





MIAMI'S SECOND GHETTO

by

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine the social and institutional forces that created the second ghetto in Miami during the three decades following World War II. During this period, Miami's inner-city ghetto was razed and a new ghetto, sanctioned by federal and local legislation and agencies, was established in the northwest section of Dade County. The northwest section, which contained a few black enclaves in 1945, was transformed into a sprawling black ghetto by 1960. The transition of the area from predominantly white to black produced racial conflicts that erupted into violence as the white majority tried to uphold segregation in Miami. In 1980, 85 percent of Dade County's African American population resided in the northwest section. This did not happen by accident; Miami's second ghetto was shaped, maintained, and reinforced through government policy, the real estate industry, and racial prejudice.



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## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the urban ghetto in America is a recent phenomena when examined in historical terms. The formation of America's modern ghetto began in the half century between 1880 and the beginning of the New Deal in 1933, as southern blacks migrated to northern cities. A second stage of ghetto formation spanned the decades between 1933 and 1968. After World War II, housing shortages became a critical issue for the entire nation, but particularly for the black population that had historically been confined to segregated neighborhoods. Black migration into Miami during and after WWII, as well as the confinement of the growing black population produced overcrowded and difficult housing conditions. In their search for adequate housing, blacks pushed into the surrounding white working class neighborhoods. The transition of white residential communities to black has been one the most noticeable urban processes since 1940 -- a process that produced emotional outrage, racial conflict, and violence in many of the larger cities across the United States.

During this era, in cities such as Chicago and Cleveland, the ghetto was reshaped and reinforced by business, political, and neighborhood interests who used various means to achieve



the creation of what historian Arnold Hirsch refers to as the "second ghetto."<sup>1</sup> In his 1983 book, Making the Second Ghetto, Hirsch states that during the decades following World War II

Private business reacted to the economic and social realities of the postwar city by experimenting with redevelopment and renewal. These activities, as well as the augmented black presence, drove "ethnic" whites in the vast residential midsection of the city to battle determinedly for the preservation of their homes and neighborhoods. And both business and neighborhood interests ultimately sought political and governmental solutions to their problems. The result was an era of ghetto maintenance and expansion that was designed, in a large part, to meet the needs of the contending white factions. Out of the chaos emerged the second ghetto, an entity now distinguished by government support and sanction.<sup>2</sup>

As in other cities across the United States, Miami's second ghetto developed during the post war era.

The term ghetto refers to a racially restricted area of a city where minorities are forced to live because of social, legal, or economic pressure. National and local legislation, racial zoning, redlining, the Home Owners Loan Association (HOLC), the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), and the re-emergence of the Ku Klux Klan were just a few of the legal, economic, and social methods used to maintain the ghetto in many American cities, including Miami. This research focuses on the later stage of ghetto formation and its subsequent development in Miami, Florida.

Housing Miami's African American population has long been an issue of major concern for city and county officials. From



the time of its incorporation in 1896, Miami has had a segregated black community. City fathers selected an area in the northwest quadrant of the city for black settlers who migrated to Miami while working on Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad. The area was called "Colored Town" and comprised approximately fifteen percent of the city's original area. Restrictive clauses in land deeds prohibited the sale of land to blacks except in this area. Another small community of blacks, mostly Bahamian, settled in Coconut Grove during the late 1800s in a restricted area known as the Charles Avenue Settlement. By the early 1920s, two other small subdivisions in northwest Dade County, Brownsville and Liberty City, emerged as centers for black settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Liberty City was subdivided for blacks by white developer, Floyd Davis. This new black housing development offered relief from the overcrowded conditions in "Colored Town." Originally known as Amos Town, Brownsville was comprised of farmland cultivated by blacks who had settled the area. In 1916 a black farmer, W.L. Brown, recorded a plat of the area called Brown's Subdivision. The area soon came to be known as Brownsville. During the Depression most of the blacks who lived there lost their homes and whites began to move into the area. After World War II, blacks trying to escape overcrowded conditions in the Central Negro District (CND) replaced the white population and by 1950 Brownsville once again was considered a "negro area." This racial transition

was facilitated by a white realtor, Wesley E. Garrison, who worked with blacks seeking better housing in the Brownsville area.<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1930s most of Miami's 25,000 blacks were crowded into the restricted boundaries of "Colored Town." The area was characterized by shotgun shacks, sometimes fifteen on one lot, and an absence of electricity, running water, and indoor toilet and bathing facilities. The deplorable housing and sanitary conditions in "Colored Town" were a concern for the entire community. Miami's civic leaders and businessmen began to seek ways to remove blacks from the downtown slum area in the early 1930s. Relocation of blacks to areas distant from downtown Miami would make available valuable land and allow for the expansion of the business district.<sup>5</sup>

During the New Deal era, the federal government passed legislation and established agencies that assisted local officials in the removal of slums and the relocation of blacks. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 established the Public Works Administration (PWA) and authorized federal funds to finance slum clearance and the development of low-income housing. This law stimulated the creation of local housing authorities with powers to receive federal assistance and to finance, develop, and maintain low-income housing. At first, the PWA's Housing Division supported limited-dividend housing corporations in many American cities. In Miami, the limited-division Southern



Housing Corporation, organized by downtown businessmen, submitted an application in 1933 for a public housing project. Though the project did not receive enough private funding, the PWA went ahead with the plans for public housing. Opponents of the project -- slumlords, real estate groups, and white neighborhood associations -- fought a fierce battle. Their battle, which almost terminated the project, was based on established segregationist beliefs and the fear of declining property values. However, the Negro Service League, under the leadership of Reverend John E. Culmer, initiated the first slum clearance program in "Colored Town." His efforts gained coverage in a two-week series of front page articles in 1934 in the local newspaper, The Miami Herald. His activity and the publication of his findings produced the necessary moral justification for the construction of a federally funded housing project. In 1937, the Liberty Square housing project opened in the northwest section of Dade County. One of the nation's first public housing projects, it was heralded as the most beautiful project in the country. Located five miles from downtown Miami, Liberty Square (now part of Liberty City) became the nucleus of Miami's second ghetto, a new ghetto planned and sanctioned as early as 1936 by local officials, businessmen, and realtors.<sup>6</sup>

In 1936, the Dade County Planning Council, working in cooperation with the City of Miami, approved a "Negro Resettlement Plan" that was expanded and confirmed in 1937.

In this plan, three areas were to be zoned for black settlement: a tract of 3,000 to 8,000 acres west of Flagami; 3,000 acres west of Perrine; and 3,000 to 5,000 acres northwest of Opa-locka. At the time, all of these areas in the western section of Dade County were completely underdeveloped. These plans were never carried out. In 1942 the Dade County Planning Council attempted to encourage black housing development in Opa-locka, but shortly afterwards and not surprisingly, the County Commission rejected the proposal. A private developer was already at work constructing Magnolia Park, described by housing reformers as "a potential slum" located on the east side of 27th Avenue in Opa-locka. The Commission continually voiced objections to other areas suggested for black settlement. In desperation, in November 1943 a group of blacks met with the Commission to ask for "elbow room." They stated that blacks did not want to expand into white sections, but white sections encircled their neighborhoods. In reality, decades of racial discrimination meant that the housing available to African Americans was confined to segregated neighborhoods, or to the blocks immediately adjacent to them defined as "changing" and hence undesirable for whites as the neighborhood resegregates. The Depression slowed the pace of racial transition of white neighborhoods. During the 1930s and early 1940s, only slight additions were made to black housing areas, while housing shortages grew increasingly severe. In August 1944, county



and city officials formed a committee to "work with negroes for the improvement of housing, recreation and health facilities."<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this research is to document the experience of Miami's African American population in their search for adequate housing during the two and a half decades following World War II. It is my thesis that during this period local officials, businessmen, neighborhood associations, and the real estate industry, working through national and local legislation and supported by the racist viewpoint of many white residents, kept the barriers of segregation intact. The result was the creation of Miami's second ghetto. The northwest section of Miami, which contained a few black enclaves in 1945 was transformed into a sprawling black ghetto by 1960. With the tools used to shape its expansion already in existence, the small black enclaves merged and also expanded into white middle class neighborhoods surrounding them to form the northwest ghetto. The second ghetto was also accomplished by new construction purposefully placed in the growing designated area. Miami's northwest ghetto did not develop by coincidence or accident; it was created and reinforced by racial zoning, governmental decision making, and the real estate industry. This research examines the social and institutional forces that created the second ghetto in Miami.

## Notes

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2. Arnold R. Hirsch, Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), xii-xiii.
3. Paul George, "Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930," Florida Historical Quarterly, 56 (April 1978), 435.
4. Pat Morrissey, ed., Miami's Neighborhoods (Miami: Miami News, 1982), 19, 72; Dade County Planning Board, Survey of Negro Areas (Miami: Dade County Planning Board, 1950), 35.
5. City of Miami Planning Board, Dwelling Conditions in the Two Principal Blighted Areas (Miami: City of Miami Planning Board, c. 1940), 67; Raymond A. Mohl, "Trouble in Paradise: Race and Housing in Miami During the New Deal Era," Prologue: Journal of the National Archives 19 (Spring 1987), 7-20.
6. Mohl, "Trouble in Paradise," 10; James E. Scott, "Miami's Liberty Square Project," Crisis Magazine (March 1942), 87.
7. Dade County Planning Department, "Negro Resettlement Plan," 1936, typescript in author's possession; Mohl, "Trouble In Paradise," 13; Miami Herald, November 1, 1946.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CREATION OF THE SECOND GHETTO: 1945-1950**

The decade of the 1940s signified a period of crisis and change for the United States. Economic resurgence after World War II and the rapid urbanization that followed affected the nation's housing demand and supply. In Miami housing shortages existed prior to World War II, as was true elsewhere in the nation. A brief building boom between 1938 and 1941 began to ease some of the housing pressures. However, the nation's entrance into the war halted housing construction. The end of World War II in August 1945 brought the nation's housing shortages clearly into focus. South Florida experienced a massive population influx during the post-war years. Many veterans who had been stationed in the area returned after the war to make the area their permanent home. Between 1940 and 1950 Dade county's white population grew from 217,909 to 415,857, while the black population grew from 47,549 to 79,227.<sup>1</sup> Housing shortages became a national problem, particularly in South Florida, and especially for the black population living there.

