

Unruly Teachers: Florida's Political Culture during the 1968 Florida Teachers' Strike

by

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Abstract

On February 19, 1968 over 27,000 teachers in Florida resigned from their positions as educators. In doing so, these teachers created the country's first and only statewide teachers' strike. The teachers who went on strike did so to improve both a failing educational system, and their own professional standing. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Florida's political landscape was dominated by a group of conservative rural legislators known as the Pork Chop Gang. The policies of the Pork Chop Gang deteriorated Florida's educational system, but as Florida's population increased during the early 1960s demands for political and educational reform permeated the state. These demands created a shift in political culture that placed education at the forefront of politics in Florida. This thesis examines how the shift in political culture in Florida influenced the development of teacher militancy that culminated with the 1968 statewide strike.

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Introduction

On the morning of February 19, 1968 more than 27,000 classrooms in Florida remained empty.¹ Hoping to improve their standing as professionals as well as the educational system, the teachers who usually filled these classrooms each morning had walked out in protest. The teachers who went on strike came from both urban and rural areas of Florida. Moreover, as an integrated work stoppage, both white and black teachers crossed racial boundaries in an effort to improve Florida's educational system. In the only state wide teachers' strike in American history, the teachers of Florida stood resolute against an anti-union governor and conservative legislators. The importance of the strike on Florida's political and educational landscapes was overshadowed by all the other seminal events of 1968, including the assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, during the Memphis sanitation workers strike (another public sector movement), and the general social and political upheaval of 1968. Thus the strike has remained on the periphery of scholarship on the turbulent sixties. In his article "The Florida Teacher Walkout of 1968," James Sullivan argues that the teacher strike played an influential role in the development of Republican-led conservatism within Florida, and foreshadowing the rise of conservatism throughout the country. Sullivan asserts that the teachers' decision to walk out provided the turning point in the political culture of Florida. However, I argue that a study of the strike and its preceding years tells a different story.²

Countering Sullivan's argument, I argue that the transition from rural Democratic

¹ The number of teachers who participated in the strike fluctuates between sources. The National Education Association places the number at a much higher 35,000 while Governor Claude Kirk in numerous discussions of the strike puts the number around 20,000. The number used in this paper comes from James Sullivan's article "The Florida Teacher Walkout of 1968", in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995*, ed. Robert H. Zeiger (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

² Sullivan, pg. 206.

conservatism to business-centric Republican conservatism occurred in the years leading up to the strike. At the forefront of this shift was education. Florida, in the years after World War II was controlled by a group of rural legislators referred to as the Pork Chop Gang. The Gang formed as a means to stymie desegregation and to maintain a rural dominated political power structure within Florida. Many policies put forth by the Gang, especially in regards to funding towards education, hindered any chances at educational advancements within Florida. Due to a population increase during the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, the Gang began to see their power dwindle, leaving a void in conservatism. Republicans filled this gap and saw their political influence rise during the Florida elections in 1965 and 1966. These Republicans, led by newly elected Governor Claude Kirk in 1966, brought with them an ideology that centered on industrial recruitment. Essential for industrial recruitment was improvements in education. Nevertheless, their concern for education did not extend to an increase of funding for education. By placing education at the forefront of his governorship, Kirk also provided an outlet for teachers' to voice their concerns. Moreover, Kirk's ideas of business efficiency within government and education did not conform to educators' ideas of improvement. This political change itself facilitated the teacher militancy of 1960s that ultimately led Florida's educators to walk out. As public sector strife persisted and grew in the years following the Florida teachers' strike this thesis builds upon historical analysis that views conservatism as detrimental towards public sector unionism. My analysis of the strike, however, also indicates that this conservatism formulated the basis for public sector strife. While Sullivan's article remains one of the few in depth analysis of the teacher strike, other works on public sector unionism assist in understanding the teachers' actions in 1968.

Public sector unionism, like the teacher strike in Florida, has remained an

understudied aspect of America's history, but recent years have seen an increase of scholarship that discusses it in terms of race and politics. Joseph McCartin's recent work on the 1981 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization's (PATCO) strike in *Collision Course* provides an excellent narrative on the detrimental impact of Reagan era conservatism on public sector unionism.³ While McCartin points towards President Reagan's decision to fire the striking workers as an influential factor in the development of modern conservatism, he does little to address how the development of modern conservatism shaped the PATCO workers decision to strike. McCartin's argument, like Sullivan's, is predicated on the idea of the rise of conservatism as a reaction to labor and social militancy during the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. Recent works on conservatism, however, illustrate a different dynamic, one that indicates an earlier shift in political culture within America.⁴ It was through this earlier shift, that teachers' in Florida found their motivations to walkout.

The historiography on public sector unionism, while limited, also indicates a period of prosperity during the 1960s and 1970s for public sector employees. The decade of the sixties saw an influx of public sector unionism throughout the nation. By signing Executive Order 10988, President Kennedy in 1962, gave the right to collectively bargain for federal employees, facilitating the rise of public sector unionism at the state level as well.⁵ Joseph McCartin complicates his own narrative, in his article "A Wagner Act for

³ Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America*, (Oxford University Press, 2011,) pg. 10.

⁴ Nancy McLean in *Freedom is not Enough*, Daren Dochuk, in *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, Jennifer Brooks in *Defining the Peace*, and James Cobb in *The South and America Since World War II*, all argue that rise of conservatism in America had its roots in the years preceding Richard Nixon's election in 1968. An examination of the Florida teacher strike and the years leading up to it affirms this stance.

⁵ Joseph A. McCartin, "Bringing the State's Workers in: Time to Rectify an Imbalanced US Labor Historiography," *Labor History*, 47, (February 2006), pg. 73.

Public Employees.” Here, McCartin argues that while public sector unionism grew during the 1960s and 1970s, public sector unionizers struggled to revive a national labor movement. This was due largely to the failure to gain a “Wagner Act” for public employees.⁶ In Florida, however, teachers used their union, the Florida Education Association (FEA), to address their concerns over education and their profession, and in doing so, gained the right to collectively bargain for all public sector employees within Florida.

While demands for collective bargaining played a role in the formation of the teachers’ strike, the problems within education took precedent. In my first chapter I argue that the Pork Chop Controlled legislature, for a period of over ten years, stunted educational improvements and advancements. While teachers within Florida long demanded educational improvements their calls often went unheard. A population increase beginning in the late 1950s, though, created a new public concern for education within. It was this population increase that also shifted the political culture of the state. As the size of the educated work force increased, so too did demands for political reform. These demands stemmed from a business centric conservative ideology that formulated in areas of large population growth, such as Orlando and the Space Coast. Demands for educational improvements increased as well. It was through these demands that the Pork Chop Gang lost their power. Moreover, the growing concern for education provided an outlet for teachers’ to voice their concerns. Recognizing this, teachers asked the National Education Association (NEA) to step in. While they saw hope in the growing concern for education, their ideas and demands for reform and improvement did not conform to the

⁶ Joseph A. McCartin, “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976,” *Journal of American History*, (June, 2008). Pg. 122.

growing business centered conservatism permeating the state.

With the growing concern for education on the rise, teachers hoped to realize improvements within education. Again pointing to an earlier shift in political culture, I argue, in chapter 2, that Kirk's policies coupled with the continuation of stymieing funding for education increased the demand for militancy by teachers during the education crisis of 1967. Moreover, the events of 1967 also indicated the FEA leadership's recognition of the public's disapproval of a teacher strike. By implementing a cautious approach in regard to teacher militancy, FEA leaders sought change through negotiations with the Governor. Kirk, however, responded to FEA overtures with an anti-union rhetoric that played well to a conservative public. This anti-union backlash continued during the strike.

While Kirk originally refused any overtures of compromise in 1967, he agreed to hold a special legislative session on education at the beginning of the year in 1968. This compromise gave teachers hope that their demands for educational reforms and improvements would finally occur. Teacher ideas on improvements centered on increased autonomy within their profession, and a growth in educational funding, but Kirk, at the special legislative session, continued to espouse his business oriented reforms. Moreover, while Kirk did call for increasing taxation to fund educational improvements, the majority of the money went elsewhere, further angering the teachers. It was through these proposals, I argue in chapter 3, that teachers and FEA leaders determined to create the country's first statewide teacher strike.

While Kirk's conservative policies provided the impetus for the teacher strike, his and the public's reactions towards the teachers' actions provided a commonality with

striking teachers and the social movements permeating the state. Jonna Perrillo's recent work examines the function of teacher unions and their relationship with the Civil Rights movement.⁷ Arguing that the teachers push for professionalization in New York during the sixties came in direct conflict with the Civil Rights movement, Perrillo portrays teacher militancy and unionism as one and the same. Perrillo sees the conflict stemming from the black power movement's push in New York City to replace white teachers with African American teachers in predominantly black schools. In doing so, northern white teachers came into direct conflict with these activists. The Florida teacher strike, however, tells a different story, and my analysis, in effect, decentralizes the Civil Rights movement. In his book, *Civil Rights Unionism*, Robert Korstad illustrates how interracial unions formulated a civil rights consciousness for white workers. An examination of the racial dynamic in the Florida teacher strike affirms his argument. As an integrated work stoppage in Florida, both white and black teachers formulated professional bonds that created an interracial awareness of civil rights, and in doing so, perhaps influenced teachers' demands for the desegregation of Florida's schools in the years following the strike.

While the Florida teacher strike has remained an understudied event in Florida history, it remains important on the state's political and social landscape. By drawing upon various primary sources such as newspapers, political papers, letters from teachers, and letters from the public, I show that a shift in conservatism prior to the strike played an essential role in the development of the teacher walkout. Teachers across the state left their classrooms to protest both a failing educational system and the business-centric

⁷ Jonna Perrillo, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equality*, (The University Press of Chicago, 2012,) pg. 9.

reforms proposed by Republican Governor Claude Kirk. The change in conservatism also created a concern for education by both politicians and the public. Teachers' believed these concerns provided an opportunity to address the problems that plagued education, but their understanding of what type of reforms were needed conflicted with Kirk's agenda. While teachers used their union to elicit the improvements they demanded, Kirk used their union participation to garner public support through a law and order rhetoric that played well to conservatives across this state. With little support from the public, teachers returned to their classrooms three weeks after the initial walkout. Viewed as a loss for teachers in the immediate months following the strike, frustrated teachers left their union at a rapid rate. FEA officials responded with a campaign to regain union membership by emphasizing the gains they did make.

In the epilogue I discuss the months following the strike. FEA officials continued their attack on Kirk's business model reforms, reinforcing my argument that the shift in conservatism within Florida was a cause, not a consequence of the teacher walkout. Furthermore, while teachers' failed to garner the funding and governmental support they demanded, they did force the legislature to address public sector unionism, which subsequently provided collective bargaining rights for all state employees, a major victory for public sector unions across the state. Moreover, the teachers successfully staved off Kirk's attempts for merit pay and the loss of continuing contracts for teachers. Both of these factors indicate that the strike was more successful than originally perceived.

When the teachers walked out of their classrooms in 1968, they did so after years of statewide neglect that had deteriorated the educational system. As conservatism shifted

towards a business-centric model in the 1960s, concerns for education increased within the public and among state officials. Teachers used this concern to elicit improvements, but their ideas of reform did not conform with the business style policies of Republican Governor Claude Kirk. Kirk's refusal to compromise on his definition of reform amid the growing concern with education across the state, provided the impetus for the teacher walkout. When the educators finally returned to their classrooms, they did so disenchanted with the union and government. The importance of the strike, however, cannot be denied. Illustrated through the gaining of collective bargaining rights, and Kirk's failed re-election bid in 1970 to more liberal minded Democrat Ruben Askew, the 1968 Florida's teacher strike left an indelible footprint on Florida's political landscape.

Chapter 1

When the teachers walked out of their classrooms on February 19, 1968, they created the country's first statewide teacher strike, but the strike did not occur in a vacuum, rising spontaneously on Florida's landscape. Instead, the actions of the teachers had their roots firmly planted in the years preceding the walkout. Viewing their actions as a means to fix a broken educational system, as well as improve their professional standing, teachers left their classrooms on that fateful February morning after years of frustration over myriad issues. An examination of Florida's political culture in the years before the strike leads to two important questions that this chapter seeks to answer. First, what caused the deterioration of Florida's educational system by the Pork Chop Gang? Second, why, after years of unconcern for education did the population, and the politicians of Florida, begin to focus on educational improvements? The answers to these questions lay in the shift of political culture in the years' preceding the strike.

During the 1950s, education within Florida saw a lack of funding due to a legislature more interested in maintaining the rural dominated power structure within the House and the Senate than in improving education. Led by a group of rural legislators known as the Pork Chop Gang, the state legislature espoused a rural-centric conservative ideology that maintained school segregation, while simultaneously disregarding districts outside of their electorate.⁸ By ignoring the educational needs of the state, the Pork Chop Gang created an educational system that necessitated improvements. While the Pork Chop Gang remained in power for over ten years, an influx of a younger working

⁸ The term Pork Chop Gang was coined in an editorial by James Clendenin, a *Tampa Tribune* editor, to describe twenty rural legislators who controlled both the Senate and the House within Florida. *The St. Petersburg Times*, July 26, 1962.

population demanded both political and educational reform.⁹ This newly formed population brought to Florida a conservative ideology that perpetuated the Pork Chop Gang's anti-tax, business friendly platforms, implementing them across the state as a means to garner industrial recruitment. The population increase also demanded change to both governance and education.

While the Pork Chop Gang's governance depended on the use of rural centered apportionment, overtly racist ideology, and a good old boy system that placed their allies in positions of power, the newly transplanted conservatives viewed government in fundamentally different ways. Bringing with them a conservative ideology that was influenced by business leaders, they viewed government as essential to the formulation of business friendly policies that would boost economic development throughout the state.¹⁰ Moreover, they sought to place ideas of business efficiency within government as a means to ascertain the economic benefits of government programs.¹¹ In doing so, they fought against the Pork Chop Gang's stranglehold on Florida through re-apportionment. Central to this business centric government, as well as the battle over re-apportionment, was education. Parents and politicians across the state correctly ascertained that the educational policies and practices under the Pork Chop Gang stunted educational growth and deteriorated educational quality. Ultimately this evolution in conservatism contributed to the teachers' decision to walkout, as their ideas on improvement and

⁹ David Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans*, discusses a rural dominated conservative ideology in Florida before the Pork Chop Gang's rise to power. The Pork Chop Gang, however, increased this rural dominance during their tenure.

¹⁰ In her book, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism*, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf discuss the influence big business had the shaping of this business-centric conservatism. *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism*, (University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹¹ The demand for business efficiency within government was most evident with the governor election of Claude Kirk in 1966. Kirk, throughout his tenure as governor pushed for a business administration that invested in governmental programs, but only at rate that could be returned to the state.

reform did not mesh with ideas of business efficiency as reform purported by conservatives. Nevertheless, teachers used the growing concern for education that stemmed from the change in political cultures as a means to address the issues they believed limited educational growth and quality. Illustrating the teachers' use of the growing concern over education as a means to elicit improvements and reforms, they asked the National Education Association (NEA) to conduct an investigative report on education in 1965. The report pointed to the lack of funding stemming from the Pork Chop Gang's control as the central reason for the problems within education. The problems within education were deep, as overcrowded classes, out of date textbooks, and decrepit schools pervaded the state, hindering, to the NEA, students' ability to learn. The shifting political culture demanded educational reform, and teachers' hoped that this concern would ultimately lead to the type of improvements they believed necessary to fix the broken system.

