

“The Charleston Navy Yard and World War II:
Implementing Executive Order 8802. 1941-1945”

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In fall 1944, as the Second World War neared a triumphant conclusion for the United States and its Allies, James Logan, an obscure civilian employee of the Charleston Navy Yard, was acknowledged by the Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, for his forty-two years of dedicated service to his country. While today this seems remarkable in an age of corporate mergers and daily layoffs, its perhaps just as significant that Logan, an African American, born and raised in Charleston, received recognition at all. Until Pearl Harbor few minorities could find employment outside of the traditional menial jobs reserved for Charleston blacks. And even after Japanese planes crippled most of the U.S. Pacific fleet on December 7, 1941, the Navy showed extreme reluctance to change its long-standing discriminatory policy against service personnel and civilian employees. Despite pleas to do so within a few days after declaration of war, the Secretary of the Navy responded to NAACP officials that its discriminatory policy would remain. This despite President Roosevelt's June 1941 Executive Order 8802 that outlawed racial discrimination on federal facilities or contracts for production of war material. While enacting this decree proved difficult in most parts of the nation, Southern states, including South Carolina were the most difficult to implement the President's order.¹

This paper will start by examining how the Charleston Navy Yard fulfilled FDR's Executive Order. It will demonstrate that while the letter of the law was observed, albeit slowly, the spirit was largely ignored. While African Americans employees increased significantly as the war progressed skilled jobs remained generally reserved for whites. But in the second part of this study it will show that Charleston's black community did not rely on the federal authorities to bring equity to the city's largest wartime industry. Through efforts of its own local leadership and their pressure on powerful white Charleston politicians, blacks improved crowded and inadequate living conditions for black war workers and the larger minority community. This complicated relationship would also be a key to avoiding major racial conflict inside the city during the first year of war, something that could not be prevented in other Southern port cities because of different historical and wartime conditions.

Regardless of historical differences between Charleston and other coastal cities, legal segregation in the low Country City, as in the rest are well documented through the first half of the twentieth century.² African Americans had virtually no political rights, their living conditions were generally the worst, and their economic and educational opportunities severely limited. As bad as African American conditions were through the first three decades of the twentieth century their plight was exacerbated by the nation's depressed economy that plagued the state during the thirties.

Within this environment the Charleston Navy Yard evolved unsteadily. Transferred in 1901 from its original location near Beaufort, South Carolina, some seventy miles south, the new location was born more out of political influence than naval desire. Charleston politicians and businessmen hoped that the new facility would bring much-needed jobs to city's depressed economy and revive the commerce of the once busy port. Located on the banks of the Cooper River, a few miles north of Charleston harbor, the navy facility never proved the economic panacea during its first decade. Although World War I finally generated its economic promise, including the employment of several hundred African American women in the Yard's uniform factory. But this was short lived. After the 1918 Armistice the facility soon began to stagnate again, including closing the uniform factories. By 1922 the Navy ordered the closure of the Charleston facility which only the intense lobbying of the state's congressional delegation managed to block.³

Without regular contracts for new ship construction and repairs during the twenties, it is not surprising that job opportunities for blacks at the Navy Yard were meager. There was not a lot more for whites either. As the nation continued its economic tailspin in the early thirties the Yard had a work force of just 250. The few blacks included in this number were primarily in custodial and other unskilled jobs. The most numerous minority the Yard employed before World War II was the short-lived uniform factory where several hundred women made Navy uniforms. But it closed soon after World War I. By the early thirties few jobs came to the facility as the small work force struggled to justify its existence.⁴

Then, in March 1933, as the Roosevelt Administration came to power, its prospects improved. Desperate to find ways to revitalize the staggering U.S. economy, government installations such as the Charleston Navy Yard became one of the President's ways to find work for some of the local unemployed. In the summer of 1933 the Navy awarded a gunboat contract to its low country facility. This started a modest construction program that three years later led to its first destroyer contract. While this loosely fit within the President's evolving government works program, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), blacks in the Charleston area received little more than the crumbs as far as Navy Yard work was concerned. Minorities gained low end, unskilled jobs for construction of new buildings and roadways on the facility. By the late thirties, as the President slowly equipped the nation for war, the Navy Yard's new ship construction had increased enough that its work force had grown from its small force of 250 in 1933 to nearly 1,600 five years later.⁵

