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POLITICAL EXCESS SHAPED BY A GAME OF CHANCE: Tampa, *Bolita*, and the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Pam Iorio

The first half of the twentieth century saw the city of Tampa grow from a frontier village to a medium size metropolis, experiencing challenges that set it apart from other cities in Florida. Tampa's ethnically diverse population consisting of Cubans, Spanish and Italian immigrants, who settled in Ybor City and West Tampa, fueled a booming cigar industry that brought tremendous revenues and nationwide recognition to the city.

Tampa's port and railroad linkage supported economic growth. Civic affairs were dominated by pioneer Tampa families, white, Anglo businessmen who traveled in a constricted social circle webbed by marital ties among their families. The city's political affairs were the stuff of legend and lore. Election days were raucous affairs. Tooting car horns and brass bands provided a festive backdrop to the highly intense and personal campaigns that culminated in rowdy and unpredictable election-day antics. Election fraud was pervasive. Deeply intertwined with the political and social life of Tampa was another industry that defined the city - gambling. For more than half a century, Tampa's reputation grew as a gambling Mecca where lawlessness was condoned by a wink and a payoff to public officials. At the heart of the gambling industry was a game of chance, imported from Cuba. It was called *bolita*.¹

At the northeast corner of Eighth Avenue and Fourteenth Street in modern Ybor City is a parking lot for Hillsborough Community College. While historical markers dot numerous locations throughout this historic Latin district there is no marker on this corner, nothing to indicate that this spot in Ybor City saw the birth of a gambling industry that would shape the identity and the politics of Tampa.

Tampa historian Tony Pizzo credits the 1895 arrival of *bolita* to Tampa to Spaniard Manuel Suarez, known as *El Gallego*. Drawn to the growth and vitality of Ybor City, *El Gallego* opened a saloon at the northeast corner of Fourteenth Street and Eighth Avenue, and introduced a game of chance that was, at first, considered a fun diversion for working class families. Pizzo described how the game of *bolita* was played:

Bolita was 'played' by the selling of chance on numbers ranging from one to one hundred. Little wooden balls bearing the numbers were placed in a bag, which was tossed around a circle of men. A number of the crowd would reach for the bag when it was tossed into the air, and seize one of the balls. This ball was cut from the bag with scissors, and declared the winning number. Those holding the winning number were paid at a rate of 8 to 1. Bets started at 5 cents and up to a limit set by the house. *Bolita* was 'thrown' every

night at 9 o'clock and twice on Sundays.²

Bolita was illegal, but despite that fact, its popularity quickly spread throughout the city, crossing racial, ethnic and economic lines. Affluent customers bought their tickets in fashionable Hyde Park; blacks played in their neighborhood, an area west of Ybor City called the "Scrub," while cigar workers in Ybor City factories bought *bolita* tickets and cafe con leche with the same regularity. Though Cuban and Spanish boliteros first organized syndicates to control this profitable industry, it was an Anglo from a well respected Tampa family who figured out how to form a partnership that linked both Tampa's gambling and political interests.

Tampa's written local history is rich with references to Charlie Wall. Called the "dapper dean" of Tampa gambling, the "*Bolita* King," a "brilliant gambling czar," the "Big Boss," Tampa's Racket Chief," "the brains behind a gambling empire," and "Ybor's Underworld King," Wall is a fixture in Tampa's colorful local history. No novelist could conjure up a more compelling character. Born in 1880 into a highly respected and leading Tampa pioneer family, his father, John P. Wall, was a former mayor and well known doctor and Wall's mother was descended from the McKays, another pioneer family prominent in civic and business affairs of the city. His mother died when he was just twelve; his father died two years later. Charlie was left only with a stepmother whom he disliked so much he shot at her with a .22 rifle, earning himself a stint in jail by age seventeen. Finally an uncle, Dr. H.T. Lykes, a member of another wealthy and prestigious Tampa family, took Wall

under his wing and sent him off to military college. This was a short-lived experiment in rehabilitation; Charlie was kicked out of college and returned to Tampa where he found his true vocation: gambling.