The recent deterioration of education within Florida began in the 1950s with the rise of the Pork Chop Gang, who controlled the state legislature during the 1950s and early 1960s.¹² This "small-county coalition," brought both a conservative ideology that focused on maintaining the racial oppression of segregation, and an anti-tax business friendly atmosphere (within their districts) that stymied educational advancements during

¹² The Pork Chop Gang resembled the Tallmadge Machine discussed in James Cobb's book, *The South and America since World War II* and Jennifer Brooks' book, *Defining the Peace*. While Cobb does not discuss the Pork Chop Gang, their control over the legislature through mal-apportionment, overt racist ideology, and practice of government through the good old boy system, all parallel the Tallmadge machine that dominated Georgia politics during the post war period. However, comparisons between the Pork Chop Gang and the Tallmadge Machine diverge in discussions of education. Whereas the Tallmadge Machine sought to reform and improve education within Georgia, the Pork Chop Gang remained wholly unconcerned with educational improvements. James Cobb, *The South and America since World War II*, (Oxford Press, 2012), Jennifer Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

a period of population growth.¹³ The Pork Chop Gang had its roots in the years preceding the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954, but it was this decision that provided an even greater impetus for collaboration between Florida's rural legislatures, who sought to uphold segregation. They maintained their power through the mal-apportionment of Florida, which allowed for only 13.6 percent of the population to elect over half of the State Senate and 18 percent electing more than half of the House.¹⁴ Furthermore, led by Senator S.D. Clarke from rural Jefferson County, they used their power to control the nominations of the Senate president who oversaw committee appointments. By controlling committees they had the ability to decide the fate of a bill without having to go to the House or Senate floor.¹⁵ If the bill made it through the committee level, then in almost all cases the legislature passed it into law. Using their power as committee members to push through bills congruent with their ideologies, the Pork Chop Gang impeded legislation that did not benefit their districts or ideology. For example, Dempsey Barron, a Senator from Panama City, discussed the Pork Chop Gang's obstruction of an urban renewal bill, stating that, "Don't you think we could make a good argument that we need some slums in America so people can realize there is somewhere for them to work up to?"¹⁶ An *Ocala Star Banner* editorial in 1984, reflecting on the Pork Chop Gang's reign and propensity for killing bills without giving them due consideration wrote about, "...Bart Knight, the old Pork Chopper from Blountstown, who once conducted a committee meeting as we walked down the hall of

¹³ Robert Sherrill, "Florida's Legislature: The Pork Chop State of Mind," (*Harpers Magazine*, November 1965,) pg 84. The term small town coalition was used by David Colburn in, *From Yellow Dog Democrat to Red State Republicans: Florida and Its Politics Since 1940*, (University Press of Florida, 2007). Pg. 56.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Pork Choppers Near Last Stand," *The St. Petersburg Times*, July 26, 1962.

¹⁶ Sherrill, 90.

the Florida Capitol. He whipped out the proxies and killed a bill I had inquired about.”¹⁷

By controlling the legislature in this manner, the Pork Chop Gang limited state wide funding and obstructed improvements within education progress.

By using their control of the legislature the Pork Chop Gang not only maintained segregation, but also created a business friendly climate within their own districts, that often ignored the majority needs of the state. By providing tax incentives for businesses to move to Florida, the legislature stripped education and the state of essential tax revenue.¹⁸ The increase of population necessitated extra funding for education, but with no state income tax, and an inadequate corporate tax structure, Florida lacked the tax base needed for increased funding. Robert Sherrill described the problems of state funding created by the Pork Chop Gang:

There is no corporate income tax, no state property tax, no severance tax on natural resources (except oil, which as of now is practically nonexistent as an industry in Florida) The state desperately needs operational money, but the legislature has made few demands on paper mills, insurance companies, banks, mines, and timber companies. The billion dollar citrus industry pays almost no taxes, and those it does pay are specifically earmarked to be spent in advertising and promoting the sale of Florida citrus; none is used to support state government. This not soon likely to change, since half of the House members own citrus groves or are financially involved with the citrus processors.¹⁹

The Pork Chop Gang maintained a stranglehold on Florida for a period of over ten years, impeding state wide funding, their attitudes towards education proved particularly galling. Discussing the problems of educational funding under the Pork Chop Gang, the FEA noted in a memo sent to teachers that, “. . .a Constitutional limitation of 20 mills for school purposes in Florida’s 67 counties left school boards

¹⁷ “Legislature’s ‘Pork Chop Game was a Long Time Dying,” *The Ocala Star Banner*, June 13, 1984.

¹⁸ Sherrill, pg. 86.

¹⁹ Sherrill, pg. 84.

without adequate finances for school operations or teachers' salaries."²⁰ In another instance, the appropriations committee, led by S.D. Clarke, debated a bill that provided \$100,000 towards library improvements for a mere two hours, concluding that while the bill was a nice sentiment the state simply could not afford the money necessary to implement these improvements. Minutes later, with virtually no debate, the committee approved \$500,000 towards combating fire ants within Florida.²¹ Such blatant disregard for educational programs became a central theme in the Pork Chop Gang's rule over Florida for two reasons; first as a publicly funded entity, education and educational programs did not conform to their ideas of small government.²² Second, many within the Gang viewed educational reform as a threat to the status quo of racialized segregation. In 1963, a battle over funding for the educational television commission occurred. This fight over funding illustrates the Pork Chop Gang's attitude towards education reform and desegregation. The commission sought to place inroads into the state, asking for \$1,800,000 to create ETV (educational television) stations across the state.²³ Surprisingly, ETV gained support from the legislature until local citizens began complaining about the progressive message towards race some of these stations took. In response, the Pork Chop Gang fought against appropriations going towards these programs, eventually stripping the funding from \$1,800,000 to a meager \$200,000. When questioned by the media, Pork Chopper and Senate President Wilson Carraway

²⁰ Florida School Crisis Chronology 1965-1967, August 1967, in FEA Papers, Series 1186-11, Cartn 40, File Folder 3. In the State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

²¹ Sherrill, pg 84.

²² While the Pork Chop Gang espoused a small government ideology, they did use federal funds when it benefited their districts. This evident in their approval of the Cross Florida Barge Canal in 1964 which used federal funding to build a canal through the heart of North Central Florida, a hotspot for Pork Chop control. Moreover, the Pork Chop Gang also supported the use of federal funds in the development of the Space Coast. This contradictory stance Southern legislators and governors is also discussed by James Cobb in, *The South Since 1945*.

²³ Sherrill, pg. 85.

responded that “If I had been on the committee I would have cut even more. I was under the impression educational television was supposed to help us knock some teachers off the payroll, but it’s been a failure at that.”²⁴

While the Pork Chop Gang stunted educational progress, their anti-tax and business friendly platforms assisted in attracting a younger working population who changed the political culture within Florida.²⁵ As industries associated with the space coast and the building of Disney World grew, they recruited highly educated workers who demanded improvements within education. The increase of pupils (the children of these transplants) necessitated educational improvements. Schools now faced the problem of overpopulation, and demands for more reform percolated throughout the state.²⁶ A *St. Petersburg Times* reporter, reflecting the growing concern for education while discussing the elections of 1966 stated, “The number one issue in these elections will be education.”²⁷ The calls for reform often came from the newly transplanted northerners who sought an end to the Pork Chop Gang’s reign over Florida.

While retirees and traditional rural conservatives, especially from north Florida, continued to dominate the landscape both politically and demographically during the

²⁴ Sherrill, pg 90.

²⁵ David Colburn, in *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans*, discusses the population growth seen in Florida during this period. The Pork Chop Gang’s policies often only affected their districts. These policies though began to create a political system that focused on business friendly platforms which spread statewide even as the Pork Chop Gang lost their grip on Florida. While the business friendly atmosphere played a role in this growth, Colburn also points to other factors, such as warm climate, that played a role in this growth.

²⁶ Wayne Malone, “Development, Operation, and Evaluation of the Statewide Teacher’s Walkout in Florida,” (PhD Diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969.) pg 42. James Cobb, in *The South since 1945*, also discusses the demands for educational improvements permeating the South. Cobb argues that this concern stemmed from the need for educational improvements as means to garner industrial recruitment. While Cobb does not discuss Florida specifically, an examination of Florida’s political culture during the early 1960s places the state within the same context of other Southern states who sought to address the problems with education.

²⁷ “Editor Says Burns can be beaten,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, January 12, 1966.

1950s and early 1960s, the influx of a more educated population forced many within the state to question the current political and educational system. Moreover, northern transplants often believed that government should also be run as a business.²⁸ The newly transplanted Floridians formulated different ideas on conservatism that shifted the power away from the Democratic Pork Chop controlled legislature and placed it under the purview of business focused Republicans. In doing so, the the dialogue of racialized politics shifted to a more business centric narrative that ultimately continued to stymie educational growth within the state. In analyzing this new form of conservatism, Robert Sherill wrote that, “There is the reactionary-scientific Florida around Orlando and Cape Kennedy; this is Goldwater country, not for reasons of race but because it is inhabited by so many young conservative executives who work for Martin in Orlando or around the space business at the Cape.”²⁹ These transplants brought with them a conservative ideology that focused on business friendly policies through legislation, and ideas of business efficiency within government. Before the change in governance could occur however, mal apportionment had to be addressed.

The battle over reapportionment within Florida became a contentious debate beginning in the late 1950s, due largely to the increase in population. With the Pork Chop Gang firmly in control, legislators outside of Pork Chop controlled districts fought to gain a more equitable legislative distribution that better reflected Florida’s changing

²⁸ Ideas of business efficiency within the government of Florida is reflected by the election of Claude Kirk. Discussed later in the chapter Kirk, ran the Governor’s office more as a CEO than a Governor.

²⁹ Sherill, pg. 84. Nancy McLean, in *Freedom is Not Enough*, in discussing the rise of conservatism, argues that while this business centric conservatism did not use the outwardly racialized rhetoric of conservative Southern Democrats, it centered on ideas of racial superiority that stunted the advancements within the workplace.

population patterns.³⁰ Since 1952 the Pork Chop Gang fended off calls for reapportionment, but as the demands for reform increased, a new “gang” formed within the legislature to combat the powerful grip the Pork Choppers held within the state.³¹ In 1962 this group of urban legislators, labeled the “White Knights,” attempted to pass a resolution that called for a reapportionment that accurately reflected the state’s population. The Pork Choppers naturally used their influence within the legislature to quash any calls for major overhauls of the system. In a December 1962 interview with the *Evening Independent*, Wilson Carraway referred to any plan for reapportionment as “doomed” before it ever reached the floor of the Senate.³² While the Pork Chop Gang continued to hold sway within the legislature, overtures for change persisted, creating an aura of conflict within the legislature that proved detrimental to other aspects of governance. Education specifically took a back seat to the battle for reapportionment, where progressive urban legislators, instead of fighting for educational improvements, found themselves mired in a conflict to restructure political power within the state. Recognizing that reapportionment meant their demise as a political power, the Pork Chop Gang staunchly opposed any change.

Because the Pork Chop Gang resisted all reapportionment proposals, resistance to their power increased. By 1963 many citizens within the state demanded reform to wrest political control from these rural legislators. Mayors from urban areas such as Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Miami formulated a coalition called the Mayor’s Council on Fair

³⁰ The battle over reapportionment often centered on a conflict between rural (the Pork Chop Gang) and urban (government reformers) legislators. David Colburn provides a more in depth analysis of this rural-urban conflict in his book, *From Yellow Dog Democrat to Red State Republican*.

³¹ “New ‘Gang’ Opposes Pork Chop Tactics,” *The Evening Independent*, December 5, 1962.

³² *Ibid.*

Apportionment.³³ The council sought to make reapportionment a central issue in the legislature, while also filing briefs with the state Supreme Court in the hopes to garner legal as well as political support for the legislature.³⁴ Recognizing the threat to their power in public's increased calls for reform, the Pork Choppers took a proactive approach, agreeing to discuss reapportionment in order to stymie efforts at a complete overhaul of Florida's voting bloc. Calling for an increase of Senate seats from thirty eight to forty two, giving urban areas four extra seats but maintaining district lines, the Gang sought to remain in power while placating demands for reapportionment.³⁵ The initiative actually garnered support from urban legislators who viewed the plan as a step in the right direction.³⁶ While urban legislators and much of the public at large hoped the plan would lead to a drastic overhaul of governance within the state, such change never came to fruition. Only a ruling by the Federal Supreme Court in 1964 began to truly reapportion power within Florida.

By 1964, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, reapportionment had become a national issue. The Federal Supreme Court's "one man, one vote" ruling in the *Reynolds v Sims* decision of 1964 stated that legislative malapportionment in 32 states was unconstitutional and had to be eradicated.³⁷ This federal action created a new impetus for change in Florida. The Pork Chop Gang reacted with their typically confrontational style, bemoaning the federal government's intervention within the state. Nonetheless the tides had turned, due largely to the population increase, and the power

³³ "Apportionment Council Plans Political Action," *The St. Petersburg Times*, August 1, 1963.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *The St. Petersburg Times*, "A Plan to Keep Pork Choppers in Firm Control," January 19, 1963.

³⁶ *The St. Petersburg Times*, "Pork Chop Gang Still on Top," February 4, 1963.

³⁷ *The St. Petersburg Times*, "For Reapportionment, More Momentum," January 31, 1965.

they once held began to diminish in the immediate years following Courts' ruling.³⁸ Many Pork Chop leaders, recognizing what reapportionment meant to their political careers, did not run for re-election. Most notably was S.D. Clarke, who the legislature thanked for his service by naming a highway after him. Reflecting the virulent racist nature of the Pork Chop Gang and many rural Floridians, Clarke thanked the Senate by stating that, "I have niggers at home with children named after me, but this is the first road."³⁹

With the battle over reapportionment in its waning moments, problems with education rose to the forefront of Florida politics. Even with reapportionment though, the Pork Chop Gang's influence remained intact during the Governorship of Hayden Burns. With the educational system in crisis, the NEA, the largest teachers' union in America, sought to address the problems within Florida in 1965. They faced off against Governor Hayden Burns, a conservative Democrat with ties to the Pork Chop Gang. During Burns' 1964 election campaign, recognizing the new importance of education on the political landscape, pandered to the teachers and an increasingly interested public, expressing his concerns over teachers' salaries and educational funding in Florida. Burns, however, failed to gain the support of teachers, who were wary over his ties to the Pork Chop Gang. By 1965, recognizing the public demands for educational reform, Governor-elect Burns and the legislature, called for a legislative session focusing on education, that addressed the recurring problems of funding. This brought hope to many teachers who had witnessed a severe lack of monetary support from the legislature since 1957.⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Sherrill, pg. 88.

⁴⁰ Malone, pg. 57.

Demanding adequate funding which “included more transportation units, supervisory services, reading teachers, kindergartens, counselors, visiting teachers, new school construction and competitive salary schedules,” the FEA (the Florida state affiliate of the NEA) aspired to cement its status as chief negotiator for the teachers.⁴¹ The legislature, though, largely ignored these requests. Suggesting that they seek adequate money at the county level, Burns and the legislature claimed there no funds were available from the state.⁴² For many within the FEA this marked the beginning of the teacher militancy that dominated the state in 1967-1968. Phil Constans, secretary of the FEA during the strike, reflected that:

I suppose the roots of the walkout could be traced back through many, many years. Certainly, the tremendous reservoir of frustration among Florida teachers did not develop overnight. Undoubtedly, the progressive deterioration of the schools that resulted from poor state support ever since 1957 was a contributing factor. However, the first overt action by the profession that could be considered a starting point from which all other things followed occurred in 1965. It was during the 1965 session of the legislature, when it became so obvious that political considerations would once again receive priority over needs of the schools, the FEA called for an investigation of the state. From that point forward, the road appears to be one of ever-increasing militant teacher reaction to a constantly more obvious lack of statesmanship on the part of the politicians. Although there were many, many contributing factors directly related to the walkout, the key issue was that political concerns had once again won over concerns for the children.⁴³

For Constans, and other leaders of the FEA, the legislative session that brought great hope to educators within Florida ended in disaster. For teachers, it was just a perpetuation of the Pork Chop Gang’s educational policies. The unwillingness of the legislature to provide proper funding illustrated their basic lack of understanding of the problems

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Oral History of Phil Constans conducted by Wayne Malone in, “Development, Operation, and Evaluation of the Statewide Teacher’s Walkout in Florida,” (PhD Diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1969) Pg. 145.

educators faced, allowing them to place their priorities elsewhere. While a population increase and Supreme Court ruling had necessitated political reform in the form of reapportionment, many of the Pork Chop Gang's policies continued under the rule of Governor Burns. Recognizing the failings of Florida's educational funding, many in the public called for reform. Their anti-tax and pro-business sentiments however, served as a reminder that the reform educators sought would be hard fought. Burns' call for funding to come from the county level rang hollow as years of Pork Chop policies left counties financially weak.

