Atlanta Industry During WWII

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Atlanta, one of the Top 50 biggest cities in the United States, has been a stronghold in manufacturing and distribution in the Southern region for an extensive amount of time. This is because of its prime location and transportation. Transportation is very important to large cities and Atlanta holds all the necessities with the Chattahoochee, railroad lines, highways, and the Savannah ports all in close proximity (Cobb, 2011). With Atlanta being the distribution center for the South, it made perfect sense for the federal government to invest money to war-industries in this strategic location. The government invested over 10 billion dollars to the South to help in the war effort, and Atlanta benefited from a lot of this money.

The Great Depression affected nearly every American during the 1930’s and World War II helped economic growth for the nation. With war supplies at a huge demand, the government was left with no other option but to invest in businesses that would help defeat Hitler and the Axis Powers. Atlanta had been dealt a very bad hand throughout the depression and finally received some relief from FDR’s New Deal. As with the rest of the nation, relief programs and projects sprung up all over the Atlanta metropolitan area. With farming in Georgia becoming unsuccessful and all the new jobs in Atlanta it made sense for the farmers to migrate to the city and find jobs.

A war was going on overseas and America had done its best to stay out of the fighting until December 7th, 1941. This was a turning point for American feelings and emotions. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the whole nation was in shock and ready to fight for their freedom. This was not only the turning point for American involvement in the war, but it was also the turning point with the American economy. With war supplies in high demand, industries sprang up all over the United States and the unemployment rate significantly decreased.

Atlanta became a booming city with its easy access to transportation and increasing
population. Businesses sprang up all over the area to provide war supplies as well as goods for all the soldiers and military support that passed through the city. (Ambrose 2010) Fort McPherson, located in the heart of Atlanta, helped the economy with the demand for consumer products. This military base ended up helping the city’s growth as well (Fort McPherson, 2011), and Atlanta provided plenty of entertainment for the soldiers.

With soldiers and workers migrating to the Atlanta area, the city soon became in high demand for consumer goods. With the depression ending, the few stores that did manage to survive were slowly increasing their business, and jobs allowed for more to open. The soldiers helped keep the sports stands packed, as well as visit different events and movies around the city. The new workers in the big manufacturing companies helped keep the flow of money going, and helped smaller businesses thrive.

With Atlanta being a vital position for the South, a lot of the government’s investments ended up going to this city. Of course this helped out immensely with employment opportunities and led to the growth in population of the city. The Bell Aircraft Corporation, built in 1942 by government funds, produced 665 B-29 bombers (Cobb, 2011) which helped defeat the Axis Powers. This was one of the largest government funded projects during the war, and thankfully, for Atlanta’s sake, it was placed in the location it was.

Work was now in demand as the Bell Aircraft plant was in construction. The bombers also needed a place where they could be sent off, so an airfield was also in construction right next to it (Ambrose, 2010). This airfield was a military alternative to the civilian Candler Field. With all the construction going on, Atlanta became a popular place for work and it has remained that way.

The Bell Aircraft Company was also a turning point for the South’s workforce. With men
gone from the home front, the company employed women and African Americans (Ambrose, 2010). This was something new to the culture, but the company had to have workers in order to manufacturer the bombers. It also changed the lifestyle for women who now wanted to work in the workforce rather than just stay at home. This helped with the ongoing struggle of women’s rights and civil rights simultaneously. The women were still treated better than the African Americans, but both worked long and hard hours producing war supplies.

Although the company went out of business after the war, it served its purpose and then some. Not only did it provide a key war product, it also helped Atlanta’s economy during the period of regrowth after the depression and helped change the lifestyle a little too. Thanks to the Bell Aircraft Company, thousands of families had money in their pockets to spend on leisurely activities. This was something people had not been used to for quite some time due to the Depression.

Bell Aircraft Corporation was the most influential big business in Atlanta in the short-run, but the war also affected another type of company. Coca-Cola Bottling Company made a change in business that greatly affected it. The company was already very large in relation to other consumer products, but not near as big as it would become due to the war and after that.

Coca-Cola is conveniently located in the busy Midtown area Atlanta. This is very profitable for their company due to all the people within such a close proximity. With all the new work springing up in Atlanta and people moving from all around, Coca-Cola was finally getting out of the Depression as well. The company began to sell bottles at five cents a bottle to soldiers off fighting. This was fairly cheap at the time, but it is not the money that affected the company. The long term affect that World War II had on Coca-Cola was something much larger than that. The corporation had become an international distributor due to the war and this led to
company growth (Coca-Cola, 2011). Today, Coca-Cola has different tastes for countries all over
the world. This was something that Coke had been able to get ahead of the competitors on, and
after that business soared.

With all this going on, business was soon booming in Atlanta and it was the place to be if
someone was not a soldier. Bell Aircraft Corporation and Coca-Cola are the two main companies
that sprung up and were most affected by the war, but there were many other small private
companies that helped in the war effort. These were definitely not the only two. In other cases,
some smaller manufacturers were forced to help in the war effort and start making ammunition
for the fighting overseas (Cobb, 2011). Little factories and businesses like this popped up
everywhere, but a lot were only temporary during the war.

So, World War II affected the city of Atlanta in many more ways than people could have
ever imagined. It helped pull the city out of distress from the depression and employed thousands
of workers. Atlanta was a key role in the war effort and the war has helped it grow into what it is
today.

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