Charlie's new career was helped by the fact that "some of Tampa's most prominent citizens . . . were heavy bettors." One of his first experiences with gambling was as a courier for bets placed on horse races. Wall made a commission from the transaction and saw just how lucrative having the right connections could be. Wall surmised that a *bolita* system built on these same powerful connections could also flourish and he saw the long term potential for amassing wealth and political power. The dynamics of small town Tampa, with a clearly defined political power structure that operated on a system of cronyism and personal favors, served Wall's interests. *Bolita* operators would pay Wall for protection from the police, Wall would buy votes, elections would be won, and public officials would be paid to tolerate the status quo. Tampa elections, which never enjoyed a history of fairness or accuracy, would now be manipulated by gambling interests.³

Understanding gambling's influence on elections and political life in Tampa requires an appreciation of how Tampans historically chose to exercise their franchise. Even before the turn of the twentieth century, Tampa elections were steeped in personal attacks, managed in a slipshod fashion, and generally only for the most stout-hearted participant. An election in 1887 provoked the following editorial from the *Tampa Weekly Journal*:

For two or three days before the election, whiskey was dispensed free by some of the saloons. On election day the streets were lined with drunken men, the most obscene, vulgar, and profane language could be heard, not only on the streets, but also in the room in which the election was held. Frequent rows and fights occurred, and during the entire day and night a drunken and riotous mob held possession of the town. Such a state of affairs are a disgrace to an intelligent and civilized community, and the Journal desires to place itself on record as being opposed to any such proceedings. We denounce the buying of votes by any man, either with money or whiskey; we do not believe in coercion or intimidation, and we call upon the respectable, law-abiding and intelligent citizens of Tampa to see to it that the like does not occur again.⁴

The reality of Tampa elections was at odds with the image that city fathers wanted to project of their growing city. Early boosters of Tampa attempted to depict a vibrant city on the move, led by progressive men of vision. In 1895, *The Tampa Morning Tribune* featured a front-page spread entitled "Beautiful Tampa By the Gulf" which detailed the tremendous growth and vitality of the city. The article's headlines summarized Tampa in this way, "Public Spirit and Harmony Abound Among Its Prosperous and Contented Inhabitants - - The Demand for Real Estate - It Is Impossible to Supply - - Suburbs Are Spreading Rapidly - Public Improvement the Order of the Day." Historian Karl Grismer saw a different Tampa during this same time period, concluding,

"Tampa was still nothing but a lusty boom town which was suffering acutely from growing pains."⁵ Election day revealed an unruly and unsophisticated facet of this diverse community, a side at odds with the progressive and vibrant image city leaders so desperately wanted to portray. But the history of Tampa contains an interesting sidebar: the men who ruled the city through most of the twentieth century were willing to put up with the city's wild elections and notorious gambling reputation, as long as they remained in power.

Elections would continue to be raucous affairs, far into the new century. Election day was often a festive event, with highly competitive races that brought excitement to the citizenry. In the 1908 mayoral race, the *Tampa Morning Tribune* reported that, "Every musician in the city who could muster an instrument was marshaled into bands, and from early morn until the last ballot had dropped into the boxes, blasts of 'A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight' and other melodies added to the din of cheering around the polls. The bands were transported from one precinct to another in carry-alls, and after regaling the workers at one voting place would hasten to another to cheer with their lively airs."⁶ When automobiles replaced the horse and buggy, candidates hired cars to transport voters and carry their messages throughout the city with megaphones. On election day in 1910, the streets of Tampa were teeming with activity, "with people moving about in every possible kind of conveyance excepting balloons and airships, and the thoroughfares were congested at all the polling places."⁷