The United State's entrance into World War II in 1941 took the focus off local needs such as slum clearance and new black housing. American thoughts turned to the more immediate

need of winning the war. However, developers made several attempts between 1941 and 1942 to establish African American settlements in Dade County. One such attempt was made by the developers who spearheaded the Liberty Square project, Floyd Davis and John Gramling. Floyd Davis had purchased a vast amount of acreage in the area where Miami International Airport is now located -- north west of the Miami city limits. Davis formed the New Myami Development Corporation in order to develop a "model negro settlement." Development of the area required a zoning change from general use to residential use. When the developers filed to petition for the change, the County Commission voted to change the zoning from general use to industrial use to provide for facilities connected with National Defense. Davis and Gramling appealed the change on the grounds that it denied the owners use of their property and that the change was based upon "prejudice of negroes."<sup>2</sup>

Undaunted by the Commission's decision, Davis and Gramling prepared themselves for battle. The two men understood the obstacles to the development of any land for black housing and they carefully garnered support from various groups in Dade County. Naturally, they received support from black civic groups such as the Baptist Ministers Council and the Negro Business and Professional Women's Circle, but remarkably they received support from the Ku Klux Klan and the Miami Central Labor Union. The Dade County Klan Number 26 and the John B. Gordon Klan Number 24 wrote a letter to the



County Commission in support of the New Myami Development. The letter stated that since blacks would have to be moved out of the downtown area to allow for industrial and commercial expansion, New Myami was an acceptable area for black settlement. The Klan felt New Myami would eliminate the smaller black communities that existed in the middle of white districts and admonished the Commission that the project should not be the subject of political controversy and that the Commission should be guided "by the greatest good to the greatest number."<sup>3</sup>

When homeowners in the area learned of the development plans they quickly responded to the Zoning Commission with storms of protest. By far the most emotional protest came from the Secretary of the Miami Realtors Association, Louise Pencke, who owned a house in the proposed area. Between 1941 and 1942 she wrote several protest letters. In one letter she maintained that the developers were not interested in the betterment of the "negro" race, but that the project was a money making scheme. She also stated that she had given her son to her country and would have no hesitance in giving up her home to that purpose. "But being compelled to give up ones home to make possible the building of places for negroes to live is a different thing entirely." The developers had plans to build an eight foot wall around the new black settlement, but Pencke asserted that the eight foot wall would offer no protection from "negroes on the loose." The Greater

Miami Building Corporation responded to the Commission that the "universal experience in the South indicates that no respectable white community can exist adjacent to a colored one."<sup>4</sup> Though Davis and Gramling fought tirelessly, the Zoning Commission ultimately refused to allow the development of black housing on this acreage.

In 1942 Fickling Properties proposed a self maintained black settlement in the same area as New Myami. This project was located one mile from the upper-middle class development of Miami Springs. The tract of land had been verbally approved for development by the Dade County Zoning Commission and Planning Board. The company was told when they purchased the property that they would be able to obtain the needed zoning change. However, when the plan was submitted to the County Commission for final approval, which the company had been advised was only a formality, the Commission called for a public hearing. Again, the proposed development met with storms of protest and in the end the area was preserved for white residential and industrial use. The needs of the black community took a back seat to the defense of the country and the desire of white residents to maintain segregated housing.<sup>5</sup>

Another attempt for new black housing was made in 1941 by the Daval Corporation, which proposed a 350-acre black development in the Golden Glades area, located in the extreme northwest section of Dade county and just west of N.W. 7th



Avenue. The State Road Department was in the process of extending 7th Avenue to Stuart, Florida, which would make it a direct route for tourists travelling to South Florida. Protests over this development came not only from area homeowners, but from groups such as the Miami Chamber of Commerce and the Florida Research Foundation. The Florida Research Foundation was created and financed by businessmen to act as a watchdog over government activities. Both groups protested black settlement on a main artery that tourists would take into Miami. Additional protest came from the nearby white community of Biscayne Gardens which could not accept the possibility that blacks would have to travel through their community to reach their workplaces.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-1940s, the slum conditions that had plagued Miami prior to the war were virtually unchanged. The Miami area had experienced decades of residential segregation, during which official policies of racial zoning allowed only a few areas for expansion of the black population. Several extra-legal devices were employed to segregate the black community in Miami and in most major cities across the U.S. Race restrictive covenants, racial zoning, redlining, social pressure, municipal action, "gentlemen's agreements" between realtors, and violence to person and property were all used to establish and perpetuate segregated communities.<sup>7</sup>

One of the most effective methods was the use of restrictive covenants, provisions written into deeds that

essentially limited ownership or use of land by any unwanted minority. Although restrictive covenants were usually used to maintain the segregation of blacks in urban areas, the first reported case was an attempt to forbid the use of a laundry by a Chinese person in 1892 in San Diego, California. The utilization of restrictive covenants became a universal policy. For example, in 1947 as much as 80 percent of Chicago's residential area was covered by restrictive covenants. The practice became so pervasive that the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) supported restrictive covenants on the assumption that it was necessary to safeguard the value of the properties they insured.<sup>8</sup>

Another effective method of maintaining segregated housing was redlining. Bankers, lenders, real estate professionals, and appraisers kept ready reference maps that outlined all neighborhoods by race. The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), established in 1933, granted long-term low interest mortgages to homeowners. Local bankers and real estate men were usually the appraisers for the HOLC. Each neighborhood was assigned to one of four categories which were color coded on "residential security maps." The least desirable neighborhoods were colored red and described as hazardous areas. Neighborhoods in this category were inhabited by blacks and or lower class whites. In 1936 the HOLC had redlined the Central Negro District (CND) in Miami and most of the northwest section of the county, which was the



location of the black public housing project, Liberty Square-- not yet completed. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which also insured mortgages, used the HOLC categories in determining loan availability. The effect of this redlining was that lending institutions were reluctant to invest mortgage money for homebuilding or buying in those neighborhoods. This practice reinforced and strengthened residential segregation in the Miami area.<sup>9</sup>

In most southern states racial zoning was the most effective means used to maintain racial segregation in neighborhoods. Zoning, as a planning tool, was established in Dade County in 1936. However, it was also used as a tool to preserve segregated neighborhoods. County zoning maps, called "Use Maps" redlined areas for black occupancy. Yet, many years before zoning became an official way of safeguarding land use, Miami had zoned certain areas of the city deemed appropriate for black residential use. It was referred to as the "color line." The color line in Miami had been established by a city resolution prior to 1920. In 1920 that color line was crossed near the "white" Highland Park section of Miami. Houses for blacks had been built in Braggs Subdivision located on the western edge of the black section and the eastern edge of Highland Park. In June 1920 three of those houses were bombed -- one totally destroyed. It was reported that masked men had visited the houses a few weeks prior to the bombings and told black residents they must

leave. The Miami Metropolis reported that, "The bombings were caused by the feeling of bitterness among the white residents of the Highland park section against the encroachment of the colored section on what they claim is white territory." In addition, the paper added that the color line was not only under dispute by blacks and whites, but also between white owners of black property and white residents. Frank Davis, who represented Highland Park at a special meeting on the issue, pointed out that the color line had been broken by overzealous real estate men. In fact, he stated, "it is the measly real estate dealer who wants to make a dollar by selling lots in white town to a negro who is to blame." There were several opinions for alternative uses of the disputed land, such as a park or a cemetery. However, the city council chose to bypass the issue entirely. Black residents were left with no choice but to push into the white areas that surrounded them and the slumlords were there to help them through this process.<sup>10</sup>

By definition, a slumlord is a landlord who receives unusually large profits from substandard dwellings. Typically, the slumlords of the Central Negro District (CND) were absentee landlords who hired agents to collect rents and maintain their property. Frequently, these agents were involved with the black community on a personal level and it becomes difficult to determine whether or not they were motivated solely by greed. One such agent was Luther L.

Brooks, who opened the Bonded Collection Agency in 1933 for the purpose of collecting rent and maintaining the property owned by absentee landlords or owners who did not want to be bothered with the dirty business associated with rental housing in slums. By 1950 the Bonded Collection Agency operated three offices -- one in Coconut Grove, one in the CND, and another in Liberty City. The Agency employed 117 people -- brick layers, carpenters, maintenance men, collectors, and office clerks. Brooks involved himself in the needs of the community from which he drew his profits. He was president of the Greater Miami Colored Research and Improvement Association, and he donated money to such causes as the Dunbar Day Nursery and garbage collection in black areas. He took out a full page ad wishing the readers of the Miami Times, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year." However, from the money he made Brooks himself became a slumlord. He owned lots in Coconut Grove and an apartment building called the Caddillac in the CND. Yet, an article in the Miami Times stated that representatives of the Bonded Collection Agency had been leaders in the advances made for slum clearance and that, "Mr. Brooks has always been interested in community matters and makes his contribution financially and otherwise."<sup>11</sup>

In the black community of Coconut Grove, a family of real estate owners have provided housing to Bahamian blacks and African Americans for three generations. The Blumenthals came



to Coconut Grove in 1924 where they operated a grocery store in the black business section on Grand Avenue. The family patriarch, Max Blumenthal, set up business in the back of the store collecting rent for owners of rental property in the Black Grove. During the 1920s the black section of Coconut Grove was surrounded by wealthy white residential sections. Most of the Grove's black residents worked at menial jobs for the white community. Blumenthal learned quickly from his experience as rent collector the need for affordable housing in the black community and the potential profits to be gained. He began to buy lots in the black district, build shotgun shacks, and rent them for one dollar a week. By 1955, Blumenthal had become so successful as a realtor that he closed the grocery store and hired his own rent collector. The business was passed on from Max to his son Elliot and then to his grandson Maurice. Today other members of the family work in the business. The Blumenthals do not view themselves as slumlords, but as providers of a needed commodity -- housing at an affordable price. Like Luther Brooks, the Blumenthals took an interest in the black community by donations of time, money, and labor. The black community viewed them as benevolent benefactors.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike Brooks and Blumenthal, Wesley E. Garrison, a real estate agent, involved himself in the black housing market by pushing the boundaries of the black districts into surrounding transitional white areas. Wesley E. Garrison's name first

appears in the 1927 Miami City Directory where he is listed as a real estate agent. By 1930 the Directory shows he had incorporated with the name Wesley E. Garrison, Inc. Garrison purchased lots, usually through Tax Deeds, throughout the City of Miami and Dade County for black homeowners. In 1938, Garrison purchased lots in the Henry Ford Subdivision, a white community, and was allowing shacks worth no more than two-hundred dollars to be built on these lots. In 1938 he formed Garrison's Home Builders, Inc. and purchased a number of lots in the segregated Brownsville area and in the surrounding white communities of Causeway Park, Seminole Crest, and Lorah Park. In 1942 Garrison became the Dade County Chairman of the Republican Party and in 1944 became the State Committeeman for the Republican Party. In those roles he fought for blacks to obtain the right to vote and declared that he "always stood for all peoples no matter what their race or religion." For many years Garrison defended the property rights of Miami's black community. It is evident that all of these men made profits from the black community in relation to their housing needs. A shrewd businessman would see it as a natural outgrowth of supply and demand. On the one hand these men can be viewed as money mongers--capitalizing on the necessities of those less fortunate. On the other hand, they can be viewed as supplying options to a group of people that society had given few, if any, choices in terms of housing.<sup>13</sup>

In 1945 several black homeowners tested the legality of

racial zoning in Miami. In June, James Sellers, an African American, and Wesley E. Garrison appeared before the Board of County Commissioners to request approval of a building permit for Sellers for additions and repairs to his house. After a lengthy discussion it was discovered that the house had been recently moved to Homeowners Paradise Subdivision, an area located in Brownsville, but zoned for white occupancy only. The Commissioners referred the matter to the Zoning Committee, which denied the permit. This case was one of three involving racial zoning that would evolve into significant civil rights legislation in Dade County.<sup>14</sup>

In another racial zoning case, two African American couples were arrested for buying houses just outside racially zoned Brownsville. They were vindicated in a suit before Judge Stanley Milledge. The other case involved the County Zoning Department, which had refused building permits to four African Americans who sought to install septic tanks in houses they had purchased in a white neighborhood. In November 1945, Judge Stanley Milledge of the Circuit Court of Dade County ruled that County Commissioners could not zone property according to a person's race or color. He ruled the Dade County policy of racial zoning unconstitutional, in violation of the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The County Commissioners appealed this decision, and on April 20, 1946 a Florida Supreme Court decision prohibited Dade County Commissioners from segregating blacks or whites by restrictive



zoning. This decision was the culmination of a year-long struggle to end racial zoning in the Brownsville neighborhood. The United States Supreme Court followed in 1948, ruling that racial zoning and restrictive covenants were unenforceable by court action and contrary to public law. In 1949 the FHA and VA followed by stating that they would no longer insure or guarantee loans in areas where covenants were imposed after February 1950. Until this time only one African American, a dentist, Dr. Ira Davis, had been able to obtain a FHA loan to build a home. Even though the practice of the racial zoning had been deemed illegal on the local, state, and national level, county and city officials remained determined to preserve Miami's segregated neighborhoods. Shortly after the ruling, County Attorney Fred W. Carson pointed out to the commission that though they could not zone for racial segregation they could have the "understanding" that the areas are for "Negroes."<sup>15</sup>

