestern communities on the periphery. Public education remained minimal, social services suffered, and migrant farm workers often became stranded in the Panhandle following crop harvests or farm failure and foreclosures.

A more acute reverberation of the “bust” in Florida held sway in the Panhandle, where a decline of forest resources led to a shortage of work for sawmill, timber, and turpentine

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laborers. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) worked especially well for large, established farms, of which very few existed in the Panhandle. In first two years of the 1930s, the Farm Security Administration extended its work into Florida. FSA proved vital to the publicity of New Deal agencies and programs and in an increasingly broader technological world of the 1930s, news reels and still photographs reached millions of Americans while helping enhance public understanding and knowledge of New Deal programs like FSA in areas like the Florida Panhandle. Perhaps more importantly, the immediate and demonstrative impact of the Farm Security Administration highlights just how poor sections of the rural South were during the Depression and New Deal eras.

In helping to cement a legacy of outreach promoted by federal programs and agencies, FSA’s images of Florida in the 1930s most clearly exhibit a contrast of lifestyle among residents. Although the migrant worker predominates, many images show daily middle-class life. Whether the FSA project was used to essentially promote the New Deal or whether it is an example of successful federally funded art, photographs by Marion Post Wolcott and Arthur Rothstein reveal yet another facet of Depression-era America with rural Florida serving as the backdrop.

Created in conjunction with the WPA in 1935, the Resettlement Administration worked in conjunction with WPA in 1935 and had a distinct and direct impact on the Panhandle. One of


\footnote{Major Resettlement Administration programs in the Florida panhandle were composed of:
  1. Wakulla Agricultural Demonstration Project near TLH
  2. Withlacoochee River Ag. Project in Panhandle
  3. Combination Reforestation Project and Wildlife Reserve stretching across Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties
     See also W.A. Hartman, “Revamping Land Use in Florida”, Florida Historical Quarterly no.47, fall 1979, p.81-99.}
the first projects undertaken between the FSA and RA was the Wakulla Project, a land reclamation experiment in Wakulla County that began after 262,000 acres of Leon and Wakulla county land was optioned to the federal government and Resettlement Administration. The Wakulla and Withlacoochee land reclamation projects demonstrate the transformative powers of New Deal agencies and programs while serving as examples of the RA’s work and manifestations of an inclusive New Deal environmentalism that had a salient and immediate impact on the rural South.

Formerly an area rich with pine forests alongside cypress and valuable native hardwoods, lands inclusive in the Wakulla Project had been clear-cut several times since the region’s first settlement and by the 1930s could no longer support farming or timbering activities. Fires and the destruction of trees for turpentine production had contributed to the decline of the area, as well. A portion of the land was later added to the St. Marks Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, with remaining acreage optioned to the U.S. Forest Service as an addition to the Apalachicola National Forest. The Withlacoochee Project involved the restoration of approximately 113,000 acres of land, 45,000 acres of which were set aside as pasture for cattle by the Resettlement Administration. Both projects were instrumental in their immediate impact in restoring the agricultural economy of northwest Florida.

Meanwhile, Resettlement Administration activities in Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, and Washington counties differed from the Wakulla and Withlacoochee projects in their emphasis on the development of fish and game resources, which provided badly needed

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alternative uses for submarginal farmlands. Although short-lived, the Resettlement Administration proved vital to New Deal efforts in the rural South, especially in cut-over regions like south Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle. The RA also helped establish small farms on which displaced farmers or those cultivating unproductive land could be resettled. In and around Pensacola in Escambia County (where unemployment soared as a result of the decline of the lumber industry) farms of approximately 100 acres, including a four-or five-room frame house, a barn, and outbuildings, were made available to approximately three hundred farming families.

As L.C. Gray, chief of the Land Policy Section of the RA in Florida, explained, “These people...needed funds and they often need technical help. The government is offering them both. It is making them loans and it is giving them advice on the best methods of working their land. It is testing their soil to determine whether or not it is suitable for certain crops, it is helping them select the correct fertilizer and the best seed.” By January 1, 1937, the RA had loaned nearly 1.5 million dollars to approximately 8,000 farmers across the Florida Panhandle. With this money, residents made basic farm improvements to structures and equipment and took on new methods of scientific farming. Similar agricultural and scientific aid offered by the Public Works Authority (PWA) in tick eradication and hog cholera programs established a precedent for New Deal involvement in the Florida Panhandle as well. In Florida, the PWA began in 1936 in Chattahoochee for construction of the site for the Florida State Hospital, a project directed by M. Ross Watson. The PWA and Florida Construction Program served as the initial program to transform the built and natural environment during the 1930s while promoting commercial and residential development through federal largesse. Under the PWA,
advertising and contracts became channeled through extractive industries like lumber and planning mill companies in an integrated, centralized and multi-platform industrial undertaking. On the ground, PWA grants $14,082,380 million dollars allotted for Harbor and Waterway Improvements in the ten Panhandle counties.

The broad distribution of federal aid and wide-reaching impact of projects undertaken by the PWA and RA in western Florida extended to livestock ranchers in the state, all of whom were particularly hard hit by a culmination of declining market prices, difficult weather patterns and hurricanes, and disease infestation among herds from the late 1920s through 1940. Livestock (primarily hog and cattle) operations in Wakulla, Liberty, Gadsden, Okaloosa, and Washington counties were especially impacted by the Depression. A resolution adopted by the board of county commissioners in Wakulla County on February 5, 1934 regarding open range hogs and the infestation of wild swamp hogs and disease implored the need for federal intervention on behalf of the rural county’s most important source of independent, non-corporate income. In late March 1934, livestock inspection workers with the PWA conducted hog cholera treatments in conjunction with State Livestock Sanitary Board. This four year, multimillion dollar effort to eradicate hog and cattle disease in rural north Florida epitomized the immediate role of federal involvement and support on a localized, individual level and cooperation by state, local, county, and federal governments that combined with local efforts by stockmen who often were also commercial fisherman in Wakulla and Franklin counties.
The lingering and costly presence of livestock disease underscored the isolated and rural nature of Panhandle ranches, as well. In helping safeguard the property of livestock owners while improving overall herd health, tick eradication and hog cholera quarantines played an integral role in garnering local support and establishing a precedent for success of New Deal aid in rural Florida. The federally authorized and funded Tick Eradication program undertaken in the panhandle was not only well received publicly, but served a human desire to control the natural environment under the guise of economic and social “improvement”. The PWA’s Tick Eradication program also proved symbolic of the conflict between old agriculture and new scientific approaches to animal husbandry in what many rural Floridians considered a confusing, befuddling period of urban development around their state. The transition from open range and non-scientific husbandry to tick eradication and disease vaccination of cattle remains a significant and understudied facet of New Deal aid in Florida. The Tick Eradication Program in Florida was built upon the foundation of a cattle reimbursement program vital to ranchers in Panhandle during the late 1920s. Payouts and programs totaled up to nearly $35,000 in individual payments over five years for over 8,000 landowners and ranchers in Bay, Escambia, Gadsden, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Walton counties.

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294 In Florida Cowman: A History of Florida Cattle Raising (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), Joe Akerman highlights the often-neglected and sometimes even forgotten role of cattle ranching in the Sunshine State. The history of cattle raising in Florida engages notions of change and continuity, conflict and harmony, between both humans and the natural world around them. With intense urban development undertaken in Florida following World War II, the importance of cattlemen and their social, cultural, economic world and their approach to land and husbandry has been thoroughly neglected. Spanish rancheros with buffalo and cattle herds existed in north Florida as early as the 1650s, so livestock have proven an integral part of state’s history. Akerman emphasizes the period from Spanish colonial period through eve of the Civil War, not twentieth century or contemporary cattle raising in Florida. The work is good for examining notions of romanticism and mythology attached to cattle raisers outside of the West, and Akerman does point out that tick eradication programs made fencing and enclosure acceptable among ranchers across Florida in the 1930s.

The payout program slowed by 1932, (with records indicating only minimal payouts to ranches in Gulf, Franklin, and Leon), with the impact of the cattle payout program felt most directly in rural counties like Wakulla, Calhoun, and Washington which most needed assistance. During tropical tick fever outbreaks from 1928 to 1931, Florida required cattle ranches to dip but showed no record of reimbursement to Panhandle cattlemen for their efforts. Few cattlemen noted reimbursement, and records show only meager payouts to ranchers from 1925-28, thus adding to the collective economic misery of the Depression.²⁹⁶

Panhandle counties left out of reimbursement altogether included the most rural ones: Wakulla, Calhoun, Washington, and Franklin. While these counties were indeed more rural and less populous (in terms of total population), the lack of federal payouts to existing ranchers highlighted the neglect by state and federal agricultural authorities working within a system in need of drastic overhaul by the time New Deal programs began to emerge. That being said, Tuberculosis (TB) reimbursement remained relegated to the dominant “cattle counties” in south-central Florida from 1937 to 1947, with Panhandle herds not covered under TB programming. Rather, the PWA worked in conjunction with programs like Florida State Farms in

²⁹⁶ If ranchers were reimbursed prior to the 1930s, records show receipts from 1925-28. From 1930-1937, a total of $34,936.00 of federal aid had been invested in pest and disease eradication panhandle counties. Tick Eradication Program files, Box ½, 1933-35, TLH State History Lib. (with individual county totals in parentheses, 1926)
-Bay Co.(5 ranchers or PAYOUTS@$72.32) May 1926
-Escambia (5,000 payouts@$11,230) 1926-27
-Franklin (7 payouts@$82.10!!), 1929
-Gadsdenen (20 payouts@$171.48), 1926
-Gulf (24 payouts@$275.13), 1929
-Holmes (2,000 payouts@$4,688.84), 1926-27
-Jackson (900 payouts@$400.00), 1926-27
-Liberty (55 payouts@$122.00), 1926
-Okaloosa (1,500 payouts@$7,553.65), 1926-28
-Santa Rosa (1,100 payouts@$5,540.95), 1926-27
-Walton (1,000 payouts@$5,248.76), 1926-27
Last payouts in Panhandle were made in January 1931 in Leon County; total for Leon County, 1928-31 was only $39.51!!Source: Cattle Tick Eradication Reimbursement Files, TLH State Archives, 1925-1930, Box 1, Folders 1-12
Monticello, which sought to rehabilitate farmers locally on 70 farms and 8,500 acres, to provide TB testing for small herd raisers.  

The federal Tick Eradication program in Florida established a communal precedent within local areas that often led to the emergence of other cooperative agricultural programs through the Agricultural Adjustment Act. A unique cooperation between cattle producers and state and federal agricultural agencies emerged and was witnessed not only in business transactions and the impact of agency programs, but also in advertisements for livestock sales across northwest Florida. “The bulls are ready for service...and well priced” noted an ad for a sale in Marianna. This and other bulletins emphasized the potential profit margin for ranchers under the AAA. “All animals are registered in their respective Herd Registers and are the right kind for the southern cattleman to use....the New Agricultural Program (AAA) makes the cattle business more attractive than ever before. This sale will afford an opportunity to improve your herd or start a herd of quality cattle. ATTEND THIS SALE.” The import of livestock from wiregrass Alabama counties underscored the dire condition of Florida herds that felt the immediate impact of federal intervention and vaccination immediately. Herd health and size, as well as average price of sale for cattle from 1934 through 1940, increased in all of the counties examined not only in the Florida Panhandle, but in south Mississippi as well. This was at least in

297 Symbolized by move from cattle vaccinations and PAYOUTS under Hoover to mandatory cattle dipping and and tick eradication measures under FDR and New Deal during early New Deal period. Source: Florida State Archives, Tick Eradication Files, 1933-51, RG 293, S1888, cont.1-7

298 Ad appearing in regional newspapers-the Apalachicola Times, the Jackson County Herald, and the Tallahassee Democrat printed one AAA advertisement per month from 1933-1937. This one read: “March 26, 1933; 1230 PM in Marianna, FL: through the cooperation of the Florida Agricultural Extension Service and the State Marketing Bureau this choice lot of purebred Hereford and Aberdeen Angus Cattle are being brought to Marianna to be sold at Auction. The Hereford Bulls will come from the herd of Nolan Huddleston, Montgomery, AL, and the Aberdeen Angus Bulls are from the herd of Passmore and Smith, Prattville, AL.”
part created by tremendous changes in scientific agriculture/husbandry undertaken with New Deal aid and programs. 299

Although historical works have emphasized the supposed unwillingness of cotton and other single-crop farmers to undertake scientific methodology in planting and harvesting, it is evident that cattle ranchers in Mississippi and west Florida were more than willing to transform their practices to improve quality of livestock herds. 300 Under increased involvement at state universities, the development of agricultural extension offices, and New Deal aid all allowed the Panhandle and wiregrass regions of Alabama, Florida, and south Mississippi to flourish as cattle-producing regions through the mid-twentieth century. New Deal agencies and programs carried encompassing impact on not only the cattle industry, but land-use practices, husbandry quality, and individual production, while at the same time transforming the perception of the natural world commonly held by southern cattlemen and livestock owners. 301

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299 Ten year study showed that by 1937, Cattle sales increase profit by more than 300 percent in market (source: Pensacola News, “Cattle Prices Steady Up”, May 10 1937, 2. AAA had a tremendous impact on cattle raising in the coastal South. Ranchers and cattle owners in both Mississippi and Florida counties in this study experienced an increase in herd size, health, and average sale price for cattle from 1934 through 1940. Source: Agricultural Census of 1936-40, Mississippi and Agricultural Census of 1936-40, Florida. Washington: Census Bureau, 1942.