Of course this did not translate into significantly better jobs for blacks. But in 1941, on the national level, African American leaders lobbied the President for a more equitable proportion of jobs for blacks on military installations and government war contracts. Despite FDR's attempts to put off the demands of A. Philip Randolph, President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Workers, Walter White of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other prominent black leaders, his hand was forced when these leaders threatened to march on Washington to back their demands. To forestall such a political embarrassment at the eleventh hour the President reluctantly signed his famous Executive Order 8802, establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). Formulated on behalf of not only blacks but also other minorities, including Asians, Hispanics and American Indians it was ostensibly designed to end discrimination in government facilities, the armed forces, and federal war contracts. This milestone in Federal Government efforts to eliminate discrimination in important aspects of the workplace, was the first since the failed attempts of Reconstruction, more than seventy years earlier. But the FEPC proved more of a symbolic gesture during its five-year existence. Although it did achieve some successes in rectifying job discrimination for minority workers, as we shall see at the Charleston Navy Yard, nationally only a third

of its cases were resolved successfully. This was due, in large part, to a weak mandate from a President who had not wanted it. Its national staff never reached more than forty investigators, its funds to prosecute cases were meager, and there was strong opposition to its very existence among local and state leaders and white workers steeped in racist sentiments.⁶

Job discrimination appeared at the Charleston Navy Yard before and after the FEPC was born. Despite a growing labor shortage in skilled and unskilled labor by 1940 and 41, few, if any, blacks were hired to fill the void for skilled and semi-skilled jobs. More than a year before Pearl Harbor Walter White, NAACP spokesman, accused the Charleston facility of job discrimination. While several blacks had the skills to aid in various aspects of production, White wrote that once experienced blacks taught skills to novice whites in the engine room the latter were promoted above their teachers to engineer positions and then earned more as well. In the machine shop blacks were not allowed to rise above mechanic helper even after attaining the skills to advance to a higher level. Adding insult to injury, White added that even white janitors were paid \$1.36 per day more than blacks in the same positions.⁷

In the months after Japanese planes destroyed most of the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor the production demands on Charleston accelerated. Nonetheless black employment remained heavily restricted at the Navy Yard and the frustration of its black labor force increased. By the spring of 1942 notice of minority anger reached L. Howard Bennett, respected principal of Avery Institute, one of two prestigious private black schools in Charleston, when he received several complaints from those working at the Navy Yard. James Logan, of the facility's blue print shop, bolstered these complaints for Bennett by providing solid data to him that substantiated the individual claims of discrimination. Fortified with this information Bennett met with the newly appointed Yard commandant, Admiral W.H. Glassford, to appraise him of the situation. Glassford, a California native and career naval officer, was "shocked" by the information. Soon after the meeting the new commandant ordered that the black labor pool be tapped to help resolve the serious labor shortages.⁸

Evidence is lacking on whether Glassford's predecessor, Admiral W.H. Allen, a career Navy officer and a native of Florence, South Carolina might have instigated a freeze on hiring more blacks to reduce potential racial strife. But the fact is that Allen had served as the Navy Yard commandant since 1938 and might have acquiesced with Southern segregation laws at his work place. But it also can't be ignored that the Navy as a whole had adhered to strict segregation on all levels since the beginning of the century. Whatever the case may be there was a new policy on hiring that white workmen, both in and outside the Navy installation, did not like as the summer of 1942 wore on.⁹

By October 1942 seventeen per cent of the Yard's work force of 18,500 was black. Of that percentage, or 3,185 minorities, most were classified as unskilled, with just "some" employed in skilled and semi-skilled positions. The few skilled African Americans hired had a difficult introduction to their white co-workers. In 1942 John Moore, a fledgling white machinist that began working at the Yard as an apprentice in 1941, recalled years later that in the early months of the war a black machinist named Haynes was recruited from New Jersey to bolster the ranks of the over-worked machinist shop. In spite its desperate need Haynes was shunned. Most of his co-workers ignored him and provided no advice or aid. The white machinists even refused to lend the newcomer tools when he requested them. But he was already a trained machinist and despite his chilly reception the black machinist remained and eventually gained acceptance. According to Moore Haynes retired from the Yard more than thirty years later as one of the best machinist he ever worked beside.¹⁰

Although few specific examples of individual treatment during the early war years have come to light the general attitude of whites is clear. Like Haynes' white colleagues, few, if any wanted to work with blacks, regardless of their skills. South Carolina politicians, bolstered by their white constituents, did their best to make it difficult for naval authorities to fully tap the minority labor force. And FDR's Executive Order 8802 didn't hinder politicians from defending segregation in the work place and beyond, despite the crisis faced by the nation. Senator Burnet Maybank, Charleston's former mayor and the

Palmetto State's recent governor, made this abundantly clear to Frank Knox, Secretary of the Navy. Even as the Navy Yard tried to make a better effort to hire minorities by the late summer of 1942 most whites were affronted. Spurred on by what he claimed were numerous letters from white employees at the Yard Maybank pointed out the "seriousness of the situation... and that every effort be made to separate the races completely." He had even been informed that some blacks were supervising whites. To the South Carolina Senator's mind it was necessary to maintain segregation in the work place to the extent "humanly possible" for the nation's own welfare. In spite of such remonstrance the Navy Secretary showed little sympathy. Referring directly to the "President's Fair Employment Practices order," Knox pointedly told the South Carolina politician that it was the law and his intention to tap all labor sources, regardless of race.¹¹