Though Dade County was determined to keep its neighborhoods segregated, no one could deny the need for black housing. After the war, black districts were literally bursting at the seams. The slum clearance program begun in the early 1930s resumed after the war. In December 1945, the Miami Housing Authority asked the Board of County Commissioners to designate two areas of at least 600 acres in the county for African American housing development. The request was referred to the County Advisory and Planning

Committee which was formed in 1944 to focus attention on area-wide long range problems. In April, the Planning Committee recommended to the Board of County Commissioners that "the four major negro districts, namely Miami, Coconut Grove, Liberty City and Brownsville, be replanned to the limit of their present area capacity thus providing additional housing space for 26,000 persons."<sup>16</sup>

After surveying Liberty City, the Committee found sixty acres of undeveloped land that would provide for expansion west of the area and north to the FEC railroad tracks. The committee felt that the new area should incorporate housing that would allow for FHA financing and minimum standard homes. For Brownsville, the Committee recommended replanning the area into a "model negro community" within its present bounds, with special consideration for home ownership. A completely new and planned model subsistence homestead town for African Americans was also recommended. The Coordinating and Planning Committee had the task of choosing the site with the approval of the Inter-Racial Committee and the County Commissioners. An unnamed Miami philanthropist sponsored the project and planned to purchase the land for the purpose of creating the finest model negro community in the United States. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown, this plan never materialized.<sup>17</sup>

The committee's recommendations also included: adequate zoning regulations and building restrictions, with uniform and

rigid standards for "negro" construction; that all building and zoning regulations conform to FHA requirements; better types of houses in the new and expanded restricted sections; parks, playgrounds, recreational areas, and greenbelts around restricted sections to be included in the planning process. They also recommended the withholding of building permits if any new construction did not conform to these recommendations.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1946, the Miami Herald reported that the housing needs of the black community were immediate "and because of the slowness of city and county authorities to take action, the worried population of the Central Negro District is spreading into areas which contain, or border on white residents." The consequence was racial tension that resulted in a cross burning in the Brownsville section and white mob action against the opening of a new black club in the Liberty City area. The Ku Klux Klan used scare tactics such as cross burnings, bombings, effigies, and parades to keep blacks "in their place." The Klan has a long history in Miami. The earliest boundary dispute occurred in 1911 when several black families tried to move into a white area north and west of "Colored Town." Also, in 1915 several black families moved beyond the boundary line into North Miami. Those homes were raided by six masked klansmen who forced them to leave. During the early 1920s, the Klan, whose Miami membership stood at around 1,000, placed a stone monument on the Dade County



courthouse grounds which read on one side, "NOTE If You are a Reckless Negro Chauffeur or a White man who believes in Social Equality be advised Dade County Don't Need You." The other side read, " On this Spot a few years ago a white man was found who had been tarred and feathered because he Preached Social Equality to Negroes."<sup>19</sup>

During this time, the Klan was protected by the Police Chief, Leslie Quigg. He was eventually dismissed from that position after a trial for the death of a black man. However, Quigg was rehired in 1937 and became even more blatant in his racism. Also in 1937, the John B. Gordon Klan No. 24 of Miami inducted one hundred and twenty-five people at an annual initiation ceremony. Life magazine featured photographs of the Miami Klan in 1937 at this induction and a few hours later raiding a night club. In 1948 the Miami chapter of the KKK was granted a charter under the name of Sports, Inc., located in Hialeah. Though a 1949 newspaper article approximated membership at 100, by 1950 the number had clearly grown. Repeated newspaper articles covered Klan meetings and parades, and the various legislation that tried to outlaw the group suggest that the Klan's presence was felt. The growth of the Klan during this period clearly was a response to changing race relations after the war. Blacks were in a better economic position and were beginning to move into traditionally white neighborhoods.<sup>20</sup>

The designation of new residential areas for blacks was

a political football in Miami for many years. Continual pleas from the black community for more living space led to unkept promises on new housing from city and county officials. Again in 1946, the Miami Housing Authority asked the County Commission to designate a new area for black housing. A Plat was approved by the county commission for a new twenty-eight lot subdivision, Liberty Heights, located just north of Liberty Square. However, twenty-eight houses did not begin to solve Miami's enormous black housing problem. In September of the same year, the City of Miami Planning Board recommended the St. Albans tract in Coconut Grove and a 1,400 acre tract west of Liberty City be designated for black housing. City officials turned down the Coconut Grove recommendation and referred the Liberty City tract to the County Commission. County Commissioner I.D. McVicar revealed that no matter where a black settlement was planned, there were going to be problems, but McVicar pledged that he would try to find an appropriate area. Many obstacles prevented the successful implementation of slum clearance and the designation of new black housing areas. One of the problems that authorities faced was the storm of protest that arose from white residents in surrounding areas wherever a new district was proposed. Another problem was the slumlords who created opposition to slum clearance by telling their tenants that they would be relocated to remote portions of the city. Another problem seemed to be the ineffectiveness of the Miami Housing

Authority (MHA) to take the public housing program in a decisive direction. The executive director of the MHA, J.T. Knight, condemned real estate boards and speculative builders for their opposition to low-cost housing, but at the same time he stated his preference for projects built by private interests rather than public housing.<sup>21</sup>

The Housing Authority continually pleaded with the County Commission to designate areas for black housing. In order to rid the city of slums, new housing needed to be provided for the displaced. The Miami Herald reported again that the Commission was slow to make a decision on areas for black housing and that "the community's long standing and still unsolved major problem -- negro housing -- is a problem which does not diminish. Each time it is further delayed, it becomes bigger and more menacing to the community."<sup>22</sup>

A small breakthrough came in 1947 at Fiftieth Street Heights, an apartment complex planned by local attorney Malcolm Wisehart and his associates, John Bouvier and Helen Harris. Located on a five-acre tract in the Brownsville area, Fiftieth Streets Heights contained twenty-nine eight-unit apartments of one and two bedrooms. It was located in an already segregated area. Bouvier and Wiseheart were speculators who were buying up large amounts of property throughout Dade County. They were also developers who seemed to understand early the need for black housing and the potential profits involved. Bouvier and Wiseheart built what



came to be called "concrete monsters," smaller apartment projects constructed of concrete block with no recreational facilities or adequate parking. It should also be noted that Bouvier was a member of the Dade County Planning Committee, a position that today would be considered a conflict of interest in light of his speculative and development interests.<sup>23</sup>

A number of areas had been selected previously for larger developments, but those met with storms of protest from white residents. Black residents also protested the sites because they were too far removed from downtown Miami. By May 1947, the Dade County Regional Planning Board and the County Commission finally selected a one thousand-acre tract in the northwest section of Dade County. It was decided that no action would be taken to zone the area for blacks. That problem would be circumvented by filing subdivision plats with reservations on setback of houses, footage, and a restriction providing only for black occupancy. However, in July these plans were still tentative. In fact, the thousand-acre Brownsville area tract never progressed past the planning stage. The Regional Planning Board and County Commission seemed to realize the need for new housing before slum clearance could be accomplished, but they were unable to find an area suitable to all the various factions. The government entities that had the power to make a decision, the County and City Commissioners, refused to take a stand because of the desire to maintain the political support of one group or

another. The issue was a political and social nightmare with no easy solution at hand.<sup>24</sup>

Both county and city officials insisted they were concerned about black housing, but the following story puts into question where their alliance really lay. In August 1947, thirty-five black families were evicted without warning from their homes in the Railroad Shops Addition at N.W. 45th Avenue and 13th Street. The reason for the evictions was to make room for a school for white children. A court order gave these families four hours to be out of their homes. All of their household contents were placed on the street. The fight to keep their homes had been going for several years and the families had hired an attorney to fight their case in court. However, the city moved quickly with condemnation proceedings and the families were told at eleven in the morning that they had to be out by three in the afternoon.<sup>25</sup> It would seem that government officials who understood the need for more black housing might have looked elsewhere to build their school.

In Miami, all hopes of the proponents of slum clearance were hanging on the Wagner-Ellender-Taft bill. This legislation provided federal funds for communities requesting assistance in slum removal. It would give local housing authorities the right to condemn property and resell it to private developers who would be bound to develop low-cost rental units with controlled rents. Local activists were

willing to take a stand on the issue of slum removal. A huge step was taken for slum clearance in Miami when Elizabeth Virrick, a Coconut Grove resident, joined forces in 1948 with the Reverend Theodore Gibson and formed the Coconut Grove Slum Clearance Committee, which sought to eliminate slum housing in Coconut Grove. The two brought the issues of disease, filth, and squalor that existed in Miami's slum housing to the attention of the press. Elizabeth Virrick was the wife of prominent Miami architect Vladimir Virrick, who had been one of the architects of the Liberty Square project. Another proponent of slum clearance was Bill Baggs, editor of the Miami Daily News. He was especially helpful in educating his readers about the program with his editorials "In the Bag," which continually communicated the social ills of slums in Miami. Baggs summed up the problem in an editorial when he admonished city and county officials by a prophetic statement, "courage and a little less politics are needed to put a real, an effective slum clearance program across...put it in right [or] this whole community will someday suffer a long and deep anguish."<sup>26</sup>

The city of Miami had made headway in condemning some of the worst shacks in Overtown, but the problem of relocating displaced persons remained. In 1948, Judge Stanley Milledge rejected the petition of 48 property owners to deny Gaines Construction a building permit for a new black project, Earlington Heights, located south of Brownsville. However,



the few private construction projects that had been built for blacks were not able to provide enough housing to take care of the population growth, let alone the people being displaced by slum clearance. In November 1948, a group of displaced blacks served with eviction notices to make way for improved housing appealed to the newly formed Miami Citizens Slum Clearance Committee to ask for a place to sleep. The committee said that their personal needs could not interfere with the basic goal of clearing the slums. The committee asked for a coordinator to contact churches, civic organizations, and individuals to list available housing for the emergency.<sup>27</sup> It was clear that more housing had to be available before slums could be eliminated.

