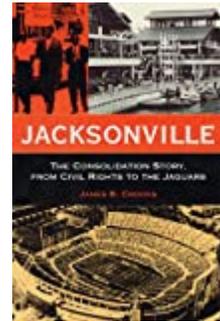


James B. Crooks. *Jacksonville: The Consolidation Story, from Civil Rights to the Jaguars.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004. xx + 274 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2708-1.



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Published on H-USA (December, 2004)

New South Revival: Jacksonville's Return from Disaster

Jacksonville, at 874.3 square miles, is the largest city in the contiguous forty-eight states. *Jacksonville: The Consolidation Story from Civil Rights to the Jaguars* is a brilliant narrative that explains how the city has grown from a small cow town on the narrowest portion of the St. Johns River to a major metropolis in the sun belt, that is now home to many important and influential residents, including countless corporations and the U.S. Navy among others. Crooks's main thesis is that as the Civil War and Reconstruction impacted northern Florida, Jacksonville's population grew, and the necessity for municipal services grew with it. The town, originally named Cowford and renamed in 1822 to Jacksonville, had seen its corner of the world change dramatically with every generation. By the time the nation had become fully engaged in the civil rights movement, Jacksonville had become wrought with problems such as pollution, terrible schools, blatant racism and racial tensions, and municipal mismanagement. The city needed to turn to the other municipalities in Duval County and combine municipal services and land area, a process known as consolidation.[1]

Consolidation is similar to incorporation in the sense that the areas surrounding Jacksonville officially became part of the city of Jacksonville. Thus, the square mileage was brought to 874, making it the largest city in northern Florida, as well as the largest metropolitan city, in terms of square mileage, in the United States. The redundant municipal services were eventually eliminated or consolidated into the services provided by Jacksonville. Crooks explains that the return of soldiers from Germany and the Pacific at the end of World War II led to a dramatic rise in the city's population, particularly due to the Jacksonville Naval Station. However, at the expense of clean air and water, the city never took the initiative to keep up with the strain on resources and services until the inconvenience turned into a crisis. Citizens of Jacksonville complained for years and years of an immediately recognizable stench coming from two large pulp mills and two chemical factories as well as dozens of other plants and homes that dumped millions of gallons of waste and refuse into the St. Johns River without rebuke.

The subsequent strain on the public school system led the Florida Department of Education to withdraw

state accreditation from eight local schools and threatened thirty-seven others. The Florida Commission of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools also promised to withdraw accreditation of all fifteen of Jacksonville's public high schools. The attempted desegregation of Jacksonville's school system after a 1961 District Court ruling was not met with tremendous success. Further, racial tensions and scattered confrontations between blacks seeking the removal of segregation and whites seeking the status quo increased the growing discontent with municipal government.

The election of Hans Tanzler in 1967 as mayor led to the first true effort at rebuilding. A grand jury, a few months earlier, had recommended the "complete revision of the governmental structure of the City of Jacksonville" due to the uncovering of a laundry list of acts of corruption including no-show jobs, vehicles paid for by the city but used for personal enjoyment, and general misuse of public funds (p. 46). Tanzler seemed ready to work toward a solution right away. The Citizens for Better Government began campaigning for a consolidation charter. The advantages of consolidation, according to the group, were exactly what the city needed. "It would make a consolidated Jacksonville more competitive in attracting new businesses; combine city and county into one, efficient, economical structure; and provide responsible government with one person, the mayor, in charge" (p. 46). The opposing Better Government for Duval County quickly cried foul as they believed giving all the power to the mayor alone would create a tyranny. Yet on August 8, 1967, Jacksonville voters supported consolidation by nearly sixty-five percent. Crooks gives detailed statistics that show nearly every pertinent demographic supported the concept.

Now the hard part would be acting on the overwhelming support and actually creating a better Jacksonville. Tanzler made inroads toward improved race relations, cleaner air and water, and eased the lack of public transportation. The city's health services were so dramatically improved that Jacksonville was regarded as "the safest city in America in which to have a heart attack" (p. 84). Duval County's public schools were reaccredited and new parkland was created. Two achievements proved the most amazing. First, the consolidation of city and county law enforcement agencies actually led to a reduction in the crime rate in 1971. Second, property taxes were actually reduced thanks to "new construction, user fees, increased state gas and local cigarette taxes, higher property assessment, and increased Jacksonville Electric Authority revenues in the city budget"

(p. 84). It should be a point for further discussion that such an immediate success would be altogether unlikely in the current day and age. Yet for all the initial success, funds proved to be tight as the 1970s moved on and the city stared down the barrel of bankruptcy. Still, the city needed to increase power production to meet customer demand. All influential businessmen and newspaper editors supported the idea of contracting with Westinghouse-Tenneco to build two nuclear power plants on Blount Island between the St. Johns River and the Atlantic Ocean. However, Tanzler's crack team of city attorneys analyzed the proposed contract and found a multitude of flaws, chief among them, the prospect of the city and county paying the full price of \$2.2 billion if the project was not completed on time. Crooks cogently points out that a fortunate red herring contract to build two floating nuclear power plants potentially saved the city from the same fate as Three Mile Island or Chernobyl.