300 In contrast to what Claire Strom says in Making Catfish Bait out of Government Boys, records and public reaction through newspapers and advertising demonstrates little, if any resistance to tick eradication program in Florida, and that tropical fever was indeed eradicated by increased inculcation amongst herds and ranchers reimbursed in a fairly straightforward process. See company/ranch records of JW Jernigan Farm (Milton); Wayne Mixson (Marianna), Circle J Farms (Wewatchika), and Doyle Conner (Tallahassee), located at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, in RG0151, “Tick Eradication Program Files” and RG0236, “Ranch Records, 1933-40, no.FL”. Both file folders located within Archives New Deal archival listings.

301 New Deal efforts and aid, services provide a tangible improvement in Panhandle herds, as noted by increases in overall herd size and program distribution in the ten counties under examination. Tick Eradication Files, Florida State Archives, RG 293 S18888, Box 1, Misc.M Folder)

# of Cattle Dipped in Panhandle Counties, 1929-34
Gadsden-12,419
Holmes-15,743
Jackson-25,736
Washginton-15,963
Bay-9,218
Calhoun and Gulf (combined b/c of annexation and creation of Gulf Co., 1931)-12,947
Franklin-3,863
Walton-16,043
program not only proved more inclusive and encompassing than previous attempts to control
disease and enforce vaccination of herds, it transformed the panhandle’s ecological landscape
to make it more epidemiologically sound and ecologically sustainable, while reinforcing the
region’s socially communal approach to ranching wherein cattle dipping and vaccinations were
inclusive, almost familial events. New Deal improvements to cattle ranches in the Panhandle
created a visual impact upon the land as well, with vats, cattle guards, dipping stations, and an
increase in fenced acreage all serving to transform landscape and natural environment. 302 In
their work to modernize ranches while extending new roadways into particularly rural sections
of the Panhandle, range riders and inspectors were financed by WPA funds not because of any
supposed connection with Jeffersonian agrarianism but because of pragmatic need of the
modernization of agriculture. Improvement of the region’s cattle herds stands as symbolic to
the process of “improvement” in an encompassing effort to increase connections between
humans with their natural environment for both balance and profit. 303 More broadly, the Tick
Eradication program helped to effectively globalize the cattle and dairy industries in Florida by
1940. Environmental determinism for expansion of the capitalist marketplace did, after all,
stand as one of the foremost (yet unspoken) goals of the New Deal.

Escambia-15,831
Okaloosa-12,723
Santa Rosa-18,313
Wakulla-8,165
Leon-11,890
West Florida counties=358,854 cattle dipped between 1929 and 1934
Of a Florida total of 625,628 cattle dipped; more than half of herds were located within Panhandle counties
302 Across west Florida, local governments worked in conjunction with CWA (and later, WPA) projects to construct
dipping vats, cattle guards (Source: Tick Eradication Files, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, RG 293, S1888, Box
2, FF8 “CWA Projects”).
303 Coincides with desire of ranchers FOR fencing, fence laws, in contrast to theories by Strom who attempts to
argue that southern ranchers detested fencing and fence laws because of some kind of unseen, but inherently “felt”
desire to be free from bounds of structure and a desire for the open range that was mythical to begin with.
Other early New Deal programs developed in Tallahassee, Florida’s forested capitol city both alternately in the midst of and yet substantially removed from the fence lines and crop rows of the rural Panhandle. The State Board of Conservation (SBC) was one of the first boards or committees created by new Governor Dave Sholtz and enacted by the Florida House in February 1933. One of the first projects undertaken by the SBC was to develop federally owned lands suitable for aquaculture in the Apalachicola River basin and in other bays and estuaries in Gulf, Okaloosa, Walton, and Franklin counties. In December, 1933, an application for a massive plot of oyster farms to be placed by Cultivated Oyster Farms, Inc., of Apalachicola was denied by the SBC, but by November of 1934 the Board allowed the company to assign certain leases on oyster bottom lanes in Apalachicola Bay. Thus commenced a ten year program of overhauling and adaptively re-using the natural resources and agricultural opportunities inherent with massive federal financial investment in the Florida Panhandle. Conducted with Federal Emergency Relief Administration funding and staffing, aquaculture re-development was carried out in west Florida by the FERA Agency and Fish Hatchery in Wekala. In designated over thirty-five thousand acres of Apalachicola Bay for oyster farming, New Deal agencies worked in conjunction with state entities to create a transformative and ecologically conscious policy.

However, economic invigoration was not the only goal pursued by the SBC. In November 1936, SBC closed the waters of Choctawhatchee Bay for commercial oystering after fearing the spread of oyster leaches and over-use of the sensitive floor of the bay. SBC kept crab and shrimp seasons open in 1939-40 after numerous complaints by citizens, politicians, and businesspeople in the Panhandle during closed seasons in 1938. The SBC worked in close

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304 State Board of Conservation files, File marked “Oystering”, RG 592, S1684 at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.
conjunction with the New Deal-mandated federal Department of Environmental Protection, which provided organizational oversight for the Florida SBC. Throughout the 1930s, the Florida SBC remained committed to protecting commercial fisheries in the Panhandle, a move that allowed for a revitalization of the once-fledgling seafood industry later on in the 1940s. As in coastal Mississippi, the Panhandle’s seafood plants began rebuilding with WPA labor between 1937 and 1940. In addition to its localized impact, the SBC represented a transformation of government as well. Perhaps more than any previous Governor, Dave Sholtz understood and emphasized the social, economic, and commercial importance of conserving Florida’s natural environment. In the initial months of its development in 1933, the Board was consolidated from a wide range of previous entities-including the State Shellfish Commission, State Department of Game and Fresh Water Fish, and State Geological Survey-all consolidated in a move symbolic of the often visionary approach and leadership of the New Deal.

In providing a new and legislatively-mandated perspective on the use of natural resources in Florida, the SBC decreased the negligent exploitation that marked the period from 1890 to 1920 and turned instead to favor multiple and wise use of resources. The Florida Conservator, official publications arm of the State Board of Conservation, promised a “New Deal for Wildlife” in its initial April 1934 issue. Other SBC publications promoted notions of ownership conservation ("its your Florida") that became imbued within publications from the 1930s forward for the next five decades. The State Board of Conservation indeed protected the

305 State Board of Conservation Files, TLH FL State Archives-RG 550, S2159
306 Stands counter to the “expansion of government” thesis of the New Deal that remains surprisingly prevalent in contemporary assessments of the New Deal.
307 Within its organizational records from 1934-1937, the Florida Marine Patrol argues that no industry suffered more during the Depression than commercial fishing. 1936 report cites commercial fisheries investment at $10 million, employing 10,000 persons with gross net income of $20 million annually; 10 percent of entire fish business in the United States occurred in Florida in the 1930s. See Florida Marine Patrol Project Files, 1930-1990, RG0398, S151, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee.
notion of “paradise” but also effectively guarded Florida’s most important economic and commercial resource—the natural world and water—both of which were vitally important for continued success of tourism and commercial development in the Sunshine State.

The Florida SBC led the way both practically and ideologically for the emergence of the Florida Park Service (SPS), a statewide organizational institution initiated in 1934 under the direction of the Civilian Conservation Corps. The SPS was a response to both the ideological commitment to conservation and the thirty percent increase in resident and visitor population in Florida from 1920 to 1930. The Florida SPS had its origins in the Panhandle and grew to encompass over 100 sites across the state. The first parks developed in conjunction with the CCC were Florida Caverns State Park and Torreya State Park in rural Jackson and Liberty counties. The development and emergence of increased recreational and park opportunities for panhandle residents is one legacy of the interconnected nature of New Deal bureaucracy wherein the SBC, State Board of Forestry, and State Planning Commission all worked in conjunction.

The Works Progress Authority further documented the development of state parks in Florida under the SPS. A recreational survey conducted by the Works Progress Authority in 1938 included site evaluations for Florida Caverns, Torreya, Santa Rosa Island National Seashore, Apalachicola and Choctawhatchee National Forests, the Natural Bridge Battlefield, and Port St. Joe monument. The report served partly as publicity to highlight the integrated development of parks and the use of nature to promote recreation and tourism in the Panhandle. Earlier

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308 Florida WPA Project Director files, RG 0192, S1653, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee.
309 By 1947, Florida Caverns was largest income producer in the system while more remote Torreya S.P. remained dependent general revenue funds from the Florida State Park Service due to its remote location; RG 510 S1943-Administrative Files of CCC director Emmett Hill, RG0150 S1943 housed at the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee.
surveys published by the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) in 1934-35 established the foundation for later WPA works. Promoting “Florida the Beautiful” under the direction of Florida Park Committee Chair Edward Ball, ERA sought to actively develop tourism and recreation across the state. Using planning modeled after California State Park Survey, ERA surveys and establishment of state parks led in turn to the creation of state and national forests like Apalachicola and Choctawhatchee in northwest Florida. The initial surveys took place over eight weeks in the fall of 1934 with ERA working in cooperation with Florida Board of Forestry. The “advantages of Florida,” as viewed by the ERA survey, included categories like “Scenic Grandeur,” “boating, fishing, swimming,” “population centers served,” “Camping facilities,” and “points of historic interest.” Torreya State Park was noted for its arboreal, historic, and scenic qualities, with ERA citing terrain and flora as reasons for dedication as a state park. Meanwhile, private property sites, like Alum Bluff in Liberty County, were not deemed by surveys to be acquirable by state and federal governments. The Gulf Coast Beach Park System—including Santa Rosa Island, Crooked Island, and St. Joseph’s Bay—was included in surveys by ERA initiated by the state, and soon thereafter integrated into the National Park system and renamed Gulf Islands National Seashore.

State entities conducted a second survey in October 1936 that considered the Falling Waters site in Washington County but ultimately private ownership interests kept those lands until the 1960s. As a general rule, ERA surveys declined potential sites with any visible deficiency of commercial possibilities such as remote access or a lack of aesthetic appeal. The

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310 State Park Service Files, RG 510, S1351 Tallahassee, FL State Archives
311 A second survey would later be undertaken by ERA and WPA under the Florida Park Service in 1939.
312 WPA and ERA surveys of potential state park sites at Blue Spring Creek, Lake Wimico, and St. Vincent Island engaged the importance of perception of natural environment exemplified by the report on Blue Spring Creek citing
emphasized importance of aesthetics of the natural world inherent in ERA’s surveys helped likewise determine organizational and public perceptions of the environment in much the same way TVA helped to reorient the geography of regionalism in northeast Mississippi. At the site that would become Grayton Beach State Park in Walton County, ERA surveys listed debris and oyster shells on the beach, as well as dunes that impaired building of cottages and bathhouses as conflicting with the goals and aesthetic appeals of the SPS. Much the same was said about Lake Wimico in Gulf County where the “water is not clear, but brackish” and officials listed the remote inaccessibility of the area (as well as the fish they caught as “tasting of mud”) as a hindrance to the development of camping, boating, and picnicking sites. With no roads and “bad mosquitoes”, Lake Wimico suffered from a significant lack of commercial infrastructure. The experience of ERA with places like Lake Wimico and Forbes Island in Franklin county engaged the practical aspects of limitations mentioned in survey reports that often emphasized commercial and developmental possibilities that drove the park selection process but were also manifestations of an intrinsic New Deal environmentalism working to shape a supposedly more prudent, responsible, and sustainable approach to the environment.

Consider the approach taken by New Dealers and local officials regarding St. Vincent’s Island in Franklin County, which as late as the 1940s was home to some of the last virgin strands of longleaf and slash pine, with palmetto undergrowth providing home to thousands of rare species of native and migratory birds. St. Vincent’s Island had been owned, until 1935, by Pierce Estate, Inc., of Buffalo, New York, which in 1930 listed the land’s value at $56,000. Although several residences and a road were in place on the island during 1930s, ERA and state officials its view as “not attractive”, and surrounded by swampland where the “desolate appearance of Cypress trees” supposedly detracted from general beauty of the potential site.

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deemed the beach at St. Vincent’s “not attractive.” Surveyors emphasized the land as a potential game preserve, and the ERA survey encouraged growth of new timber while noting that cabins on the island provided little or no revenue. Lagoon Beach in Gulf County experienced a similar approach, with officials noting that the site (which would later become a state park in 1969) “should be considered only as an addition to anything that might be done with St. Vincent Island” and that it “does not offer enough area or attractions to make it a unit by itself”. Navigable water at Lagoon Beach was too rough, and the beach did not hold enough scenic or historic attractions for the surveying eye of the FERA and Florida Park Service. Meanwhile, the Torreya and Caverns sites became canvassed by FERA and CCC, which sought to help transform the Apalachicola River basin and bluffs into a commercial and residential destination. At these two sites, scenic beauty became the future parks’ calling card in spite of their remote location and sizeable mosquitoes. With the two sites separated by less than fifty miles, it would be in Torreya and Florida caverns that the State Forest Service, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Works Progress Administration would most clearly demonstrate both the actions and ideals of the transformative New Deal. From 1934 through the beginning of World War II, forestry and conservation projects in the Florida Panhandle conducted on the ideological and practical foundations of earlier work programs under the Resettlement Administration, Farm Security Administration, Emergency Relief Administration, and fledgling Florida State Park Service would flourish as a representative zenith of the transformative capabilities of New Deal environmentalism in the rural South.