Other South Carolina politicians protested to the Army about its integrationist leanings at its military operated hospital during the same period. In August Gov. Richard Jeffries protested to Col. Vaughan, commander of Stark General Hospital, a facility that also served the Navy Yard. The South Carolina Governor had learned from one of his constituents that a white and black soldier shared a room at the federal facility. Colonel Vaughan claimed that he was acting under orders from Washington but had not known that the "two races" were treated in the same room. Later, the hospital commander claimed that he would do all that he could to make Stark "agreeable to both races of patients" but that with the construction then in progress at the hospital it was impossible to "completely" separate the races. A native of Virginia Vaughan seemed to sympathize with the South Carolina governor's position but orders from superiors sometimes forced him to override the state's segregation laws.¹²

The Navy and other federal agencies, particularly as the War Manpower Commission (WMC), that recruited new workers for the Navy Yard, had a tough choice. While most federal agencies were concerned about hiring whoever was available, white or black, the local white work force seemed adamant against working with blacks. In April 1942 one WMC inspector insisted that Yard management would gladly hire more blacks but white employees refused to work alongside African Americans. Claiming that Navy Yard

management "risk[ed] losing all of the white workers in the crew" if minority employees worked amongst them, the WMC inspector recommended that groups of "qualified Negro workers" be placed in a gang or crew that worked completely separate from white crews. While other Southern shipyards adopted this policy there is little evidence that Charleston's Navy Yard took such action.¹³

Fearful of a white walk out, Navy officials tried to avoid a direct confrontation by restricting most new minority hires to semi-skilled and unskilled positions. Along with the WMC they were able to restrict most African American hires to these lower levels because of statistics that showed the poor educational levels of blacks. In April 1942, the Navy Yard had 5,100 blacks listed as potential workers but a vast majority, according to one Navy reviewer, lacked the basic skills to even be trained for semi-skilled, let alone, skilled positions. Half were classified as illiterate and only ten per cent had more than four years of schooling. Consequently just one out of five applicants had passed preliminary exams for the Yard's various apprenticeship programs, ranging from helpers in the electrician shop to the machinist or pipe fitter shops. While this may have been legitimate as far as it went, government official ignored the fact that skills for most local whites were little better. The basic education levels of all groups in South Carolina were low regardless of race. Yet white hires at higher skill levels significantly out paced that for blacks. Thus in October 1942 as the WMC evaluated the next twelve months of hiring needs at the Navy Yard, out of 3,530 nonwhites it expected to hire, 500 were for skilled and 3,000 for semi-skilled positions as compared to 3,625 and 5,809, respectively, for whites.¹⁴

Time and again throughout the war the Charleston Navy Yard was short on its labor quotas. While reluctant to tap the full potential of blacks, it was somewhat more willing to tap another labor source-women. In the spring of 1942 the first female helpers started on shipping ways. Until that time the only feminine employees at the Yard served as office workers. Although reluctant to consider women as pipe fitters, electricians, and sheet metal workers, navy directives from Washington ordered all its yards to tap women for these jobs as male workers left for the armed forces. By the end of 1942 most shops at

Charleston's facility employed women in various production jobs. While male acceptance was not usually enthusiastic the feminine work force contributed and sometimes superseded their male counterparts. Thus in spring, 1943, female tack welders could sometimes "out work the boys." Granted few female recruits attained supervisory levels and most were employed as helpers in various capacities, regardless of the assignment, they still played a significant role in increasing the production capacity of the facility as war needs accelerated. ¹⁵

Although such enthusiastic endorsements of black workers is hard to find there is no question that black numbers within the Navy Yard steadily grew and made important contributions to as the war quotas. In doing so a majority were confined to semi-skilled positions and lower. By the end of 1944 black employment within the Navy Yard numbered nearly one third of the total workforce of 23,000. It is unclear how many of this number were skilled workers. Nonetheless some percentage within this number did achieve the highest levels in the labor force, ranging from electricians to welders. But even though it was difficult to gain this status, it remained problematic for at least some skilled minorities to keep their positions because of white harassment and outright violence. ¹⁶

In May 1944 Edward Tolliver, an African American driller, 3rd class, was working on the shipping ways. As he reached for a tool a group of whites nearby attacked him, claiming he made advances to one of the woman in the group. Using his tool he was able to fend off the attack but soon after was suspended from the shipyard job without appeal. However, Tolliver took his case to the FEPC and related this to his attackers. Tolliver believed that the "magic letters 'FEPC' brought about a thorough investigation ... with the result that the complainant was reinstated to his former job with back pay..." Tolliver's bold action saved his job but it others that resorted to the FEPC were not so fortunate. ¹⁷