The lack of legislative support also demonstrated Governor Burns and conservative legislator's negative attitude towards the FEA. These anti-union sentiments continued under the leadership of Claude Kirk during the education crisis of 1967 and subsequent walkout in 1968. Florida's anti-union policies obstructed unionization, as state right-to-work laws stripped power from unions attempting to make inroads within the state. While these laws stemmed from a desire to attract private industry to the state, they also extended towards public sector employees, complicating the FEA's push for recognition as a negotiating body for teachers. The state laws at the time prohibited public employees from striking, but these laws did cover the legality of walkouts in the form of employee resignations. Frustrated, and with little choice, teachers and FEA leaders asked the National Education Association to step in and investigate the problems within Florida, hoping that their involvement might garner improvement and increased recognition of the FEA by the state.

After the failed legislative action of 1965, the NEA, at the request of the FEA, conducted a study which focused on Florida's educational crisis. The final NEA report

released in 1966 criticized the state's education system, focusing on the dearth of support and state funding for all facets of K-12 education. The document exposed educator's frustration. As one spokesman for the teachers stated, "Never before had they known a governor and legislature to be so firmly committed to holding the line on taxes, or a governor to hold so tight a reign over the legislature."⁴⁴ While classroom enrollment grew, state funding failed to keep up with population growth, as the legislature raised state allocations only \$34,005,154 in a two year span, placing Florida seventeenth in the country in regards to educational funding. This was a comparatively low ranking considering Florida's growing upper middle class population.⁴⁵ Florida's reliance on sales tax revenue alone stymied state revenue growth, allowing conservatives to plead poverty whenever it came to educational funding.⁴⁶ Many educators within the state believed that the steep population growth could provide surplus tax revenue that could go towards education, but the legislature, as well as Governor Burns, refused to budge. The NEA report discussed this dynamic, believing that the state now had the means to increase funding through taxes, but that politicians refused to do so in an effort to maintain their popularity with retirees and business executives.⁴⁷ Ideas of adequately funding schools and reforming the educational system without raising taxes represented the crux of the battle over education. Schools lacked proper funding to provide an adequate education. In order to raise funding to a level that accommodated increased enrollment, policymakers had to approve tax increases, an unpopular move with the older population, traditional small government conservatives, and the newly transplanted

⁴⁴ Don Pride, "NEA Report Highly Critical of Situation" *The St. Petersburg Times* March, 11 1966.

⁴⁵ Roger Levine, "A Survey of the Attitudes of Volusia County Teachers: One Year After the Statewide Teacher Walkout," (Master's Thesis, Stetson University, 1970), pg 10.

⁴⁶ David Halberstam, "Claude Kirk and the Politics of Promotion," *Harpers Magazine*, May 1968, pg. 40.

⁴⁷ Don Pride, "NEA Report Highly Critical of Situation" *The St. Petersburg Times* March 11, 1966.

Republican minded conservatives. The legislature and Governor Burns, influenced by the political pressure of these groups, refused to budge on this issue.

Beyond political and funding considerations, the NEA report examined other aspects of Florida's educational system as well. The document listed numerous failings, including teacher shortages, disproportionate funding and quality between white and African American schools, low teacher salaries, and an overreliance of out-of-state teachers to staff Florida schools.⁴⁸ The issue of in-state recruitment of teachers proved especially galling for the NEA. While people from around the country flocked to Florida, teachers trained in Florida left the state in droves. As the report stated, "five out of every six teachers in Florida come from other states."⁴⁹ Florida could not competitively match other states' teachers' salaries, thus forcing many Florida graduates to seek work elsewhere. Burns openly supported a minimum teacher starting salary of \$5,000, stating that he would address this within the legislature, yet even this minimum salary, lower than even the proposed \$6,000 minimum salary by the Continuing Education Council in 1965, would do little to keep teachers in the state. While teachers were often underpaid in other states, Florida appeared especially miserly in this regard. Many of the teachers involved in the walkout described their wages as barely above the poverty level, believing fair pay for their work a necessity to improve education.

The report also addressed concerns over the practice of electing county school board superintendents. While many progressive counties, such as Alachua County (home of the University of Florida), appointed their superintendent through the school board,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. While I could find no direct reasons for out of state teachers to move to Florida to work, their migration, like other workers who flocked to the state, perhaps had its roots in Florida's warm climate and numerous beaches. This is discussed in David Colburn's book *From Yellow Dog Democrat to Red State Republicans*, and also in Gary Mormino's book *Land of Sunshine State of Dreams*.

most small rural counties held elections for the superintendents. Often times, elected officials had little experience with education, putting their counties at a severe disadvantage, as they used patronage to fill school board positions with unqualified cronies and friends. While the Pork Choppers lost power, many of their practices, especially in their rural districts, remained in place. Prior to 1949 and the Minimum Foundation act, county superintendents did not even need college degrees. Unlike other states, as the NEA report stated, “Florida is the only state in the union which does not require its superintendents to have professional qualifications for running the schools.”⁵⁰

Governor Burns responded to the report by saying he had already addressed many of the concerns laid out during a conference with 5,000 teachers held in Tampa in 1965.⁵¹ There, Burns had discussed his concern with education, assuring teachers that he would do everything in his power to address the situation. The failed legislative session of 1965 proved once again that many of Burns’s promises rang hollow. Preaching a message of support and conciliation, he did little, in actuality, to recognize the demands of the FEA. Burns also fired back at the NEA report, exclaiming that, “Politics should be left to the professional politicians,” indicating his anger towards teachers push for more say within their profession.⁵² Burns’ reaction to the critical report reflected both his opinion on education and on the FEA, an opinion mirrored by future Florida politicians in both houses of the state legislature. The general consensus remained that education policy should be decided by Tallahassee politicians and not by educators themselves, or their union.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ “Burns, Supporters Hold Tampa Meeting,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, December 9, 1965.

⁵² Don Pride, “NEA Report Highly Critical of Situation,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, March 11, 1966.

The NEA's report demanded more political action from teachers, though the document also "warned that blindly militant action could cost the groups their professional status."⁵³ Since its inception, the NEA had adopted an anti-strike stance, believing that teacher's strikes came in direct conflict with their mission as educators. However, NEA leaders also feared the more militant AFL-CIO affiliated American Federations of Teachers push into NEA controlled states. Thus, the NEA's stance against strikes began to change during the 1960s.⁵⁴ While the NEA's stance against "militant action" changed drastically a few years after the report, at the time the report came out NEA and FEA leaders felt they could garner change without such drastic measures as a strike. This would all change with the 1966 gubernatorial election of Claude Kirk, whose ideas on conservatism and industrial recruitment placed education at the forefront of his campaign.

The election of 1966 in Florida brought Claude Kirk to the forefront of both Florida and national politics. As the 1966 Republican gubernatorial candidate, Kirk ran in the general election against sitting Miami mayor Robert King High, who had defeated incumbent Governor Burns in a nasty and divisive Democratic primary battle. This divide in part stemmed from Burns' policies in regards towards education. Teachers, and educational reformers supported High, while traditional conservative Democrats supported Burns. Kirk's election illustrated the rise of a Republican led conservatism within Florida, that focused on industrial recruitment, and ideas of business efficiency within government. At the center of this was education. Reflecting his recognition over the importance of education in regards to industrial recruitment, Kirk stated, in a

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Michael Makowsky, *The Origins and Development of Teacher Unions in Florida, 1945-1975: A Study in Organizational Politics*. (PhD Dissertation, Florida State University, 1998,) pg 22.

campaign speech that, “The state can’t just live on sunshine. To convince these men with payrolls to come to Florida, I will tell them education is moving from 37th in nation to first in the nation.”⁵⁵ Kirk’s election illustrates the shift in political culture within Florida. While liberals and moderates across the state saw great hope in the success of the reapportionment battle earlier in the decade the elections of 1966 placed a Republican Governor in power, while also increasing the number of Republicans in both the House and the Senate. The newly minted Governor brought with him the background of a businessman who sought to place Florida at the forefront of conservative fiscal minded policies and governance. Essential to Kirk’s plan was improving education, but as teachers quickly came to understand, his agenda often perpetuated the issues of funding created by the Pork Chop Gang. Possessing a management style befitting any CEO, he often refused to compromise and allowed partisan politics to rule his decisions. His promise to continue the practice of stymieing tax increases resonated with retirees (still a vital voting force in Florida), Republicans, and business leaders, but to teachers, did little to address the problems in education.

Illustrating their concern with Kirk’s election, FEA leaders, sent out a memo to its teachers before Kirk even took office discussing the possibility of sanctions against Florida and the Governor-elect. These proposed sanctions included notifying businesses of the problems with education, and the censuring of state officials for their lack of leadership on educational issues.⁵⁶ The announcement of possible sanctions served two purposes. First, it addressed the issues and conditions of Florida schools, and let teachers know that the union sought to champion their cause in an effort to improve the schools

⁵⁵ “Kirk’s Philosophy: Go Get It.” *The Ocala Star Banner*, February 19, 1967.

⁵⁶ FEA Action Alert: Status of Sanctions Alert, February 9, 1967, Series M86-11: FEA Papers, Carton 106, File Folder 1, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

and their profession. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it placed the newly elected Governor on notice of the union's increasing power both nationally and within the state of Florida. The final section of the memo spoke directly to the possibility of national sanctions against the state, which forbade members of the NEA and local union chapters to take jobs in Florida in the possibility of a teachers' strike.⁵⁷ By publishing this report, FEA leaders sought to inform Kirk that they would advocate for teachers and improvements within education. The document also discussed the power union officials believed they had, stating that "if statewide sanctions are imposed, they will be a result of lack of adequate legislative action; therefore, they will apply to all 67 counties regardless of local financial effort."⁵⁸

By 1966 the FEA had integrated its ranks, merging with the existing African American education union (Florida State Teachers Association), showing that while the state remained mired in segregation within its schools, the union served as a progressive forbearer demanding equality for its constituents.⁵⁹ Also recognizing the importance of gaining support from teachers in wealthier counties, the FEA pushed for solidarity, not only across racial lines, but class ones as well. Teachers from counties like Dade, Hillsborough, and Pinellas, representing the cities of Miami, Tampa, and St. Petersburg respectively, stood resolute with their fellow teachers from rural counties even in the face of inadequate funding. This demonstrated that the strike revolved around more than just a call for increased funding, but involved a demand to improve education and respect for teachers throughout the state.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Shircliffe, *Desegregating Teachers*, pg. 178.

The years preceding the strike had a direct influence on the teachers' militancy in 1968. After years of frustration, the teachers felt they could no longer adequately serve their mission as educators. The problems of education stemmed from a lack of governmental concern led by the Pork Chop Gang. As a population increase shifted the political culture within Florida, education rose to the forefront of political concern. Educators across Florida saw great potential in the elections of 1966 only to have their hopes dashed by a shift in conservatism that placed the states control in the hands of fiscally conservative Republicans. The teachers now faced an increasing population and a governor who espoused ideas of educational reform, but whose political ideology did not conform to the needs of education as they interpreted them. Kirk's election, coupled with the culmination of years of frustration, brought quick action by the NEA and the FEA in the threat of sanctions. As Kirk took office in January, 1967, such threats would soon become a reality.

Chapter 2

Claude Kirk's election in 1966 illustrated the shift in conservatism within Florida. Initially viewing Kirk's election with cautious skepticism, the teachers and the FEA struggled throughout 1967 to garner public support for education. Bolstered by early support from Florida's newspapers, teachers and FEA officials enlisted the media to emphasize the problems within education, but as the threat of a strike loomed, newspapers began to view them as militants detrimental to the education of Florida's students. In personifying the role as a law and order governor, Kirk played to the public's concern over teacher militancy by using the media to portray the teachers as largely self-interested. In response, many teachers pushed for stronger direct action protests, but the FEA leadership gauged the public's skepticism and responded cautiously, asking for patience from members as they waded the treacherous waters of public sector strife.

Although the strike occurred in 1968, the events of 1967 played an essential role in the tumult that produced it. The teachers and Kirk agreed that mismanagement of the Pork Chop Gang in the legislature necessitated reform, but they did not agree on what reform meant, nor on how change would be implemented. Here, Kirk and educators had decidedly different views of educational progress, leading to a rhetorical confrontation between the two parties. Illustrating the shift in conservatism, Kirk viewed both government and education as a business. Unlike the Pork Chop Gang, Kirk made education a priority in his tenure, but his ideas of business efficiency within education, along with his anti-tax platform, allowed him to further strip educational funding. Kirk's plans for business efficiency centered on removing educators from positions of

administrative power and replacing them with businessman who had little to no experience within education. In doing so, Kirk believed that the problems of funding would be fixed through cutting unneeded costs within education. His ideas of business efficiency however, conflicted with educators' demands for both increased say over policy decisions and a general rise of funding for education. Given this impasse, why then did it take a full year after Kirk's election for teachers to leave their classrooms in protest? Here, FEA leaders played a key role in providing a voice of caution for the teachers; cognizant of the public's unease with teacher militancy, the FEA viewed a strike as the last resort in their battle to improve education. As the conflict with Kirk progressed, however, and the threat of a strike inched closer to a reality, FEA became more proactive. While they did not sanction localized wildcat strikes in St. Petersburg and Miami, they did use both work stoppages to provide the framework for the walkout of 1968. In the process, the FEA created a duality of forbearance and vigilance. The FEA's prudent approach prolonged the educational crisis of 1967, but union leaders felt they had little choice if they wanted to improve the professional lives of teachers and education within a conservative political climate.

As demands for educational improvements permeated the state, Kirk and teachers took decidedly different approaches towards reform. Seeking to improve education through business efficiency, Kirk cut back an already bare bones educational system. It was because of these cuts that teachers implemented the NEA proposed sanctions across the state. These sanctions demonstrated, again, the teachers' willingness to use the union as a means to elicit improvements within education. The union's role, however, allowed Kirk to paint the teachers as militants disrupting law and order within the state.

Nevertheless, the threat of a walkout forced Kirk to compromise with FEA officials over the issue of a special legislative session, perhaps influencing the teachers' decision to walkout in 1968.

Kirk's election and his subsequent policies reflected a shift in political culture within Florida. While the Pork Chop Gang had remained wedded to Florida's regional identity as a Southern state, Kirk's governorship focused on making Florida a national power. In discussing Kirk's proposed plans, the *Ocala Star Banner* concluded that, "he wants Florida to be number one in everything. For Kirk, Florida is just another corporation which needs a top salesman."⁶⁰ Kirk's plans to make Florida "first," centered around ideas of industrial recruitment that would provide Florida with a "decisive vote on the national political scene."⁶¹ Unlike the Pork Chop Gang, Kirk understood the importance of statewide industrial and corporate recruitment. In doing so, he placed education at the forefront of his governorship.⁶² Like many southern politicians World War II, Kirk viewed education as a means to garner industrial recruitment. While this view would do much to improve education in areas of significant population growth such as Orlando and the Space Coast, it did little to improve education throughout the state as a whole.⁶³ Furthermore, Kirk proclaimed his ideas of making Miami the epicenter for

⁶⁰ "Kirk's Philosophy: Go Get It." *The Ocala Star Banner*, February 19, 1967.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Before the 1960s, much of the South remained well behind the national average in education in almost every regards. Between 1960 and 1968 though, many Southern states saw educational improvement as paramount to the industrial recruitment. While states such as Mississippi and Alabama remained steadfast in their anti-big government ideology, educational funding saw a surge during this period. This extra funding though did not come from the state, but rather from federal funding, illustrating the contradictory nature of Southern politics. Cobb, *The South and America since World War II*, pgs. 173-176

⁶³ In *The South and America Since World War II*, James Cobb explores the educational improvements, largely through federal funding, that permeated the South often as a means to improve industrial recruitment. This strategy though, I argue, address some of the problems within education, but also allows for the continued marginalization of other groups such as African Americans and lower income

financiers, stating that he “wants to plant the embryo of an international money center in Miami. That’s all the New York Stock exchange was when it started. There is no smog in Florida and there won’t be any traffic jams. Where else do the bosses want to be?”⁶⁴

Kirk’s pro-business agenda and national emphasis reflected an evolution of Florida’s political culture that sought to move Florida away from its southern identity and make it a national economic and political power. Recognizing that the population increase necessitated governmental reform, Kirk sought to move away from the rural conservatism of the Pork Chop Gang. For Kirk, educational improvements played a large role in the creation of Florida’s national significance.