Chapter III: New Deal Transformations: Forestry, State Parks, and Public Works

Projects

By late 1935, the New Deal in the Florida Panhandle had evolved into a series of interconnected and encompassing programs of aid and public works. The development and subsequent transformation of the physical and intellectual landscape emerged in conjunction with the work of all agencies involved in region, not merely or singularly the WPA, CCC, or AAA. Just as New Deal officials in Florida engaged infrastructure improvement and the eradication of livestock disease, the Florida State Forestry Service came to being with Forestry Laws passed in late 1933 and early 1934. Although contemporarily viewed as a hindrance to ecological balance and growth, fire prevention and control proved vital to the lives of rural Panhandle citizens in the 1930s. Approximately 16 million acres of virgin timber in Florida, including pine and cypress hammocks, had been cut by naval stores and lumber companies between 1880 and 1930. Deemed essentially worthless by state and federal authorities, hundreds of thousands of acres of cut-over lands became tax-delinquent, depriving state and local government of desperately needed revenue.\textsuperscript{316} Reforestation programs were eagerly accepted and implemented, but not singularly because of the dire economic situation. Support from Florida conservationists, the

\textsuperscript{316} Report for Southern Forest Headquarters, 1931 (New Orleans: Emergency Relief Administration GPO, 1931), 1-2.
federal government, and state officials, combined with the efforts of the CCC, resulted in the replanting of approximately 90,000 acres of Florida forests and public lands between 1934 and 1942.

The Florida Board of Forestry (FBF) proved central to those efforts and took its cues from federal legislation on forest management; rather than only working with individual landowners, counties were given the opportunity to vote on forestry services, a move that galvanized an overwhelmingly positive response from local communities and electors. Protectionary laws authorized the FBF to set up forest protection districts within which permits would be required before burning was allowed and provided penalties for allowing fires to spread to another’s property. The FBF passed laws now considered commonplace, including one which made it unlawful to leave camp or warming fires unextinguished and another requiring state, county, and contractors’ employees to fight all fires within 200 feet of right of ways and prohibits them from allowing fires to spread from right of ways. Florida legislators also gave the newly created FBF permission to offer public rewards for apprehension of fire law violators, a move that provided significant backbone and a public sense of accountability in enforcing new conservation law.

Emergent New Deal forestry laws in Florida carried a distinct educational and conservation component, as well, with laws providing for the teaching of natural resources as a required subject in state educational institutions and high schools and for nature study in public elementary schools. The 1935 bill mandated that students graduated from state institutions

317 According to Annual Reports of the Florida State Forest Service, from 1928-1940, over 3,000 forester cooperators produced and planted 29,954,985 trees on over 58,000 acres of land for CCC in the state of Florida alone-allows for a substantial reshaping of the landscape.
would be trained in the fundamentals of conservation of fish and game, soil fertility, erosion control, forest fire damage, and the value of protection.318 Florida’s Forestry Education Bill appropriated $7,500 to provide for the teaching of forestry at the University of Florida in Gainesville and establishment of a permanent Forestry School at that same institution. The same bill authorized the Florida Board of Forestry to establish a park service and to cooperate with state and federal agencies in acquiring, developing, and administering state parks, one wherein the FBF was required to cooperate with counties in park work. The Florida Forestry Bill provided for the acquisition of state forest and state parks, a move that the law stated “ties in with the national land planning program of President Roosevelt and will provide employment for thousands of young men in CCC camps.” The 1935 Bill also allowed for forest and land management demonstrations, for fire control and land utilization in the form of hunting, fishing, camping, and for a lien against property on which the owner failed to pay fire control assessment fees to the state. Laws and bills mandated by the FBF enforced a distinct fire management and protectionary status in the state’s forestlands, a majority of which were in the Panhandle counties.

The Florida Forestry Act represented cooperation between state, local, and federal authorities in implementing New Deal programming and agencies at the state and local level. Forestry Laws that emerged from 1935 through 1940 were exemplary of the New Deal approach toward Florida’s natural environment (source: doc.: “A Forestry Program for Florida”), while allowing counties to make expenditures for the prevention and control of forest fires, working in cooperation and conjunction with the Florida Board of Forestry. Forestry legislation

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318 1935 Bill Mandating Creation of Florida Forestry Service: otherwise to be known as the Florida Forestry Bill Passed and approved in Tallahassee by the Florida House of Representatives, April 1935.
encouraged timber growing by private individuals by means of a low fixed annual land tax and a yield tax on forest products when harvested, which fostered an expansion of timber farming. In the Panhandle counties, silviculture emerged almost instantly as a vital sector of suddenly growing commercial economy during the New Deal period. The Florida Forestry Act created state forests embracing such forest lands and those not deemed necessary for agricultural development. These forests were to be located within 50 miles of all cities and to be used for timber production, grazing, game refuges, public shooting grounds, recreation, and areas for fire control and timber growth demonstration areas.\textsuperscript{319}

Under new conservation laws, forestry extension agents hired in Florida assisted farmers in the management of farm woodlands and in coordinating timber growing and stock raising on thousands of Panhandle farms. The Florida Forestry Act worked in cooperation with federal provisions of the McNary-McSweeney Law in creating an inventory of the state’s forest resources, as well. Emergent New Deal forest law in Florida represented not only the origins of the Florida State Forestry and State Park services, but also the genesis of modern environmental and conservation consciousness within the state. The federally and state-mandated approach to conserving land and resources worked to transform the natural landscape in order to benefit local communities and citizens. The Forestry Bill in Florida helped foster an overhaul of economic and social conditions away from a half-century of exploitation of timberlands across the state, and created a transformation in the approaches taken by both citizens and public officials in dealing with the natural landscape of the Florida Panhandle.

\textsuperscript{319} Florida Forestry Bill of 1935, in Florida Statutes for 1935 (Tallahassee: Florida House of Representatives, 1936), 279-281 inclusive of pertinent material.
Forest conservation, reforestation projects, and the involvement of private industry operated in conjunction with federal programs. This was perhaps most clearly noticed in projects with private lumber companies and works completed in the development of several state projects in rural north Florida. Private companies that engaged federal aid and New Deal projects promoted a heightened environmental and conservation consciousness that often transcended deep racial, cultural, social, and economic divisions. This is evidenced in promotional tracts and articles published in industrial and trade magazines and newspapers. As the only media outlet outside of word-of-mouth and newspapers, these magazines and articles were extremely influential and demonstrated the ideological impact of the New Deal as it pertained to places like rural western Florida. One piece detailing the trajectory of the Brooks Scanlon Corporation and lumber firm in Foley noted one of largest timber interests in the South developing a “interesting and comprehensive program of forest conservation” within the companies’ 285,000 acres of forestland in northwest Florida. In 1934, Brooks Scanlon initiated its reforestation project by placing under protection 37,054 acres of its lands lying in what the article calls “a solid body.”\(^{320}\) This program undertaken by Brooks Scanlon emerged from a cooperative contracted entered into with the state through the Florida Forest Service.

Under the arrangement between Brooks Scanlon and the State of Florida, the lumber companies paid three cents per acre annually, with funds matched cooperatively by the state and federal government. However, cooperative funds of six cents/acre did not defray all costs associated with improvements, protection, equipment, or personnel, and the lumber company effectively covered the cost on its own volition. With companies like Brooks Scanlon taking a

public leadership role in conservation measures, the Florida Forest Service recommended in late 1935 that a CCC camp be established in Foley, Florida, in rural Washington County. With the CCC working in cooperation with the United State and Florida Forest Services and private land owners, protection and stewardship of fledgling timber in the Forests of Madison, Liberty, and Leon counties proved to be a priority. Work completed at the Foley plant by 1937 included construction of two fire observation towers and living quarters for tower watchmen, along with the construction of 63.25 miles of roads and truck trails for creation of fire suppression lanes and the creation of 45 miles of telephone lines connecting a series of observation towers with “all parts of the project.” At Foley, the CCC plowed over 120 miles of fire lines to check the annual spread of wildfire and established a private nursery with a capacity of 200,000 seedlings annually. Under this share-cooperative system between state, local, and federal entities, Brooks Scanlon provided the equipment in fire prevention and suppression work, consisting principally of a fire line plow pulled by a Caterpillar Tractor, with two fire trucks equipped with pump, hose, and 150 gallons of water fought blazes. Scanlon worked with CCC men to construct 125 miles of fencing around 67,000 acres of its projects, work that provided a substantial and significant re-enclosure of once dilapidated land.321 The mutually beneficial and combined efforts of private business and New Deal agencies at Foley set the stage for future collaboration between lumber companies and federal agencies throughout the Panhandle.

In addition to legislatively mandated bills and laws engendering cooperation between private lumber firms and New Deal works agencies, the CCC and WPA continued to play a major part in the transformation of the Florida Panhandle’s intellectual and physical landscape

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321 Annual Business and Operations Report for 1937, Brooks Scanlon Lumber Company (Madison, FL); paper collection housed at Special Collections and University Archives, University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL.
through the mid-thirties. The year 1935 was a peak one for the CCC in the state, with 33 camps statewide and CCC obligations to Florida amounting to over 34 million dollars with nearly 50,000 men served. Two future state park sites-Torreya Park in Liberty County and Florida Caverns in Jackson County-would serve as foundational models for federal public works in the rural Panhandle. Conservation at the Torreya site began in earnest in the 1880s, when botanists following the lead of pioneering scientist (and infamous eccentric) Hardy Bryan Croom in the 1830s began to document an extremely rare species of *Torreya Taxfolia* growing amidst the pines and oaks along the bluffs of the Apalachicola River.

As early as 1885, botanists and scientists were commenting on the unique nature of landscape in and around what would become Torreya State Park. The Torreya and other species noted during AW Chapman’s visit to the area in 1885 were unique not only because of their location in Florida, but because the Torreya had never before been recorded outside of China and the central coast of California. By the late 1920s, the scientific community had come to recognize the inherently unique qualities of botanical life in and around Liberty and Franklin counties. Several famous botanists called for expanded state forestry management and establishment of a national park at Torreya for protection of the species.

Ten years later in 1936, Herman Kurz, a botanist from Florida State College for Women, expanded the vision of the Torreya taxonomy by showing how widespread the tree was in Florida’s Panhandle counties. Research by Uphof and Kurz proved to be one of the primary

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322 Files of the Florida State Park Service, RG155, S1270, housed at the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee. See File Folder 14, “Data Reports and Analysis” for yearly totals.
324 J.C. Thomas Uphof, “Protection of the Tumion in Florida” in *Science* vol.64 no.1660, Oct.22, 1926 p.405). Uphof noted that the situation specifically in and around Torreya “becomes of international importance when certain forest species become extinct”.

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foundations for development and emergence of a state park at Torreya, with FERA citing both botanists in its “Survey of Torreya Area, Liberty and Gadsden Counties, Florida,” conducted in cooperation with the Florida State Forest Service. An inherently distinct New Deal approach to the physical environment emerged in the proposed site for State Forest Park and Recreation Area at Torreya Pines, a project that included transformation of Kelly Branch, “where a beautiful dell is formed by the high banks.”\textsuperscript{325} The FERA report cited the ecological diversity and unique character of the natural environment surrounding Apalachicola River, noting that the spot would be a paradise for people interested in natural beauty and stranger flora and fauna.

While the New Deal approach has traditionally been interpreted both by scholars and the general public as centrally focused economic redevelopment, the establishment of a state park and forest at Torreya shows that conservation was a primary goal, as well. While it represented the first CCC project to be transformed into a state park in Florida, FERA’s report on the area noted that the only purpose for acquiring other lands besides those forming the dell, and especially those lands between the dell and the Apalachicola River, would be to protect the dell. The report underscores a distinct ecological consciousness emerging from Washington, noting that “all of this country in Torreya area is unique to the general impression of Florida, and in spots is beautiful. The appeal, as it now stands, will be entirely to the nature lovers and seekers of unusual scenic beauty.” Observers saw the rugged terrain and mosquitoes present around the site as natural impediments, but the Florida State Forest Service saw unique potential in the area and worked with large timber companies to promote reforestation in both Liberty and Gadsden counties, with particular emphasis on area immediately surrounding the

proposed park site.\textsuperscript{326} The FERA survey emphasized the desolate, cut-over appearance of landscape, and the ability of the Florida and National Forest Service to reclaim and reshape the land.\textsuperscript{327}

In witnessing the fragile but promising potential for development of a park area at Torreya, New Deal officials were particularly interested in the aesthetic appeal of landscape at the site, justifying purchase of lands from lumber companies to, in their words, “preserve the beauty of these spots.”\textsuperscript{328} All roads surrounding the park site became listed in the FERA survey as in bad condition, and CCC crews immediately set out to reconstruct all roads in and out of the Torreya site in 1935. Concerned with the ecological aesthetics of the Torreya site, the Florida State Forest Service and FERA noted the possible extinction of wild turkey and quail and the possibility of a game preserve within the park area. In a pattern similar to other New Deal projects across the Gulf South, the report and survey of land by FERA and other federal works agencies depended upon local knowledge and information drawn from local residents. As the FERA report notes, ”AC Jackson, Bristol, Florida is a good man to show Jackson Estate Properties…..Sam McLaughlin (negro), who lives in house described in route from Bristol to Rock Bluff Landing, is a good guide for Rock Bluff Landing, Rock Bluff, and Battery Hill…..D.H. Ward, County Agent, Bristol, Florida, is good guide to Kelly Branch and Alum Bluff.” This public

\textsuperscript{326} In addition \textit{FERA Survey of area}, ibid., see also \textit{Florida Park Service Report on Torreya Area}, 1936, p.5. Housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, RG151 S19934. The FPS report noted that, “Mosquitoes were felt at practically all units in the area, and are said to get worse in the summer. However, the beauty is there-beauty, which if protected and made known, should make this section a tremendous drawing card for Florida”, p.6.