Tampa politics was personal and many citizens understood that their own success in this fledgling city had much to do with being aligned with a winner. A reporter in 1900 perhaps captured the importance of the mayor's race best when he wrote, "According to the street-corner gossip, there are about four thousand five hundred jobs to be dished out, and the exalted position of the mayor of Tampa is as important as being chief ruler of the United States."⁸ With so much at stake, controlling the vote, by paying individuals for their ballot, became the goal of those in power. Gambling interests had the motivation to keep those in power who would allow their operations to continue, unfettered by legal action, and they had the money to buy influence.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw African-Americans effectively shut out of electoral politics in Tampa. City fathers became concerned that the black vote was a "purchasable" vote that added a degree of instability and uncertainty to the election outcome. In 1908, a group of leading Tampa citizens formed the White Municipal Party, to "prevent the future operation of the Negro vote as a balance of power in municipal elections."⁹ With city elections now run under the auspices of the White Municipal Party, the elections of 1910 were held with the *Tampa Morning Tribune* happily reporting that the candidates for the first time, did not have to "go down into the dives of the 'Scrub' to hobnob with the festive colored brother on his own ground, to 'fight the devil with fire' by resorting to money, used in the most shameful way, as a means of securing the bulk of the Negro vote."¹⁰

While the thought of the black "purchasable" vote was unacceptable to city leaders, other "purchasable" votes were apparently more palatable. The poll tax, enacted by the Florida legislature in 1889, set at \$1.00 a year, was now a tool the gamblers could use to manipulate elections. Wall would pay the poll taxes for voters and keep the receipts. The voters would never make it to the polls, but the votes would end up in the ballot box nonetheless. Poll tax manipulation could also be used to prevent support for the opposition from voting. In 1934, supervisor of registration John Dekle charged that certain groups were "attempting to disenfranchise voters known to be in the opposition camp by collecting and destroying their registration certificates and then promising to pay poll taxes, which are never paid."¹¹

Wall's real power lay in the city's Fourth Ward encompassing Ybor City. Wall had built up a tremendous amount of good will in Ybor City through his financial support of striking cigar workers in 1910. Now those workers allowed Wall to pay their poll taxes, and a voting bloc was Wall's to deliver at election time. Those in the Latin community saw Wall as the powerhouse Anglo who had the necessary ties to those in power to make the system work. One elderly cigar maker interviewed in 1985 recalled that "Charlie Wall was the Big Boss. He used to run the city of Tampa. Charlie Wall had connections. You see, he was americano. The Latin had nothing. What power did we have?"¹² Charlie Wall could deliver votes from the Fourth Ward and politicians knew that their success on election day was often determined by Wall's support. In return for the support,

Wall expected law enforcement officials to make only token gambling arrests, but essentially leave the bolita operators alone.

The issue of gambling was destined to become a perennial campaign topic with all candidates vowing to fight the evil, while the status quo continued unabated. During the mayoral race in 1910 between D.B. McKay, W.H. Frecker and J.N. Holmes, rumblings of gambling's influence on the election was voiced. McKay enjoyed a close friendship and political relationship with Charlie Wall's brother, John, and Charlie Wall was McKay's cousin. Frecker charged in a speech that McKay was too close to the gamblers of the city and that "gambling in the city had been monopolized under the present administration by Charlie Wall," who was "allowed to control the gambling of the city because John Wall had influence with the authorities." McKay responded that Frecker was "in cahoots with 'saloon men'" and that Charlie Wall expected no "special privileges" from supporting him for mayor. McKay won his first mayoral race by 136 votes, and went on to eventually serve for four terms as mayor, leaving an indelible imprint on the city.¹³

With so many gambling related votes for sale at election time, candidates soon found that the cost of running for office was increasing. In 1911, some civic leaders, including Mayor McKay, who had been instrumental in the formation of the White Municipal Party, complained that the white primary had become an expensive undertaking for candidates. Exactly why this new system cost more than the old was not entirely clear, but for the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, the cause was still the old

bugaboo - purchasable votes. This time, however, the culprit could not be branded as the black voter, since he had been effectively eliminated from city politics. Now the offenders were gamblers, who expected candidates to pay for delivering the vote. The white primary was only pricey, wrote the *Tribune* editors, "because the men who run for office by meekly obeying the command of the grafter to 'stand and deliver' have made it so. Would it not be much better, much safer to eliminate altogether the fellows who demand money for their votes and influence, and ask the honest citizens of Tampa to make a selection?" When, lamented the *Tribune*, "are we ready to admit here in Tampa that there are enough purchasable votes among our white voters to control a municipal election?"¹⁴