By the end of 1948, it became apparent that Miami would be among the first cities to seek federal assistance for slum clearance under a new housing bill being prepared for Congress. The new bill (later to be known as the Federal Housing Act of 1949) was touted as the greatest aid given by the federal government to local communities. It was more liberal than the Taft-Ellender-Wagner bill in its provision for slum clearance. The National Board of Realtors and the National Home Builders Association opened an office in Washington, D.C. to prepare their strategy to defeat the bill. A resolution was introduced to the Miami City Commission by Commissioner Perrine Palmer that instructed the city manager to appropriate the necessary funds for gathering information

to back up an application. J.T. Knight explained that under the new bill all of the land would be acquired by short term federal loans, then cleared and resold; but first an area needed to be designated for housing for the displaced people. Knight also said that there was no need to build public housing if private builders would provide the right kind of housing.<sup>28</sup>

The Federal Housing Act of 1949 established the national housing policy of "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family." To implement this commitment, the law established federal assistance to local communities for slum clearance and redevelopment programs. A massive private building campaign to house the black community began after the passage of this act. The impetus for this was twofold: builders and developers had over-saturated the white housing market after the war and came to realize the profits to be made in black housing; and slum clearance and public housing posed a threat to private enterprise. In the larger cities across the United States, such as Baltimore, Milwaukee, Chicago, and Detroit, private builders were finding the black housing market attractive strictly as a dollars and cents proposition. An article in House and Home magazine addressed the subject of profits in the minority housing market. The article stated that the upward movement of blacks after the war meant thousands of prospective customers "with better jobs, higher incomes and more education clamoring for housing

to replace the hovels they now call home." The writer also gave trade secrets for the black housing market: "be sure your site will not involve you in a civic hassle [and] go quietly to the planning commission."<sup>29</sup>

In the northwest section of Dade County during 1949, three single-family subdivisions were under construction, as were seven apartment complexes. All of the single-family projects were located in and around Opa-locka. The average price for a home was \$6,000 with a \$25 down payment and monthly payments of \$35 per month. The average apartment rental price was \$17 per week (or \$68 per month). The largest private development for African Americans in this area was Bunche Park. Located east of N.W. 27th Avenue and north N.W. 167th Street, it contained 1,002 single-family units. The Lantie Corporation developed the property. Julius Gaines, president of the corporation, donated 7.9 acres for a school in the middle of the development and planned a shopping district. Eleanor Park and Biscayne River Gardens, developed by Albert Construction, were located east and north of Opa-locka and south of Bunche Park. It was determined that the three developments would eventually merge to form a new black housing district.<sup>30</sup>

As usual, each new development met with storm of protest from angry white residents in and around the area. On October 25, 1949, five hundred irate northwest Dade residents representing the City of Opa-locka, the Opa-locka Improvement



Association, the Curtiss Park Development Corporation, and the Northwest Dade County Property Owners Association appeared before the zoning board to oppose the Biscayne River Gardens project adjacent to Eleanor Park (N.W. 22nd Avenue and 151st Street). On November 1, the Northwest Dade County Property Owners Association protested to the Board of County Commissioners about the rezoning of the Lantie property from agricultural to residential and business. Their protest fell on deaf ears. One reason for placement of black developments near Opa-locka was the city's small population. They would create fewer problems than in other more populous areas. In addition, Opa-locka already had a small black population on the east side of 27th Avenue. These tracts of land were also far removed from the Miami city limits. The northwest section of Dade County had been clearly established as the site for the future development of a large black housing district. This fact had been established as early as 1947 when the Dade County Regional Planning Board, the Dade County Board of Commissioners and the FHA endorsed the area as "the solution of the negro housing question." Large tracts of land were available in the area, but more importantly building restrictions were less rigid. Unfortunately, the lack of county services and the poor building practices of the developers doomed the area to decay.<sup>31</sup>

Though the appearance of the new housing for blacks in Dade County had improved greatly compared to pre-war housing,

many felt the new housing was not of much better quality. Elizabeth Virrick contrasted the Richmond Heights Development built for blacks in South Dade County to Bunche Park, Eleanor Park, Biscayne River Gardens, and Magnolia Park. She stated that, "The houses [in Richmond Heights] are better built than any other units in Dade County and are in fact on a par with houses in white projects." In Virrick's opinion, the projects in the northwest section were poorly built. After a hurricane hit the area in 1950, most of the new homes in Bunche Park lost their roofs. A Veteran Administration representative was sent to assess the damage to homes in the area and found that most were improperly constructed. The rooms were small and the quality of materials and workmanship was unsatisfactory. Many subdivisions had been developed to obtain the maximum spread between the value of the mortgage and the minimum cost of land acquisition, site development, and construction costs. Physical standards were sacrificed for profits. One study stated that it seemed unlikely that these homes would last as long as the mortgage placed on them and that there was a probability that whole subdivisions would eventually become slums because of their poor construction.<sup>32</sup>

In 1950 the Dade County Planning Department published a Survey of Negro Areas, which documented each African American settlement, housing project, and apartment complex within the boundaries of the County. In its report, the Planning Department stated that the African American population in Dade

County could no longer be ignored or regarded as unimportant to the community. At the time, there were approximately 88,000 African Americans in the Miami area, about one sixth of the county's total population. One half of that population lived in substandard dwellings. The report confirmed the housing shortage in segregated areas but declared, "The Dade County Planning, Zoning and Building Department, realizing its obligations to the community for the betterment of the negro in the County, has guided the planning and approved the sites and types of buildings for large self sustained communities."<sup>33</sup>

As a result of this survey, the Dade County Planning Division recommended three steps to improve living conditions for African Americans. First, since they felt that decent and adequate housing was already a reality, they urged condemnation of existing substandard dwellings and the improvement of blighted areas. Second, they felt that adequate parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities should be provided. Third, in view of the fact that approximately only one-third of the land in already designated segregated districts was occupied, no expansion of the existing areas nor new areas for African American occupancy should be made available until all existing land was utilized.<sup>34</sup>

The post-war areas of black settlement in Dade County's northwest section that contained vacant land were Brownsville,



Liberty City, Opa-locka, and Hialeah. Slum conditions already existed in Brownsville. The Brownsville population was 5,500, with overcrowded slum conditions. Those conditions were being eased by privately developed small apartment complexes such as Fiftieth Street Heights, Lincoln Gardens, and Atlantis Manor. Much of the vacant land in Brownsville was held by speculators who inflated prices, making land acquisition prohibitive for large developments. By comparison, nearby white residential lots could be purchased for a third of the cost of those in areas designated as black residential areas. Liberty City, a sprawling area north and west of the federal housing project, Liberty Square, contained 800 vacant lots. The prices of these lots were high, but not as high as in Brownsville. Because county and city officials did not set aside land for large black housing developments, speculators were able to buy up property and drive up the prices. Brownsville and Liberty City constituted almost 50 percent of the vacant land available to blacks. However, according to the 1950 census a high proportion of homes in Liberty City were overcrowded.<sup>35</sup>

Opa-locka provided additional space for black residential expansion. The Opa-locka developments of Bunche Park, Biscayne River Gardens, and Eleanor Park supplied the black community with thousands of new housing options. There was also more room in that area for expansion of the existing communities, which the Planning Division thought would make the largest black housing area in the county. New Liberty

City, located just south of the Broward County line and north of Bunche Park, contained 80 acres with a population of thirty-six. This area was considered unsuitable for further development because of its distance from business centers and the lack of transportation. A small black neighborhood also existed in the Hialeah area. The population was 725, with half of the dwellings substandard and two-thirds of the land vacant. Multiple family units were also built in the unincorporated area. According to the study, 1,518 units were public housing units, of which 64 percent was black housing; no additional public housing units were constructed until 1953. More importantly, the Planning Board stated that "The uncontrolled expansion or opening of the new and additional areas for Negro occupancy was not the answer to the problem of more living space and better living conditions" for the black community. The Board determined that expansion of existing areas should be controlled--meaning that adequate housing must be built and sold under favorable financing and that areas should provide for community needs in the form of schools, playgrounds, community centers, churches, and businesses. They felt that with the combination of favorable financing and willing developers, the Board had been able to encourage and guide development of Bunche Park and Biscayne River Gardens, which were large self-contained communities.<sup>36</sup>

In 1950 the Central Negro District (CND) still remained the largest area of black settlement, containing 40 percent of

the available dwelling units. However, the location of black settlement had begun to follow a trend of movement from the CND to the outer fringe areas in the county. In 1940, these outer fringe areas possessed 23 percent of the dwelling units; by 1950 this figure had increased to 32 percent. In 1940, some 83 percent of blacks lived in Dade County municipalities; by 1945 that percentage had dropped to 77 percent. Between those years the county's black population increased 5.7 percent. There were several reasons for the countywide movement: first, the high cost and poor condition of housing for blacks within the city of Miami; second, the encroachment of commercial and industrial developments on existing black sections within the city and its failure to open up new areas for black housing; third, property speculation in areas already zoned for black housing which caused prohibitive land costs. However, the major impetus came with the large scale building at the end of the war.<sup>37</sup>

After the passage of the 1949 Federal Housing Act, it appeared that slum clearance could become a reality. This legislation provided for a preliminary loan from the federal government to survey, assess, and chart the blighted areas. The area to be cleared would then be appraised and resold to private interests for redevelopment. Two-thirds of the cost would be paid by the federal government and one-third by the city in the form of paved streets, sidewalks, and allocation of land for parks and recreational facilities. The



construction of low-cost housing for displaced slum dwellers would be paid by the federal government. When construction was completed, bonds would be sold to banks and brokerage houses, and the loan would be repaid. The purpose of the Federal Housing Act of 1949 was to give private enterprise every opportunity to clear the slums while at the same time providing federal aid for those who could not afford to be housed by private construction. It appeared that every major city across the U.S. would take advantage of this opportunity to clear their slums. However, opposition forces immediately formed to fight the new program. Naturally, the first group to oppose this bill were the people who owned and profited from the slums. These slumlords became the core of opposition to federal housing assistance. The real estate lobby, composed of the National Real Estate Board, the National Association of Home Builders, and the U.S. Savings and Loan League joined in the efforts to defeat the bill on a local level.<sup>38</sup>

In Miami, the fight against public housing began in earnest early in 1950. In March of that year, the Miami City Commission, obviously pressured by private interests, suddenly switched its position on public housing. In a three to two vote, Mayor Wolfarth, and two other Commissioners voted down slum clearance on the grounds that it involved federal money and that they were opposed to public housing. It was decided that the question of slum clearance, and the issue of public

housing would go to referendum. Contrary to the usual pattern throughout the country with opponents forcing a referendum vote, in Miami opponents of public housing fought bitterly to stop the referendum. They went so far as to file injunctions against holding a popular vote with the Circuit and Supreme courts. Both courts ruled in favor of the referendum. The Miami Herald and the Miami News disclosed the tactics used by the opposition. Organizations that supported the issue were organized labor, Negro voters, the League of Women Voters, and the Citizens Committee for Slum Clearance. The real estate industry, developers, builders, homeowners associations, and especially the slumlords felt they had much to loose with public housing. Cities across the nation were sent packages with instructions on how to fight public housing. At the height of the new Red Scare, communistic and socialistic adjectives were used when speaking of public housing. Many fliers and posters were sent with the slogans, "Hey Stranger-Pay My Rent!" and "Socialism-Dangerous Road -- Travel at your own risk." Constant radio breaks urged a "no" vote. Questions were posed such as, "Can you afford to pay someone else's rent" and "You may have a Negro project in your neighborhood."<sup>39</sup>

The Committee Against Socialized Housing was formed to fight the issue in Miami. When their ad first appeared, it listed the name of Dick Trice, president of the Miami Board of Realtors, along with the Miami Home Protection Association, a

splinter group of the women's division of the Chamber of Commerce. Other organized opposition to public housing came from the Chamber of Commerce, Miami's Women's clubs, mortgage bankers, suppliers of building material, the Builders Association of South Florida, and the Miami Board of Realtors. The Miami Herald stated that it was one of the most bitter campaigns fought without running mates in Miami's history.<sup>40</sup>

Proponents of slum clearance and public housing, headed by Abe Aronovitz and Elizabeth Virrick, circulated petitions and gained enough signatures to force a vote on the issue. Miami opponents fought bitterly to stop the referendum and filed an injunction claiming that petition circulators had misrepresented the facts. The circuit court decided in favor of the referendum, and on June 27, 1950 Dade County residents decided they wanted a slum clearance and public housing program. Ten million dollars had been earmarked for the Miami slum clearance plan, but the city was going to lose the funds unless officials could satisfactorily prove that they were moving forward with an approved proposal for black housing. The Miami Housing Authority convinced the federal government that the city had formal plans for a project and the money was reserved for Miami. Numerous private developments were built for blacks during 1950, yet a site for a public housing project could not be found. The suit filed by the opponents to stop the first referendum on slum clearance was not dropped and the State of Florida Supreme Court voided the June 27,