\textsuperscript{327} Ibid., \textit{FERA Survey of Torreya Area}, p.21-25. Perceptive federal officials wondered aloud if, “In other words, would the desolate cut-over land so detract from the other beauties of the area as to make it uninviting, keeping away the class of people who would furnish the revenue in cabins, use of concessions, et cetera, for the upkeep of this area until it could be reforested?”.

\textsuperscript{328} The \textit{Annual Report} for 1937 of the Florida Park Service noted that “…it may be within reason to acquire enough land with timber rights from these companies to preserve the beauty of these spots and to keep enough timber standing along the roads to these spots; thus making a pleasing entrance to the different units of the area”, p.23.
interaction highlights the notion of local cooperation and outreach so vital to New Deal efforts and success in the region.

A year after the initial FERA survey, a report written by officials in Washington described the swift movement and progression of activities undertaken by the Florida Forest Service and CCC in the Florida Panhandle counties. In describing motivations behind the selection of Torreya as one of Florida’s first state parks, the report notes that selection of the area supported growth of the Torreya tree whose range is for a distance of approximately twenty miles in length on the east side of the Apalachicola River and approximately four miles in width, noting that, “This tree is very attractive and rather unusual in many respects.” Reminding New Deal officials that the area around Torreya embodied some of the most rugged topography in the state of Florida, FERA writers stationed in Florida highlighted the principal topographic feature of the park at Neals Bluff, and noted that services at the park were to include those for historical preservation, conservation of native plant life, conservation of wildlife, making scenic features available, and “building up the social structure locally, and to provide means for both Active and Passive recreation.” With its trajectory rooted in conservation and environmental consciousness shaped by an intrinsically New Deal approach to ecology and local environment, the final survey of Torreya presented before Congress emphasized that “the scenic features of the park will be preserved and made accessible by means of vistas, roads and trails as well as the removal of unsightly effects of man’s abuse or negligence.”

329 Emergency Relief Administration in conjunction with Department of the Interior released the Report to Accompany Master Plan Torreya State Park, Florida SP-6, written by C.H. Schaeffer and released in March of 1937. Copies are located within the New Deal Historical Resources file housed at the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, RG043 S2333.
In the months preceding reconstruction at Torreya, FERA proposed that the CCC help develop the park at Torreya using local labor when possible and emphasized the close proximity of the Torreya State Park to other parks and the state park system itself, thereby promoting notions of an interconnected region with a cooperative park system to serve the public. 

Through 1935, FERA officials continued to stress the park’s role as a physiographic, historical, and ecological attraction as well as an intrinsically unique ecological resource, with reports concurring that “to a Botanist, Torreya State Park is possibly more interesting than any other park we have in the State, likewise it is interesting from a forestry point of view due to the large variety of tree specimens to be found.” FERA and CCC officials would seek an architectural uniformity throughout the site and its surrounding acreage almost immediately following congressional approval of Torreya as Florida’s newest state park in January 1936. CCC work in the creation of Torreya State Park included fencing, removal of logging debris, erosion control in gulleys, and the creation of a main park road. CCC crews from Chattahoochee oversaw construction of combination and park buildings, restrooms, sidewalks, and a trail system, and assisted with the removal of the Gregory House, an antebellum structure that had been moved off private land to be located within the park as a tourist attraction.

In the complete overhaul and transformation of the natural environment of the park, work at Torreya represented the carving of nature out of what was essentially wilderness, and

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330 Ibid., Federal Emergency Relief Administration Report on Torreya Area, p.33-34. Officials took note of a “50 mile radius will include the Florida Caverns State Park and the Chattahoochee State Park in Alabama…a 60 mile circle, using Torreya State Park as a center, will intersect a 60 mile circle using Suwannee State Park as a center” adding that, “It will be seen that Torreya State Park fits in well with both the proposed Santa Rosa Island State Park and the proposed Suwannee River State Park but it is relatively near to Florida Caverns State Park”.

331 Ibid., Federal Emergency Relief Administration Report on Torreya Area, Passage on page 35 is especially insightful in judging the trajectory of what officials saw as Torreya’s purpose in regional conservation: “the entire park will serve this purpose (wildlife refuge) to a very great extent as is demonstrated by the fact that since it has been established a great amount of wildlife has developed or taken up its abode in the park”.

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along the way provided a model for the aesthetic component of the New Deal experience in its approach to landscape and the natural world. Likewise, construction and establishment of Florida Caverns State Park beginning in late 1937 stood as the culmination of two decades of work by local citizens in Jackson County calling for the establishment of some kind of governmental presence or oversight in the area, in an attempt to help create a natural tourist attraction that would bring fortune, fame, and federal aid to the rural Panhandle. The Caverns of Jackson County became known as not only a geologic oddity, but also a testament to the resiliency and efficiency of Florida CCC companies involved in development of another state park in the most rural and underserved areas of the state. Between 1935 and 1937, excavations conducted by a camp of 25 CCC enrollees and local laborers on the federal dole provided the first entry into the caves. Workers at Florida Caverns spent most of their time surveying the terrain, setting fence lines, and cutting fire lanes, and in January of 1936, Marianna banker J.C. Patterson purchased 494 acres and worked with Tom Yancy of the Marianna Chamber of Commerce to promote the caves for federal distinction and designation as a tourist site. Additional land acquisitions, the important discovery of the large cavern, and effective lobbying by Marianna citizens and businessmen led to a decision to establish a CCC camp at Florida Caverns Park, designated Camp Florida SP-12. Civilian Conservation Corps Camp 1445 transferred to Marianna from Chatham, Louisiana in July 1936. Patterson received federal assistance to make the Caverns a state park, a move underscoring the relevance of local

\[332\] It is significant to note the federal government’s purchase of land and caverns from Florida Caverns, Inc., in 1936 that was nearly $10,000 more than estimated value of property itself, as highlighted in the Florida State Park Service Annual Report of 1936. Seemingly cooperative transactions like these seem to refute the persistent historical (if not ideological) argument that the FDR administration intended to simply buy out private enterprise. Furthermore, earliest works by CCC and WPA at the Florida Caverns site allowed for the swift implementation of a Rural Electrification Program for Jackson County and the surrounding area.

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institutions, as well as the efficiency of state-federal interaction and cooperation in the Panhandle. Almost immediately thereafter, CCC Camp SP-12, formed with the help of Florida companies 4453 (Black), 1445 (Junior, Whites), and 2415 (WWI veterans) commenced work at Florida Caverns as a crew that would become known as the “Gopher Gang.” The first CCC crews at Caverns installed trails, a visitor center and golf course, administrative and camping buildings, built new roads and a fish hatchery, and initiated the process of developing the internal trail through the Cave itself, difficult and blinding work where men were often tethered to a rope in order to prevent them from getting lost or stuck in the cave. Above ground, CCC corpsmen performed reforestation work and seedling planting, helping to conserve bald cypress, tupelo, swamp chestnut oak, lizard’s tail, and spider lilies, all exemplary Florida specimens. The Caverns’ floodplain flourished to once again become one of the best examples of an upland hardwood forest in the state, with huge spruce pines, white ash, Florida elm, southern magnolia, American beech, black walnut, and needle palms all growing in abundance following restoration and reforestation projects undertaken by the CCC.

In a move indicative of the continued rise of recreation and outdoor activities promoted nationally by the Roosevelt administration, a golf course was built at the Caverns site by WPA and the National Youth Administration in late 1937 to the tune of $98,000. The golf course remains in use today, unlike Fish Hatchery which closed only a few years after its opening after the United States involvement in World War II. Above and below ground trails also remain popular with visitors to the Caverns, and stand as testament to the power of conservation and

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emergence of an environmental consciousness. Like Torreya, the Caverns represented the ecologically unique within Florida, and the combined WPA, CCC, and NYA projects at Florida Caverns State Park all exemplified the emergence of a recreational infrastructure driven by the transformation of landscape. The CCC proved instrumental in the construction and continued successful development of the park at Caverns, with Company D reliant upon the backs and arms of largely local labor.

As was the case for all of the aforementioned New Deal works, local politics and boosterism were important in the case of the Caverns, as well. Letters to the chief Florida New Deal administrator, Julius Stone, from concerned and eager citizens of the Panhandle imploring the opening of Caverns as the state’s newest park exemplified the power of boosterism and influence of the local upon federal programs, aid, and agencies. Governor Spessard Holland was instrumental in the establishment of Caverns State Park, also, and as one letter from J.P. Streetman (president of the Marianna Chamber of Commerce) to FERA administrator Louis Scoggin makes clear, the Governor’s background as a politician in Virginia helped him to “know the value of caves.”334 Letters and correspondence regarding the park site show the suddenly united civic identity that emerged from the possibilities of New Deal programs and aid. Much like the role of the Tennessee Valley Authority in northeast Mississippi, new parks in the Florida Panhandle helped not only to reshape previously damaged land, but also to recast the prevailing cultural and social identity of regions. In the case of white residents in the Florida Panhandle, places like Torreya and Caverns emerge as galvanizing, shared experiences wherein

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334 Governor Spessard Holland Collection, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, RG0038 S1517. See files for 1938 marked “Correspondence” in boxes 13-15.
the surrounding environment transitioned from contested space of dominion to a place of unified spirit and ideological belief in the power of New Deal possibility.³³⁵

This was initially, at least, evidenced in correspondence between local Jackson County boosters and C.H. Schaeffer, director of the Florida Park Service. A letter written in July 1935 proposed the development of “Endless Caverns State Park, 1 ½ miles north of Marianna,” a program for individuals working in cooperation and conjunction with wide-ranging interests in community. A previously inaccessible 854 acres noted as “impassable” in local letters to Schaeffer would be transformed just three years later by WPA and CCC work crews.³³⁶ With reports and correspondence emphasizing the unique natural beauty of the site and importance of its protection, correspondence from Schaeffer to Washington emphasized park features, including the Chipola River, Natural Bridge, and Caverns while noting that “a walk, horseback ride, or boat trip along this beautiful river is an event long to be remembered.”³³⁷ In connecting trails more than a half-mile underneath the earth’s surface, the accessibility of cave rooms was of central importance, as well. Workers, and proxy, the surrounding community’s men, were willing to risk their lives in the excavation and development of the Caverns. As was the case in Torreya, promotionalism proved central to the New Deal mission at Florida Caverns. “If a State park is established at this point, in all probability it will have extremely high use, especially by tourists, winter visitors entering or leaving the State, residents of West Florida, persons in

³³⁵ The central paradox of race and public works is that projects were usually not public in their approach. Aside from having strictly segregated CCC, WPA, and NYA camps, segregation found its way in to maps, charts, compilations of demographic data, reports of facilities, parks, and recreation. Official reports and publications from Washington emphasized the interconnections between recreation and conservation, which followed closely New Deal ideologies on the use of “human resources”, wherein African American enrollees were deemed easily exploitable, never noticed, never praised while whites were never exploitable, always noticed, and consistently praised.

³³⁶ Florida State Park Project files, RG 510 S1352 file marked “Florida Caverns”, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee.

³³⁷ Ibid., Schaeffer to ERA, “Florida Caverns” file, box 3, folder 14 “Correspondence” in RG510, S1352.
adjoining states, and other Florida residents,” noted reports from state FERA administrators to Washington in late 1936. New Deal officials in Florida remarked that the Caverns “will be very accessible to tourists, inasmuch as the highway through Marianna received traffic mostly from the West, North, and the East, in addition a considerable amount of traffic comes into Marianna from the South.” With instruction from FERA chief Julius Stone, public works officials compared the Caverns to caves in more well-known locales, noting that “only a small portion of our population realizes that Florida has caves and caverns, and an infinitely small number of these realize that these caverns contain formations that equal those found in Virginia, insofar as beauty and variety are concerned.”