During his campaign and early in his governorship, Kirk put forth a narrative of educational progress as crucial to industrial recruitment. His policies, however, seemed to only perpetuate the problems of education formed by the Pork Chop Gang. In discussing Kirk’s election, an FEA document stated that, “Kirk becomes the next four-year Governor of Florida and the first Republican chief of state in this century, leaving teachers without a friend in the Governor’s Mansion.”⁶⁵ Kirk’s anti-tax platform for example did not address the problem of funding within education. The *St. Petersburg Times* wondered, “How he will stick by his promise of no new taxes and still find new money for education, and what his long- ranging planning will mean to a Legislature due to meet in three months to grapple with the vastly increased educational needs? Kirk

families as it focuses on the building of new schools and programs that directly benefited transplants, often ignoring those already within the state. This is illustrated in numerous FEA documents, teachers’ letters, and newspaper articles that discuss the disparity of funding between established cities and schools systems, and cities such as Orlando that saw exponential growth both in terms of population and school funding during the 1960s.

⁶⁴ “Kirk’s Philosophy: Go Get It.” *The Ocala Star Banner*.

⁶⁵ Florida School Crisis, FEA Papers, Series 1186, Carton 40, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

remains silent.”⁶⁶ While Kirk at first remained vague about his plans for education, his statements pointed to a business style approach to progress. He stated that “I am concerned with the child in the classroom. I will look at education from the vertical and the horizontal. I want to be sure education is working in Florida. After all, Florida is 37th in nation.”⁶⁷ Alluding to horizontal and vertical integration as a means to examine education, underscored Kirk’s background as a businessman. Such ideas of business centric reforms became a central theme during the 1968 teacher walkout.

For Kirk, ideas of business efficiency as educational policy played an instrumental role in formulating his budgetary policies. Seeking to place businessmen into positions of administrative power, Kirk believed that the state could save money while still improving education. Illustrating his ideas on educational improvements, and the shift in how conservatives wanted to run government, Kirk, in a speech to teachers, stated, “You have nothing to fear and everything to gain from a business administration of our government. And you have a friend in the Governor’s office at Tallahassee.”⁶⁸ In referring to the business administration of government, Kirk indicated his hopes of running Florida, which included education, similar to a business in terms of finances. In doing so, Kirk sought to restructure the state’s educational system by using ideas of business. His plan focused on saving money, not increasing funding, and illustrating this he stated that:

American’s from the earliest days have always been willing to spend a good proportion of their substance on education. Today, however, education has assumed an importance that has made public officials almost afraid to suggest a close look at educational expenditures. This is most unfortunate for two reasons.

⁶⁶ “Kirk Still Sidesteps Specifics,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, December 27, 1967.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Claude Kirk Speech, May 1, 1967, Claude Kirk Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 21, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

First, if you are afraid, for political reasons, to look searchingly into the area where you spend the most money, how are you going to assure the people who pay the taxes that they are getting real value. And, second, the expenditure of more and more dollars is not by itself any guarantee of excellence in education. Money is certainly necessary for quality education, but it is how and where money is spent that makes the difference.⁶⁹

Continuing he also placed the blame of education on those already within the system, and pointed to his plans of removing educators from positions of administrative responsibility exclaiming that, "... the bureaucrats of our educational system, I call them educrats, do have cause for concern. These are administrative educrats who never see a student and are often sadly out of touch with the realities of education in their own school system."⁷⁰ Kirk's business styled reforms played a large role in the teachers' decision to walk out in 1968 as they directly countered teachers demands for increased funding and autonomy within their profession. In 1967 though, his plans for reform allowed him to cut the educational budget further, and it was these cuts that led to the educational crisis during that year.

Kirk, addressed state budgetary concerns early in his tenure as governor. Rather than expanding funding as many teachers hoped, Kirk further reduced it. On April 26, 1967 Kirk slashed education funding to the tune of 66.4 million dollars from education in the name of balancing the budget.⁷¹ These planned cuts affected junior colleges, kindergartens, libraries, and exceptional child care.⁷² The cuts also revealed Kirk's actual intentions towards education. Responding to his educational cuts Kirk stated, "We

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

⁷² Junior colleges at the time were under the jurisdiction of the public education system of various counties rather than a statewide system. Exceptional child care are services for students with a disability, both physical and mental.

have looked long and hard at Florida's education budget and we have found places to save very substantial amounts of money, without taking anything away from the education of your child."⁷³ Kirk continued, stating that, "Not adding six hundred, sixty one new kindergarten units at this time resulted in a saving of seven million dollars. We simply don't have the money to afford a massive new investment in kindergarten."⁷⁴ He also proposed a plan that addressed textbooks, exclaiming, "I am recommending that we institute a textbook responsibility deposit program. What this means very simply is that every student in our schools who can afford to do so, and most can, will place a deposit in the hands of his school for the texts he receives."⁷⁵ His proposed decrease of educational expenditures demonstrated, to teachers, the continuation of the problems that persisted within Florida before Kirk's election.

With news of Kirk's proposed budget in hand, teachers sought to increase union pressure on the Governor. On May 10, described the malcontent that pervading the teaching ranks:

"Make no mistake Florida teachers are angry. They started getting exasperated about the state's neglect of education about eight years ago. For the past two years they have been determined to act. They have waited only to give the 1967 governor and legislature an opportunity to begin making up for the neglect, in fact the FEA had some difficulty persuading the members to that patient."⁷⁶

Three days later teachers had reached their breaking point. With little support from the legislature or Governor, and no relief in sight, FEA leaders held a statewide

⁷³ Claude Kirk Speech, May 1, 1967, Claude Kirk Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 21, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶"FEA Sanctions Seem Likely by the End of Next Week," *The Miami News*, May 10, 1967.

meeting to vote on whether to implement the NEA's threatened sanctions. The FEA document reported the results to teachers:

The members participating in the meetings of May 12 and 13 made their position exceedingly clear. The overwhelming majority of those who filled in the poll ballot said they would support all sanctions listed if sanctions are imposed. This was true of every single one of the meetings. The percentages of support in some meetings ran as high as 99 percent. In no meeting did any sanction receive less than 75 percent. The profession closed ranks last weekend. We will indeed have the courage to act.⁷⁷

The NEA also issued a statement that illustrated why the sanctions were being implemented, and how they were to be implemented, stating that:

The executive committee of the National Educators Association has been notified the NEA commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities that the climate for public education in Florida has deteriorated since the commission made its study in 1965. In view of the Situation, the following national sanctions are invoked by the NEA Executive Committee: 1. Censure of the Governor of the State of Florida and those legislatures who support his program as it applies to schools 2. Request members of the teaching profession not currently under contract to teach in Florida to refrain from seeking employment there.⁷⁸

While teachers voted to implement the sanctions set forth by the NEA, union leaders held off for a week in the hopes that a compromise might still occur. In an attempt to re-open dialogue with Governor Kirk and the legislature, the FEA held a legislative information session at Florida State University on May 24. Over 2,000 teachers attended to show their support for the FEA, and in hopes of ending the sanctions before they were ever applied. Foreshadowing his refusal to negotiate during the walkout, Governor Kirk failed to appear. His refusal to attend the session showed Kirk's unwillingness to even discuss the education crisis with the teachers, and demonstrated his role as an anti-union

⁷⁷ FEA Action Alert, May 15, 1967, FEA Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 106, File Folder 1, The State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

⁷⁸ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

governor. This was a role Kirk relished, and he used it effectively to garner public support during both the education crisis in 1967 and the walkout in 1968.

In response to the sanctions, Kirk fought back against what he perceived as the militant actions of FEA officials and teachers. In a press conference on June 6, Kirk attacked FEA president George Dabbs, stating that, “George Dabbs’ contention that Florida is an unsatisfactory place to teach is a lie. Dabbs is a quisling to teachers and the taught.”⁷⁹ His choice of words, smeared Dabbs as a traitor to the state, indicating Kirk’s anger with what he perceived as the union’s attempt at garnering educational improvements. Perhaps afraid that the sanctions and union involvement would hurt industrial recruitment, lashed out in a press conference on June 9, calling the FEA the “Anti-Florida Education Association,” and referring to the FEA leadership as “extreme lobbyists who do not represent the average teacher at all.”⁸⁰ By attacking the FEA Kirk deliberately casted the union as anti-business as a means to control the public relations battle against the FEA. Kirk also discussed the sanctions threat to notify the businesses of the educational climate within Florida, stating, “If the lobbyists are bluffing about this anti-business crusade, I am calling their bluff right now; if they are serious about it, it is important that every citizen see them operate out in the open, in the white light of publicity.”⁸¹ The shift in conservatism that Kirk’s governorship illustrated depended largely on industrial recruitment, and central to this recruitment was education. The problems with education though were deep, and Kirk’s plans to cut the budget only exacerbated the problems with the system. For teachers, Kirk’s proposed budget forced

⁷⁹ Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

⁸⁰ “Kirk Challenges FEA Role, *The Evening Independent*, June 8, 1967.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

them to implement statewide sanctions, but in doing so, they provided Kirk with the opportunity to shift the debate away from the problems with education to one over union control. Shifting the focus away from the problems of education became an important tactic in Kirk's stance against the teachers. Like much of the South, education played a crucial role in industrial recruitment. Kirk understood this factor, and by placing the blame in the hands of the union he played into anti-union sentiments from industries while simultaneously moving the focus away from the problems of education.⁸² This anti-union rhetoric only increased during the walkout, but its roots were firmly planted in the education crisis of 1967.

The war of words between Kirk and the FEA leadership grew increasingly malicious in the months after the sanctions. Directly after imposing the sanctions, teachers began to see a backlash in some newspapers, especially in more rural counties. The larger urban newspapers continued their support of the educators' cause, but the stance of more conservative newspapers foreshadowed the shift in public opinion that was coming. These early negative reactions illustrated the disdain that many within Florida, and within the South at large, held towards unions. These newspapers, like Kirk, sought to place the teachers union in the same context as northern industrial unions, viewing their actions as detrimental to both education, and to industrial recruitment. For example, a newspaper editorial from the conservative *Ocala Star Banner* led with the headline, "FEA Puts Picket Line Around Florida" on March 26, just days after the imposed sanctions became public, claiming that, "Florida Education Association's decision to adopt statewide sanctions, in effect, puts a picket line around Florida- a feat

⁸² In *The South and America Since World War II*, Cobb discusses both anti-unionism and improvements of education as a means to garner industrial recruitment within the South.

for which even Jimmy Hoffa would be proud.” Maintaining an image of greedy teachers concerned only with themselves, the editorial continued, “It seems to us that what the educators are really protesting is they do not want to be held accountable. They don’t want to account for the money they get, especially to politicians.”⁸³ The anti-union rhetoric though, did little to fix the severe problems within education, forcing Kirk to continue to address these problems. This anti-union rhetoric from rural newspapers also assisted in Kirk’s push to move the debate away from education.

By mid-summer of 1967, Kirk and the legislature still had not provided any solutions the education crisis, aside from cutting an already bare budget. In response, teachers maintained the sanctions, hoping to force Kirk to concede to their demands for increased funding. Kirk, however, refused to play. On June 6, 1967 he used a line-item veto to scuttle a Senate bill would have appropriated \$150 million for education. Kirk defended his vetoes, pointing out that, “In spite of the stringent nature of this budget, the total figure reflects an overall increase \$295.5 million, or approximately 29 per cent, over spending for the 1965-1967 biennium.”⁸⁴ The increase that Kirk mentioned however, could not sustain Florida’s rapidly growing population, given the dearth of funding before Kirk took office. While marginally increasing educational spending, Kirk further alienated an already angry teaching workforce.

To counteract Kirk’s budget vetoes, FEA leaders disseminated a survey to teachers in all Florida counties to determine how many planned to teach in the fall. The investigation found that Florida would be short 4,000 teachers, leading to what the FEA

⁸³ “FEA Puts Picket Line Around Florida,” *The Ocala Star Banner*, March 26, 1967.

⁸⁴ “Kirk Slashes Stated Budget to 1.4 Billion,” *The St. Petersburg Times*, June 7, 1967.

referred to as the “the worst teacher shortage in the state’s history.”⁸⁵ The shortage of teachers and the problems with teacher recruitment emphasized the problems with Kirk’s education policies. While Kirk maintained a stance of improvements for education, his policies, however, directly harmed education. When Kirk stripped funding for education in April, and line item vetoed appropriations in June, he perpetuated the problems of education. The issue of teacher recruitment, however, cannot be solely blamed on the Governor. The sanctions implemented by the union most likely played a role in the teacher shortage. By asking teachers from across the country, and also new college graduates not to accept jobs in Florida, there seemed to be no way Florida could recruit enough teachers to fill the vacancies. This dynamic illustrates the purpose of the teachers’ militancy which was to disrupt the educational system in an effort to garner improvements in education. With this shortage, teachers would be forced to work with even larger class sizes, a major complaint that already existed in Florida. Nevertheless, teachers maintained the sanctions, hoping the problems of funding would be resolved before the opening of the new school year.

As the conflict persisted throughout the summer of 1967, Kirk attempted to placate the teachers by implementing a pay increase. The increase amounted to an extra 17 cents an hour, leaving the yearly base salary for a teacher with a bachelor’s degree at a \$5,000.⁸⁶ This offer did little to appease teachers’ resentment as it fell short of the expectations of teachers, since it still kept Florida salaries below those for teachers in less

⁸⁵ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

⁸⁶ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crises, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL. Taking inflation into account, this amount would be close to \$35,000 in 2014.

wealthy states such as Alabama and Georgia.⁸⁷ FEA leaders referred to the pay raise as “a very minimum and totally unacceptable pay raise.”⁸⁸ Kirk, however, had chosen an unacceptable pay raise for deliberate reasons. While teachers’ resentment towards the Governor and legislature stemmed from a plethora of issues, especially funding for education generally, Kirk made pay a central point in their struggle. This again illustrates Kirk’s plans to transform the public image of the conflict. As lower middle class wage earners and public sector employees however, teachers played a dangerous if they demanded more money. They faced the challenge of convincing a skeptical public that they sought to better Florida’s educational system not just to improve their wages. Kirk, illustrating his background as a businessman, understood this dynamic. By showing the public he sought to satisfy the teacher’s with a small raise he placed teachers in a difficult position. Agreeing to the increase gained teachers almost nothing, while opposing it allowed Kirk to paint them as greedy and unconcerned about their students.

The FEA soon fought back, demonstrating that teacher anger stemmed primarily from the failures of education at large. In reply to the Kirk’s trivial offer, FEA asked all its members to “write a personal letter to the parents of each child you taught explaining the undesirable conditions under which you have taught their child.”⁸⁹ The memo also included an outline of talking points for teachers to discuss with parents. Pointing to such problems as “heavy class loads, lack of materials, inadequate and out of date textbooks heavy class loads, and low salaries,” FEA leaders sought to illustrate how teacher

⁸⁷ FEA Action Report, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

⁸⁸ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

⁸⁹ FEA Action Alert, July 18, 1967, Series M86-11, FEA Papers, Carton 106, File Folder 1, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

demands stemmed from educational as well as professional needs.⁹⁰ The campaign to have teachers to contact parents served two purposes. First, the FEA realized that they needed public support on their side. If the public viewed the sanctions as little more than a ploy to get teachers higher pay, then they would lose battle of public opinion. Second, the FEA wanted, and needed, parents to get involved in the improvement of the school systems. FEA leaders and teachers hoped that increased awareness would provide the public support necessary to force the governor and legislature to act. As the crisis persisted though, and calls for a walkout became popular among the teachers, they had little chance of garnering support from the public, due largely to white anti-union sentiment. Nevertheless, teachers continued to increase their militancy hoping to improve education.