Civic leaders disliked having their dirty laundry aired for it was at odds with the image they wanted to present to the rest of the state and to the nation. Maintaining an image of law and order was more important than actually having law and order. When, in 1912, a Jacksonville newspaper editor of the *Dixie*, named Claude L'Engle, sent an investigative reporter, Charles E. Jones, to Tampa to write a story on the *bolita* business, tempers flared in Tampa. The *Dixie* article described Tampa as "reeking in crime" and described Charlie Wall's gambling empire and political machine that delivered votes and payoffs to public officials. Jones highlighted Wall's control of the Latin vote and cited corruption in Ybor City: "The establishment of great cigar factories in Tampa brought to the city thousands of Spaniards, Cubans and Italians. Many of these were, and are, inoffensive, but hundreds were natural criminals. They

had no respect for law and order." The *Tampa Daily Times*, whose publisher was D.B. McKay, then the mayor of the city, lashed out at L'Engle and the *Dixie* article as being "full of falsehood" and "inspired by mean, personal motives." (L'Engle had successfully run for Congress, and the *Times* had opposed his candidacy.) The "gambling evil," maintained the *Times*, was being fought every day.¹⁵ The issue of gambling was raised in the 1912 mayor's race when McKay ran for re-election, and his opponent H.P. Baya condemned the current administration as being lax in enforcing the laws against gambling. Baya was unsuccessful in his attempt to unseat McKay but his campaign came out squarely against the gambling element. At one political rally, James Joseph Lunsford [see *Sunland Tribune* article, pg. 37-ed.], a Tampa citizen, spoke on behalf of Baya's candidacy:

The police administration is not good and Baya will change that. You men know that there are men about this city who never work. They are not capitalists; they are not vagrants, yet they live well. They live on that of which they fleece the unwary. They are gamblers. The mayor does not seem to be able to explain where these men get their money. Let me tell you if Baya is elected mayor he will make these men go to work or leave the city.¹⁶

Gambling continued unabated for several decades. Its effect on elections was undeniable. Historians Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta conducted extensive interviews for their study of immigrants in Ybor City with residents who had first-hand involvement and knowledge of the *bolita*

business. "Many observers staunchly believe that during these decades [the 1920s through the 1940s] there was not a single honest election in Tampa/Hillsborough County," the historians concluded.¹⁷ Ballot box stuffing and repeat voters (voters who went from precinct to precinct to vote) were common. Gambling had clearly become Tampa's "Biggest Business," according to the *Tribune*. The Tampa Junior Chamber of Commerce produced a study in 1935 concluding, "past election frauds can be attributed directly to a fight for control of the gambling industry in the community."¹⁸ Being a poll worker could be hazardous business. In 1931, three masked bandits entered a Hyde Park polling place and shot two election workers in an attempt to steal the ballot box. The perpetrators of this crime were never caught.¹⁹ Through payoffs, violence and fraud, Wall had successfully created an empire that produced huge profits and allowed his political machine to keep sympathetic public officials in office. Isidro Stassi, interviewed in 1985, recalled the success of his father's *bolita* business in Ybor City that generated 57,000 on a "good night." Charlie Wall pocketed fifty percent of those revenues, which in turn, was used to pay off the police and other public officials.²⁰