Like their counterparts at Torreya, officials and developers sought an architectural uniformity in the construction and building of the Caverns State Park. Bridges and roads incorporated native materials that constituted an appropriate medium of structural interpretation. The site itself was (and remains) architecturally marked by its rugged and informal simplicity reflecting natural formations occurring within the immediate vicinity and its rugged landscape. In an ambitious project lasting over two years, the CCC constructed an encompassing park infrastructure at the Caverns that remains in place over seven decades later.\(^\text{339}\) A Park summary completed by CCC and FERA in 1937 concluded that while there are other caves in this same vicinity and some few in other parts of the state, “in all probability a

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\(^{338}\) Schaeffer to FERA, Washington D.C., in “Correspondence” within Florida State Park Service files, Tallahassee: Florida State Archives. See also Schaeffer to J. Stone, 23 December 1936 in Caverns State Park file marked “Correspondence, box 58, folder 29.

\(^{339}\) See Schaffer, ibid., “Correspondence” (1937-40) and Civilian Conservation Corps, Project Summary for Florida State Parks: Florida Caverns, 1939. Officials noted completion of the following for Caverns State Park by 1940: Fire and Observation Tower, Roads, Walks, Bridle Trails, bridges, cave development, cave lighting; water system; public picnic grounds; covered picnic tables; open fire places; light plant (for naturalistic area and caves); caretaker’s quarters; park garage and storage; picnic pavilion; administration building; public museum; small post office building; landscaping; cave entrances; bathing facilities and docks.
A combination of caves, natural bridge, river, spring, spring run, rock formations, and hammock growth make it the best cavern park site in the State of Florida.” New Deal officials both locally and in Washington remained conscious of the inherently unique nature of the Caverns, noting that “The newly opened caves will, in all probability, make available formations which have been untouched by the hands of man and under proper care and protection, they no doubt, may be kept in this condition.” Letters emphasized the need to limit commercial intrusions as much as possible to retain the significant fabric of the site. A distinct environmental and ecological consciousness is noted in one particular report from FERA offices in Marianna to Washington, noting that “if the property is highly commercialized, much of the surface beauty may be jeopardized by overly ambitious developers, who, in their zeal to improve on nature, may destroy masterpieces in rock formation, and combination of rocks, herbaceous growth, and trees. It is felt that if this property is made a State park all of these values may be preserved as much as possible and yet make the area accessible and usable to the general public, which, under present conditions does not realize Florida has this type of cave.” The federal approach at the Caverns represented a combination of highly accessible form of nature with conservation, protectionism, and the pragmatic approach of New Deal aid and agencies.

With publicity efforts emphasizing the unique nature of Florida Caverns as the supposed “ninth wonder of the world,” encompassing improvements undertaken by public works agencies at Caverns forced a delay in its opening until July of 1942. Cavern improvements which

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340 Federal Emergency Relief Administration in conjunction with Civilian Conservation Corps issued a Park Summary for Florida Caverns, O’Leno State Park, and Florida Highlands issued following completion of all three Florida State Park properties in 1941. Please see FERA Annual Report for 1938, Florida housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, RG0151 S15359, box 39 folders 1-2. Note that folders contain separated files, and no archival attempts have been made to combine the Annual Report.
had begun in September 1937 continued until the CCC evacuated its Florida Caverns camp in April 1942. Sufficient development of the main cavern was made by 1941 to permit it to be opened to the public. Florida Caverns State Park became an instant and substantial tourist attraction. In 1942, the park appeared in Florida Highways, a monthly journal published in Winter Garden, in an article describing the flora, fauna, an geological characteristics of the region, the nature of the underground formations of the cavern, and the historical significance of the park area. The Caverns garnered substantial national attention because of an increase in the popularity of cave exploration, spelunking, and commercial development in the Florida Panhandle during the 1940s. Despite the park’s isolated location, attendance rose from fewer than 2,000 visitors in 1940 to more than 19,000 in 1945. The Florida Caverns also became the location of a fish hatchery, developed and operated by the federal government during the New Deal period. The hatchery was part of a nationwide effort to stock ponds and replenish depleted fish resources in America’s rivers and lakes, and the CCC and WPA worked in cooperation to construct the Marianna hatchery completed in December 1940.

The success of New Deal construction and development at Torreya and Florida Caverns State Park established a distinct precedent for other potential state park sites within the Panhandle. An example would be the emergence of Ponce de Leon Springs State Park in rural Washington County. Emerging from land along Mill Creek and Sandy Creek, the Jackson Spring Run served as prime timber and turpentine land until cutover in the 1920s led to abandonment of the property that would become Ponce de Leon Springs State Park. Majestic longleaf pines taken from area were ideal for building homes, businesses, and the railroad that traversed the panhandle. The spring itself belonged to the Smithgall family in the mid 1920s, who prior to
state ownership and CCC reconstruction on property, installed many amenities on the property including a restroom with showers, a restaurant, and a skating rink.\textsuperscript{341} The Smithgalls also added a wooded retaining wall around the spring to prevent erosion prior to selling the 406 acres of spring land to the State Park Service in 1932, which with the help of the CCC and local Co.1456 (Marianna) transformed the sleepy park into a full-fledged tourist destination in one of the most rural areas of the Panhandle. The emergence of Ponce de Leon Springs as a State Park carried with it an immediate impact not only on the natural landscape, but also served to improve the local economy and quality of life in much the same way as nearly all New Deal projects undertaken in rural northwest Florida.\textsuperscript{342}

The emergence of new public recreation areas like Torreya, Caverns, and Ponce de Leon underscored the importance of public works agencies both on the national and local levels. Work programs like the National Youth Administration and CCC gave jobs to the unemployed and helped support local economies while providing a locus for merging Roosevelt’s conservation ideals with a pragmatic purpose. In the Florida Panhandle counties, Civilian Conservation Corpsmen helped in the reforestation of woodlands that had suffered decades of despoilment, created facilities for a public that was just beginning to appreciate the concept of

\textsuperscript{341} A History of Washington County, Florida, 1820-1995 (Tallahassee: Sentry Press, Inc., 1997), p.47-48. See also “Cultural Resource Survey: New Deal Era Resources in Nine Florida State Parks”, created by Historic Property Associates (HPA) of St. Augustine, FL in November 1989. Originally written for the Florida State Park Service as a consulting deliverable, this document examines all New Deal-era parks created by the CCC and Florida Park Service and Forest Service. HPA notes that the United States Forest Service had encouraged creation of the Florida Forest Service as early as the mid 1920s to replant destroyed timberlands across the northern third of the state.

\textsuperscript{342} It is important to re-emphasize at this point that, if judged by the experiences of the rural South, Roosevelt’s New Deal programs indeed transformed the quality of life for citizens. Contemporary scholarship politicizing the New Deal and viewing it through a lens of presentist values and constructs has served to diminish the impact of the New Deal on the local. Andy Shofner writes on Roosevelt’s Tree Army and the CCC in Florida, noting that New Deal programs were welcomed in a state where Hurricanes in 1926 and 1928 and the collapse of speculative real estate economy had devastated the states’ economy; bank failure of 1926 proved disastrous, as well. It would seem that any historically minded assessment of New Deal projects and works would likewise examine local results of those projects and works.
recreational use of forest lands, and established preserves for wildlife and botanical specimens while assisting in establishing fire protection and conservation measures in the state’s forests. As has been shown, CCC played a critical role in the development of the Florida state park system, where none had existed prior to the Great Depression. Federally assisted workers in the CCC and WPA developed roads, infrastructure, and facilities that remain salient in the contemporary period with their genesis in a difficult but creative time in both Florida and America’s history. The approach and historical experience of public works agencies in the most rural areas of Florida is shown to be symbolic of the New Deal trajectory toward forestlands across the southern United States. Federally mandated and locally implemented aid programs and works projects both helped to conserve and to transform all facets of life, from young seedling trees to the broader socioeconomic and cultural demographics of place.

In addition to transformation of rural places and the forests of these ten Panhandle counties, works undertaken by the WPA and documented by the Division of Recreation Survey in 1938 demonstrate the tremendous impact of New Deal agencies and programs in urban and town areas across west Florida. This comprehensive and encompassing listing of projects completed from 1935 to 1937 remains important in outlining the legacy of New Deal public works in Florida, and offers specific insight into development in the cities, towns, and villages of the Panhandle region. In Apalachicola (pop.3,730 in 1930) an airport and armory were built while rural communities like Barney Hill and Bethlehem in Gadsden and Madison counties were most commonly the beneficiaries of new schools, playgrounds, and children’s recreational facilities. In Bristol, Liberty County, a new community building and park were constructed, both of which can be seen off the east side of Highway 29 today. Crestview (pop.1,730) in Okaloosa
County received a new playground, while residents of the smaller village of Dorcas in the same county saw an auditorium and playground constructed in their community (as did Fort Walton).

In Graceville (pop. 1,165), then the seat of Jackson County, workers fabricated a community building, while the predominantly African American community of Greensboro (pop. 374) in Gadsden County welcomed the addition of a town park in 1937. In Havana (pop. 1,036) in Gadsden County, playgrounds were constructed at both black and white schools, while Hosford, one of the smallest communities to receive a makeover from the WPA, gained an auditorium, gymnasium, playground, and library for its white school and a playground for its African American school. Another small community that witnessed the big impact of the New Deal was Rock Bluff in Liberty County, where an auditorium, as well as playgrounds for whites and blacks, and a golf course were all constructed over the course of two years.

Projects and buildings completed in just one year—1938—highlight the transformative power and energy of New Deal agencies and programs in the Florida Panhandle. Many of these works rebuilt and helped construct communities quite literally from the ground up. Lynn Haven in Bay County (pop. 1,340) gained two new city parks, while Marianna (pop. 4,022) in Jackson County gained an airport, auditorium, club rooms, community building, golf course, and school playground. Milton in Santa Rosa County received an auditorium, community building, gymnasium, library, park, school playground, and community building. Communities where the WPA transformation took place perhaps most vibrantly were Panama City (pop. 8,701) in Bay County and Pensacola (pop. 30,822) in Escambia County. Panama City residents witnessed construction of an airport, community building, four parks, two school playgrounds, and two tennis courts, while Pensacola (then among the largest cities in the state) saw the building of an
airport, two baseball fields (one white, one negro), a bathing beach, bowling green, two community buildings (white and black), a gymnasion, a library, an organized girl’s camp, three parks for whites and one for blacks, four playgrounds for blacks, a school playground, a stadium for blacks, a roque court, as well as thirteen shuffleboard courts and ten tennis courts in 1938 alone. WPA construction of shuffleboard courts across the state leads to a surge in popularity of a sport that has remained salient today. Shuffleboard was not merely something retirees “brought with them” from the northeast, but rooted in the organic construction of WPA recreation facilities in Florida.  

While work camps and projects remained rigidly segregated by race, many WPA building projects transcended racial lines in their impact. The mostly African American community of Quincy (pop. 4,064) in Gadsden County saw the building of athletic fields for blacks, baseball fields, two playgrounds at negro schools, as well as two stadiums for blacks and two tennis courts in 1937. Nearby in Florida’s sleepy capital city of Tallahassee (pop. 11,723), WPA workers constructed an airport, two baseball fields, a community building, two golf courses, two municipal playgrounds, eight school playgrounds, three tennis courts, a municipal stadium, swimming pool, auditorium, and library all built between 1936 and 1938. WPA projects across the Panhandle demonstrated the transformative power of New Deal aid and works agencies in improving the quality of life for thousands of Floridians, while also dramatically reshaping and, in many cases, enhancing the natural ecological environment of the region. 

343 Florida Division of Works Progress Administration, “Florida Recreation Facilities 1938” (WPA: Jacksonville GPO, 1939). An outline and survey of all facilities constructed by WPA was printed annually in Florida from 1935-1940.  

344 WPA Recreational Facilities Survey for Florida housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, RG192 S1653, 14-18. Chipley Golf Course, Defuniak Golf Club, Panama City Golf Club, Pensacola Golf Club, along with three new golf clubs in Tallahassee created a new and distinct recreational infrastructure within the region. In recreation
When quantitatively examining the WPA’s project list, there were a total of 230 projects completed in 64 different communities across Florida’s fifteen western counties from 1936 to 1938. In the Panhandle, as across the rest of the state, development of and federal investment in the improvement of recreational facilities by the Works Progress Administration served to help build previously non-existent local economies while fostering a new commercial tourist infrastructure in the most isolated and rural regions of a state that had often marginalized it within the broader view of recreational development during earlier periods of commercial and residential prosperity. The success of construction programs is all the more remarkable because of statutes in Florida’s state constitution outlawing the state’s counties and communities from borrowing money or pledging credit to federal entities, which for most states served as the local construction arm for public works projects during the New Deal period.

Dynamic leadership at the state level certainly helped Florida’s New Deal redevelopment. In addition to expanding state government programs and involvement, Governor Dave Sholtz began in 1936 to aggressively pursue local business alliances with federal works agencies like the WPA, CCC, and NYA to provide investment and labor for projects that would have otherwise required substantial lending and extension of credit to the state. New Deal agencies created during 1930s Florida included the Florida Department of Roads, Florida Canal Authority, Florida Forest Service, Florida Park Service, the State Board of Conservation, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the Florida State Planning Board.

facilities constructed or improved by WPA from July 1935 through December of 1938, each county in the Florida panhandle had at least one federally funded and completed project.