On April 23, 1945, Matthew White entered the gate of the Navy Yard to start his shift. The "policeman" at the gate told him to stop, remove his badge, and when White turned to leave, the officer attacked him with his handgun. Although an approaching naval

officer intervened, reprimanded the policeman for improper arresting procedures, and escorted the black employee to the police station White still lost his job. After waiting for over three hours to discuss his ordeal with a personnel officer White never had his chance to provide his side of the case before being discharged without recourse to a review. Somewhat weakly, a FEPC review officer closed the case based on lack of sufficient evidence.¹⁸

In early 1945 James Lester, another skilled African American, claimed their Yard supervisors discriminated against him and several other minority. In spite of years of experience their ratings were reduced to "third and second class ratings" as opposed to first class levels where pay and work assignments were better. In addition, when African American welders reported in sick they had to go before a review board each time they missed work to defend their claim, something that white welders never faced. Clearly frustrated, Lester argued that unless he and others received fair treatment the Charleston facility could not achieve the production goals set by the Navy. The outcome of the case could not be resolved because FEPC officials failed to follow up on Lester's initial evidence.¹⁹

Regardless of the outcomes in these examples, frustrations lingered within the Navy Yard with a double standard for black employees. In spite of this general calm was sustained throughout the war. Caught in a dilemma between hiring more minorities while increasing the resentment and possible loss of most of its white employees, Navy supervisors tried to compromise. Both because of Roosevelt's decree and certainly out of sheer necessity, Navy supervisors increased overall black numbers but minimized those hired to supervisory and skilled positions. This helped allay some of the potential for violence by giving African Americans greater opportunities than possible prior to 1941. But another factor was equally important-Charleston's black community and its relationship with whites who worked together, albeit reluctantly, to curb violence. Long before 1941 its black leaders had negotiated and appealed to white local leaders to rectify grievances against the system. Two decades before World War II the black community requested that black teachers be hired to teach their children who until that

time had only white teachers. When initial requests to the city school board failed to bring the change black activists went door to door within their community to sign a petition to demand African American teachers. Armed with thousands of signatures, black leaders returned to the school board and convinced the white members to agree to the new policy. Admittedly such actions were not regular nor when they occurred successful, but they demonstrated that dialogue between whites and blacks was possible and could be used as an avenue to resolve problems without resorting to violence. Such tactics were resurrected to address the black community's serious war housing shortage.²⁰

Of course white politicians and their constituents claimed that most blacks were satisfied with their social and economic conditions, as they had done at the beginning of the black teachers' issue. And even as housing shortages accelerated before and after Pearl Harbor whites tried to ignore it. Nonetheless, Charleston's black community sought relief for the poor and inadequate housing in their neighborhoods. Housing within city had long been an issue for African Americans. Mamie Fields, a Charleston activist and educator since World War I, had helped lobby the city government in the thirties for more and better housing for the poor in her community. Finally in 1936, through WPA grants, the first public housing for blacks was constructed. But with thousands of new minorities attracted to the city in the early 1940s the housing crisis grew worse. By 1940 the housing shortage forced the navy to seek city aid to persuade all residents with empty rooms to make them available for rent. Of course this focused on assisting white newcomers. By 1942 new housing was either constructed or underway to relieve the pressure on whites. No plans existed to improve the lot of the worsening black situation.²¹

To prove that black housing needs were just as serious its leaders organized a two-day housing survey of the black community under the auspices of Avery principal Howard Bennett and his faculty and high school students. Going door to door the survey gathered important details on matters such as numbers of children and adults per household, total number of persons per room, and the time of arrival of the household to the city. The specific results of the survey have yet to be uncovered but the general impression left little question that for most in the black community the housing problems were serious.

One student who took part in the survey remarked soon after its completion that while conditions varied there was no question that some people lived in "appalling" conditions. Once tabulated, the results were submitted to the city's Negro Housing Authority of Charleston who then turned them over to the Federal Housing Authority.²²

It would take nearly another year but public housing plans and construction for blacks finally began, in large part, due to this survey and the constant lobby of black organizations and leaders. But as African Americans waited for action to address their needs tensions were growing during the summer of 1942. Although rumors and isolated incidents did not identify a specific catalyst it appeared that as more people entered the city to bolster the production quotas at the Navy Yard and smaller war industries in the area fears of race violence mounted. Howard Bennett remembered years later that as rural whites streamed into the city to work for the Navy Yard they harbored extreme racial hostility to blacks. He claimed that "It was not beneath them to throw a black on the ground and step on them just like they weren't even there." The Avery principal had first hand knowledge of this. When he stepped in front of a white man to board a bus the man grew irate and threatened to get a knife and cut his head off. Fortunately nothing more than words were exchanged but the actions showed the racial tension in the city.²³