With the summer ending, the FEA called for a statewide meeting of all teachers on August 24 at the Tangerine Bowl in Orlando. Teachers from across the state flocked to this meeting with estimates of attendance ranging from 19,000 (*Ocala Star Banner*) to 30,000 (*St. Petersburg Times*).⁹¹ The FEA hoped that such a large turnout would force Kirk to act. Those in attendance demanded a special session of the legislature to address the continuing education crisis. A message of restraint came from FEA secretary Phil Constans. Amid a raucous crowd, Phil Constans gave a speech demonstrating the FEA's cautious approach, stating,

Lord knows I know how fed up, frustrated, and mad you are; how tired you are of seeing kids you teach cheated because you have to give them individual attention; how tired you are of crowded classrooms, limited materials, and old textbooks. And I know how angry you are to again and again see the children of the state of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ "Teachers Meet in Orlando," *Ocala Star Banner*, August 24, 1967. "Teachers: Try Again, Win...Or Resign," *St. Petersburg Times*, August 25, 1967. This disparity between how many teachers actually attended the meeting exemplifies the divide between liberal and conservative news outlets.

Florida used as political pawns; and that you have had enough political promises that don't come true. I know all these things and yet I am asking you to turn the other cheek. It would be so easy for us to harass and disrupt the school system, it seems to me and the leadership that that is so foreign to the commitments we have to the children. I ask of you that we fulfill our commitment to the children in full until such time as we are driven to overt action and then to break clean.⁹²

With that speech Constans served notice to Governor Kirk, and the legislature, that while the FEA and the teachers of Florida would show restraint now that could quickly change. Inaction on Kirk's part would force the FEA, NEA, and teachers to walk. Constans also asked the teachers in attendance to send in a letter of resignation with a blank date, illustrating that a walkout would occur if the state did not act. FEA officials sought to place the onus of responsibility squarely on Kirk and on the legislators' shoulders. In doing so, the FEA also gave Florida's politicians a last chance to address the educational crisis. If the government of Florida could not come up with agreeable solutions, however, teachers would now walk in protest. The FEA did not want this to happen, correctly ascertaining that public support would dwindle in the face of a strike. If no action was taken, though, the FEA felt they had little choice but to go through with the threatened walkout. In response, Kirk proved remarkably tone deaf. FEA leaders set time in the meeting for Kirk to speak, but he responded by stating that, "I don't attend union meetings," and referring to the meeting as a "voodoo gathering." Once again, Kirk had marginalized the teachers and their union.⁹³ Perhaps Kirk recognized the invitation from the FEA as nothing more than a publicity stunt. Organizers knew full well that Kirk would not attend the meeting, but by inviting him to speak, they placed the burden of the walkout on him.

⁹² "Teachers: Try Again, Win...Or Resign," *St. Petersburg Times*, August 25, 1967.

⁹³ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

Soon after the meeting, Kirk took to the air to combat the backlash from teachers with a television program called “Education in Florida: Perspective for Tomorrow.”⁹⁴ In this program Kirk laid out a plan to call for a privately funded study to glean how to make Florida first in education. He also appointed a thirty member citizen committee to look at the needs of education and make suggestions on reform for the legislature to follow. This committee consisted of businessmen from across the state, further illustrating Kirk’s agenda to limit educators’ influence on policy.⁹⁵ This did not please teachers as they demanded immediate results. Teachers felt they could no longer allow education to take a back seat to other political policies. State School Superintendent Floyd T. Christian, along with Phil Constans, replied to Kirk’s plan. They defended the teachers, reiterating that their primary concerns stemmed from school problems (i.e. outdated textbooks, overcrowding, decrepit schools, etc.) and not salary, as Kirk often argued to the public.⁹⁶ The war of words between Kirk and FEA leaders continued during the school year, with both sides hoping to avoid a walkout. In some counties though, the time for action had already arrived.

With the 1967-1968 school year about to begin, with no sign of progress from the governor or the legislature, some county educators began considering more direct protests from educators. Led by the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association (PCTA) (a local affiliate of the FEA and NEA), and fearing an imminent salary cut from the county school board, Pinellas County teachers called for a countywide boycott of school. The boycott became the first of many local protests leading up to the statewide walkout. While the boycott was a non-sanctioned protest, FEA leadership closely watched events

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

unfold as a test case for a possible statewide strike. The Pinellas County School Board, in response to the threatened boycott, refused to negotiate with the teachers; instead the district took the battle to the courts where Circuit Court Judge Ben Overton signed a temporary injunction barring the teachers from striking. President of the PCTA, Fred Cekau, responded to the injunctions noting that, “It’s a sad day for Pinellas County and the state of Florida when teachers are forced to go to work as a result of a court order and not as a result of a mutually satisfactory solution to the problem at the negotiating table.”⁹⁷ The article also quoted Cekau’s discussion with the school board and that body’s response. An excerpt from a *St. Pete Times* article on the job action proclaimed that:

The PCTA head had warned the School Board that forced arbitration through the courts will not solve this problem...we have constitutional protections against involuntary servitude.” He was cut off abruptly by School Board chairman William H. Williams who said, “I will not permit that Stokley Carmichael type language here.”⁹⁸

Williams’ response to Cekau’s language mirrored the attitude of Claude Kirk and other officials towards the teachers’ union. By 1968 America had seen a new form of political action emerge that sought to disrupt society to garner political and social change. The context of the turbulent sixties also provided Kirk and his allies with the opportunity to paint teachers as radical militants seeking to disrupt order within the state. This became a major point during the walkout, but originated during the educational crisis of 1967. Like his anti-union rhetoric, Kirk used terms such as radicalism and militancy to shift the focus away from education, and this language only increased when the teachers went on strike in 1968. For their part, Pinellas County educators did report to schools

⁹⁷“Teachers Ordered by Court to Report to Work Today,” *The St. Petersburg Time*, August 16, 1967.

⁹⁸Ibid.

after the court injunction, although they did so under protest. While the planned boycott ultimately failed, it served as a harbinger for the future, illuminating to the FEA the legal challenges they would face in the event of a statewide strike. At this time Florida laws prohibited any public employee under contract to go on strike. The law, however, did not extend to public employees who tendered their resignation, and this became the legal strategy for the walkout of 1968.⁹⁹ While the planned boycott in Pinellas County never came to fruition, it did provide a legal framework for the FEA's rank and file to leave their classrooms in protest.

After the failed boycott in St. Petersburg, another localized protest soon occurred. Teachers in Broward County resigned on September 15, 1967 in an attempt to force the Broward County School Board to negotiate in good faith.¹⁰⁰ While the Pinellas County boycott ended before it could even begin, the Broward County teachers successfully resigned from their positions, forcing the School Board to act.¹⁰¹ Broward County closed all schools in response until September 25. Officials first sought an injunction, but outside pressure from parents in Broward County forced them to negotiate with the teachers.¹⁰² Negotiations occurred through the courts and on September 28 both sides reached an agreement that reopened schools Broward County schools.¹⁰³ This successful walkout provided a framework that FEA officials would implement during the walkout of 1968. Even though the Broward County walkout registered little on a national scale it success if forcing negotiations played an important role in the development of the

⁹⁹ Charles Patrick, "Teachers Ordered by Court to Report to Work Today," *The St. Petersburg Time*, September, 13, 1967.

¹⁰⁰ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

¹⁰¹ "Broward School Issue Misses Court Deadline," *The Evening Independent*, September 13, 1967.

¹⁰² "Broward School Board Would Enjoin Teachers," *The St. Petersburg Times*, September 13, 1967.

walkout of 1968. While the Broward County teachers successfully forced the school board to capitulate to their demands by going on strike, FEA leaders, nevertheless, continued a strategy of negotiations with Kirk, hoping to avoid a statewide walkout.

As the school year progressed, the FEA continued its push to sway public opinion to the union's side. Organizers came up with the idea of holding a parent meeting in schools on Sunday, October 1, referring to the day as "Crisis Sunday." At these gatherings held across the state, teachers hoped to explain the failing system to parents, and to implore them to write their legislators and the governor to take immediate action now to fix the schools. Unfortunately, the meeting brought very little attention to the problems as attendance was relatively sparse across the state. The FEA blamed "a close pennant race in baseball and Sunday football games" as the reason for the lack of attendance.¹⁰⁴ Phil Constans in response to the low attendance stated that, "There were isolated instances in individual schools where the number in attendance was good, but in general attendance was poor." Nonetheless, "Those attending did seem interested in the problems and in many cases were appalled at the conditions found."¹⁰⁵ While the attendance of "Crisis Sunday" did not reach the numbers the FEA hoped for, it again underscored the FEA leadership's understanding of the importance of public opinion. By attempting to discuss the problems with those who have the most vested interest in education, parents, they sought to highlight Florida's educational ills, hoping, in part, that direct action protests might come from the parents themselves.

The disappointing attendance at "Crisis Sunday" notwithstanding, FEA leadership continued its battle with Kirk over public opinion. In response, the governor looked for a

¹⁰⁴How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

way out of the pending disaster that would result from a statewide walkout. While originally planning to hold a legislative session after the completion of the thirty member task force's study of education (of which he had given no timetable) Kirk, perhaps recognizing the damage a statewide teacher would do to his political career began to backpedal on his hardline stance against the union. During the crisis, Kirk also traveled across the country stumping for the Nixon campaign in an effort to diminish George Wallace's rising popularity with conservatives. By opposing Wallace, and supporting Nixon, Kirk further illustrated his push to move Florida away from its regional identity as a southern state. Moreover, Kirk hoped to receive the Republican Vice-Presidential nomination, and this dynamic certainly played a role Kirk's reversal. A statewide walkout would certainly tarnish his reputation, and hinder his chances at the nomination. He was quoted as saying that, "Obviously the time will come when we have to meet on the problems of education and the first of the year is only two months away." Kirk, however, quickly retracted this statement, angering teachers who demanded a quick turnaround by Kirk's commission.¹⁰⁶ With the Governor flip flopping on when he would call a special legislative session, the FEA called for another meeting of teachers at the Tangerine Bowl to vote on whether they should go through with their resignations. Now that the threat of a statewide teacher walkout loomed even closer public sentiment began to turn against the FEA. The *St. Petersburg Times*, a paper that in the past had seemed supportive, referred to the teacher union as "militant," a word that Governor Kirk often used when discussing the FEA.¹⁰⁷ Before the meeting could take place, however, leaders from the FEA and Governor Kirk held a secret meeting, hoping to avoid what would be

¹⁰⁶ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

¹⁰⁷ "FEA Sets Meeting for Tangerine Bowl," *St. Petersburg Times*, October 11, 1967.

America's first statewide teacher strike. After a week of such meetings, FEA leaders joined Kirk in announcing the cancellation of the October 22 Tangerine Bowl meeting. They also placed a stay on all sanctions, culminating with Kirk's agreement to speed up the release of findings from his committee and to hold a special legislative session in January 1968. The FEA released this statement:

The FEA Executive Committee has this morning called off the October 22 meeting in Orlando. In light of our work this week, we are confident we can be an effective force behind the Governor's Commission on Quality Education to reach an early special session of the Legislature dealing with education.¹⁰⁸

Kirk, too, released a statement: "With this enthusiasm and support, I am confident the Commission can accelerate its work materially and drive for a finished report by this January or sooner."¹⁰⁹ Both sides finally seemed to be communicating and negotiating with each other. As the year closed on a positive note teachers hoped their demands for improvements would finally be heard. This hope though, would come to a crashing halt during the special legislative session in 1968.

¹⁰⁸ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

As the education crisis in 1967 illustrated, the teachers and the FEA faced steep opposition from both the governor and the public in regards to a walkout. Emphasizing their unity during the crisis, the FEA forced Kirk to call a special legislative session to address the educational crisis. In doing so, the FEA gained an important victory over an anti-union governor. In forcing Kirk's hand, the teachers had realized the importance of collective action as a means to garner both professional and educational improvements. Despite the looming threat of a direct action protest in the form of a statewide walkout, many Floridian's believed Kirk and the teachers had weathered the worst of the crisis. This optimism though, came to a crashing halt once Kirk proclaimed his business style agenda during the special legislative session. Kirk, through these reforms illustrated neo-conservative ideas of running education and government as a business.¹¹⁰ Teachers' reactions to this shift in political culture culminated with the statewide walkout of 1968. Moreover, by continuing to propose business like reforms, Kirk mirrored conservative ideas on running government as a business. Calling for the placement of non-educators into positions of administrative power along with a merit-based pay system for teachers, Kirk further marginalized an already besieged workforce seeking to gain power in an anti-labor state. Kirk's plans diminished the role of teachers in policy decisions, and in effect disregarded them as professionals. Viewing Kirk's proposals as a continuation of the problem, not a solution, the teachers and the FEA responded with the nations' first

¹¹⁰ In her book, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition*, Jennifer Brooks discusses the demands for "good government" by conservative white veterans within Georgia. Viewing government as necessary to facilitate Georgia's push towards the "national economic mainstream," these veterans pushed for a conservative ideology that centered on economic progress, while simultaneously impeding social advancement for African Americans and unionization for industrial workers. The shift in political culture, especially in the context of the Florida teacher strike affirms Brooks' argument.

and only statewide teacher's strike. Furthermore, his reactions towards the teachers' decision to walkout placed them in the realm of other social movements permeating the state, such as the Civil Rights and Second Wave Feminist movements. Kirk used gendered notions of teaching and law and rhetoric to gain public support in his fight against the teachers, and, it was through these reactions that teachers found a commonality with other marginalized group like women and African Americans. As teachers struggled to gain influence within the state as professionals they found direct and indirect motivations and support from both second wave feminists and Civil Rights activists during the strike. The commonality between the teachers and the social movements permeating the state point towards the development, by the teachers' during the strike, of a larger social awareness regarding their profession and education. However, it would not be enough to overcome, and possibly contributed to the public's anti-union sentiments and wariness over the social upheaval permeating the state. As a result, the FEA and striking teachers failed to gain the community support necessary for success, even as they remained steadfast in their mission to improve education and their professional careers. In the end, the strike would accomplish more than anyone, neither the teachers nor Kirk, had anticipated, even as it failed in the short-term.

The immediate impetus for the walkout occurred during the special legislative session, when Governor Kirk called for reforms that stripped the teachers even further of their already limited autonomy and financial security. After months of conflict in 1967, the teachers had little reason to believe major change would or even could occur. Nevertheless, they hoped that Kirk's forthcoming proposals would address their complaint and support their vision of educational progress. Kirk opened the special

legislative session with a speech on January 29, 1968 that outlined his plans for educational reforms. Stating that, “Never before in the long history of Florida has any legislature convened for the sole purpose of examining the state of public education and considering the ways and means by which it might be significantly improved,” Kirk acknowledged the special session as a landmark in Florida history. Moreover, Kirk recognized the importance of education as a means to improve industrial recruitment:

The shape of Florida’s future is in electronics, in Oceanography, in space age engineering, and in the technically oriented industries of tomorrow. To attract these steadily growing payrolls calls not only for educated people but for an educational establishment that has within itself the vitality to anticipates the learning needs of the business community.¹¹¹

Understanding the importance of education in regards to industrial growth, Kirk reversed his anti-tax stance, stating for the first time in his tenure that an increase of funding would be necessary for the “restructuring and revitalization of education.”¹¹² Moreover, he proclaimed that, “whether we are young or old, Florida born or comparative newcomers, we must all be real Floridians—and we must be willing to bear the burdens of citizenship just as we accept its privileges.”¹¹³

Throughout his term as governor, he had adamantly opposed the raising of taxes, but as the crisis dragged on throughout 1967 he realized the necessity to raise them in order to address the situation. While proposing his tax increase of \$580 million in the name of education, however, less than half would actually get to the K-12 programs.¹¹⁴

Using education as a rationalization for increased taxation, Kirk played to the public’s

¹¹¹ Address of Governor Claude R. Kirk, Jr. To the Special Session of the Florida Legislature Florida State Archives, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10

¹¹² Address of Governor Claude R. Kirk, Jr. To the Special Session of the Florida Legislature.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. The majority of the money in actuality went to law enforcement programs that Kirk viewed as essential to his law and order campaign.

demands for educational improvements as a means to increase taxes. In actuality though, the majority of the money went elsewhere, further angering the teachers. In an attempt to rectify the new tax increase, the State Senate, with the support of the FEA, proposed a compromise package that placed the majority of the money raised directly into the educational system.¹¹⁵ While the shift in political culture placed the first Republican governor in office since reconstruction, and increased the number of Republican legislators in both the House and the Senate, Democrats still controlled the Senate. The shift in conservatism also changed the Democratic Party in Florida. As conservatives moved towards the Republican Party, liberal Democrats from urban areas began to control the Party and the Senate.¹¹⁶ While many of these liberal Democrats never outwardly supported the teachers' militancy during 1967 and 1968, they did support many of the teachers' demands, especially in regards to increased funding. Due to this dynamic, Kirk often came into conflict with the Senate over issues of state funding, and his refusal to accept the Senate proposed bill illustrates his uncompromising nature towards the Senate in regards to budgetary concerns.