The late 1930s brought about significant changes that loosed Wall's grip on Tampa's *bolita* empire. The poll tax, which Wall had used as a tool to control votes, was repealed by the Florida legislature in 1937.²¹ That same year, Hillsborough County residents, weary of ballot box stuffing, voted in a referendum election to change the county's voting system to a new lever style voting machine, a system more

difficult to manipulate. Embarrassment about Tampa's elections reached a peak after the 1935 mayoral race that necessitated the presence of the National Guard to maintain order. While 65 mile per hour winds swept through the city, election workers were arrested at polling sites on charges of ballot box stuffing. The city received national publicity that depicted a lawless and politically unstable community. The 1935 election, concluded the editors of the *Tampa Morning Tribune*, represented a new height of election fraud, "never had been anything just like it in Tampa, even with all the evidence of crooked voting in the past." The next year, the *Tribune* heartily endorsed the new voting machine "which shuts out every form of ballot box skullduggery except the repeater." The adoption of the voting machine was a blow to the gambling syndicate's election day shenanigans. Adept at manipulating the paper ballot by having corrupt poll workers replace or add pre-marked ballots in the ballot boxes, this new system had a decided impact on the syndicate's control.²²

Another significant change in the late 1930s revealed a transformation in the power center of Tampa's underworld. Italian gangsters, whose interests had previously focused on illegal liquor, infiltrated the Cuban and Spanish dominated *bolita* operation. The dynamics of the *bolita* syndicate changed dramatically. Violence became commonplace. Wall himself was a target of assassins, but escaped serious injury. In 1938, the escalating violence within the gambling world reached a fever pitch, resulting in the assassination of Tito Rubio, a Wall confidante. Shaken by Rubio's death, Wall sought out the assassins, and agreed to testify before

the grand jury about the Tampa rackets. Indictments resulted, not just of Wall, but also of Sheriff Jerry McLeod and Tampa Police Chief C.J. Woodruff. 'Fall was eventually released, but he revealed to newspapers a public acknowledgment of his role in the underworld of Tampa. "I am a fellow that seems to be the brains or the smart fellow in what is known as the underworld," Wall confessed. He refused, however, to publicly name others. "I shall not testify against anyone for gambling or operating a gambling house," Wall said. "I could not do so and retain my self respect."²³ Wall fled to Miami, and the *bolita* business continued to flourish in the 1940s under the leadership of an Italian syndicate.

It took a persistent and skilled reporter, along with the crusading spirit of a newspaper publisher, and attention from Washington, to finally break *bolita*'s grip on Tampa's public officials. Jock Murray, known by the by-line J.A. Murray, was chosen by *Tampa Morning Tribune* publisher Virgil M. "Red" Newton to ferret out the connection between *bolita* and the city's elected and appointed officials. Newton's crusade in the later part of the 1940s led to Tampa hearings in 1950 by the Senate Committee to Investigate Organized Crime in Interstate Commerce chaired by Democrat Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee. These hearings highlighted to the entire nation the unseemly side of Tampa politics.

In October 1947, the *Tribune* published the Murray series on gambling and described the post-Charlie Wall gambling "syndicate" that was made up of Italians and had thrived since 1940 with the election of former constable

Hugh Culbreath as sheriff. One article suggested that "a notorious Italian gang of northern racketeers" might have a hand in the Tampa operation, leading to an "underworld theory" of how the syndicate functioned. Clearly, Charlie Wall was no longer in the picture, but the influence of gambling on elections was as strong as ever. Sources interviewed suggested that as much as \$100,000 was spent by the syndicate for a local election. Some observers noted improvements in elections. Ballot boxes were no longer stuffed, thanks to the new lever machines, and intimidation and violence at the polls had lessened. But people were paid to register, to vote and heads of large families or organizations were paid to deliver blocks of votes. Once candidates were elected to office their political dependency on the syndicate continued as some received payoffs from gamblers. Estimates of gambling revenue in Tampa totaled \$5 million a year, with a percentage of the profits going for political contributions and campaign activities. "Who else but the gamblers can afford to finance elections today?" asked one former office holder. An estimate from one source indicated that the syndicate could control about 3500 votes in an election, which was "enough to control if lined up with certain other groups, not enough to put over an unpopular candidate unaided." Another Murray interviewee believed that "the gamblers are in a position to influence perhaps 50 per cent of Tampan's." Another factor in the syndicate's influence was a change made syndicate's the city charter, transforming the government structure in Tampa from a single-member (ward-based) election of city council members, to an at-large system. One political observer

interviewed by Murray believed that this shifted the balance of power in favor of the gamblers: "Under the old form they could have controlled one or two precincts and perhaps elected one or two aldermen. Now they are all over the city, and I am not sure they do not have the balance of power all over the city."²⁴