1950 referendum in February of the following year, deciding that voters were not fully advised on the issue.<sup>41</sup>

By 1951, the northwest quadrant of Dade County had emerged as the only acceptable section for expansion of Dade County's segregated community. Several factors facilitated private development of this section for black housing. First, the area contained large tracts of land that could be purchased for a reasonable price and had few building restrictions. Second, the two communities of Liberty City and Brownsville, located in the surrounding area, were redlined communities -- they were already segregated. Third, the area was relatively unpopulated and new black housing created less opposition than other areas in the county. The massive building campaign that took place in this area between 1945 and 1950 was a response by private developers to secure their hold on the building market and shut out government-funded public housing. Though the black community had made great strides in achieving needed housing, the requirements of low-income families had not been addressed. Private development could not afford to allow all segments of the black community the opportunity for decent living conditions. In addition, affordable housing for blacks in Miami could not be achieved because the political machinery refused to make a stand on their behalf, and white homeowners were vehement in their belief that whites and blacks could not live side by side. However, men like Wesley Garrison and Luther Brooks, whether

driven by greed or altruism, or some combination of both, pushed out the boundaries of the segregated communities into the surrounding white areas. Racial turmoil and violence resulted in the process of the resegregation of Miami's second ghetto neighborhoods.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### CARVER VILLAGE CONTROVERSY

Miami's second ghetto tensions came to a head in the early 1950s, when a surge of racial violence erupted in transitional neighborhoods. Throughout the 1940s, blacks had been restricted to designated areas. Miami's growing black community had little choice in purchasing land, building a house, or renting a decent apartment. In 1951, the pressure of population expansion finally broke the rigid barriers of segregation in Miami. Acts of violence and terrorism followed.

In the early morning hours of September 22, 1951 thunderous dynamite blasts tore gaping holes in the walls and foundation of Carver Village, an apartment complex located in the Edison Center section of Miami.<sup>1</sup> For months Carver Village had been the center of an emotional and controversial issue -- black integration of a white residential neighborhood.

Housing in Miami's black community had been a serious problem for several years in Miami. Twice in 1951 citizens voted overwhelmingly for slum clearance and public housing. Everyone agreed that something had to be done about the deplorable conditions in black neighborhoods. The largest of

the ghettos, the Central Negro District, housed approximately 37,000 blacks in 136 residential blocks. Most of the residents did without electricity, running water, and garbage collection, creating conditions ripe for contagious diseases. The slums had to be cleared and public housing provided for the displaced residents. On this issue, blacks and whites agreed. Yet, no one could agree on where to locate the new black housing project.<sup>2</sup>

One black housing project had been built in 1937. Located in Edison Center, the Liberty Square project had been heralded as the largest housing project in the south and the most beautiful in the country. However, Liberty Square was surrounded by a six-foot stone wall. A physical and mental barrier, the wall stood as a reminder to blacks to keep out of white areas. For the black community, the wall became a source of tension. For the whites, it stood as a safeguard against blacks invading their neighborhood. That was all soon to change.<sup>3</sup>

Two real estate developers, Malcolm Wiseheart and John Bouvier, had built two private housing projects in Edison Center; one black project inside the wall and one white project on the outside. Units in the black project filled quickly while units in the white project, known as Knight Manor, remained half empty. Realizing the need for black housing, Wiseheart and Bouvier opened 216 units of Knight Manor to blacks in June 1951, renaming this section Carver

Village. This decision broke down the barrier to segregation and began a wave to terrorism that brought shame to the city and citizens of Miami.<sup>4</sup>

News of the owner's decision to rent to blacks spread quickly through Knight Manor. The white residents immediately formed the Dade County Property Owners' Association. They retained attorney William J. Pruitt to help keep blacks out of Knight Manor. Led by Ira Hawthorne, the Property Owners' Association met with the Miami City Commission several times to plead for help with their problem. The commissioners, however, understood that something had to be done about the shortage of black housing and refused to help the association. Shocked by the City Commission's decision, citizens and residents took matters into their own hands.<sup>5</sup>

On July 14th the Ku Klux Klan distributed hate literature and burned giant letter Ks in four locations around Carver Village. The campaign escalated when Knight Manor residents organized an "Indignation Meeting" and "Mammoth Motorcade" to demonstrate white supremacy. After the meeting, cars filled with angry whites circled Carver Village honking horns and flashing search lights. During the motorcade, an employee of The Miami Daily News shot and wounded a black man.<sup>6</sup>

Daniel Francis, a long time resident of the black Liberty City area, recalled more than one motorcade where whites threw rocks at windows in Carver Village. Whites also posted signs and patrolled the area during the summer, warning blacks of



trouble if they moved into Carver Village. Tensions rose to a fevered pitch when reports surfaced that 76 units of Carver Village had been sold to black project managers, George Bubee and Stanley Sweeting.<sup>7</sup>

All efforts by the white community to keep blacks out of Carver Village failed. The first blacks moved in during the week of August 11th. In September, David Hawthorne of the Property Owners' Association again went to City Commission to ask for help. This time he requested that the city acquire Carver Village through purchase negotiations or condemnation. Hawthorne believed that acquisition by the city would end the tension, and he had little problem convincing the commissioners. Before a packed meeting, Commissioner Louis Bandel offered the motion to begin negotiations "to condemn buildings at Carver Village ... and to acquire them by eminent domain for municipal purposes other than public housing." However, Bandel also went on record stating that this resolution would not be a permanent solution to the problem. Earlier during the meeting, Commissioner Perrine Palmer asked Hawthorne what would prevent the owners from allowing blacks to rent property east of Carver Village. Hawthorne assured Palmer that whites already occupied these units. Unconvinced, Commissioner Palmer offered an amendment to the resolution -- that the city acquire the entire project owned by Wiseheart and Bouvier. This suggestion received thunderous applause from the audience. Bandel refused to accept the amendment.<sup>8</sup>

At this point, the meeting turned into a political battlefield. When Bandel refused to accept the amendment, Palmer accused him of "trying to fool these people, because the election is close." He went on: " I am going to second Mr. Bandel's resolution with my tongue in my cheek." With this, Bandel retorted, "You are determined to beat me in the election . . . . I welcome your opposition." The resolution passed four to one. The City of Miami would acquire Carver Village through condemnation, and the units would be used as fire and police sub-stations and office space for the city's sewage disposal projects.<sup>9</sup>

The commission's decision to condemn Carver Village only added more tension to the situation. The Miami Daily News called the decision "a vote-getter, no more and no less." Everyone seemed to agree that making Carver Village out-of-bounds for blacks did nothing to solve the real issue. As one black man put it, "negroes went out to Edison Center not to make trouble . . . . They went out there so they could live in clean apartments with little yards around them. You don't see much of that in Negro town."<sup>10</sup>

Some citizens were outraged at the commission's decision. Attorney Victor Levine referred to the decision as an "extravagant squandering of tax funds." As a taxpayer, Levine filed a suite to halt the condemnation proceedings. After all, the cost of acquiring Carver Village exceeded the balance in Miami's Treasury by \$1.3 million.<sup>11</sup>

The Carver Village situation literally exploded on September 22, 1951. At 2:15 a.m., two 100-pound boxes of dynamite ripped two holes into the walls of an untenanted building in Carver Village. The dynamite shattered windows, twisted doors off their hinges, and ripped off the roof. Police estimated the damage to be in excess of \$200,000. A third box containing 80 sticks of dynamite failed to detonate. The blasts shook the whole Northwest section of Miami. Dan Francis, who lived a few blocks away, grabbed his shotgun and headed for Carver Village. "You see," he stated, "I knew what had happened." A large group of black and white people gathered around Carver Village, but the newspapers reported no other disturbances. The Miami Police Department followed several leads, but to no avail.<sup>12</sup>

As police kept guard, an uneasy quiet prevailed at Carver Village. City Attorney John W. Watson drafted a letter to the Assistant U.S. Attorney, Fred Botts, asking an opinion on the legality of a declaration of a state of emergency "in view of civil rights statutes." Except for alarming residents, the bombing of Carver Village "aroused no serious public reaction." David Hawthorne asked the City Commission to remove the Negroes from Carver Village; they refused his request, stating no law existed by which they could be evicted. After a few weeks, Wiseheart and Bouvier hired a night-watchman to patrol Knight Manor and the police removed their guards.<sup>13</sup>



In spite of increased purchases of arms and ammunition by whites, the month of October saw no disturbances at Carver Village. The dynamiting, however, continued. Three times during the month of October, Jewish synagogues and schools were blasted. Miami Police Chief Walter Headley saw no connection between these bombings and the Carver Village bombing. He perceived the blasts at Carver Village as the work of professionals, while the bombings of the synagogues appeared amateurish. The police chief said, "the explosions were Communist-inspired to incite racial hatred."<sup>14</sup>

Stetson Kennedy, a writer for The Nation magazine, saw it differently. "The Ku Klux Klan," he wrote, "has long used terror to keep Negroes inside the ghettos assigned to them, and their program for exploiting any minority has included anti-Semitism." He went on to cite Miami's long history with the Klan and police support given the organization. David Hawthorne went so far as to accuse blacks of the bombings in order to receive Jewish support.<sup>15</sup> Indignant over the bombing of their synagogues, the Jewish community united with the black community to demand an end to these acts of violence.

On November 30 at 2:12 a.m. a second blast rocked Carver Village, totally demolishing two units. The culprits again placed the dynamite in an untenanted building, suggesting that they did not want to kill but only intimidate. Mrs. Senecheria, the wife of Miami's new mayor, told reporters that

she had received a threatening phone call. The caller told her "to get the Negroes out or we'll blow the whole place apart." The night watchman, employed by Bouvier and Wiseheart, had driven past the complex just a few moments prior to the blast and saw "nothing out of the ordinary." A bomb expert from Chicago, in Miami to aid local officials, sorted through the debris, but found little evidence. Police Chief Headley insisted the explosion was "an attempt [by the Communists] to create racial discord."<sup>16</sup>

Black leaders accused the Miami police of not doing enough to halt the bombings. Outraged, Miamians demanded a stop to the violence that swept their resort city. The dust had barely settled from the last explosion when, on December 2nd, three more bombs exploded. The first blast hit Carver Village at 3:57 a.m., but caused no damage. The second blast at thirty minutes later shattered the windows of a Jewish synagogue. The third bomb exploded harmlessly at 5 a.m. in a southwest residential area.<sup>17</sup>

Finally spurred into action, Governor Fuller Warren dispatched Adjutant General Mark Lance of the Florida National Guard to Miami to study the situation. The Governor also sent an investigator from his office to assist local officials in their investigations. Miami police believed the bombings on December 2 to be the work of pranksters. Regardless of who was responsible, the citizens of Miami were frightened and ashamed. Jewish and black leaders met with city and county

commissions to plead for an end to the bombings. The Committee Against Bombing, a Jewish group headed by Burnett Roth, offered to the Miami City Commission a plan to end the violence. Their plan called for FBI intervention, regulation of dynamite sales, and a \$5,000 reward for the capture of those responsible for the recent atrocities.<sup>18</sup>

A newly elected city commission met on December 5. Guarded by six policemen and four detectives, the commissioners took several actions to help end the wave of bombings. In order to attack what they felt to be the basic problem, the commissioners passed an emergency measure to obtain additional low-cost housing and federally financed slum clearance. To get the slum clearance underway as soon as possible, they passed a resolution asking the Miami Housing Authority to acquire Knight Manor, Carver Village, and the adjacent vacant land (also owned by Bouvier and Wiseheart) to be used as a low-cost housing project.<sup>19</sup> The previous commission had recommended the purchase of only Carver Village, to be used for purposes other than public housing. This change in policy suggests that Miami city officials were ready to do something about housing the black community.