In July the planning committee of Charleston Negro Community council reported that 12,000 blacks had entered the city placing severe strains on its housing and recreational facilities. This coupled with the inadequate training facilities for minority males and females restricted them from work in local war production. The frustration that this situation produced at first did not move local white leaders or galvanize local federal authorities into substantive action. But the rising tide of protest by African Americans coupled with the overt racism by rural whites entering the city finally forced city fathers to take action to curb an explosion.²⁴

In August and early September Charleston police were inundated with calls from Charleston residents throughout the city asking about riot rumors downtown. Among such rumors it was circulated that blacks had purchased 800 ice picks from a King Street

store. It was later shown that only two were bought during the period from this store. Another rumor was the Eleanor Clubs, a mysterious organization that fueled by whites throughout the South. "Eleanor" referred to Eleanor Roosevelt, the President's wife, and defender of minority rights throughout the nation. Rumors of these "clubs" had circulated for some time. In Charleston many whites had employed black domestics for generations at poverty level wages. According to the stories black domestics were forming underground unions to demand better pay and working conditions. Such "subversive" actions were revolutionary in the mind of most whites. But as in the rest of the South, no one in the white establishment ever proved such organizations existed. Neither local law enforcement nor the city's newspaper, the *Charleston News and Courier*, could find any evidence to substantiate them. Nonetheless white fears fueled by rumors of Eleanor Clubs and blacks buying pick axes mixed with other racially charged fears made it necessary to take action. In early September Mayor Henry Lockwood canceled the annual black Labor Day parade for 1942 to "prevent" a possible race riot.²⁵

The seeming powder keg on the verge of exploding never happened. The old city remained relatively peaceful throughout the war. Fears of race riots that mesmerized so many on Labor Day 1942 never reached such fever pitch again. Instead compromises between both groups quelled further rumors of conflict and a dialogue, of sorts, ensued. Although the evidence is meager two factors help to explain how a dialogue came about between both groups. One was the Charleston Biracial Committee. Formed in the wake of the Labor Day riot rumors, this group of prominent Charlestonians included six members each from the white and black communities. Formed to "promote a better spirit of cooperation between the races" it had the support of Mayor Lockwood. Its success gained national attention leading other cities, including Detroit, to adopt it as a model to help ease tension in their community following the race riots in that city in June 1943. Even an organization of Southern businessmen invited representatives of the Charleston committee to provide guidance to aid other Southern communities to find solution to race tension.²⁶

The other factor that led to this dialogue between whites and blacks was their long history of living side-by-side. Unlike many Southern cities segregation communities had never occurred in the lowcountry city. Generations of whites and blacks had lived in the same neighborhoods. Black activist Septima Clark recalled years later that at the beginning of the twentieth century white families lived on the same street as her parent's home. And integrated neighborhoods were common through most of the city up to World War II. Black sociologist, Charleston S. Johnson, studied Charleston's unusual practice and determined that this grew out of the old master-servant relationship of the nineteenth century where black servants generally lived behind their white employer. With so many African Americans as neighbors white Charlestonians had a more tolerant attitude to blacks even if it did not mean they socialized or worked together. Thus while rural whites that streamed into the city had little daily contact with blacks they could not understand how whites Charlestonians could accept any dialogue, let alone compromise with them. Consequently fears of race riots were borne out in the minds of newcomers.²⁷

But while we do not know what the Biracial committee of Charleston discussed in their meetings there is evidence to show that Charlestonians of both races discussed their frustrations about each other publicly. Some of it was hostile, almost unpatriotic, from blacks while white frustrations were often openly racist but it did not generate further riot hysteria.

In late 1942 one perceptive Avery student complained in the school paper that democracy meant nothing to the black community because none of its ideals were realized by African Americans. More than a year later another student protested that the nation's efforts to produce war material for the boys overseas was sabotaged by discriminatory practices preventing blacks from working in many areas of war industries. Claiming able-bodied African Americans were removed, "whenever the opportunity is at hand" and given some menial custodial duties, valuable skills that might otherwise be producing valuable parts on the assembly line or shipyard were squandered. Proclaiming that the nation was in the war together, it was essential for the South to stop hindering and intimidating the Negro so an all out effort for the war could be reached.²⁸

Such feelings about South Carolina and Charleston were expressed even in the main stream white press. One minority business man from Lake City, South Carolina told the editors of the white owned *Charleston News and Courier* that African Americans did contribute important things to the war effort despite the paper's indifference to their achievements. He expected that whites would have a greater respect for blacks before the end of the war. A younger writer proclaimed to the same editors that blacks were continuing to make progress despite the odds that were stacked against them. She boasted that minorities did not need to follow in the "white man's ... footsteps... when he could make those tracks larger and even better."²⁹