Kirk's comments during the legislative session indicated his recognition that his funding proposals would create conflict with the teachers. Anticipating this negative response towards his funding proposal, he attempted to illustrate that the failings within education stemmed from the mismanagements of funds, just as much, if not more so, than a general lack of funding. Pointing to annual increases between 1958 and 1968, Kirk portrayed the teachers' demands for increased funding as misguided, ignoring the disparity produced by rapid population growth in Florida. Educational funding grew but

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ This is discussed in depth in Colburn's *From Yellow Dog Democrat to Red State Republicans*.

not at a rate congruent with Florida's population boom. Administrators had to use these newly appropriated funds as stopgap measures instead of for major improvements. In a letter to the governor, Sharon Keyzer-Andre, an teacher in Orange County highlighted some of the problems that stemmed from poor funding:

This year my floor had to be painted because it could no longer be cleaned. The lunchroom where I eat lunch frequently has roaches running across the floor. Last week the beds in the clinic had to be moved into the middle of the floor because the rain had caused the termites to come out of the walls and gather deeply in the room. These are only a few of the problems and not necessarily the most irritating.¹¹⁷

Such complaints, though, as illustrated by Kirk's proposal, fell on deaf ears. Rather than offering detailed solutions or adequate funding, Kirk demanded accountability for funding that already existed, proclaiming that, "Money has always been asked for on the basis it was needed for education. But never was there a management system that could provide the facts about specific performance for money already spent."¹¹⁸ Kirk's assertions for accountability had merit, but statements, however, directly attacked educators. By calling into the question the previous use, or in his belief, the misuse of funds, he placed the blame Florida's educational troubles on the shoulders of those already working within the system. Kirk continued, stating,

Education is America's biggest and most important business. But despite the millions and the billions invested in education it has never really been operated along businesslike lines. Now, for the first time, education is going to be structured so that for dollars spent, there must be a corresponding accomplishment. No longer will we be asked to embark on vaguely defined programs. Now we will work with planned program budgets that will detail the goals dollars are to achieve.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Letter to Claude Kirk, Florida State Archives, Claude Kirk Papers, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10

¹¹⁸ Address of Governor Claude R. Kirk, Jr. To the Special Session of the Florida Legislature.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

While education certainly needed increased funding, something that Kirk slowly came to understand, he believed that a model of business efficiency within education provide long term solutions towards funding. Illustrating this he stated that, “these business management practices can produce an annual savings of as much as \$75 million dollars by 1975.”¹²⁰ Kirk’s business style reforms sought to place non-educators in positions of power, and directly contrasted with the FEA’s demands for increased autonomy.¹²¹ An FEA memo sent to the teachers on July 18, 1967 outlining the demands for educational improvements, directly stated that teachers have, “no voice in policy decisions,” and that this, coupled with other factors such as funding issues and overcrowded classrooms, “kept the teachers from giving the students a better education.”¹²² The confidential memo illustrates that while the teachers and FEA leadership demanded educational improvements through better funding, they also sought an increased say within their profession, a concept that Kirk refused to accept. Hal Lewis, a professor at the University of Florida and member of the American Association of University Professors, also pointed towards the teachers’ strike as stemming from their

¹²⁰ Ibid. Kirk’s ideas on business and education illustrate his failure to understand the significant differences between the two. While discussed in the previous chapter, it is important to reiterate the differences between education and business, especially when viewed in the context of Kirk’s speech. While Kirk believed a business approach would not only improve education, but also save the state money, he failed to recognize that management of a system of education differs greatly than private business. Supporting the needs of the people involved, from the teachers, students, and administrators is more complex than supporting those needs of a private business. Kirk asserted that, “...a blueprint for the management of public education should occur on a basis of business efficiency and business economy,” but while private business can look at its production and profit as a measurable outcome of success, education does not have such black-and-white quantitative measures.

¹²¹ During his speech Kirk never directly stated the necessity of placing businessman in administrative positions, but in a speech given to the University of Florida’s College of Business in 1967, in which he sought to recruit business students into the field of education administration points to his desire to replace educators in positions of power with individuals with a business background. Claude Kirk Speech to the University of Florida College of Business, October, 1967, Found in Florida State Archives, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10

¹²² FEA Action Alert, Florida State Archives, Series M86-11, Carton 106, File Folder 1.

demands for increased autonomy within their profession, stating that the teachers' were "saying the determination of their fate is no longer in the hands of politicians. They are saying that 'we are not hired help; we are not to be used... we demand you take us into partnership in making decisions affecting us.'"¹²³ Kirk's failures to understand the differences between education and business, and teacher demands for increased professional power, widened the division between him and the teachers, contributing to the teachers' decision to walkout.

While Kirk's business reforms sought to address funding issues through the restructuring of financial management, he also called for teacher accountability in the form of merit pay and the loss of continuing contracts for teachers.¹²⁴ While Kirk never directly attacked teacher performance, his demands for merit pay, however, called into question the professional success of the teachers, further marginalizing an already disrespected profession. Presaging current political debates, on merit based pay, Kirk demanded quantitative measures to assess teacher performance, exclaiming that, "There should be some acceptable method devised to pay teachers on the basis of demonstrated ability, professional performance, and their functional roles in the system."¹²⁵ His demands for merit pay ignored the difficulties teachers face when forced to work with inadequate funding that leads to a plethora of problems, such as decrepit schools, out of date textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, and even non air-conditioned buildings (a major issue due to Florida's tropical climate), all of which affected teacher and student

¹²³ "AAUP Weighs in on Teacher Strike," *The Gainesville Sun*, Feb 27, 1968.

¹²⁴ While the teachers did not have tenure, they did receive continuing contracts after their third year of employment. While continuing contracts provide a semblance of job security, in that teachers cannot be fired without cause, they differ from tenure in that they are not lifetime appointments, meaning that teachers under continuing contracts may lose their positions after the school year in the face of financial considerations or enrollment numbers, to name just a few factors.

¹²⁵ Address of Governor Claude R. Kirk, Jr. To the Special Session of the Florida Legislature.

performance.¹²⁶ Moreover, his plan for merit pay conflicted with the FEA's demands made before the special legislative session. In a confidential memo sent to its members on January 3, 1968, the FEA discussed the issues of merit pay and the loss of continuing contracts, stating that, "This association is unalterably opposed to depriving any level of the profession of continuing contract, and to merit pay in any form or disguise."¹²⁷ By maintaining his stance on merit pay and continuing contracts, Kirk showed his refusal to listen to many of the teachers' concerns.

By stripping what little autonomy the teachers previously held and placing it in the hands of non-educators, Kirk's calls for business efficiency and accountability directly conflicted with educators' demands for increased power within their profession. However, Kirk did address some of the concerns that were raised by the 1965 NEA report. First and foremost, he called for an end to the election of school superintendents, and the de-politicization of public education. Viewing the practice of electing school officials as detrimental towards education, he understood the need to end this decades old practice, stating that, "These recommendations remove education from the political arena. There is no longer any justification—if there ever was—for electing a Superintendent of Public Education." Despite this concession on governance over the school board, Kirk's broader view of education as a business did not conform to the teachers' demands. His conflict with the FEA put, teachers, administrators, and union

¹²⁶ Edmund Kalina, in *The Politics of Confrontation*, a biography of Claude Kirk, argues that Kirk was ahead of his time in regards to education. It was this forward thinking, of which Kalina believes is now "commonly accepted as educational wisdom," that provided the impetus for the strike. While the teachers' actions did in fact stem from Kirk's policies, the continued debate over them today indicates that it is still a contentious point for educators, and not as Kalina asserts, "commonly accepted."

¹²⁷ FEA Action Alert, January 3, 1968, FEA Action Alert, Series M86-11, Carton 106, File Folder 1, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

officials on notice that the battle over education would continue during his tenure. The goodwill and patience held by many of teachers at the beginning of the new year dissipated

Kirk's refusal to sign the proposed Senate bill, coupled with his continued support of merit pay and continuing contracts, left teachers feeling they had little choice but to take drastic measures. At the close of the special session on February 16, 1968, FEA members sent in the letters of resignations signed by the teachers at the Tangerine Bowl meeting had signed in the previous September. The day that the FEA leaders, teachers, Governor Kirk, and the legislature hoped in earnest to avoid had finally come to fruition. In an open letter to the parents of Leon County explaining their reasons for resignation, teachers discussed the planned raise in taxes which only partially went to education, writing that, "Whereas, only \$126,000,000 will go in K-12 operations...we have resigned in a sincere effort to bring urgently needed improvements in education in the state, as well as in Leon County."¹²⁸ Given Kirk's stance, the teachers believed their only response lay in direct action protest. The country's first statewide teacher strike began in earnest.

Florida's teachers faced steep opposition with their decision to walkout, including Governor Kirk and much of the public. However, the character of this opposition this same opposition unified the teachers and brought them in line with other social movements of the time. Indeed the social upheaval of the 1960s influenced both the teachers' militancy, and the public's negative reactions to. Viewing the teachers' actions in the same context as the civil rights movements, Floridians looked to Kirk to maintain

¹²⁸ Open Letter to the Parents of Students in Leon County, Series 303, Floyd Christian Papers, Carton 10, File Folder 24, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

the status quo and public order. Playing up to these demands, Kirk portrayed the teachers as militants seeking to disrupt stability. Teachers, however, found support and inspiration in the social movements permeating the state. The direct and indirect support and influence of the civil rights movements, coupled with the public backlash that was created by both the gendered perceptions of teaching and white anti-unionism, illustrate the importance the social upheaval of the 1960s played during the strike.¹²⁹

The congruence of the teachers' strike with other social movements began quickly after the teachers' left their classrooms empty. The strike brought together both white and African American teachers, often for the first time interracial strike meetings gave many teachers, regardless of race, a heightened social awareness they had not expected.¹³⁰ Moreover, as members of an integrated union, many teachers found common ground in their demands for educational improvements and professional respect. Black teachers who joined in the strike often found their inspiration through their participation in the Civil Rights movement.¹³¹ May Simpson, an African American teacher in Alachua who participated in the strike discussed her early involvement in the Civil Rights movement as an influential factor in her decision to walkout:

¹²⁹ In his biography of Claude Kirk, Edmund Kalina briefly discusses the walkout. Viewing it as a struggle between Claude Kirk and the FEA, Kalina ignores the social aspects of the teachers' actions. James Sullivan in his article "The Florida Teacher Walkout in Political Transition of 1968," examines the strike through the political context of 1968, but he does not address the how the social movements permeating Florida influenced and supported the teachers' actions.

¹³⁰ In *Civil Rights Unionism*, Robert Korstad examining tobacco workers unions in Winston-Salem, NC, discusses how interracial unionism fostered awareness of civil rights for African Americans. Moreover, Michael Honey in his book, *Going Down Jericho Road*, exploring the Memphis sanitation workers strike, indicates the important role unions could play in garnering civil rights for African American workers.

¹³¹ Gubrium, *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*. Gubrium uses seven oral history interviews of African American teachers in Alachua County as a means to illustrate how the Civil Rights movement shaped African American participation during the strike. While this is a localized study of one county in Florida, these interviews, coupled with editorials and articles in Florida's two major African American newspapers, *The Florida Star* and the *Miami Times*, point to a statewide trend in regards to African American participation and support.

I am not really sure what made me want to become a part of, well I guess I am not really telling the truth, because I was very active. I went to in Atlanta, Clark University, and that is right across the street from Morehouse, and during that time you know there was unrest, and I knew Martin Luther King. He came to our schools, and he delivered many messages there. And they had a big walkout...and I was a part of that. And with Julian Bonds and Andrew Young, I knew all of them because they were right across the street. We were, I guess young radicals, we believed in the cause. I just belived at that point in time in causes. And if you really believe in something than you needed to be with it wholeheartedly.¹³²

Understanding the importance of teacher unity to collective action, the FEA used civil rights rhetoric as a means generate African American participation, creating a fully integrated work action.¹³³ African American participant Emma Evers discussed the importance of the strike as a means to develop interracial professional relationships:

We enjoyed each other. We got to know each other, because, we had not as teachers, we had not interacted with each other okay? I got to meet White friends that, we're still friends today. And, the same with them. They got to meet us, they got to know us. And we talked and we found that we all had the same goals in mind. And we wanted better for education, the teachers, for each other, for our children.¹³⁴

In the context of ongoing school segregation, the walkout provided an unusual opportunity to develop professional relationships between white and black teachers. This unity underscored the historical importance of the strike played. An examination of the Florida teachers' strike de-centralizes the Civil Rights movement as it points to collaborative efforts between teachers and Civil Rights leaders to improve education within Florida, even while teachers in the North conflicted with the Civil Rights movement. Recent scholarship has explored the relationship between the Civil Rights

¹³² Oral History of May Simpson, Interview conducted by Erika Gubrium, in *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 128.

¹³³Gubrium, *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 135.

¹³⁴ Oral History Interview of Emma Evers, conducted by Krika Gubrium, *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 145.

movement and the teacher power movements that permeated the country during the 1960s and 1970s; often portraying them as conflicting in their message and goals. Historians have examined teacher strikes in the North to illustrate the tensions between these two movements.¹³⁵ In her examination of teacher unionism in New York City, Jonna Perrillo argues that, “Although teachers’ rights and civil rights need not be viewed as conflicting categories, they were often made so, both by teachers, who came to see civil rights efforts as detracting from or competing with their own goals, and by civil rights efforts and mandates that regulated and at times deprofessionalized teachers’ work in minority schools.”¹³⁶ Florida’s teacher strike, however, illustrates a different dynamic, one of collaboration and unity between the teachers’ and their union, and Civil Rights movement activists. While their Northern counterparts used teacher militancy to increase an already established union, teachers in Florida, both black and white, fought to gain power within their state. This shared struggle over increased autonomy and power within their profession provided even white teachers’ in Florida a common cause with African Americans common not seen in northern cities such as New York.¹³⁷ The shared struggle during the strike provided an impetus of collaboration between white and African

¹³⁵ The conflicting nature of teacher power and the Civil Rights movement is discussed by Jonna Perrillo, in her book, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equality*.

¹³⁶ In her book *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equality*, Joanna Perrillo explores teacher unionism in New York City with a particular focus on the Ocean Hill Brownsville Teacher strike in 1968. While Perrillo attempts to draw parallels with the conflict seen in New York and the nation as a whole an examination of the Florida teacher strike illustrates that it is difficult to discuss teacher unionism in such broad strokes.

¹³⁷ Perrillo points to the weakness of teacher unions in New York up until the late 1950s, but by the 1960s with an increase recognition by the teachers of the power they could wield through their union, teacher unionism began to gain traction and influence within the state. By gaining collective bargaining rights for their union and other important professional aspects such as tenure, teachers within New York gained much power over both their professional careers and the education system as a whole. Moreover, the collaboration between white and black teachers in Florida, points to a common trend in the South. This relationship demands further scholarship, of which I hope to address in later works.

American teachers. May Simpson, and African American participant, illustrated the importance the teachers saw in collective action, regardless of racial status, as a means to garner power within their profession, stating that, “It was strength in a group that was going to have, and would be bonded together and we all be together for a common cause. And they felt like the mood that we had then we would have a voice, a bigger voice that would be able to stand for what we believed in.”¹³⁸ This collaborative effort also provided Florida’s Civil Rights leaders with a means to further their protests against the failings of education, created by the Pork Chop Gang, and perpetuated by Claude Kirk’s business-style governance.