At the meeting, speaking on behalf of the property owners of Edison Center, David Hawthorne stated, "It is unfair for the authorities to uphold this situation since these colored people have not invested the first dime in this white section." Hawthorne recommended that the commission declare



an emergency and clear Carver Village of all its black residents. The commissioners made no comment.<sup>20</sup>

The commission also passed three specific resolutions in response to the bombings. First, they offered a \$3,000 reward for the apprehension of the criminals responsible for the bombings. Second, they created a \$5,000 fund for the police department to pay for overtime relating to the bombings. Third, they passed an ordinance regulating the sale and use of dynamite in Miami. All of the commission's decisions passed unanimously.<sup>21</sup>

Miami received some unwanted national attention after the December 2nd bombings. The Justice Department began a study as requested by the Anti-Defamation League. Representative Louis B. Heller, a Democrat from New York, said that if the Justice Department did not push the inquiry immediately, he would introduce a severe bill to curb such action "against racial and religious groups, their property and institutions." Heller also wrote a letter to Florida's Attorney General, J. Howard McGrath, urging him to find the culprits of this "wave of vandalism" and bring them to justice before the violence spread to other communities.<sup>22</sup>

The violence did spread into a central Florida community. On the night of December 25, 1951, a bomb exploded beneath the home of NAACP leader, Harry T. Moore. Moore died enroute to the hospital; his wife was critically injured and died a few days later. At first, some officials believed the bomb-murder

of Harry Moore to be linked with the Miami bombings.<sup>23</sup> This could never be proven. However, the thread of hatred, bigotry, and violence had been woven into all of these incidents.

The murder of Harry Moore brought swarms of FBI agents into Florida. On January 8, 1952, Attorney General Howard McGrath widened the FBI investigations to the bombings in Miami. Meanwhile, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League, Benjamin Epstein, met with Governor Warren to confer about a statewide program to halt violence. Epstein recommended a survey of local areas to determine racial or religious tension, as well as a project at the community level to combat the "basic issues of racial and religious hatreds."<sup>24</sup>

As February 1952 approached, with no further bombings reported, Miamians began to clam down. But, the recent violence had not been forgotten. FBI agents continued their investigations while officials laid the groundwork for a proposed Dade County Council on Community Relations. The Council, composed of leading white and black Miami citizens, set as its objective a community-wide effort to better relations between racial and religious groups. In New York, a group called Americans Protesting Florida Terror suggested an "Americanism" educational program for Florida.<sup>25</sup> In Washington, D.C., Representative Heller proposed a federal law carrying a penalty of death for acts of violence inspired by

racial or religious prejudice. In addition, Senator H. Alexander Smith of New Jersey asked for an immediate report by the FBI on the recent wave of terrorism in Florida and for a determination by the Justice Department on the adequacy of federal laws.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, on October 6, 1952, over a year after the first bomb was set, Attorney General James P. McGranery asked a federal grand jury to review the evidence gathered by the FBI concerning Carver Village bombings. McGranery stated that he believed "there have been violations of Civil Rights statutes and other federal laws."<sup>27</sup> The jury thought that the testimony on Carver Village would take approximately three weeks. The first witnesses to testify were the FBI agents who had investigated the possible civil rights violations at Carver Village. The jury also ordered twelve other witnesses to produce all records of the John B. Gordon Klavern of the Ku Klux Klan in Hialeah, Florida. On December 9, two months later, the federal grand jury returned indictments against four people, three men and a woman: William G. Orwick, Harvey G. DeRosier, Arthur F. Udgreen, and Helen Russell. All four surrendered to federal authorities after being indicted for perjury.<sup>28</sup>

The grand jury charged William Orwick, a linotype operator in Miami, on two counts of making false statements pursuant to the Federal Employees Loyalty Program and to the provisions of the National Security Act of 1947. Orwick told



FBI agent Melvin Jett that he had not been a member of the Ku Klux Klan since 1946 and that he had no knowledge that Sports, Inc. in Hialeah was used as a front for the John B. Gordon Klavern. Investigators showed that Orwick had been a member of the Klan during the years 1950 and 1951 and that he also knew Sports, Inc. to be a Klan meeting place because he had attended regular meetings there.<sup>29</sup>

The indictment against Harvey G. DeRosier, a Post Office employee, stated that he had given false statements to the Postal Loyalty Board. Apparently, the Loyalty Board learned that DeRosier had been a member of the John B. Gordon Klavern, and that through his job at the Post Office he had been assembling information concerning organizations opposed to the Klan. DeRosier denied membership in the Klan, saying that he had resigned in 1950 when he learned the nature of Sports, Inc. The jury charged that DeRosier had not resigned but, in fact, had been installed as Klan Kludd (chaplain) in January 1951.<sup>30</sup>

Arthur Udgreen, a laborer in Miami, was charged on one count of having made false statements to the FBI. Udgreen told FBI agents that he had not taken part in any Klan activities. The indictment states that he participated in Miami cross burnings on July 14, 1951.<sup>31</sup>

Helen Russell, a 55-year-old resident of Edison Center, was charged with perjury. She denied under oath that she had met with a committee of Klansmen to discuss ways of preventing

blacks from moving into Carver Village and had requested the assistance of the Klan. The jury also reported that as vice president of the Edison Center Civic Association, Helen Russell organized the protest motorcade in Edison Center during the summer of 1951.<sup>32</sup> To reporters, Russell replied, "I've never lied in my life . . . I've got a daughter and a fine husband. I've never even been in traffic court."<sup>33</sup>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Grand Jury had reason to believe that the John B. Gordon Klan had something to do with the wave of violence that shook Miami between September and December of 1951. Despite months of investigation and 3,200 pages of testimony taken in connection with the bombings of Carver Village, the jury never indicted any one of the bombers. The jury said in its defense, "Dynamite leaves no traces, making crimes difficult to solve."<sup>34</sup> Jurists criticized the absence of laws dealing with the purchase of dynamite in Florida and recommended tighter controls. In addition, the jurors pointed to "the Negro housing problem in Miami," stating that the Carver Village bombings demonstrated "the urgent need for slum clearance and adequate housing." Referring to the Ku Klux Klan, the jury said, "It is a cancerous growth . . . a foul pollution in the body politic . . . [and] is founded on the worst instincts of mankind."<sup>35</sup>

Testimony concerning Carver Village continued until March 1953. Then, suddenly, the jury swung the spotlight to the

murder of Harry Moore. In its investigation, the FBI uncovered a "reign of terror" in Florida that covered a three-to-four-year period. The Carver Village and synagogue bombings in Miami led the incidents cited in the FBI investigation. The jury also discovered that the home of a black woman, Maime Woodward, had been burned to the ground in 1947 because it was located within a white residential area. Most of the violence uncovered had taken place in central Florida. In June 1953, the Grand Jury indicted six men on counts of perjury. Reportedly, these men had denied under oath that they had been members of the Ku Klux Klan or that they took part in a series of violent acts in central Florida from 1949 to 1952.<sup>36</sup>

Though the grand jury insinuated that the Ku Klux Klan was involved in the bombings of Carver Village, they could never prove it. So instead, the jury and everyone else came to the same conclusion, that the bombings of Carver Village had been caused by the failure of the City of Miami and its officials to provide adequate housing for the black community. Though the jurors attempted, in their feeble way, to chastise the community for its failings, they failed to point out the inequity of keeping blacks in segregated areas. No one saw, except perhaps the black community, that they had a right to decent housing no matter where it might be located.

In October 1952 Bouvier and Wiseheart opened more apartments in Knight Manor to blacks. The Miami City



Commission rescinded its resolution of December 5, 1951 to acquire Bouvier and Wiseheart's vacant property near Carver Village. Instead, they changed the property's zoning from residential to industrial. Erection of any more housing in the Carver Village area thus was effectively blocked. The Miami Housing Authority said it would acquire "the development for white public housing, but only if new areas are designated for Negro housing." <sup>37</sup>

The Carver Village bombings set the stage for continued housing controversies throughout the 1950s. After the first bombings, Dade County residents went to polls in November 1951 to vote on the issue of slum clearance and public housing. Again, a unanimous decision was made in favor of the program. By September 1952 President Truman had signed the papers that awarded Miami eleven million dollars for slum clearance and public housing. Several tracts of land were brought before the commission for approval as public housing sites. The Dupuis tract was a vast expanse of pasture land located in the northwest quadrant of Dade County, yet the commission turned it down because of the political influence of its owner, Dr. John Dupuis. Instead, a site in the Brownsville area was chosen. Eight houses owned by African Americans had to be demolished in order to make room for the project. Wesley Garrison vowed to do everything in his power to insure that these black homeowners did not lose their homes. He stated, "the commission gave more consideration to cows than to the

sixty-five families that would lose their homes."<sup>38</sup>

Excluding additions to the Liberty Square project, the only public housing built for the black community was the tract of land in the Brownsville area, known as Para Villa Heights and completed in 1954. It contained seven hundred sixty-two units and housed approximately four thousand people. Elizabeth Virrick declared that this site was unacceptable because it had deprived black families of their houses and denied them the additional land they so desperately needed. By the end of the decade, Edison Center, the location of Carver Village, had become ninety percent black. Another area where blacks were beginning to buy houses was the area between N.W. 54th Street and N.W. 62nd Street. By the end of the 1950s seventy-five percent of the houses were owned by blacks.<sup>39</sup> The original black communities of Liberty City and Brownsville had merged into one large district despite protests of white homeowners and despite the city and county commissions efforts to control black expansion.

On the national level, the slum clearance and urban redevelopment program appeared to be doing well by the middle of the 1950s. The program, run by the Housing and Home Finance Agency received a budget of twenty million dollars for the 1954 fiscal year. Builders, realtors, and financial institutions had waged fierce battles over public versus private development. However, in 1954 there was little opposition to the program because most of the land that had

been cleared under the program had been converted to industry or private housing rather than public developments. By the mid 1950s there were ninety-two projects in various stages of planning in sixty-four cities across the nation. Chicago had plans to clear one hundred acres on its south side. Little Rock, Arkansas had cleared forty acres of slums and replaced them with three blocks of apartments, three blocks of single family and multiple homes, four blocks of community facilities and a new school. In Philadelphia six new projects were underway that would level one hundred acres of slums.<sup>40</sup>

In Miami, the story was different. Some vast improvements had been made in living conditions in the black area of Coconut Grove through the efforts of Elizabeth Virrick. In the CND, a number of dilapidated housing had been torn down and private developers had built apartment complexes. Still, in those two areas alone over one-third of black housing was considered dilapidated and the new housing units that had been built were already deteriorated because of poor construction and overcrowded conditions. In addition, there were no plans by private developers for additional large scale black communities. In 1954, the Greater Miami Urban League published An Analysis of the Housing Market of the Negro Group in Dade County in an effort to give the housing market the needed information to develop communities for the black population of Dade County. Other reasons for the analysis were a recommendation from the federal government for



improvement in minority housing and the need for a realistic program. The study found that the majority of African Americans in Dade County wanted to buy a house and could afford to buy one. Most of the people polled wanted to remain within the limits of the City of Miami. However, land prices were too prohibitive for large scale projects within the city limits. Those who wanted to move out of the city preferred projects like Bunche Park and Richmond Heights. Most wanted a three bedroom house that cost an average of \$8,000. African American renters in Dade County were paying too much for apartments, and there was some resistance on their part to the high prices of the new rentals. Many of the new apartments stood vacant. Essentially, this Urban League study found that African Americans in Dade County were no better off than they had been in 1940 in terms of housing. Between 1940 and 1950 the black population increased 31.1 percent and residential density was very high -- 150 people per acre compared to twelve people per acre for the white community.<sup>41</sup>

In areas other than housing, African Americans achieved many advances on issues of human rights during the decade and a half following WWII. In 1944 blacks won the right to vote in Democratic primaries; the Supreme Court ruled against racial zoning in 1948. However, it was not until 1946 that the Florida State Democratic Executive Committee voted to open its primaries -- and then it was with separate polling places.<sup>42</sup> Racial zoning continued in Dade County through an

understanding between developer and realtor. It seemed that Jim Crow laws were not going to be easily put aside in Miami.