Ibid., WPA Recreational Facilities Survey for Florida, 1-38.
Moves by Sholtz and his cabinet were more extensive and encompassing than those that took place in Mississippi, partly because of the desperate need in Florida for wide-ranging infrastructure to help centralize the far-flung state’s human and natural resources. Under Sholtz, CCC camps expanded in the Panhandle, with emergency conservation work undertaken in nearly 285,000 acres of the Apalachicola and Choctawhatchee national forests to the tune of $624,900 federal dollars and 340 man-hours of labor primarily composed of CCC and NYA enrollees.346 Sholtz established boards and commissions within the state to serve as oversight and funding arms for public works projects, as well. Programs like the Florida Conservation Department and State Board of Forestry were not only part of the broader public relations and publicity efforts by New Dealers in state government under Sholtz, but also served to provide organizational oversight for federally funded programs operated by a largely localized labor force. In Florida, New Deal efforts were centralized and increasingly interconnected under Governor Dave Sholtz from 1936 through the end of his term in 1939.

Sholtz worked in the summer of 1936 to ensure WPA’s role in helping to build and improve the infrastructure for commercial fisheries in the Panhandle. Fishermen in places like Port St. Joe in Gulf County witnessed a transformation in their livelihood with new operations facilities for cleaning, packing, and icing their catch bound for markets previously inaccessible. Created in the whirlwind of Sholtz’ first 100 days as governor in 1936, the Florida Conservation Department helped to diversify and improve local economic conditions throughout the state, but most acutely in previously remote and poverty-stricken areas like the rural Panhandle.

Further inland in 1937, Sholtz created the Florida Forestry Association and FFA worked in

346 Files of the Florida State Conservation Board for 1937, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, RG0252 S55776, box 9, file folder 6 entitled “Conservation projects-North".
conjunction with the CCC and WPA to improve, promote, develop, and market Florida’s forestlands. Sholtz worked to centralize Florida’s National Forest areas, including the Apalachicola and Choctawhatchee national forests. Correspondence to Sholtz from constituents emphasizes the importance of rural fire fighting by CCC, and throughout Sholtz’s four years as governor his cabinet stressed the importance of reforestation in the state. Always the resourceful innovator, Sholtz used funds from a newly implemented license plate program for the use of airplanes in combating forest fires while reforestation, like notions of conservation before it, became increasingly promoted in statewide advertising and promotional material.  

In places like rural Franklin County, the extension of state-implemented, federally funded New Deal programs was felt most acutely. The area around the county stood as a microcosm of the New Deal experience in the Florida Panhandle, perhaps by virtue of its relatively small size and isolated geography. By 1936, it was clear to the Sholtz administration that Franklin needed encompassing reform and transformation of social, economic, and environmental problems associated with the land bust and Great Depression. WPA works enhanced the fisheries infrastructure in coastal Franklin county, while CCC work on the forested inland sections of the county combined to provide an overhaul and really, creation of a new world in this isolated corner of the coastal Panhandle. As attested to in letters to Sholtz from residents, economic conditions were so bad in Franklin County that bootlegging alcohol, gambling, and prostitution became increasingly widespread supplements to the income of some citizens. One letter to Sholtz proclaimed Apalachicola to be “the dirtiest spot on the

347 Governor David Sholtz Collection, housed at Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, boxes 15, 18, 21, 23, 47, 48, 49 all utilized for this report. See files marked “Constituent Correspondence”, “Forest Projects”, “Road Projects” for reports on federal interaction with state and local projects.
map...where everybody sells illegal whiskey.\textsuperscript{348} Soon after Sholtz took office, the WPA and CCC emerged as instrumental in the transformation of Franklin’s depleted rural landscape. Work agencies helped improve bridges and construct new ones. In the spring of 1937, skilled CCC workers constructed a new bridge across Apalachicola Bay eastward, thus ending the city’s complete isolation from the rest of the state, if not the world. Landlocked Holmes County saw similar issues of cyclical rural poverty, a distinct jail culture, and the prevalence of contraband whiskey and prostitution throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s.\textsuperscript{349} Sholtz and his New Dealer staff implemented Home Demonstration Work in the county, a move juxtaposed against the prevalent racial violence evident in letters to the Governor from several of the county’s citizens.

With the smallest population in western Florida, Wakulla County’s economic situation went from bad in the early 1930s to dire in September 1935, when county officials were first unable to secure payment for services through the state.\textsuperscript{350} The county’s low tax base and, thusly, lower amount of special project funding from Washington made redevelopment difficult under the Hoover administration and through the early years of the Roosevelt presidency. In April 1937, the State Forest Service and Conservation Board directed the first malaria control program for Wakulla County. Successful alleviation of livestock disease by 1938 helped state

\textsuperscript{348} See \textit{Sholtz Collection}, box 47, folder 13, “Correspondence”. Housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., \textit{Sholtz Collection}, boxes 58 and 59, file folders marked “Correspondence” listed by county. Housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., \textit{Sholtz Collection}, box 118, file folder marked “Wakulla County” in 1935 County Reports file folder 22.
wildlife officials direct fishery restoration and revitalization efforts central to improvement of social and economic conditions in the county.\textsuperscript{351}

In Washington County in the northwest corner of the Panhandle, CWA and FERA road building projects under Shotlz marked the physical transformation of upland swamps and flatwoods. In 1937, the State Road Department Headquarters became established in Chipley, a surprising move considering its distance from urban areas of the state. Sholtz perhaps built his economic reputation on the successful initiatives and work created by the State Road Building Commission in areas like Washington County, where New Deal-era expansion and improvement of transportation infrastructure became symbolic of transformation of a physical place.\textsuperscript{352} As late as 1933, official Florida road maps and surveys showed zero paved roads in Franklin, Calhoun, Bay, and Walton counties.\textsuperscript{353} The Sholtz governorship helped secure the resources for a tremendous overhaul of landscape taking place over the course of ten years during the 1930s. Improvements to and construction of roads, bridges, canals, and highways transformed both urban and rural life while also substantially transforming the natural landscape and environment of the Panhandle.

New Dealers depended upon “Good Roads” advocates in the Florida Panhandle and the precedent established in 1916 and Bankhead Act legislation that required each state to establish a road department to administer improvement and development projects. This

\textsuperscript{351} The Hog Cholera and Tick Eradication programs were especially emphasized in Wakulla, hog cholera program emphasized in Wakulla County, which had enough of a frontier setting imbued within its farming and ranching practices that stockowners still let animals run free on open range and forests of the county through the 1930s.

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., \textit{Sholtz Collection}, box 119 folder 2, “Washington County”, housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

\textsuperscript{353} 1933 Road Survey, \textit{Fl Department of Transportation: Roads Division}, p.17. Housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee. For contemporary reports on historical roadbeds in the Florida panhandle, see George Ballo, “Historic Highway Bridges of Florida” (2003), Florida Department of Transportation, Tallahassee.
established an important legal precedent for massive projects undertaken during the New Deal era. Florida had previously created a State Road Department in 1915. The transition from solely local control of roads to state supervision moved slowly, and the national crisis created by World War I impeded it. By 1923 the Florida Legislature had officially designated a system of state roads and authorized the Road Department to complete “first system” routes, the first of which was a road that cut directly through the Panhandle on its way from Pensacola to Jacksonville. A “second system” devised in 1935 initiated construction of roads from Tallahassee to Milton (precursor to Interstate 10) and then from outside Wakulla to St. Petersburg (present US 98/19). Road number 20 stretched from Cottondale on the Alabama line to the coast, terminating in Panama City. As witnessed by the Hayden-Cartwright Act of 1934, the building of roads became a high priority as a form of active intervention by both state, local, and federal authorities. Florida officials presented legislation that committed greater levels of national support for roads, with the federal government expending nearly one billion dollars in highway construction in the five year period between 1933 and 1938. The total of all federal spending in Florida grew from $12,772,000 in 1930 to $62,718,000 in 1934 and averaged roughly $54,000,000 during the mid-1930s. In 1935, a ferocious hurricane slowed highway expansion in south Florida and destroyed millions of dollars worth of property while taking over 500 lives in the Florida Keys. The state secured extensive federal assistance from the Public Works Administration following the hurricane, and converted the former Flagler railroad line into a highway. Impact of the national Good Roads program was not merely relegated to south Florida, either. What became known as the Gulf Coast Highway gained an

354 Florida State Road Department: Annual Report for 1938 (Tallahassee: Florida Department of Transportation, 1939), 1-3.
impressive new structure in 1935 when the Gorrie Bridge opened to traffic over Apalachicola Bay in Franklin County. Using federal aid, Calhoun County completed a major long span steel bridge over the Apalachicola River near Blountstown, as well. Erected by the Wisconsin Bridge and Iron Company and opened in 1938, the Calhoun Bridge stood some 52 feet above the Apalachicola River to permit unrestricted navigation and came to symbolize the wide-ranging public impact of the federal aid to rural areas. Road and bridge construction in the Panhandle fueled the growth and development of an industrial-military complex economy in the region during the Sun Belt period from 1950 through into the 1990s.

In 1936, FERA and WPA undertook an extensive statewide road survey and mapping in conjunction with Florida State Road Department. Maps show that road construction and maintenance was primarily provided by the federal government, not the state, and that roadway building allowed for expanded commercial and residential development in the panhandle. Over eighty percent of new roads in Bay, Escambia, and Franklin counties road building projects were NRA and WPA projects, as well.\(^{355}\) In an increasingly globalized marketplace, road projects proved integral to successful port expansions in the Panhandle during the New Deal period. In February 1932, a “Survey of Pensacola Harbor, Florida” recommended building a shipping channel 30’ deep x 500’ wide for commercial barge and shipping traffic. State intervention was increasingly necessary to modernize commercial and industrial infrastructure under the guise of the federally mandated River and Harbor Act of July 1930. Three years later, Pensacola had emerged as the best and most diversified port in Florida, and as the chief port of call for bunker coal in the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning in 1936, extension

\(^{355}\) *Florida Road Maps, 1930-1939.* Housed at Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, RG700 S1847.
and completion of the intracoastal waterway across the Panhandle took ten years and was arguably the public works project that most directly impacted Pensacola and Escambia County during the New Deal.

A report issued by the United States House of Representatives on the “Survey of Intracoastal Waterway from Choctawhatchee Bay to West Bay, Florida” in July 1930 promoted the full extension of the intercoastal waterway under River and Harbor Act of 1930. By February 1932, a proposed channel in the Pensacola Bay represented an easterly extension of the Intracoastal Waterway, reaching a Corps-mandated minimum depth of 9 feet by 100 ft wide in the Pensacola Harbor area. For Escambia County officials, the economic purpose behind extension of the intercoastal was indeed tangible: dredging equated with one million new tons of increased commerce and at least $300,000 saved in transport costs.356 Further west, the Choctawhatchee Bay and intercoastal extension allowed for unimpeded commerce from New Orleans and Mississippi River all the way east (to Atlantic Ocean and south Florida) and west (to Texas, Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean). In 1933, Congress approved a $1.7 million dollar initial cost to construct a “new” intercoastal waterway 9 feet deep by 100 feet wide, with National Recovery Administration labor constituting a majority of the extension project. This New Deal environmental transformation had been driven by the needs of local, national, and global market needs.357

357 “Congressional Hearings on Intracoastal Waterway from Choctawhatchee Bay to West Bay, Florida April 1932” housed at University of West Florida Special Collections and University Archives, Pensacola, Florida. “People are intensely interested in this connecting link,” says one senator. It can be argued that completion of the Intracoastal Waterway through most rural coastal sections of Florida Panhandle created a highly integrated, connected (but not mutually beneficial) natural environment.
In conjunction with the extension of the intracoastal waterway, reconstruction by PWA and WPA of the Port of Pensacola was one of the most significant federally-funded transformations of the environment under the New Deal in the Florida Panhandle. Federally supported harbor and port improvements overhauled the face of Pensacola’s port forever. Residents and workers in July 1938 witnessed a total $2.75 million dollars in improvements that included construction of a modern grain elevator ($700,000), a fruit terminal and cold storage facility ($750,000), a shipside cotton compress and warehouse ($600,000), as well as a bonded warehouse ($150,000) and municipal dock extension and warehouses for coastal trade ($550,000).\(^{358}\) The Port project helped to industrialize and commercialize downtown Pensacola and coincided with expansion of the city’s Naval base, approved in May 1938. In places like Pensacola, port improvements were not only locally significant in alleviating the economic woes of the Depression, but also important nationally and globally because they set the stage for modern militarization of commerce on the Gulf Coast, a main depot for US Navy and goods and a strategic location between the Caribbean, Central America, and Europe as part of an imperialistic expansion of global economy and extension of U.S. interests in the Caribbean and Central/South America.\(^{359}\)

Taken broadly, New Deal programs and work projects in the Florida Panhandle can be generally described as having a wide-ranging impact on the economic and social fabric of communities in the region. The perhaps even more powerful environmental transformation of federally authorized work projects within the region has been demonstrated, as well. To gain a


\(^{359}\) See Port of Pensacola files, UWF Special Collections and University Archives, Pensacola. Piers on the original port and wharves were owned by the Louisville and Nashville RR prior to New Deal improvements. Expansion of the Port in Pensacola almost immediately enhances shipbuilding capabilities, increases the federal role in Port, with federal and local officials promoting expansion of tropical fruit trade of oranges, bananas, pineapples, and coconuts.
nuanced understanding of the impact of New Deal works in west Florida, it is necessary to peer more closely into the experience of the local. We can examine the New Deal’s impact in Okaloosa and Walton counties through the complexities of New Deal experiences in the Panhandle during the 1930s.