Murray gave top government officials an opportunity to respond to the charges made in the newspaper series on gambling. Mayor Curtis Hixon, County Solicitor Fisher, Constable Wooten and Sheriff Culbreath all indicated that to their knowledge, gambling was a minor problem that was under control. Mayor Hixon responded that he "hadn't heard a thing about it," in reference to a question about large sums of money spent by gambling interests on the last elections. Sheriff Culbreath gave a spirited rebuttal to the notion that gamblers spent money and had influence at election time, saying that election winners generally perform well all over the city, not just in Latin precincts. Further, he declared flatly, "there is no organized gambling or *bolita* in Tampa."²⁵

It took the death of Jimmy Velasco in 1948, a popular member of the gambling syndicate, to give the *Tribune* what it needed to bring the *bolita* business back to the front burner. Velasco had been shot to death in gangland fashion, the first such assassination since 1940. He had been the conduit between the racket and the politicians, and his records of payoffs to public officials came into the hands of Newton, the *Tribune* publisher. The proceeded to publish articles on Velasco's lists and payoffs, and the details of the *bolita* business. Though Sheriff Culbreath had made the incredulous statement to the newspaper a

year earlier that no organized *bolita* business existed in Tampa, his name now appeared on the Velasco list as one of the public officials who had received payoffs from this non-existent syndicate.²⁶

Sheriff Culbreath's problems were just beginning. The Kefauver Committee, as the Senate committee became known, held hearings in Florida and thirteen other states in 1950 and 1951 on organized crime and the links to gambling, drugs and other illegal activities. Most of the hearings were televised, and the nation saw more than 800 witnesses testify to the links between organized crime, public officials, and illegal activity in American cities.²⁷ The hearings in Tampa in 1950 riveted the city, with the *Tampa Morning Tribune* devoting numerous pages of coverage including transcripts of witness testimony. WFLA radio, then owned by the *Tribune*, provided live testimony for listeners. Much of the focus was on Sheriff Culbreath who faced intense questioning from Senators. Culbreath had difficulty explaining the dramatic increase in his net worth, and witnesses fingered the Sheriff as a public official who received as much as \$1000 a week in *bolita* payoffs. Associates of Jimmy Velasco testified of payoffs to a man known to the underworld as "Cabeza de Melon," none other than "Melon Head," Sheriff Culbreath. Tampa Police Chief J.L. Eddings and Prosecutor J. Rex Fariior were also named for taking bribes. Witnesses produced a list of 105 officially protected outlets that law enforcement officials were not allowed to tamper with. A former deputy sheriff testified "we were instructed not to make gambling and vice arrests." Culbreath,

witnesses said, was one of the "real guys" in the gambling syndicate. Culbreath was indicted the following year for corruption, but was not convicted; a federal grand jury finally trapped the former law enforcement officer with five tax evasion counts in 1953 and convicted him on three of those counts in 1958.²⁸

One of the stars of the Kefauver hearings was Tampa's "dapper dean" of gambling, Charlie Wall. Now 70 years old, Wall had not been a factor in the Tampa *bolita* business for ten years. Wall described the game of *bolita* for the Senate committee, even detailing how the game could be fixed by loading some of the balls with lead so they would drop to the bottom of the bag. Though a colorful figure in front of the Committee, he provided few details about gambling in Tampa, maintaining that any information he had was "second-hand." Wall professed not to know why there had been so many attempts on his life. "Could it be because you were influential?" asked one Senator, to which Wall replied, "I couldn't tell. It could be, of course." The Kefauver hearings exposed to the nation tangible links between payoffs to public officials and the protection of the gambling industry in Tampa. When the hearings ended, Senator Lester Hunt, chairing the hearings in Tampa, said that the "sordid mess" was Tampa's problem to solve, and the resolution depended on "an angry, aroused and determined public."²⁹