Subsequent mayors have taken the ball and ran as far as they could toward the end zone. Jake M. Godbold oversaw the economic revival of downtown, the construction of Jacksonville Landing, and continued development toward cleaner air and water. Then, Tommy Hazouri went a long way toward cleaner air and water by fulfilling a campaign promise and increasing the odor fines to a maximum of \$10,000 per violation. He also relaxed restrictions on hassling polluters, so it became easier to levy fines and lodge complaints. Further, he eliminated all tolls citywide due to the excessive backup at toll booths which contributed to air pollution. Hazouri, however, could not control everything. Downtown development stalled and a few major businesses moved out of the city due to cheaper rent or other market forces. The next mayor, Edward T. Austin, made further inroads to ease racial tensions, particularly after the most powerful judge in Duval County, who, ironically, had a reputation as a fair and racially unbiased judge, made racist remarks in the Florida Times-Union. As a result, the percentage of set-aside minority contracts and affirmative action style programs were increased. Austin also presided over the acquisition of the Jacksonville Jaguars NFL franchise which has been touted as the most significant thing to happen to Jacksonville in recent memory. The Jacksonville Renaissance was well on its way toward a complete turnaround from the corruption, mismanagement, and blatant selfishness and disregard in the early sixties.

Crooks himself is a personification of Jacksonville. He is professor emeritus of history at the University of North Florida, located in Jacksonville, existed in

Jacksonville's municipal government as Historian-in-residence under Mayor Tommy Hanzouri in the late 1980s where he built most of this book, and has written another book on Jacksonville entitled *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City* (1991), which is a logical predecessor to this book. Crooks's position in the Hanzouri Administration undoubtedly gave him access to government documents and provided him with an eye-level view and understanding of how Jacksonville government worked. This reviewer wonders if a person not in that same position, and, indeed, not connected to the Jacksonville government, would have been given the same free and unfettered access to the materials and "filthy old cabinet drawer after cabinet drawer" (p. xv).

In spite of the generally brilliant analysis and careful attention to detail and coherence, this book is not without warts. The author's comparison of Jacksonville with Tampa, in terms of consolidation, only pokes at putting Jacksonville's transformation into context. Tampa, as the author explains, rejected consolidation with greater Hillsborough County in the same year as Jacksonville's residents voted in the affirmative. Even the broadest reading of *Jacksonville* will lead readers to understand that Jacksonville's dilemma was much different than Tampa. Tampa did not face the persistent environmental destruction as Jacksonville, nor did it experience the same level of growth, both in population and in business. Tampa also did not experience the same magnitude conflict in terms of civil rights. Furthermore, Crooks does not sufficiently explain his reasons, either through pure rhetoric or through evidence and footnotes, for believing that Tampa and Hillsborough County are a proper comparison to Jacksonville in terms of consolidation. Therefore, the comparison falls flat in terms of helping the reader, particularly the reader unfamiliar with Florida, place the history of Jacksonville into context. If anything, the meager comparison serves as an impetus for further discussion of consolidation and the comparison of consolidated cities and counties in future texts.

Crooks's single-minded attention to Tampa comes at

the expense of leaving out a discussion of consolidation in other parts of the country. One can understand the reason for not wanting to make the book an endless explanation of consolidation, but the author should have thought better of only focusing on one city when many serve as suitable comparisons. Indeed, had there been no promise of comparison, the book would have been just as strong and just as effective. This is one particular place where Crooks's affinity for Jacksonville turns into a bias.

Other, more contemporary, examples exist again in the South. Currituck County in North Carolina and East Baton Rouge Parish in Louisiana are currently discussing similar incorporation measures that county and parish officials hope would lead both areas into much the same success as Jacksonville. The move toward consolidation in these parts has been brewing for years. However, both areas would be wise to take a lesson from the incorporation of Jacksonville and understand that successful integration into a larger mechanism takes a prolonged period of time and a great deal of trial and error. Judging from Crooks's first-hand approach to consolidation, it seems that the only reason the process worked in Jacksonville was simply because it was done over the process of fifty years and each successive mayor after Haydon Burns was in favor of the concept. Yet, he never accurately and definitively tells us why Jacksonville was the only city in which consolidation turned a city at the end of its rope into a major metropolis.

Note

[1]. Bartley's, *Keeping the Faith: Race, Politics, and Social Development in Jacksonville, Florida 1940-1970* (2000) is a good start, as another reviewer of this work has concurred, for readers interested in further discussion of Jacksonville's racial and social evolution. This reviewer agrees with H-Florida reviewer, S. Willoughby Anderson that the municipal ameliorations of citizen grievances is awkward and slow. Therefore, Bartley's work sheds considerably more light on the successful racial relations movement that also factored into the consolidation process.

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Citation: GianCarlo Estrada. Review of Crooks, James B., *Jacksonville: The Consolidation Story, from Civil Rights to the Jaguars*. H-USA, H-Net Reviews. December, 2004.

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