While whites in the city tolerated black perspectives, it did not change the racist mentality most harbored in spite of the desperate situation of the city and nation. One writer lamented that "Negroes" had a long way to go before they became an asset rather than a liability to the community. He feared that Charleston would have a huge burden after the war because of such a large black influx would become the city's "number one problem" after the war. Without war jobs to work in they would then go on relief. William Watts Ball, the editor of the city's paper, was the mouthpiece for his conservative readers. A staunch segregationist before and during the war, he had little sympathy for black demands for social and economic equality. His views on race were summed up in January 1943 when he belittled the demands of Walter White and the NAACP to make one of the nation's war aims the elimination of the "color line." Ball sneered that such sentiments were just "nonsense."³⁰

Yet even as blacks and whites sometimes vented their dislike of each other in the newspaper they worked out problems on many levels to resolved future powder kegs and get through the war years without violent street confrontations. Howard Bennett worked with the city's mayor, Henry Lockwood, established mandates for the committee- to find solutions to many wartime issues. These included congestion and friction of buses, end discriminatory practices at the Charleston Navy Yard, investigate charges of police brutality, and improve attitudes of school age children. The biracial committee did not

achieve complete racial harmony but successfully worked to bring more equitable services to the black city residents by the latter half of the war and avoided race tension from rising again.³¹

Perhaps such a committee might have prevented the major riot that occurred at the Mobile shipyard in May 1943. An old city in the tradition of Charleston, this port was an important center for the construction of Liberty ships and tankers for the war effort. Like South Carolina's port, Mobile's population had grown significantly in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Its population increase almost doubled that of Charleston and larger numbers of minorities made up this number reaching nearly a fifteen- percent of the total. Consequently the housing shortages were worse and the tensions that built up between the races became intense.³² Adding to the tensions was a more militant black work force led by a strong, sometimes aggressive black leadership.

Although unions existed at the Charleston Navy Yard and other smaller war industries in the city they had little interest in confronting management. Employees of the Navy Yard recalled years after the war that union membership was not mandatory but most workers join in order to have better job opportunities and improved chances at the best work shifts. Job actions against management rarely happened. Cecil Clay, a young sheet metal journey man at the Charleston facility in the 1940s, recalled that union membership meant more for its job opportunities than anything else. He rarely, if ever, saw black members.³³

During World War II most unions were segregated, especially in the South, so its surprising that Clay never saw blacks in his local. However, the segregated unions in Mobile lobbied for fairer treatment for its black membership. Through the leadership of John LeFlore, the executive secretary of the local branch of the NAACP, blacks pressured the FEPC to demand that shipyard management hire blacks on an equal basis with whites at the largest facility, Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. After several months of lobbying ADDSCO began hiring blacks into some skilled positions. But when twelve black welders were assigned to work alongside whites on a night shift

in May 1943 violence erupted. The three days of violence saw white workers drive blacks out of the yards, injuring several in the process. In the aftermath, which required federal troops to quell, white workers demanded that blacks be excluded from all skilled jobs, in other words they wanted blacks returned to their second calls working status. Although the FEPC, the War Manpower Commission and local unions stood firm in defending blacks' equal treatment on the job, they compromised by establishing a segregated yard for black workers. This arrangement remained the practice through the rest of the war at the Gulf coast establishment.³⁴

While the violence in Mobile was triggered by white objections to black co-workers racial greater numbers of blacks and whites entering the city had also elevated tension within the city. While Charleston County's population grew 121,105 before the war to 167,195 in 1944 the census change in Mobile was more dramatic, 141,975 in 1940 to 233,891 four years later. The increased congestion that this gave to the Gulf port city had greater impact than it did on South Carolina's Atlantic coast city. Furthermore Mobile's black population was crowded into one segregated area on the south edge of the city, a place already badly in need of aid before the war. With a city government that was unwilling to provide even moderate aid to the black community, the tensions that exploded in May 1943 remained high even seven months later.³⁵

Space and time does not allow a thorough examination of the Mobile situation. However, clearly Charleston prevented its racial tension from turning violent and after 1942 tensions moderated, although not eliminated, through negotiations between white and black leaders. As demonstrated blacks did not gain the full autonomy envisioned in FDR's Executive decree of June 1941 but it helped once black leaders in Charleston had made the Yard's new commandant aware of its discriminatory job hiring. This paper provides evidence that the South Carolina port city also had unique interracial contacts that helped prevent general riots from occurring, unlike Mobile. Further evidence will help to delineate the importance of this collaboration. Regardless of its social situation the navy facility contributed significantly to the nation's war effort by constructing nearly 150 landing craft and other lesser vessels crucial to defeating the Axis. Blacks and

women had a significant part to play in this production in spite of barriers put in their way. Often it was tough to endure but many did and a few, as we have seen, made appeals to the FEPC to rectify discrimination. While such appeals did necessarily achieve desired results they showed a determination rarely seen prior to World War II in the Palmetto State. These efforts confront a segregated world would become, paraphrasing historian Merle Reed, the seeds of change for the coming civil rights era.³⁶