The close relationship between gambling and politics was part of Tampa's culture. The 1950s saw the fading of this relationship, and symbolic of the demise of *bolita*'s grip on Tampa was the violent murder of Charlie Wall. On the evening

of April 18, 1955, Wall was found in his bedroom with his throat slashed and his head smashed. The murderer was never apprehended. The brutal killing made front-page headlines. Although Wall had been inactive in Tampa gambling for many years, many assumed that this was an old score that had to be settled, the kind of end that occurs to someone who spends his life engaged in illegal activity. The death of Charlie Wall seemed to some to be a fitting end to this "black sheep" of a prominent family who found a way to use his connections, brains and organizational skills to create an illegal empire that not only defined Tampa for much of the twentieth century, but also defined the political dynamics of the city.³⁰

As *bolita's* grip on Tampa politics lessened, Tampa elections became more orderly and well run. One key figure in the move toward clean and honest elections was Supervisor of Registration John Dekle, who served in that position from 1932 until his death in 1965. Dekle consistently fought election fraud. He eliminated bogus names from the registration rolls, and was instrumental in the change from voting by paper ballot to the lever machine. He also established a permanent voter registration system in the 1940s that did away with the need for citizens to repeatedly register for each election.³¹ Dekle's accomplishments are often overlooked in Tampa's history, perhaps because more colorful and powerful characters dominate our recollection of the past.

Tampa's growth and development during the first half of the twentieth century was shaped, in part, by its reputation as a gambling city with a political system

based on cronyism, factional politics and fraudulent elections. City leaders desired the image of a progressive, professional and modern city, yet the political system they fostered was diametrically opposed to that image. The arrangement did not change because it served all parties well. It kept a relatively small group of powerful men in power, and it allowed another group to make money. Tampa politics for nearly fifty years was a politics of *bolita* - a politics that disregarded the fundamental right of citizens - the right to an honest vote.

ENDNOTES

Pam Iorio is currently serving her second term as supervisor of elections for Hillsborough County. She was first elected in 1992 and reelected in 1996. She is president of the Florida State Association of Supervisors of Elections. Pam served two terms on the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners. In her eight year tenure, she served on a wide variety of boards of which she chaired the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Hartline, and Tampa Bay Commuter Rail Authority. She is currently on the advisory council of the Tampa Bay History Center, and the board of directors of American Victory Ship. A native of Maine, Pam attended Hillsborough County public schools and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science from American University.

¹ For background on the early history of Tampa, see Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa, A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida*, (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Printing Company, Inc., 1950). Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa Town 1824-1886, Cracker Village With a Latin Accent*, Miami: Hurricane House, 1969); Canter Brown, Jr., *Tampa Before the Civil War*, (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1999); Tampa's immigrant population is the focus of, Gary R. Mormino and George Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City Italians and their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

² Tony Pizzo, "El Gallego Tampa's First Bolitero." Tony Pizzo provided a colorful

description of the life inside the *Bolita* clubs for a Tampa Tribune series published in 1978. See, "It Was A Way of Life," *Tampa Tribune*. 7 May 1978.

³ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 April 19»; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City Italians and their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 53-54, 253; Frank Alduino, "The Damndest Town This Side of Hell: Tampa, 1920-29," *The Sunland Tribune*, November 1990; Glary R. Mormino, "Ybor's Underworld King," *Tampa Bay Metro Magazine*, March 1986. Bentley Orrick and Harry L. Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism* (Tampa: University of Tampa Press, 1998) 81.

⁴ *Tampa Weekly Journal*, 14 July 1887.

⁵ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 23 June 1895; Grismer, *Tampa, A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida*, 212.

⁶ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 3 June 1908.

⁷ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 6 April 1910.

⁸ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 5 June 1900.

⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 1 January 1909.

¹⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 5 April 1910.