In Okaloosa and Walton counties during the thirties, construction of a tourist-based commercial infrastructure represented a localized case study in New Deal transformation of the human and natural environment. Alongside the emergence of a military-industrial sector in the region, commercial development during the New Deal transformed these two formerly sleepy counties. The creation of beaches, marinas, and Eglin Air Force Base all stood as testament to the power of New Deal public works. Resettlement Administration and reforestation and wildlife sanctuary projects stretching across the region represented a commitment to New Deal notions of conservation.

New Deal transformation of the Okaloosa and Walton counties’ environment allowed for not only construction of a distinct tourist and commercial landscape, but also a military one with the construction of Eglin Air Force Base as a vital part of “Sun Belt” defense industry development in the Panhandle. The emergence of a transportation infrastructure in the two counties during the 1930s had, by the late 1980s, fostered development of full-scale resort industry in places like Destin, Seaside, Seagrove, and Watercolor. Development of what has sometimes been referred to as the “Redneck Riviera” could stand as a manifestation of the

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360 See U.S. state census data by counties on University of Virginia historical census data browser, ibid. Okaloosa and Walton counties combined in 1930 for a total of less than 30,000 residents. The town of Fort Walton had only 90 residents in 1930; by 1940, it had grown to over 580 full time citizens.
historically constructed notion of Walton and Okaloosa counties as a “Playground” that had emerged as a kind of commercial mantra during the New Deal period.

Commercial and military-industrial development prospering after the 1930s in Okaloosa and Walton informs much of what has been written about these two counties historically, albeit with little discussion of how the 1935 paving of U.S. Hwy 98 helped create commercialization and development of the coastal Panhandle. Completion of U.S. Highway 331 Bridge and connection of the Intercoastal Waterway stood as New Deal projects that impacted both the built and natural environment of the Panhandle as much as any other before or after and helped the region to flourish economically beyond the lumber industry. The production and distribution of naval stores (tar, pitch, turpentine, and resin) remained a substantial industry in the area until World War II, when petroleum-based substitutes became widespread and commercially distributed. This led to a sharp decline in local turpentining in northwest Florida, a move that wrought changes in the economy and social work culture that had been slowly underway since 1920s. The drop in the previously extractive and market-dependent modes of the lumber economy was effectively reversed by public works (especially road building and port improvements along the coast) to help industrialize the now-downsized and perhaps more centralized lumber production process that led to the emergence of pulp mills and wood pulp as the region’s leading export by 1960.361

361 Secondary sources and community histories specifically focusing on Okaloosa and Walton counties include the following: Boggy Bayou History (available at Northwest Florida State College/Niceville Florida Collection; Panhandle Memories (available at Northwest Florida State College/Niceville Florida Collection; Okaloosa County from then Till Now; Recollections: Camp Walton to Fort Walton Beach; and An Historical Geography of Land Use: Santa Rosa Island, FL, from Prehistoric Times to the Present. See also “Florida Collection” and Vertical Files on Okaloosa County (History), Walton County, Santa Rosa County, Beaches, Bridges, Roads, Florida History, Eglin Air Force Base (History), Crestview, Niceville, Fort Walton Beach, Destin, Northwestern Florida, Florida Environment, Choctawhatchee Bay- found at Learning Resource Center, Northwest Florida State College, Niceville, FL. Russell Kay’s Atlas of Florida (1927) creates perception of wilderness in Okaloosa and Walton counties but
Road building projects impacted the two counties as well. Between 1930 and 1940, a combination of federal and local spending created six separate roads linking rural areas to Niceville and Valparaiso. Florida Highway 54 linking Crestview and Highway 1 to Niceville and Eglin Air Force Base was singularly constructed by the PWA and contributed to the emergence and development of Eglin Air Force Base. In addition to Eglin, Moreno Point Military Reservation in Destin was literally repositioned by the road building process that led to an increase in tourism and commercial space after World War II. Most roads in Okaloosa and Walton, including the east-west Highway 90 and Highway 85 connecting Crestview to Niceville, were maintained by the state with an infusion of federal aid. In Walton County, Interstates 10 and 52 were federally constructed and maintained with federal aid. Highway 329 from US 98 to Seagrove was the last road project in Walton County to be completed by the WPA. Completion of Highway 98, the long sought-after coastal road, allowed for flourishing beach development in South Walton from 1960s through the late 1990s. In Okaloosa and Walton, a distinct balance existed between federally constructed and funded roads and those constructed and funded by the state, which was quite the opposite of the experience in coastal and northeastern Mississippi. With railroad freight revenue and overall usage declining each year of the 1930s in the states of Florida and Alabama (and specifically Okaloosa and Walton), road building and construction/development of infrastructure and demonstrated the immediate (and salient)

also provided important information on each county. Kay’s dual purpose work examines both speculative/investment opportunities and combines with real demographic information.
impact of public works during 1930s that changed the world for coastal Panhandle areas of northwest Florida. 362

New roads led the way for new military installations in the coastal South, and perhaps nowhere was this more prolifically evident than on the coast of northwest Florida. Okaloosa and Walton were especially transformed by the construction and development of Eglin Air Force Base within the boundaries of the Choctawhatchee National Forest tracts acquired by Teddy Roosevelt in 1908. Eglin had its beginnings with the creation in 1933 of the Valparaiso Airport, originally a triangular parcel of 137 acres cleared for use as an airdrome. In 1931, personnel of the Air Corps Tactical School headquartered in Maxwell Field, Montgomery, saw the potential of the sparsely populated forested areas surrounding Valparaiso and the vast expanse of the adjacent Gulf of Mexico. Local businessman and airplane buff James E. Plew likewise saw the potential of a military payroll to boost the local area’s depression-stricken economy. He leased from the city of Valparaiso the acreage for an airport in 1933, and in 1934, Plew offered the U.S. government a donation of 1,460 acres contiguous for the bombing and gunnery base. This leasehold became the headquarters for the Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base activated on 14 June 1935, under the command of Captain Arnold H. Rich.

Two unpaved runways, with a supply house at their intersection, were in use by 1935. On 1 March 1935, Washington officials endorsed a FERA grant to pave the runways and to build an office, a barracks 30 by 120, a mess hall and kitchen, and an oil storage building. Eglin Air Force Base was initially

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362 See collection of the Florida Railroad and Public Utilities Commission housed at the Florida State Archives in Tallahassee, RG 0161, S4332. *Annual Report on Alabama, Florida and Gulf Railroad Company* (Boxes 2 and 4)-Company controlled by the Dothan National Bank of Dothan, AL-revenue freight decreases, 1930-31-32-33-34-35, with low point of 12,919 tons in 1937, with no new track laid until 1938, profit decreases each year until 1938 (when they extend track at Greenwood, FL)-Alabama, Florida and Gulf RR remained stagnant until new rights of way opened by CCC and NRA. New Deal in rural panhandle allowed for a revitalization of the railroad industry along with an increase in shipping and freight totals from 1936-39.
established as the U.S. Army Air Corps' Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base on June 14, 1935. On August 4, 1937, the installation became Eglin Field in honor of Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Irving Eglin (1891–1937). First rated as a military aviator in 1917, Lt. Col. Eglin helped train other Army flyers during World War I. On New Year’s Day of 1937, while assigned to General Headquarters, Army Air Corps and Air Force at Langley Field, Virginia, Colonel Eglin was killed in the crash of his Northrop A-17 pursuit aircraft on a flight from Langley to Maxwell Field, Alabama. A ceremony held in June 1939 allowed for the dedication and unveiling of a plaque honoring Valparaiso banker and businessman James E. Plew as founder of Eglin Field. Embedded in the stone gate to the airfield, the plaque read "In memory of James E. Plew, 1862–1938, whose patriotism and generosity made this field possible."

In June 1935, all WPA projects in Okaloosa County were temporarily halted in favor of construction at Eglin which included building a mile long runway, the longest one used by the Army at that time, at a cost of $157,000. In 1936, a CCC camp constructed near the present-day entrance to the Eglin Golf Course off Highway 85 helped clear an additional 1,500 acres of land. The frenzied work of the CCC and WPA continued in Okaloosa and Walton until August of 1940, when a full time construction battalion and engineer corps assumed maintenance of the massive Eglin Air Force Base. CCC served on fire watch duty, as well. Eglin AFB has remained a partner in conservation with Choctawhatchee Bay National Forest lands purchased during the New Deal period.

While Eglin Air Force Base remains the primary economic catalyst for a large section of the Florida Panhandle, New Deal-era creation of a commercial, recreational, and essentially tourist landscape proved central to future development in the region. Beaches and recreational areas constructed by works agencies included Garnier Beach, Ross Marler Park, John C. Beasley Park, and the

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Okaloosa Island Pier (all in Okaloosa County and Fort Walton Beach). The CCC and NYA built new recreational facilities at Moreno Point, Miramar Beach, Grayton Beach, and Point Washington State Forest, all of which were cited in Walton County east of Fort Walton Beach. Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park emerged as a separate section of Eglin Air Force Base and its establishment demonstrated to the heightened consciousness of conservation at the federal and state level after the 1920s. U.S. Air Force Colonel Fred Gannon was instrumental in transforming this site from a bombing practice range during World War II to a picturesque state park. The property preserved old-growth forests along Rocky Bayou and helped provide an ecological buffer between future development in Niceville and Eglin Air Force Base. The range of New Deal experiences in Okaloosa and Walton counties shows how the New Deal helped not only engender creation of distinct communities and spaces public and private, but economies tourist, commercial, and defense/industrial rooted in change, as well.
Chapter IV: Public legacies, New Deal experiences in Mississippi and Florida: A Comparative Conclusion

In deconstructing and contrasting the New Deal experiences of Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, it has been demonstrated that New Deal public works agencies wrought a multitude of changes in both the physical land itself and the lives of its residents. At the same time, federal policy and agencies worked in conjunction with state and local officials in maintaining the racial hierarchy of the South during the 1930s. While works agencies and projects built Negro schools, playgrounds, and other public facilities that had been previously lacking, the removal of farm tenants from rural places like northeast Mississippi and west Florida nearly shattered opportunities for black southern agriculture in the 1930s, while African Americans who did enroll in public work corps like the CCC and NYA endured subpar living and working conditions justified by whites who saw it befitting of those on work camp relief rolls. Continued rural economic misery and segregation were perhaps the two most shared elements of the New Deal period between the two states.

If assessed by the evidence presented, New Deal projects on the Mississippi Gulf Coast served to reinvigorate—and in the case of seafood and shipping industries—overhaul an already existing economic and physical infrastructure while New Deal works created an entirely new social, economic, and environmental setting along the Florida Panhandle. Despite improvement in public services and the construction of wide transportation networks in both places, the generally poor (and racialized) economic situation in places like Gadsden County, Florida and likewise, Greene County, Mississippi
remained entrenched through the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{364} Although New Deal projects and federal aid failed to cure rural poverty in the South, it did create a new visual and constructed landscape. This conclusion briefly examines the public legacies of New Deal experiences and offers a broad comparative analysis of both regions. In looking at the development and emergence of public works projects in both Mississippi and Florida, I have attempted to highlight the nature of change occurring in both places. That New Deal experiences varied so widely in each state speaks to the flexibility of federal works creating new spaces that remain publicly visible some eight decades later.

A program first administered by the WPA Historical Research Division in 1936, the Florida Master Site File (FMSF) remains a contemporary example of New Deal outreach and a valuable source for locating and evaluating New Deal structures in the state.\textsuperscript{365} Categories of resources recorded at the Site File include archaeological sites, historical structures, historical cemeteries, historical bridges and historic districts. It represents not only a tremendous resource for historians and scholars of Florida history, but a window into projects that created a new world in west Florida. More than 2,000 public works structures built under New Deal funding and legislation from 1932 through 1940 are extant in Florida. These public spaces continue to not only define the visual landscape of the Panhandle, but also serve to commemorate a public legacy of the post-Depression crisis in the United States.\textsuperscript{366}

That New Deal-constructed spaces physically survive eighty years after their construction speaks to the success and efficiency of projects in a state that has, at least since the Sun Belt boom of 1960-90, been built on an economically motivated sense of impermanence of place and quick construction and,

\textsuperscript{364} See GNP data for Gadsden County, Florida and Greene County, Mississippi, 1930 and 1940 on Historical Census Browser available through University of Virginia. These two counties were selected because of their similar total population (around 12,000), racial demographics (over 60 percent African American), and number of New Deal projects occurring in both states during the ten year period.

\textsuperscript{365} Please see Florida Master Site File online at http://flheritage.com/preservation/sitefile/index.cfm. No comparable or comprehensive survey of New Deal structures has yet to be completed in Mississippi.

\textsuperscript{366} New Deal Structures Report, Florida Division of Historical Resources-examined roster of all New Deal structures in Panhandle counties under examination-detailed listing of New Deal-era construction projects. 2,094 buildings in the fifteen western Florida panhandle counties are listed in Florida Historic Structures Landmarks as built between 1932-1939 remain standing. Symbolic, at least on a local and regional level, of the salient impact of New Deal structures and their continued significance in the built environment.
conversely, deconstruction of the built environment. Meanwhile, few public structures and buildings from the New Deal remain extant on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi or in northeast Mississippi, which could attest not only to the strength of bad weather and storms but also to the more tenuous, short-term nature of projects in those regions. \[367\] Historic structure reports for buildings constructed between 1932 and 1939 and that are still standing in the Panhandle counties underscores the creation of new commercial, residential, and military-industrial complex spaces.