While the strike gave white and black educators a new opportunity to work together, it also provided African American leaders and newspapers an opportunity to express their discontent with the educational system within the state. Many leaders within the Civil Rights movement viewed the teachers’ militancy as a means to improve the racial disparities of education seen between white and African American schools.¹³⁹ With federal actions such as Lyndon Johnson’s creation of head start programs, the increase of federal financial support for education, and the view of education as necessary to improve social standing, African American leaders placed education at the forefront of many Civil Rights battles.¹⁴⁰ On March 2, weeks after the initial walkout, Marvin Davies,

¹³⁸ Oral History conducted by Erika Gubrium, in *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 145. In this interview Simpson discussed the importance of a collaborative effort between white and African American teachers during the strike. It was through this unity, Simpson believed that allowed the strike to occur and last.

¹³⁹ This is discussed in Erika Gubrium’s dissertation. Moreover, Michael Honey’s books *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign* and *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*, and Robert Korstad’s, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South*, all discuss labor movements and unions as a means to garner civil rights for African Americans.

¹⁴⁰ In her book, *Freedom’s Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson*, Sylvia Ellis points to the importance that federal policies, like the head start programs, played in the development and continuation of the Civil

Field Secretary for the NAACP for Florida, announced his support for the teachers. He urged members of Florida's sixty four chapters to keep their children out of the schools during the strike in order to support the teachers'.¹⁴¹ Moreover, while white newspapers often derided the teachers for leaving their classrooms empty, African American newspapers largely supported their demands for quality education and professionalization, further illustrating the congruence of the strike and the Civil Rights movement. In an editorial from the *Miami Times*, one of Florida's largest African American newspapers, the author discussed the importance of negotiations between the teachers' and Kirk to end the strike, while simultaneously extolling the teachers for the actions, writing that "We highly commend the teachers' for their dedicated campaign for quality education for our children...but let's make a sincere effort to get our schools open."¹⁴² Differing from many white newspapers that viewed the teachers' militancy as selfish, the *Miami Times*, maintained a supportive stance even as it avoided outright backing of the teachers' strike. Moreover, The *Florida Star*, African American paper based in Jacksonville fully supported the teachers' and their walkout. In one editorial, the author discussed the role of white newspapers during the strike, while also providing rationales for supporting the teachers. Discussing negative perceptions of the teachers' actions, and the role the mainstream media played in propagating them, Eric O'Sullivan exclaimed:

It is a step that many view as a drastic one; and because many people do not fully realize what is at stake or have forgotten what the teachers have gone through over the years, the FEA has come under attack from various sources...And to

Rights movement. Moreover, Ellis illustrates the how many within the Movement viewed education as essential to gain full equality within the United States. *Freedoms Pragmatist: Lyndon Johnson and Civil Rights*, (University Press of Florida, 2013).

¹⁴¹ "Teacher Strike," *The Florida Star*, March 3, 1968.

¹⁴² "The Education Dilemma," *The Miami Times*, February 23, 1968.

make matters worse a large segment of the press - and particularly Duval County's railroad controlled Times-Union and Journal papers seem to be involved in a conspiracy with the downtown business firms to discourage the teachers' fight for quality education.¹⁴³

O'Sullivan, argued for the importance of the teachers' actions as a means to improve education and the need for public support in their struggle:

"It is a fight for enlargement of the Kindergarten programs; it is a fight for instructional material for students; it is a fight to reduce overcrowded first grade classrooms; it is a fight for the construction of K-12 classrooms; it is a fight for free text books. Is there any reason the teachers' shouldn't resign? ... Now is the time for the citizens to support their teachers!"¹⁴⁴

O'Sullivan's passionate plea illustrated his recognition that the teachers' actions sought to better the educational system for both white and black students of Florida. Emma Evers, reflecting on her participation in the strike, pointed to the importance that racial inequality played in the teachers' decision to maintain the strike:

Even if racial inequality was not a part of it at first it became a part of it. And once we started meeting and then we started sharing: "But this goes in my school!" and "This is not going on at my school!" We started comparing notes. And then we came up with a conglomeration of a lot of things. They were not meeting the needs of blacks, teachers, children, and schools.¹⁴⁵

Evers' comments point towards the development of a social awareness that occurred, in part, because of the integrated work action. Through these integrated meetings, teachers formulated professional and personal bonds regardless of race. These relationships created a unified work stoppage that strengthened the FEA's position. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the integrated teacher strike highlighted the problems of a

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Oral History Interview of Emma Evers, conducted by Krika Gubrium, *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 156.

segregated educational system, perhaps furthering the desegregation of Florida's schools in the years that followed the strike.

While the teachers found support from leaders Civil Rights leaders they failed to garner the public support they needed. This lack of support often stemmed from the public's demands for law and order during the decade, and the anti-union sentiments that permeated Florida and the South.¹⁴⁶ Public perception played a crucial role during the teacher strike, as both Kirk and the teachers struggled to gain public sympathy for their cause. Kirk used his position as governor to feed into the law and order rhetoric that pervaded the state and the country, influencing many of the negative responses towards the teachers' actions. While Kirk had moved away from the direct racialized rhetoric of the Pork Chop Gang, his law and order stance still perpetuated segregation and other racialized policies.¹⁴⁷ Kirk's tough talk played well with an angry white public, who viewed the teachers' actions as a disruption of the ordered society Kirk sought to maintain. Letters from parents to Claude Kirk and Floyd Christian illustrate much of the public's anger towards the teachers they viewed as deteriorating the moral fabric of Florida. In a letter to Christian, one parent argued that, "The teachers are teaching more about the working of a lawless mob as they stay away from their classrooms than they ever taught from a book."¹⁴⁸ While this letter avoided overtly racist language, the anger

¹⁴⁶ James Cobb discusses the anti-union sentiment that permeated much of the South during the post war era as a means to influence industrial recruitment in *The South and America since World War II*. While Cobb does not directly discuss Florida, Kirk's actions before and during the strike, coupled with the public's backlash against the striking teachers, point towards similarities between Florida and its southern counterparts in regards to anti-unionism.

¹⁴⁷ In *Freedom's Not Enough*, Nancy McLean argues that such law and order moved away from the overtly racist pro-segregation stance, but still perpetuated racist policies and ideologies. This rhetoric developed in response to the social upheaval started by the Civil Rights movement and anti-war protests.

¹⁴⁸ Letter to Floyd Christian, February 26, 1968, Series 303, Carton 11, File Folder 6, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

over the teachers' actions can be viewed two ways, first as a reaction to the teachers' militancy, and second as a response to the social upheaval of the 1960s. Teachers also lost a key ally in the form of mainstream newspapers within Florida. During much of the crisis of 1967 the newspapers had largely supported the teachers' demands, but as the calls for militancy increased late in the year, such support began to dwindle. When the walkout occurred it disappeared entirely. A *St. Petersburg Times* article showcased this negative press response. Taking excerpts from editorials across the state, the article illustrated the rising anger towards the teachers. Many of the editorials referred to the perceived irresponsibility of the teachers and their actions in striking against their employers and, in effect abandoning their students.¹⁴⁹ An article in the *Miami Herald*, editorialized, "It is not our position to defend the legislature...but this does not excuse the FEA in striking against parents and children of Florida."¹⁵⁰ By losing the support of mainstream newspapers, the teachers lost an important supporter in their struggle to garner educational improvements.

In an effort to increase public support, teachers sought to frame their actions as a means to improve the educational opportunities for the children of Florida. They failed to convince a skeptical public. Kirk, though, had better luck by playing up the role of the union in the strike. Kirk placed the blame for the strike squarely on the teachers' union:

¹⁴⁹ "Florida Editors View Kirk, FEA, and Florida Legislature," *The St. Petersburg Times*, February 17, 1968. The article took editorials from numerous newspapers across the state who viewed the teachers' actions negatively. While I did not find public opinion polls that discussed the support or non-support of the teachers, the numerous negative editorials in from newspapers in Florida's major metropolitan areas, coupled with the large number of letters written to Claude Kirk and Floyd Christian negatively viewing the teachers' and their militancy indicate a general statewide lack of public support for the teachers. For examples of these letters see both Floyd Christian and Claude Kirk's papers, housed in the State of Florida Archives.

¹⁵⁰ "Florida Editors View Kirk, FEA, and Florida Legislature," *The St. Petersburg Times*, February 17, 1968.

The issues that are at stake in Florida today are important and they are basic. Because Florida has been chosen as the nation's testing ground by the National Education Association, the way in which we respond to these issues is important not only to our future in Florida, but also to the future of our national life in America, which up to now has been built on the observance of the law by all people and upon the exercise by our citizens of both their rights and their obligations.¹⁵¹

By emphasizing the union's role in the teachers' decision to walk out, Kirk effectively shifted the debate from concerns over problems within the educational system to one over union control within the state. In a letter to Floyd Christian, one angry citizen, wrote that, "National power by the teachers' association which they are trying to get, could be used as a club to paralyze our entire nation – the same goal that Jimmy Hoffa had. These teachers' unions – or rather organizations- must not be allowed to dictate nor allowed to make the decisions of our government."¹⁵² Such anti-union reactions, though, were only one part of the public's anger over teachers' actions. Gender came into play as well.

Kirk not only focused on the role of the union within the strike, he also began a public opinion campaign that emphasized gendered notions of the teaching profession.¹⁵³

In his first public response to the teachers' strike, he stated that:

If you leave your classrooms and leave unfulfilled your commitment to the children of Florida, it is our children whom you have labored so long and hard to develop into useful citizens who will be the losers. The disruption a walkout will cause, when coupled with the loss of faith in the teaching profession, will do

¹⁵¹ Statement by Governor Kirk, February 29, 1968. Claude Kirk Papers, Series M8611, Carton 21, File Folder 3, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁵² Letter to Floyd Christian, Floyd Christian Papers, Series 303, Carton 10, File Folder 24, State of Florida Archives. Numerous other letters were sent to both Christian and Kirk that portrayed similar anti-union sentiments. These letters provide examples to the anti-union beliefs that permeated Florida during the 1960s.

¹⁵³ Ideas of teaching as a feminine profession is discussed in Robert Taggart's article, "The Conflict Between Education Reformers and the Needs of Teachers." In this article Taggart discusses the role that gendered perceptions of teaching has played in teacher struggles to gain professional respect. *Journal of the Midwest History of Education*, Volume 24, 1997. James Sullivan also argues that Kirk attempted to make the conflict with the teachers a battle over traditional family values, in his article "The 1968 Florida Teacher Walkout." Pg. 209.

irreparable harm to each of you individually and professionally. Put yourself in the place of the parents of Florida students who have given their children over to you. Concern yourselves for an unselfish moment. Is a walkout the means to achieve educational excellence? You know it is not, the people of Florida know it is not. In the best interests of Florida children and you as a teaching teacher, I ask you as an individual fearless, farsighted Floridian with faith to walk into your classroom and teach in Florida. Please don't desert your children.¹⁵⁴

Kirk's letter played up the roles of gender identity within the teaching profession. Instead of imploring the teachers to complete their duties as educators, he demanded instead that they tend to their children. In doing so, Kirk, played to a gendered belief in a teacher's maternal role as caregiver of children outside of the home. By portraying teachers as abandoning their students, Kirk attempted to show them as not only bad teachers, but also as bad women. In his article "The Florida Teacher Walkout in the Political Transition of 1968," James Sullivan explores such ideas of femininity in the teaching profession by examining the teachers' response to Kirk's letter. He argues that these teachers attempted to gain support from the public by emphasizing their feminine roles as teachers, writing that, "...when striking teachers framed their demands in terms of their sacrifices, they claimed their entitlement as teachers because they had fulfilled their duties as women."¹⁵⁵ By doing so, Sullivan believes that, "...playing a feminine role also restricted the striking teachers, because to play the role credibly they had to maintain the deferential comportment expected of women."¹⁵⁶ The evidence, however, counters this claim. The teachers rarely discussed their role as educators in the context of their femininity, directly refuting Sullivan's assertions that they played to such gendered notions of their

¹⁵⁴ Open Letter to the Teachers of Florida, February 17, 1968, Series 960, Claude Kirk Documents, Carton 1, File Folder 12, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁵⁵ James Sullivan, 215.

¹⁵⁶ James Sullivan, "The Florida Teacher Walkout of 1968", 211.

profession.¹⁵⁷ The teachers recognized their importance to society, not as caregivers of children, but as highly qualified professionals. Illustrating this acknowledgment, one teacher stated that, “The teachers that are being criticized today are the truly dedicated of the profession. We are all concerned about the money involved in a good educational bill. But I ask you how much is it worth to educate a potential doctor, lawyer, legislator, scientist, or a president?”¹⁵⁸ Sharon Keyzer-Andre echoed this sentiment, while also demonstrating the public’s view of the teacher as a caregiver to children:

I have had on many occasions a class containing 37 to 38 individuals. It is impossible to give these students the individual attention which so many of them need. Quite a few times I have had parents come to me and state that although their boys and girls are basically good they need help and don’t know what to do, they have no control of them. Then a sad parent states: You are their teacher, can’t you do something.¹⁵⁹

By using professional terms such as educator, rather than something more maternal, they also indirectly redressed the gendered concept of the teacher as a motherly figure.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, by the very act of going on strike, female teachers fought against the gendered stereotypes of passivity among women. It was this act that perhaps played a role in some of public’s anger towards the teachers and their union officials. In a letter to Christian, one angry parent, launched a gendered attack on Janet Dean, a union official in

¹⁵⁷ This is illustrated through numerous letters written by teachers to Claude Kirk and Floyd Christian found in their respective papers archived at the State of Florida Archives.

¹⁵⁸ Letter to Claude Kirk, Florida State Archives, Claude Kirk Papers, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10.

¹⁵⁹ Letter to Claude Kirk, Florida State Archives, Claude Kirk Papers, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10

¹⁶⁰ While the sources I used do not point to a direct correlation, many teachers used similar language as second wave feminists while championing their cause. While this does not point to a direct influence, it does suggest that the teachers were, at the very least, indirectly motivated by the feminist movements seen during the 1960s. This indirect causality is also illustrated in Kathleen Barry’s book *Femininity in Flight: A History of Flight Attendants*, and Dorothy Sue Cobble’s, *Dishing it Out: Waitresses and their Unions in the Twentieth Century*. In both books the authors discuss the trickledown effect that the feminist movements had in developing a professional consciousness for female workers in “pink collar” positions.

Dade County, stating that, “In all this mess it is becoming increasing clear that you have short changed the taxpayers. If a bitch like Janet Dean can turn the whole system into a mess, and people like you who we pay to represent us just go along with her and her gang.”¹⁶¹

In this context, the teachers’ sought to separate themselves from these gendered perceptions of their profession. While avoiding language such as caregiver and/or motherly figure, they did discuss their role as educators of children as an essential to society. By using the plight of children to highlight a failing educational system they paralleled other female centered protest movements, such as the post-World War II civil defense protests discussed by historian Dee Garrison.¹⁶² While the teachers implemented a strategy that used their importance to the education of children to attempt to gain public support, they found little sympathy from the public.¹⁶³ Gendered perceptions of the profession also played a role in the failure of the striking teachers’ attempts to close the schools for the duration of the strike.

The refusal, from Kirk and the public at large, to acknowledge teaching as a skilled profession influenced Kirk’s decision to keep the schools open during the strike. FEA leaders recognized the importance of forcing school closures as a means to pressure

¹⁶¹ Letter to Floyd Christian, Floyd Christian Papers, Series 303, Carton 10, File Folder 24. In the State of Florida Archives.

¹⁶² In her article “Their Skirts Gave them Courage,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America*, Dee Harrison discusses the use of motherhood and concern for the future of children by civil defense protestors during the late 1950s. During these protests, protesters used the image of an angry mother to garner public support for their cause. Using their own children to strike fear within the public as a means to disrupt nuclear testing these women found success through their role as a mother.

¹⁶³ Many of the letters written by the teachers discussed their roles as educators and the importance this role had on the general public. In doing so, they rarely discussed their own professional needs, indicating their understanding that in order to gain public support they needed to frame their actions as a means to improve education for the betterment of all of Florida, not just their own profession. These letters can found in the papers of both Floyd Christian and Claude Kirk at the State of Florida Archives.