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¹² Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City Italians and their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 233; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 April 1955.

¹³ *Tampa Morning Tribune*. 5 April 1910. *Tampa Morning Tribune*. 22 April 1910. The current administration referenced during the 1910 race was that of Francis L. Wing, who served from 1908 to 1910. Wing had beaten Frecker in 1908 when Frecker ran for re-election as mayor. Curtis W. Welch, *Tampa's Elected Officials: A Narrative Chronology of Municipal Elections and Tampa's Elected Officials From 1849 to 1886* (Tampa: City of Tampa Archives, 1997)

¹⁴ *Tampa Morning Tribune*. 9 March 1911.

¹⁵ *Tampa Daily Times*. 29 July 1912; *Tampa Daily Times*. 30 July 1912; Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 81-82.

¹⁶ *Tampa Daily Times*, 3 April 1912. To what degree any of Tampa's mayors were controlled by gambling interests is unknown. Jock Murray, a *Tampa Morning Tribune* investigative reporter, who, in the late 1940s wrote in-depth articles on gambling and politics, commented on the subject during an interview in 1971: "I don't want to say that politicians who were supported by gamblers were all crooked. I know they were not. For example, I covered City Hall for a good part of D.B. McKay's regime and I would sit outside waiting to see him and sitting across the room would be Charlie Wall. One time McKay . . . mentioned that Charlie was looking after his political affairs. Well, I know that if Charlie Wall asked somebody who was running a little game somewhere to get 10 or 15 cars out to haul voters to the polls on behalf of some politician, that boy would do it. I don't think D.B. McKay ever took a dishonest nickel in his life. But I don't know if he could have won an election without Charlie Wall's engineering;" Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 255.

¹⁷ Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City Italians and their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 54.

¹⁸ Robert P. Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1988) 178-179.

¹⁹ Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 132.

²⁰ Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City Italians and their Latin Neighbors, 1885-1985*, 283-284.

²¹ Ogden, *Poll Tax*. 182.

²² *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 4 September 1935. For a recap of the 1935 election, see Hampton Dunn, "Tampa's Longest Day," *Tampa Tribune*, 1 September 1963. On the change from the paper ballot to the voting machine, see *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 11 November 1936.

²³ *Tampa Daily Times*, 28 July 1938; Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 187-189; Alduino, *The Sunland Tribune*, 15

²⁴ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 5 October 1947, 6 October 1947, 7 October 1947, 8 October 1947, 12 October 1947.

²⁵ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 15 October 1947, 16 October 1947. Jock Murray reported in an interview in 1971 that the series "created quite a bit of interest" but did not bring about real change. The public and the grand jury seemed almost anesthetized to the issue since stories of gambling and political shenanigans had become almost an institutionalized part of Tampa's character, *Tampa Tribune*, 255.

²⁶ Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 261-264. The size of Tampa's bolita operation was quite large in the late 1940s, during the same period of time when leading law enforcement officials declared they knew of no organized bolita operation. A *Tribune* article reported that Velasco and two other partners, "controlled only one-twentieth of the numbers concession here, but that small share in the city-wide operation was able to employ 48 peddlers, and make a profit of more than \$15,000 for a typical 24-day period. Simple arithmetic indicates the size of the overall operation," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, 6 March 1949.

²⁷ Patrick J. Ryan, "A History of Organized Crime Control: Federal Strike Forces," in Robert J. Kelly, Ko-Lin Chin, and Rufus Schatzberg, eds., *Handbook of Organized Crime in the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994) 338.

²⁸ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 30 December 1950; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 31 December 1950; Orrick and Crumpacker, *The Tampa Tribune, A Century of Florida Journalism*, 2113-285; *Tampa Times*, 25 September 1994.

²⁹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 30 December 1950; *Tampa Tribune*, 25 September 1994.

³⁰ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 April 1955; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 21 April 1957; *Tampa Times*, 10 August 1971; *Tampa Tribune*, 25 September 1994.

³¹ *Tampa Morning Tribune*, 20 April 1936; *Tampa Daily Times*, 29 April 1943.