In 1932, residential construction in Pensacola and Tallahassee coincided with the building of beach cottages in coastal areas like Mary Esther and Grayton Beach. That same year, a new centralized court house was built for Washington County residents in Chipley. The emergence of a New Deal-constructed Naval Air Station in Pensacola led to continued residential construction in that city during 1933-34, with new office spaces downtown and westward toward the base. Thirty new offices and homes were constructed in Tallahassee using federal funds during 1934 alone. The year 1935 proved to be an especially prolific one for New Deal construction with residential and commercial construction flourishing in conjunction with the development of a distinct military-industrial complex in the region. New airfields and military headquarters at Eglin, Warrington, and Marianna air force bases, along with the Pensacola Naval Air Station, emerged in 1935 alongside regional residential development in places like Graceville, where over 40 new houses were constructed (and remain standing) in 1935 to serve a town with a population a little under 1,000. \[368\] In addition to barracks and a visitor center at Torreya State Park being completed by the CCC in 1935, the first investment funding for residential construction in Destin commenced. Construction underwritten by New Deal labor and investment would create a new world for the self-proclaimed “luckiest little fishing village in the world.” By 1937, the completion of

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the coastal highway 98 through sleepy Panama City helped foster a new boom in construction and the creation of a new tourist recreation infrastructure that would fully transform the community.

Away from the beach, the building of new homes in previously impermanent and rough-hewn logging towns like Milton, Jay, and Bagdad offered a sense of social stability and community. Agricultural resettlement projects in the Panhandle’s most rural counties-Washington, Gadsden, and Liberty-offered farmers and landowners new possibilities economically and socially while at the same time reinvigorating a sawmill industry that lagged for nearly two decades prior. Likewise, through the intervention of federal assistance and state aid, residential construction became much more wide-ranging and inclusive of all Panhandle communities and counties by the late 1930s. The first year of the forties witnessed the zenith of New Deal construction in Panhandle counties, with well over 600 sites and projects built and completed in one year.³⁶⁹ Often quite directly in contact with new military bases, residential and recreational structures were built in both the most rural and most urbanized parts of the state. The encompassing reach of New Deal aid in creating both new natural and human-constructed worlds vividly witnessed in the experiences of the Florida Panhandle during the 1930s. New Deal public works in the Florida Panhandle contributed directly to the development and emergence of a landscape and infrastructure that had never before existed.³⁷⁰

In broadly canvassing the often contrasting experience of coastal Florida with that in Mississippi, it is important to note that the ten counties consisting of the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the 1920s and

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³⁷⁰ In Barbara Okerson’s work entitled, A Historical Geography of Land Use: Santa Rosa Island, Florida from prehistoric times to the Present (date); Master’s Thesis, Memphis State, 1988-heavily archaeologically leaning, but does provide insight into years immediate prior to and following New Deal-writes that in 1927, Escambia County acquired the eastern 68 kilometers of Santa Rosa Island from the Federal Government, while the western 13 km remained a military reservation-In 1931, a bridge (timber bridge) was built connecting the island with the mainland at the area that would become known as Pensacola Beach. 1935 construction completed on casino, bathhouse, fishing pier, and minor concessions.-In 1936, Escambia County gave their portion of the island to the U.S. Department of the Interior, declaring it a national monument, which it remained for 10 years-From 1927 to 1946, the only development that could take place on the island was for public purposes; a beach house and cantina were constructed at Pensacola Beach; but a 1946 Act of Congress removed this restriction, allowing hotels and cottage construction on Santa Rosa Island-That same year, the timber bridge at Pensacola was replaced with a new steel and concrete bridge. All stand as examples of modernization undertaken by New Deal projects and aid in the area.
early 1930s already had a higher population than all fifteen Florida Panhandle counties and a well-defined and entrenched commercial sector. Early New Deal works in Mississippi emphasized relief funding and the rebuilding of local industrial and economic vehicles, with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) and FERA spending extensively on the Mississippi Coast in 1933 and 1934.371 From 1932 through 1940, Mississippi received a much larger percentage share of relief funding than Florida did, with over $2 million dollars of RFC money given to Mississippi between 1933 and 1936.372 In creating a new world out of previously raw forested and coastal land, the Panhandle counties of Florida required far less capital investment from agencies like the RFC and much more in the way of labor, supplies, and contracting through agencies like the WPA, CCC, NYA and FERA.

Another important difference between Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle stood in the dynamics of transportation affecting both regions during the 1920s and early 1930s. According to several public officials and consistent Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald editorials condoning increased traffic and bridge closures, the existing transportation infrastructure on the Mississippi Coast was stretched to its limit by 1934. Road building in south Mississippi-particularly the paving and completion of U.S. Highways 90 and 49-were received publicly as necessary improvements involved in the rebuilding of the region’s tattered economy. Meanwhile in the Panhandle, New Deal road projects became celebrated as public events for residents accustomed to either simply not having roads or having to depend on rough trails and inconsistent ferry services in coastal areas. In western Florida, new roads came to mean literally new possibilities.

With new and improved transportation access to coastal areas alongside the improvement of harbor facilities in nearly all coastal communities in both states from 1932 forward, New Deal aquaculture projects proved significant to local fisheries and the fisherfolk who earned their living from coastal waters. In the summer of 1933, FERA managed efforts by National Youth Administration and the

371 Biloxi-Gulfport Daily Herald, “Gulfport Receives $100,000 from Reconstruction”, February 3 1933, 1.
CCC to plant oyster beds in the Mississippi sound. Discord emerged almost immediately among commercial fishermen and shrimpers on the Mississippi Coast who, fearing federal intervention and marketplace competition, did not want federal oyster beds planted in the sound or near the region’s barrier islands. Comparatively few oyster bed planting and shrimp harvest projects occurred on the coastal counties of Mississippi. Contrast that reaction with local officials and fishermen in the Panhandle, who widely supported the extensive planting of oyster beds across Choctawhatchee Bay, St. Andrews Bay, and Apalachicola Bay, a combined area of coastline over three times the size of the entire Mississippi Gulf Coast. Oyster bed planting and shrimp programs, alongside federal investment in harbor improvements in Pensacola, Panama City, Port St. Joe, and Apalachicola-all served to create new markets and new economic possibilities for fishermen in the Florida Panhandle. Local resistance to aquaculture programs in Mississippi proved symbolic of the general discord of labor with seafaring industries on the Coast. Labor conditions and tensions leading Mississippi harborworkers and shrimp pickers to strike and demand higher wages throughout the 1930s were simply not as much of a factor in the Panhandle of Florida, where coastal resources and facilities needed to be first be modernized, if not developed entirely.

For all of their apparent divergences, several significant similarities exist in the New Deal experiences of the Mississippi Coast and Florida Panhandle. With the emergence of Eglin Air Force Base alongside Kessler Air Force Base in Biloxi, both areas shared in the development of distinct military-industry complexes. With land purchased federally in the fall of 1933, what would become Kessler AFB on October 12 1933 began as a joint program between the Army Air Corps and Coast Guard. The increasing logistical significance of Kessler by the 1950s led to the placement of the John Stennis NASA complex in western Hancock County near Diamondhead. Storms battered both areas in 1936, when hurricanes caused substantial damage to both Pascagoula and Jackson counties in Mississippi as well as

Fort Walton Beach, Niceville, and Valparaiso. Intellectually, both places were still treated as the other America, but increasingly also as “playgrounds” in promotional material and publications. The *WPA Guides to Mississippi* and *WPA Guide to Florida* echo sentiment about the Coastal and Panhandle counties as existing away from the mainstream of economic and cultural life in their respective states. As if to overcome regional insecurities-and determined to somehow publicly reverse negatively imbued sentiment of the Depression-Guide writers overstated the actual agricultural realities of both places in favor of the bounty of agricultural possibilities that included the sudden emergence of crops and products never before grown in the two areas. *WPA Guides* and pamphlets emphasized the possibilities inherent within fledgling agricultural resources like cattle, grapes, pears, pecans, satsumas, oranges, tung orchards, cucumbers, truck farming, sugar cane, sheep, watermelons, corn, pears, pecans, Irish potatoes, and swine. In spite of the decidedly divergent approach to the New Deal undertaken in both regions, boosterism and promotionalism remained a commonly shared element of New Deal-era life in south Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle.

Population demographics and the impact of New Deal projects on local laborers represent another broad nexus of comparison between the two regions. We can use the censuses of 1920, 1930, and 1940 to reconstruct the character of registered relief workers in each area, thus providing an expanded profile of the New Deal’s impact on labor in Mississippi’s southern and coastal counties and those of the Florida Panhandle. Almost 295,000 people lived in Florida’s fifteen western counties in 1940, up from 215,000 twenty years earlier. The average county population was just over 19,000 in the Panhandle (a number offset by the nearly 75,000 residents of Escambia County and 30,000 plus in both Jackson and Leon counties), a number one-third of that of the Mississippi Coast. But like south Mississippi, the Panhandle counties of Florida contained a lower than average population statewide, but were also home to a higher-than-average number of relief workers in 1937. Likewise, Mississippi’s Piney Woods and coastal counties had a lower than average population, but higher than average number of
relief workers across the state. Although the 1930s remained a time of growth in Florida, as in Mississippi, the largest gains were witnessed in increasingly urbanized areas. In both Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle, growing counties received more emergency relief funding and labor. The dynamic and malleable nature of New Deal public works determined that despite similarities in population demographics and relief needs, projects on the ground would often serve divergent purposes.

This section projected the counties and communities of the Florida Panhandle as bases of both departure and convergence to engage the malleable nature of the New Deal in the South. Although they shared some broad characteristics with neighboring states to the west, public works and projects throughout west Florida sought to develop a raw but promising landscape, thereby transforming the economic and physical parameters of place. Meanwhile, aid projects in coastal Mississippi literally invested in the redevelopment of what had become in the 1910s through the 1920s a stagnant, if not declining, local economy rooted in the extraction and shipment of natural resources, most notably

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374 Registered Emergency Works for Florida Panhandle Counties, 1920-1940. Historical Census Browser. Note that like Mississippi, Florida’s western counties had similar average populations and higher than average number of registered emergency workers in 1937.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Pop (1920)</th>
<th>Pop (1940)</th>
<th>Registered Emergency Workers (1937)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>11,407</td>
<td>20,686</td>
<td>229</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calhoun</td>
<td>8,775</td>
<td>8,218</td>
<td>219</td>
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<tr>
<td>Escambia</td>
<td>49,386</td>
<td>74,667</td>
<td>2,560</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>5,318</td>
<td>5,991</td>
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<td>Gadsden</td>
<td>23,539</td>
<td>31,450</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gulf</td>
<td>(did not exist)</td>
<td>6,951</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holmes</td>
<td>12,850</td>
<td>15,447</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
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<td>Jackson</td>
<td>31,224</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Panhandle</td>
<td>217,670 (tot.)</td>
<td>294,232 (tot.)</td>
<td>7,906 (tot.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15,547 (avg.)</td>
<td>19,615 (avg.)</td>
<td>527 (avg.)</td>
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<td>FL State Avg.</td>
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lumber and seafood. In both regions, racial segregation held sway and remained a problem that neither federal, local, and state officials wanted no part in reversing.

With the continued development of a military-industrial complex in both regions assured after World War II, it could perhaps be asserted that New Deal public works played a larger role in the emergence of the Sun Belt boom than it had in any way changed the social and cultural world of the South. Despite its limited reach in enacting meaningful social change with regard to racial segregation, New Deal works and experiences in both Mississippi and the Florida Panhandle unquestionably transformed the economic and environmental landscape of two southern regions. The broad scope and ambitious undertakings of New Deal public works provided evidence of the good that could be achieved by government, as well. The dynamic similarities and striking differences driving New Deal experiences in these two seemingly analogous and representative regions of the “Deep South” can only expand our historical consciousness of one of the integral chapters in the history of the United States.


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VITA

EDUCATION:

- B.A., History and Southern Studies, University of Mississippi, 2001-2004. Major advisor: Dr. Ted Ownby

EMPLOYMENT:

- Preservationist and Historic Site Administrator, Florida Division of Historical Resources, January 2011-Present.
- Project Historian and Curator, University of Mississippi Museum and Rowan Oak, Oxford, MS, 2008-2011.
- Archivist and Special Projects Historian, Oklahoma State University Special Collections and Archives; May 2006-August 2006.
SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:


“A Pawn in the ‘Great Experiment’: The Tennessee Valley Authority in Mississippi, 1930-1942”, *Journal of Mississippi History*, Fall 2011.


AWARDS:

- Completed Doctoral Comprehensive Examinations with honor of Distinction
- Recipient, 2009 John W. Odum Award in Southern History, University of Mississippi; paper topic: “TVA and the New Deal in Mississippi, 1933-1945”.
- Member, Phi Kappa Phi, spring 2008-present.