The Civil Rights Movement, which came to fruition during the 1960s, actually began in the 1940s. Several factors can be attributed to its emergence: massive black migration from the rural south to the urban north; the organization of black workers into labor unions; Roosevelt's New Deal, which promoted liberalism; and most importantly the growth of the NAACP and its success in challenging racial segregation in the courts. The historic Supreme Court decision in 1954, Brown v. The Board of Education, stated that separate schools were unequal. This decision gave a positive thrust to the struggle for full equality. It also provided the setting for major confrontations between the federal government and the states and the black and white population of many southern cities. By 1956 most of the political leaders in the south had become defiant in the face of integration.<sup>43</sup>

In 1955 the Dade County Board of Public Instruction announced that its public schools would be "operated, maintained and conducted on a non-integrated basis for the best interest of the pupils and the orderly administration of the school system." The Board did order several studies concerning the integration of the two school systems. In one study, it was established that in some areas black children were being bussed miles away from their neighborhood when a white school was only a block away. Another study found that

because of the social problems associated with integration, student activities and social programs would have to be greatly reduced. Even though the Board had stated that it had given all children, regardless of race, equal education opportunities, it was concluded that in all grades examined black students fell one to four grade years below their white counterparts.<sup>44</sup>

In regard to the integration of Florida's public school system, the Federal District Court established the Pupil Assignment Law, which allowed parents to request a school other than the one the school board assigned to them. The first hearing in Dade County came in 1958 when four black children were admitted to Orchard Villa Elementary, then an all-white school. The area surrounding the Orchard Villa school was predominately black. Within a few years, the school resegregated and became predominately black. During the next few years black children were allowed in other white schools throughout the county, but it was not until the mid 1960s that desegregation took place.<sup>45</sup>

By 1960 it was reported that most Floridians felt that blacks were entitled to the legal rights and privileges which the law give all citizens. Yet, Floridians responded in a poll that they did not mind shopping with blacks, but they did not want them in their restaurants and schools and they certainly did not want them in their neighborhoods.<sup>46</sup> However, the actions of realtors like Wesley Garrison and



developers such as Bouvier and Wiseheart helped Miami's black community tear down the walls of housing segregation -- at least in the northwest section of the county. Local officials and white homeowners did not want to give up any portion of the county for black development or public housing. Left with no other choice, blacks pushed into the surrounding white communities, often in the face of violence. Areas originally zoned for white residents in the northwest section turned African American once Bouvier and Wiseheart removed the barrier. The Civil Rights Movement assisted the African American in their quest for decent housing. Unfortunately, integration was not the end result. As blacks moved into the transitional areas whites moved out, leaving the African American isolated once again. The racial tensions that produced the Carver Village bombings persisted throughout the rest of the 1950s.

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31. United States of America vs. Arthur Udgreen (Atlanta, Georgia, Southern District, 1954), Case 8454-m-Cr, *ibid*.
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### CHAPTER THREE

#### NEIGHBORHOODS IN TRANSITION: OPA-LOCKA AND CAROL CITY

By the mid 1960s, African Americans achieved new levels of social and political status. Since World War II the group made significant advances, but their housing situation did not change. If anything, it had grown worse decade by decade since the turn of the century. In Miami, the black population increased 112 percent between 1950 and 1960, compared to 85 percent for the white population. Yet, some 97 percent of Miami's blacks lived in six neighborhoods that were contiguous to three blighted areas. The expansion of residential areas available to blacks occurred only in places surrounding previously established segregated neighborhoods. By 1960, most of Dade County's African American population lived in the northwest sections of Liberty City, Brownsville, and Opa-locka.<sup>1</sup>

As stated previously, real estate agents and slumlords had for many years pushed out the boundaries of Miami's ghettos into the white neighborhoods on the edge. The process of racial turnover in white communities accelerated after the Carver Village incident. In addition to the obvious reason of population growth, the building of expressways, which began in the late 1950s, contributed to the pattern of residential

change. During the early 1960s, Interstate-95 ripped through the mid section of Overtown, forcing thousands of black families to search for new homes. The real estate industry was ready and waiting to expand the second ghetto in the northwest section of Dade County. In 1961, the Miami Herald reported that Luther Brooks envisioned a plan to move the families displaced by expressway building to the county's northwest section. Twenty-five years after the Miami City Commission and the county adopted the "Resettlement Plan," it was accepted by the slumlords and was becoming a reality. By the end of the 1960s, the original black communities in the northwest section had expanded and merged to form Miami's second ghetto. The white residential communities that had once existed in the area were decimated as realtors coerced change block by block, week by week.<sup>2</sup>

According to urban sociologists, the transition of white communities to black is termed "invasion and succession." The process is distinguished by four stages. The first stage is the initial entry, or "penetration," by a few minorities into a white area. The second stage is referred to as "invasion," when a substantial number of minorities enter the neighborhood. The next stage, "consolidation," occurs when there is a continued increase of the minority population. Finally, after the neighborhood has turned racially, there is a "piling up" stage in which the area becomes overcrowded. Most social scientists believe that once the process begins,



nothing will halt it until total racial change has been completed.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly and logically the process of "invasion and succession" could be stopped in its early stages, but up to this point in our history, several factors have prohibited the successful integration of communities. Typically, a white family living on the edge of the ghetto does not mind if a few blacks move into its neighborhood, but once a certain level of racial concentration takes place, a complete racial turnover quickly occurs. The percentage can range from 5 to 30 percent depending on the tolerance of the community. Attempts to maintain a racial mix in neighborhoods is frustrated by fear on the part of white residents and greed on the part of the real estate industry. Whites driving through the ghetto are struck immediately by the poverty and living conditions. Many whites fear that when blacks move into the neighborhood it will deteriorate and their property values will decline. The realtor takes advantage of this fear, propagates the myth, and busts the neighborhood block by block.<sup>4</sup> This process happened over and over again in Dade County's northwest section. Two examples of the process can be studied in the communities of Opa-locks and Carol City.

Every community exhibits a life cycle. Like a human life, a community experiences a birth, a period of development and growth, a period of decline and death, and finally a renewal or rebirth.<sup>5</sup> Also, like a human life, the life of a

community is shaped by outside influences. The City of Opa-locka, Florida, exemplifies this fact. Its history tells how a city born from a man's vision of a beautiful planned community can be transformed into a ghetto by forces beyond its control.

Located in the northwest section of Dade County, Opa-locka was a product of the 1920s Florida land boom. From the onset, Opa-locka's future appeared doomed. Construction had barely begun in 1925 when the real estate bust just one year later brought the city's development to a virtual standstill. Following on the heels of the land bust came the Great Depression, which stunted growth even further. However, other factors had a much greater impact on Opa-locka's future. Miami businessmen, politicians, realtors, the federal government, and the United States military left their mark on the city and influenced its growth and subsequent decline. A chronological view of the history of Opa-locka illustrates how these forces molded the city into what historian Arnold Hirsch refers to as the "second ghetto."<sup>6</sup>

To understand the history of Opa-locka one needs first to look at the man whose dreams and vision shaped this unusual city. Glenn H. Curtiss, an inventor and engineer, made his fortune in the field of aeronautics. The Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company developed the "Jenny," which became the primary airplane used by the United States armed forces in World War I. Curtiss originally came to Miami in 1916 to

establish a series of flying schools. His first school, located on Miami Beach, drew complaints from residents and forced Curtiss to look elsewhere for a site. He found suitable land for a flying school in the undeveloped northwest section of Dade County. Curtiss approached the owner of the land, James Bright, about purchasing a parcel of his cattle ranch. Bright gave Curtiss the land free of charge, thereby beginning a friendship that would have major consequences for Dade County.<sup>7</sup>

The following year Curtiss approached James Bright again, this time about a partnership in the ranch. The two men began to buy acreage in Dade County, adding to Bright's 17,000 acre ranch. Ultimately, their holdings included 120,000 acres. Though neither man intended to develop the land, the Florida land boom motivated them to consider dividing parcels of the ranch to sell for homesites. Their first venture, Hialeah, was incorporated as a town in 1921. Unhappy with the rapid development and growth of Hialeah, Curtiss looked south for his next project: the "residential paradise" of Country Club Estates, renamed Miami Springs in 1930. Real estate fever caught hold and Curtiss began to dream of a city where people of median means could live in a totally planned community. At that time, the Curtiss land holdings included an area known as Cook's Hammock, called Opatishawockalocka by the Seminole Indians. Curtiss shortened the name to Opa-locka and in 1925 formed the Opa-locka Company as a division of Curtiss



Properties.<sup>8</sup>

From that start Opa-locka set itself apart from other South Florida boomtime communities with its Moorish Revival architecture and the incorporation of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City approach to community building. Curtiss envisioned a fully planned community with distinct zoning for residential areas, shopping, industry, and recreation. He planned to offer a variety of housing types to provide the man of modest means, as well as the man of wealth, an artistic and well-built home for the same cost as the "boxes" usually offered to the public. Curtiss hired architect Bernhard Muller to carry out his dream. Muller first designed a medieval-style English village. However, a Curtiss family friend, Irene Fitzgerald-Bush, commented after seeing the property that it looked "just like a scene from the Arabian Nights." Curtiss sent Muller a copy of The One Thousand and One Tales from the Arabian Knights and instructed him to create Opa-locka's buildings similar to the pictures found in the book.<sup>9</sup>

Construction began in February 1926, and Muller incorporated the Moorish Revival architectural theme throughout the town's development. The focal point of the city, the Administration Building, combined minarets and arches to create an Arabian architectural fantasy. Other Arabian buildings included a bank, the Opa-locka Hotel (now known as the Hurt Building), a fire station, a police station, and a train station. Curtiss used his influence to persuade

the Seaboard Railway to run its main track through Opa-locka. He used the arrival of the first train on January 7, 1927 as a promotional gimmick. Curtiss staged an Arabian Nights Fantasy festival, dressing residents in Arabian costumes and sending them to meet the train loaded with dignitaries. By 1928 ninety buildings had been constructed in Opa-locka, and Muller had plans on the drawing board for Chinese, Egyptian, and English sections.<sup>10</sup>

The real estate bust of 1926-27 slowed construction in Opa-locka, but Curtiss managed to keep the city alive. In 1927 he formed a holding company, Glenn B. Curtiss Properties, Incorporated, to centralize control of his Florida real estate. He also established the Aero-Car Company of Opa-locka to market his invention of a trailer on wheels. In the late 1920s, Curtiss donated a parcel of land in Opa-locka to the City of Miami for aviation purposes. Curtiss hoped that the Aero-Car Company and the airport would provide employment for the 339 residents of Opa-locka. The stock market crash of 1929 and the depression that followed brought another blow to Curtiss's dream city. However, Curtiss's land company remained solvent, owning, and maintaining its properties. Chartered in 1928, Opa-locka's government included a mayor and a city council. The small community became known as the "Baghdad of Dade County" and the "City Progressive." In 1930 Curtiss died unexpectedly of complications connected with surgery for appendicitis. With the life force behind Opa-

locka gone, the dream gradually began to fade.<sup>11</sup>

Opa-locka and its population of 339 remained relatively unchanged during the 1930s. However, in 1933, three years after Curtiss's death, Miami businessmen, politicians, and realtors began making decisions that would affect the future of Opa-locka. The New Deal legislation of the 1930s provided Miami's civic elite with an opportunity to clear valuable downtown acreage of an unwanted black ghetto. The ghetto known as "Colored Town," now called Overtown, housed over 25,000 of Miami's black community in overcrowded and disgraceful conditions. In an effort to expand the business district, Miami city boosters utilized federal housing and mortgage programs, such as the Public Works Administration and the Home Owner's Loan Corporation to build a black housing project located away from the downtown area.