Endnotes:

 Glossary for abbreviations:

Avery RC- Avery Research Center Archives, Charleston, SC

CEP- Charleston Evening Post

CNC- Charleston News and Courier

CNY- Charleston Navy Yard

GRDN- General Records of the Department of the Navy

NA - National Archives, College Park, MD

Nase- National Archives, Southeast Region, East Point, Georgia

PTW- Produce to Win (CNY's employee newspaper during WWII), copies on file at the

SCL- South Caroliniana Library, USC-Columbia

SCDAH- South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC

WMC- War Manpower Commission

¹ On Jones see Forrestal to Logan, 5 October 1944, Navy Yard file, James R. Logan Collection, Avery RC, and CNC, 24 October 1944. On Roosevelt and Executive Order 8802, see Merle Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991), 11-15; David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1990), 32-33. On early attempts to change Navy discrimination see Unsigned to Secretary Knox, 9 December 1941, P Roll, NAACP Papers, microfilm copy, Cooper Library, USC and Unsigned to NAACP, 12 December 1941, *ibid.*

² I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1895-1968*, Columbia, 1973, 136-184; Edwin D. Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina," *Journal of Negro History*, XLIV, 1959, 346-369; on percentage of blacks versus whites in South Carolina in 1940 see W.H. Callcott, (ed.) *South Carolina Economic and Social Conditions in 1944*, (Columbia, 1945) 43.

³ On the history of the Charleston Navy Yard during this period see Fritz Hamer, "A Southern City enters the Twentieth Century: Charleston, its Navy Yard, and World War II," (USC Dissertation, 1998), 9-17; Jim McNeil, *Charleston's Navy Yard: Picture History*, (Charleston 1985). George W. Hopkins, "From Naval Pauper to Naval Power: The Development of Charleston's Metropolitan-Military Complex," in *The Martial Metropolis: U.S. Cities in War and Peace*, ed. Roger W. Lotchin, (New York: Praeger, 1984), 6-10.

⁴ Hopkins, "Naval Pauper to Naval Power," (1984), 6. John H. Moore, "Charleston in World War I: Seeds of Change," *SCHM*, (86, January 1985), 44.

⁵ Hopkins, "From Naval Pauper to Naval Power," (1985), 13-15; Hamer, "Charleston's Navy Yard," (1998), 18-20.

⁶ For an in-depth look at the origins and history of the FEPC see Merle Reed, *Seed time for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991), 12-14, although Reed notes that the FEPC was not the first government attempt at ending discrimination in parts of the work place, the President's decree was the first national effort to curtail job discrimination in portions of the work place, see 16 in *ibid.* For a look at the order from the President's perspective and why he was reluctant to sign it for political and practical reasons see James M. Burns, *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom*, (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanich, Inc., 1970), 45-47.

⁷ Hopkins, "Naval Pauper to Naval Power," (1984) 16, from *Saturday Evening Post*, December 14, 1940, 63.

⁸ For Bennett's meeting see his interview with Edmund Drago, June 23-24, 1981, File 69, Box 2, Drago Papers, Avery RC and also Drago, *Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations: Avery Normal Institute*: (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 206-207.

⁹ On the background and service records of Glassford and Allen see Service records of both officers on file at the Navy Historical Center Archives, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. and *CNC*, 15 May, 16 May 1942.

¹⁰ On the total number of workers at CNY in 1942 and the break down for black workers within this see "Resurvey of the Employment Situation in the Charleston Area, SC, October 5, 1942," Box 19, Series 12, WMC, RG 211, at NAsE. See Hopkins for a specific percentage breakdown of classifications for blacks in June 1942, 3.4percent skilled, 32 percent semi-skilled and the rest unskilled out of a black workforce total that made up of 18 percent in "From Naval Pauper to Naval Power," (1984), 16. John W. Moore interview with the author, Summerville, SC 9 March 1995. Transcription in possession of the author.

¹¹ Maybank to Knox, 16 September 1942, File: miscel- CNY, Box 3, BRM Papers, Special Collections, Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC; Ralph Bard (for Knox) to Maybank, 25 September 1942, *ibid.*

¹² For details on this incident see Gov. Jeffries to H.K. Purdy, 12 August 1942 and Col. Vaughan to Gov. Jeffries, 15 August 1942, file: Stark Gen. Hospital, Box 3, Gov. Jeffries Papers, SCDAH.