Kirk to compromise, but they found little support from Kirk, Christian, or the public, hindering any chances at success. One top Kirk official, in an interview with David Halberstam, denigrated teachers and the profession in specifically gendered terms, stating that, “They are all second raters. It’s become a second rate profession. No man goes into it if he can do anything else.”¹⁶⁴ This view of the teaching profession allowed Kirk to hire unqualified substitutes to replace the teachers’ during the time of the strike. By keeping the schools open, Kirk minimized the social disruption that the teachers needed, enhancing his chances for a victory over the teachers. The public also demanded to keep the schools open, often writing letters to both Kirk and Christian imploring them not to close the schools. As letter writer stated, “We endorse the efforts made to keep the schools open...the qualified volunteers and substitutes are doing a magnificent job.”¹⁶⁵ The volunteers and substitutes, hired by county school boards, in actuality, lacked any meaningful qualifications, serving more as babysitters than educators.¹⁶⁶ While demands to keep the schools open flooded Kirk’s and Christian’s mailboxes, the teachers did find some support from the students themselves. Discussing the lack of qualifications for the replacement teachers, students wrote to the governor and Christian in support of the teachers and school closure. In one letter a student stated, “I do not desire to send myself to any schools where the teachers are not certified. The implementation of an unqualified teacher substitute program is not a satisfactory answer to the immediate problem. I want to go on record on supporting the FEA’s demands for higher educational standards in the

¹⁶⁴ David Halberstam, “Claude Kirk and the Politics of Promotion, *Harpers Magazine*, (May 1968), pg. 40.

¹⁶⁵ Letter to Floyd Christian, Series 303, Floyd Christian Papers, Carton 10, File Folder 24.

¹⁶⁶ The lack of qualification of these substitutes is discussed in articles in both *The St. Petersburg Times* and *The Miami Herald*. Letters from concerned students and parents about the lack of qualifications can also be found in Floyd Christian and Claude Kirk’s papers

state.”¹⁶⁷ Even with student support, the FEA’s campaign to close the schools never gained any meaningful traction, and Kirk had won an important victory.

As the walkout continued into its third week, the FEA leadership began to see support from rank and file dwindle. During the walkout, teachers took to letter writing campaigns and public forums to garner public support and force Kirk to acquiesce to their demands. However, teachers often avoided more militant actions, such as picket lines and mass protest rallies, perhaps recognizing the public’s reticence over actions that smacked of civil rights and anti-war protests. As the walkout dragged on, FEA leadership, recognizing they held little chance at success, began formulating an exit strategy. On March 8, 1968, three weeks after the initial resignations, the State Board of Education led by Floyd Christian, called an emergency meeting. There the board approved a settlement with the FEA asking, for \$10.2 million for education for the remainder of the school year, and other minor concessions for the teachers.¹⁶⁸ The FEA also demanded that all teachers who had resigned be reinstated immediately. While Christian and the Board agreed to this, many county school boards attempted to use the walkout as means to rid themselves of the more militant teachers. By March 13, only twenty-seven out of Florida’s sixty-seven counties agreed to reinstate, in full, all teachers who resigned. In response, Christian implemented an order to allow retroactive leave of absences for teachers. Instead, Christian’s new policy allowed for the implementation of retroactive leave of absences in the face of an emergency, including work stoppages.

This provided a legal impetus to return teachers to their classrooms. By March 14, with

¹⁶⁷ Letter to Floyd Christian, Series 303, Floyd Christian Papers, Carton 10, File Folder 24, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL. This letter is just one example of the many letters students wrote to both Christian and Floyd stating their support for the teachers.

¹⁶⁸ How Florida Slept: Background on the developing Florida School Crisis, Series 1186-11: FEA Papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL

the majority of the teachers back in their classrooms the FEA cancelled all sanctions, effectively ending the school crisis and the teacher strike of 1967 and 1968.

In response to the strike's end, Kirk proclaimed his victory by playing up his role as a law and order governor. In a speech given on March 7, the day before the emergency meeting with the FEA, Kirk announced his victory, stating that, "Florida has been the national testing ground for the battle over the control of our public schools. I am pleased to announce that this sovereign state has stood its ground and has shown the nation that this is a government of laws, not of men and no organization or association will be allowed to break the law and be successful."¹⁶⁹ Kirk, throughout the speech, also placed the blame for the strike firmly on union, exclaiming, "Public employees should communicate directly with the local agencies that employ them instead of finding themselves manipulated by the distant state and national associations. In this case, the real objective of these organizations was not so much quality education as it was the creation of union closed-shop control of Florida schools."¹⁷⁰ Kirk's speech marked the official end of the country's first statewide teachers' strike, but the struggle would not end there.

Regardless of the immediate outcome, Florida's teachers, both black and white, stood resolute in their mission to gain both educational and professional improvements, and in doing so, initiated the country's first statewide teacher strike. By the very act of going on strike, the teachers created a historic event, one that has yet to be duplicated. Through their actions, they not only sought to improve schools, but also to address the

¹⁶⁹ Speech Given by Claude Kirk, March 7, 1968, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10, State of Florida Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁷⁰ Speech Given by Claude Kirk, March 7, 1968, Found in Florida State Archives, Series:960, Carton:1, File Folder:10.

racial inequities inherent in Florida's educational system and society's notions of education. Moreover, the challenged society's notions of education as a second rate feminine profession, thus making their struggle not only a labor action but a socially conscious one as well.

Epilogue

The resolution of the walkout had severe consequences for the FEA in the years following the strike. The organization that held great sway over the state during the crisis began to see its reputation decline and membership dwindle. Angry with the perceived loss of the strike, teachers left the union at an alarming rate.¹⁷¹ With the loss of union membership, FEA leaders went on the defensive, attempting to regain members by discussing the gains teachers did make. Moreover, FEA leaders continued to fight against Kirk's business centric reforms. While teachers failed to garner the improvements to funding and governmental support they had demanded, their actions did force the legislature to address public sector unionism within the state. The legislators tasked with writing a new Florida Constitution, did so by adding the right to collectively bargain for all state public employees, while simultaneously formulating an anti-strike and walkout provision.¹⁷² Furthermore, teachers successfully fought off Kirk's attempts at merit pay and the loss of tenure.¹⁷³ Both of these factors point to the importance of the strike, not only in understanding the shift in conservatism, but also as an influential moment in public sector unionism and teacher rights within the state. While McCartin argues that public sector employees failed to gain a nationally mandated "Wagner Act," some states did provide legally protected union rights for public sector employees. In Florida, this legal protection

¹⁷¹ Excerpt From Memorial Lecture Honoring Dr. Joseph Leps: By Floyd Christian, Commissioner of Education, April 7, 1968, Floyd Christen Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 112, File Folder 2, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁷² Further indicating the shift in political culture in Florida, Kirk, supported by members of both parties sought to formulate a new state Constitution, one that better reflected the change in population and government within Florida. While public sector employees never had the right to strike in Florida, the laws, before the writing of the new state constitution, remained ambiguous. This ambiguity allowed teachers to walkout without fear of legal reprisals. Even with more stringent laws in regards to strikes, the best bargaining chip for public sector employees, the right to collectively bargain in an anti-union state provided a major victory for the FEA.

¹⁷³ Merit pay and anti-tenure laws did not come to fruition within Florida until 2010, when Governor Rick Scott implemented the business centric reforms that Governor Kirk had proposed.

had its roots in the teacher strike, and influenced an increase in unionization for other public sector employees across the state.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately for the FEA, these victories did not appear as apparent in the immediate years following the strike, directly leading to a decline of membership. Nevertheless, FEA leaders continued to fight Kirk's policies, further illustrating the influence that business centric conservatism played in the development of the teachers' strike.

On October 4, 1968 FEA president Jane Arnold gave a speech to the Associated Industries of Florida, the very voice of Florida business interests. During the speech, Arnold stressed the importance of education within Florida, and the reasons why teachers determined to walk out. Recognizing the anger these businessman felt towards the FEA and the teachers over the strike, Arnold began her speech by stating that, "my family and friends have warned me to search for the trap doors in the floor, and now that I have checked and find no trap doors, now that I have spotted the exits, and now that I have my security guards posted, I can discuss the non-controversial topics of education."¹⁷⁵ Moving away from humor, she began an attack on the policies supported by the businessman, exclaiming, "It would seem to me that you, of all people, know the free enterprise system is dependent upon an enlightened citizenry. As leaders of business and industry, you are the very ones who should understand the importance of education."¹⁷⁶ Continuing, Arnold also defended the teaching profession, which had come under direct attack during the strike: " We are teaching because we believe

¹⁷⁴ Joseph A. McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976," *Journal of American History*, (June, 2008). This influence is discussed in Mark Wilkens' article, "Gender, Race, Work Culture, and the Building of the Fire Fighters Union in Tampa, FL, 1943-1985, *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995*, ed. by Robert Zieger, (University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁵ Speech By Jane Arnold, To Associated Industries of Florida, October 4, 1968. Jane Arnold Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 209, File Folder 1, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

in it, because we believe that it is vitally important- not, as you sometimes hear, because we cannot do something else!”¹⁷⁷ Arnold’s speech illustrated the divide teachers felt between themselves and “captains of industry” within Florida. It also points to the FEA’s continued push for educational and professional improvements even after the walkout ended.

FEA officials in the following months after the strike campaigned to regain their membership, but teachers seemed worn out by the years of conflict with the state government. The FEA though, did find a surprising ally in their attempts to maintain their membership. Florida Education Commissioner Floyd Christian, who assisted in the decision to keep the schools open, now fought alongside FEA officials. As an ex-FEA leader, Christian viewed the union as a necessary voice in push for educational and teachers’ rights, even while he did not maintain a supportive stance for educators during the strike. Discussing the lack of union membership in a speech at the University of Florida on April 7, 1969, Christian stated that, “We in the profession we must have the FEA. If the FEA goes down what then?”¹⁷⁸ While Christian and FEA officials continued their push to regain union membership, FEA leaders also faced off against another teacher union, the AFL-CIO affiliated American Federation of Teachers (AFT), who pushed to gain a foothold in the organization of Florida’s teachers. The AFT, who before the Florida teacher strike had a more militant reputation than the NEA, hoped to gain inroads in Florida through the perceived failures of the strike. The FEA felt under siege, not only from Kirk, but also from another more radical labor organization. In response to the AFT’s push within Florida, FEA leaders alerted teachers that the Florida union was in danger of falling “prey to the empty

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Excerpt From Memorial Lecture Honoring Dr. Joseph Leps: By Floyd Christian, Commissioner of Education, April 7, 1968, Floyd Christen Papers, Series M86-11, Carton 112, File Folder 2, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

promises of the American Federation of Teachers as it hovers around the borders of our battleground like a carrion bird.”¹⁷⁹ The FEA’s fear of the AFT carried serious weight. On March 14, 1968, less than a week after the end of the walkout, AFT organizers began a six city tour of Florida, attempting to gain support from disaffected teachers.¹⁸⁰ In response to this drive, NEA executive secretary Dr. Cecil Hannan stated, “You can’t blame the AFT, but you can blame Florida Gov. Claude Kirk who, while he gives the impression of being a union buster, is in fact building one.”¹⁸¹ Despite Hannan’s fear of an AFL-CIO takeover, the AFT failed to make any serious inroads within the state. The teachers appeared to be tired of unions and conflict altogether. The years following the strike proved particularly difficult for the FEA and the NEA, and it took a complete restructuring of the organization five years later for the FEA to begin its recovery from the fallout.¹⁸²

The aftermath of the walkout, though, had an impact on Florida that stretched beyond union affiliation. The writing of a new Florida Constitution in 1968 provided a provision for public employees to have the right to collectively bargain, but not to go on strike. The no strike provision had its roots embedded with the teachers’ strike. Angry over the confrontation and fearing other public sector strikes legislators demanded this caveat be placed in the constitution alongside the right to collectively bargain.¹⁸³ This provision became particularly contentious between public employees and the government. Public service employees rightly understood that a strike was their strongest bargaining chip and continued to fight to maintain it. Not until 1975 when the state Supreme Court upheld both

¹⁷⁹FEA Action Alert, Series 1186-11: FEA papers, Carton 40, File Folder 3, Florida State Archives, RA Gray Building, Tallahassee, FL.

¹⁸⁰ “AFL-CIO Teacher Union to Test Florida Prospects,” *The Palm beach Post*, (March 14, 1968).

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² “National Education Association a Political Force,” *The News and Courier*, (December 26, 1976).

¹⁸³ “Florida’s Plan for Collective Bargaining for Public Employees,” (*The Spartanburg Herald*, December 15, 1975).

the right to collectively bargain and the ability to ban striking public employees did the legislature formulate a collective bargaining strategy. The plan called for union recognition by the employees and approval by the state's newly created Public Employee Relations Committee (PERC). The plan was widely hailed throughout the country. William Ursay, director of the federal mediation service and President Gerald Ford's labor advisor, referred to the plan as "a milestone in the still emerging area of collective bargaining for public employees" and that it "should serve as a model for other states enduring strikes by unhappy citizens."¹⁸⁴ Ursay's hopes, however, never came to fruition. Many states maintained an anti-union stance towards public sector employees. It is through these continued anti-union stances that McCartin sees the failure of public sector unionism in reviving a nationally declining labor movement. While a federal "Wagner Act" for public employees never occurred, the teachers militancy in Florida certainly played a role in developing public sector unionism within the state.¹⁸⁵

When the teachers left their classrooms empty on that February morning they could not have foreseen the impact they had on Florida's landscape. The strike served as an embarrassment to Kirk's governorship, and while many other factors led to his campaign loss in 1970 it certainly remained as a reminder of his ineffectual leadership. Kirk lost to liberal Democrat Ruben Askew, whose calls for educational reform meshed well with the teachers' ideas on improvement. Moreover, Askew's election began the trend of electing liberal Democrats as Governors of Florida, many of whom found support from teachers and their

¹⁸⁴ "Florida's Plan for Collective Bargaining for Public Employees," *The Spartanburg Herald*, (December 15, 1975). Ursay for his part agreed with the collectively bargaining aspect of the plan, but feared the no strike provision would lead to more militancy from the unions.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph A. McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976," *Journal of American History*, (June, 2008).

union.¹⁸⁶ The teachers and the FEA also could not anticipate the lasting impact they left on Florida's public sector. By gaining collective bargaining rights they changed the face of public sector unionism within state, but teachers certainly did not seek such broad implications when they resigned. Hoping to improve both education and their profession, they walked out of their classrooms as a reaction towards the business centric reforms proposed by Governor Kirk. Kirk's ideas for reform reflected a shift of conservatism within Florida that focused on both business friendly policies and ideas of business model efficiency within government. His ideas of business efficiency extended towards education, and sought to further strip educators' autonomy within their profession. The shift in conservatism also created a concern for education throughout the state, and teachers hoped this concern would lead to education and professional improvements, but Kirk's proposals directly conflicted with teachers' vision of reform. Moreover, by using both gendered notions of teaching and anti-union public sentiment Kirk effectively won the battle over public opinion that assisted in the end of the walkout. By the end, many teachers became disenchanted with the union, leaving its ranks bare for ten years. Nevertheless, teachers, in their determination to walkout, created a historic event that assists in understanding the shift in political culture within the state. Moreover, it points to the importance the walkout played in the strengthening of public sector unionism within the state, as well as important interracial bonds between white and black teachers that perhaps assisted in the desegregation of Florida's schools in the years following the strike. Emma Evers, in summing up her participation in the strike, and its importance to the history of Florida stated, "What I did was from my heart, I enjoyed it.

¹⁸⁶ The importance of teachers and the FEA on Gubernatorial elections was recently discussed in a newspaper article titled, "Christ Files to Run, Slams Scott on Education," *The Gainesville Sun*, June 16, 2014.

Changes were made, and history was made. And I am a part of that history.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Oral History Interview of Emma Evers, conducted by Krika Gubrium, *African American Teachers Look Back: Interpreting Participation in the 1968 Florida School Walkout*, pg. 135.

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