¹³ "Statement Concerning Charleston Shipyards," April 8, 1942, Box 12, Series 11, WMC, RG 211, NAsE. For other Southern shipyards that adopted segregated sections see Merl E. Reed, "The FEPC, the Black Worker and the Southern Shipyards," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, (LXXIV, 1973), 447-451, Reed claims that Charleston Navy Yard did adopted segregated shipping ways but the author can find no evidence to back this up, either through interviews with former workers or other sources, for example see Cecil Clay Interview with the author, February 29, 1998, transcription in possession of the author.

¹⁴ "Statement Concerning Charleston Shipyards," April 8, 1942, Box 12, Series 11, WMC, RG 211, NAsE. For breakdown of future employment needs of blacks and whites following October 1942 see "Resurvey of the Employment Situation in the Charleston Area, SC," October 5, 1942, NAsE

¹⁵ On orders recruit women on the production line at the CNY see Admiral C.W. Fisher to Rear Admiral W. Allen, 18 February 1942, file: CNY, Box 80, Division of Shore Establishments and Civilian Personnel, GRDN, RG 80, NA. On the abilities of women workers at the Yard see *PTW*, April 9, 1943 and also see Hamer for other examples of women workers and their contributions in "Charleston's Navy Yard," (1998), 64-66.

¹⁶ On total work force at CNY in late 1944 see "Charleston, South Carolina Progress Report No. 1," November 25, 1944, Box 19, Series 12, WMC, RG 211, NAsE.

¹⁷ "Final Disposition Report, Case no. 7-GR-239," September 29, 1944, Box 3, CFEP, RG 228, NAsE.

¹⁸ "Charleston Navy Yard Case No. 7-GR-620," September 11, 1945, file: CNY, Box 3, CFEP, RG 228, NAsE

¹⁹ Lester to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 2, 1945, File: CNY, Box 3, *ibid.*

²⁰ For the efforts of black leaders to negotiate for needs within their community and their use of petition drives prior to 1941 see Septima Clark interview, November 9, 1971, File: I/5, Box 1a, Septima P. Clark Collection, Transcript on file, Avery RC. Drago, *Avery Normal Institute*, (1991), 175-176. Mamie Fields, *Lemon Swamp and other Places: A Carolina Memoir*, (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 194-195.

²¹ Fields, *Lemon Swamp*, (1983), 194-195. For details on the general housing shortage in Charleston prior to Pearl Harbor and after see for example CEP 24 January 1940, 8, 15 November 1941 and Hamer "Charleston's Navy Yard," (1998), 161-168.

²² *The Avery Tiger*, February 1942, on file at Avery RC; also see Charles S. Johnson, *Best Practices in Race Relations in the South*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1947), 35.

²³ Edmund Drago, *Charleston's Avery Normal Institute: Initiative, Paternalism, and Race Relations*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 206-07.

²⁴ For the report on the Negro Citizens Council see *CNC*, July 19, 1942. For the growing fears among whites about the black influx into the city see Drago, *Avery Normal Institute*, (1991), 206-07.

²⁵ *CNC* 6, 10 September 1942. On the background to the rumor of the Eleanor Clubs see David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture: 1940 to the Present*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1990), George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1967), 717-718.

²⁶ *CNC* 20 August 1943; Johnson, *Best Practices of Race Relations*, (1947), 35, 219.

²⁷ Johnson, *ibid.*, 35; Septima Clark interview with Jacqueline Hall and E. Walker, July 25, 1976, File I/6 Box 1a, Septima P. Clark Collection, Avery RC.

²⁸ For these observations see *The Avery Tiger*, December 1942, February 1944, on file at Avery RC.

²⁹ CNC 21, 26 March 1943.

³⁰ CNC March 26 1943, for editor's sentiment see 9 January 1943.

³¹ Johnson, *ibid.* 35; L. Howard Bennett interview with Edmund Drago, June 23-24, 1981, File 69, Box 2, Drago Papers, Avery RC.

³² Mary M. Thomas, "The Mobile Homefront During The Second World War," *Gulf Coast Historical Review*, (1, Spring, 1986), 58-59

³³ Cecil Clay Interview with the author, 29 February 1998, Santee, SC, copy in possession of the author.

³⁴ Thomas, "The Mobile Homefront," (1986), 70-71; Merl Reed, "FEPC, the Black Worker, and Southern Shipyards," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXIV (1973), 449.

³⁵ For statistics on population increases during the war years see "Population census of Congested Production Areas, April 1, 1940 and April 1, 1944," file: population census, Mobile, Box 31, Entry 31, Office of Congested Production Areas, RG 212, NAs. For details on racial tension within Mobile in the aftermath of the riots see "Mobile, Alabama, December 1, 1943," file: Racial Problems, Box 32, Entry 13, *ibid.*

³⁶ For war production numbers at CNY see McNeil, *The Charleston's Navy Yard: Picture History*, (1985), 102-103 and Hamer, "Charleston Navy Yard," (1998), 46-48. For Merle Reed's phrase see *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, (1991).