The new project, Liberty Square, was located in the northwest section of Dade County, just five miles southeast of Opa-locka. In fact, the entire northwest section of the county was designated for future black expansion by leading governmental officials in Miami. In essence, Liberty Square (later renamed Liberty City), was to become the nucleus of a second generation ghetto.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to the construction of Liberty Square, Opa-locka had its own black district. By December 1926, just ten months after building began, Opa-locka had a population of twenty-one whites and twenty-nine blacks, four of whom were women. Most



of the small black community worked for the city maintenance department or white families in Opa-locka. The city set aside residential space for them on the east side of 27th Avenue -- an unofficial boundary that blacks could not cross. Most blacks lived in a boarding house, but at least five homes in the area between 1926 and 1940 were owned by blacks. Built of wood and raised up on concrete blocks, residents referred to these homes as "splinter shacks." By the spring of 1929, black residents held Baptist church services in the home of Mrs. Maude Defoe. The Reverend Frank Thomas presided over a congregation of six members while also serving as butler and chauffeur to Opa-locka's first mayor, Sayre Wheeler. When hard economic times hit, between 1926 and 1935, the black population dropped to 18.<sup>13</sup>

In 1931 the United States Navy bought the airbase in Opa-locka from the City of Miami and began its expansion and improvement. Military aviation virtually took over the city in 1941, when the Navy greatly enlarged the small airbase. Military personnel arrived in Opa-locka by the thousands as the nation entered World War II. With the Navy came the civilian employment opportunities associated with military installations. A 1940 census indicated a population of 497 in Opa-locka. By 1950 the population had soared to 5,271, an increase of 960 percent. Although the military stimulated growth, it also tied the city to its unpredictable fluctuations and greatly affected further construction of

Curtiss' Arabian city.<sup>14</sup>

During the war years, Opa-locka bustled with activity. Retail establishments and housing developments (not in keeping with the Arabian theme) sprang up by the score. The Navy constructed 200 single-family concrete block structure homes and a large, low-cost housing project for civilian workers. But, with the end of the war in 1945, Opa-locka faced a new crisis. The military began its exodus, taking with it the city's life line. In anticipation of the devastating effects this would have on Opa-locka, civic leaders took steps to save their city. They formed the Opa-locka Company and Nastes, Incorporated, which in 1947 leased facilities from the Navy and established a program to entice light industry to the area. By 1951, the development had attracted over 100 new businesses, 1,000 new residents, and provided a payroll of over 3 million dollars. Private individuals purchased and rented the temporary housing built by the Navy. Gradually, some military personnel returned to Opa-locka to make their homes. Once again the city prospered and the population climbed to over 5,000.<sup>15</sup>

In September 1947, the Navy considered reopening the airbase. Even though they reversed their decision, the uncertainty involved in leasing property from the military made civilian tenants uneasy. The last straw finally came in July 1952, when the Naval Air Reserve and Marines returned to Opa-locka during the Korean conflict and civilian businessmen

were forced to relocate. This time the military stayed six years, departing in 1958 because of controversy over a proposed drive-in theater that would interfere with air traffic. The military left a ghost town in its wake and dealt an economic blow from which the city has yet to recover. Beginning in 1958, Opa-locka slowly became an economically depressed area. In addition, the low-income housing the military left behind not only killed Curtiss's dream but also left the city in a state of transition.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1940s, realtor and developer Milton H. Davis acquired land on the east side of 27th Avenue. Realizing the need for black housing after the war, Davis began to sell lots to blacks in a subdivision called Magnolia Park. The lots measured 25 feet wide by 90 feet deep and sold for one dollar down and one dollar a week, to be paid every Saturday. Yet, even this small amount put a strain on a black family's budget in 1941. Some were able to purchase the lot but unable to build a home. Mrs. Effie Eady and her husband bought two lots. She recalled having to walk through sand and scrub brush to view their lots because streets did not exist. Ali Baba Avenue was the only paved street leading to Opa-locka's black section. Black migration into the city increased and by 1950 blacks comprised 29.9 percent of the total population. Mr. Davis had sold all of the lots in Magnolia Park and the community now had streets, though unlevveled and unpaved.<sup>17</sup>

During these years, blacks experienced many hardships in



Opa-locka. Their homes had no sewer systems; cesspools had to be dug in back yards. In order to buy groceries residents had to travel to Liberty City, even though two markets served whites on the west side of 27th Avenue. Transportation also presented a problem since the two bus lines serving Opa-locka observed Jim Crow seating arrangements. The bus accepted black passengers at the corner of Ali Baba Avenue; further destinations could be reached only by a black taxi service. At the post office, black customers had to wait until all whites had finished their business before they were served. If a black man was discovered on the west side of 27th Avenue without a valid excuse or a note from an employer he would be beaten by police or put in jail. Even during the day a black person entering City Hall was expected to take care of his business and leave immediately.<sup>18</sup>

Until the 1950s, black expansion had been carefully controlled, even in the northwest section of Dade County. After World War II, the higher economic position of blacks coupled with black housing demands, pressured planners and realtors into rezoning sections of the county. They zoned an area just north of Opa-locka for a low-income black housing project. The proposed black residential corridor in northwest Dade County was quickly becoming a reality. Bunche Park, completed in 1951 by developer Julius Gaines, contained 1,072 units of single-family cement block homes. Though located on the east side of 27th Avenue, Bunche Park was perceived by

Opa-locka whites as a threat to their property values. Between 1940 and 1950 the black population of Opa-locka had increased almost 30 percent. Yet, even though blacks in other areas began to push out of their segregated confines into or near working class white neighborhoods, they were not yet crossing the 27th Avenue boundary unofficially set by whites in Opa-locka.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1960 and 1970 the black population of Opa-locka actually decreased as a percentage. Historical research indicates that as late as 1960 not one black family owned or rented a house west of 27th Avenue in Opa-locka. The blacks of Opa-locka had no voice in government and nothing to show for their tax dollars. Only their homes indicated they were a part of the city. However, as the civil rights movement gained strength in the early 1960s, black residents began voting and taking an active role in city affairs. Discontented with the operation of Opa-locka, black residents formed the Opa-locka Civic Club in order to bring about change. The Civic Club undertook the construction of a park for black children as its first project. Unfortunately, the donated land was an old dump site with a large hole in the middle of it. Yet, the Civic Club persevered and succeeded in developing the park. However, adequate playground equipment was not available even though the park for white children was well equipped. In a show of force, the club transported black children in trucks to white Sherbondy Park and instructed them

to play on any equipment they desired.<sup>20</sup>

Freeman Collins and his family, Opa-locka residents since 1949, made a stand for black rights. Mrs. Collins took civil services exams in several municipalities order to gain employment as a city clerk. Opa-locka city officials told Mrs. Collins that she had failed the exam. However, Mrs. Collins became suspicious when she learned that she has passed the exams for Dade County and North Miami. In order to pacify Freeman Collins, who was actively participating in the recall of an Opa-locka City Commissioner, officials invited Mrs. Collins to retake the exam. This time she passed, but she refused the position. Interestingly, Collins's daughter became the first black person hired at Opa-locka City Hall. She did not keep the position for very long, as city officials accused her of passing information to the black community. As a result, city officials transferred Miss Collins to the Water Department.<sup>21</sup>

The 1970s brought major changes for blacks in Opa-locka. By 1976 the black population in Opa-locka had increased 99 percent. This is especially significant because the black population in Dade county decreased as a percentage between 1960 and 1970, from 36.3 percent to 29.9 percent. The following facts explain the mid 70s increase. Historically, Opa-locka's housing stock consisted of single-family homes. Between 1963 and 1971 several multi-family buildings were constructed in Nile Gardens, an area on the southern edge of



the city and west of 27th Avenue. At first only white tenants occupied these new buildings. But, between 1971 and 1975 an intense building of apartment complexes took place in the area. By 1978 a definite shift had taken place in Opa-locka's housing stock. Multi-family dwellings made up 48.3 percent of housing in the city, single-family homes accounted for only 42.7 percent, and duplexes consisted of 2.3 percent. The housing supply in Nile Gardens exceeded the demand of white apartment dwellers. Gradually, blacks began to cross the 27th Avenue boundary and fill the vacancies. Long-time resident and realtor in Opa-locka, Don Schneck, remembers, "when one black person moved in twenty whites moved out."<sup>22</sup>

The white working class tenants in Nile Gardens felt threatened by the initial entry of blacks into their area. Studies indicate a low level of tolerance towards minorities in white working class communities. The working class lives closer to the economic edge and generally feels that integration brings crime and lessens property value, thereby posing an economic threat. However, it is also important to note that inadequate zoning laws allowed for incompatible land uses in Nile Gardens. By 1975 junkyards had become a common sight and lakes were systematically filled by dumping, also causing the flight of white families.<sup>23</sup>

A high crime rate indicates neighborhood decline. Overcrowded housing, poor living conditions, and deterioration create conditions that allow crime to flourish. All of these

problems exist in Opa-locka. A 1982 review of housing in Dade County revealed Opa-locka had the highest percentage of overcrowded owner-occupied units, 19.2 percent, and the lowest median value for owner-occupied housing, \$32,000. As early as 1972, Miami newspapers were reporting the shameful living conditions in Opa-locka. One article stated that residents "are living in a nest of degradation. Rats are rampant and the buildings are in disrepair." Opa-locka had the reputation of being one of the worst areas in Dade County. Drug sales, crime, and riots had become commonplace. Race riots due to poor and overcrowded living conditions, occurred in Opa-locka at the rate of one every four years. In 1974, 1978, and 1980, rioters burned and looted businesses in the city.<sup>24</sup>

The 1980 census showed a mass exodus of whites from Opa-locka. This social phenomenon, known as "white flight," creates an even greater housing surplus. Oversupply leads to rentals and the growth of FHA financing with all of its attendant problems. When so little is invested in a property, its importance is lessened. Occupants who lack interest in their houses tend to neglect repairs and lawn maintenance. As a consequence, blacks with higher incomes are unwilling to buy in the area. Therefore, houses pass on to groups of lower economic status, thus beginning a cycle of further neglect and blight. To improve the condition of housing in Opa-locka, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) bought Opa-locka houses that had been foreclosed on by the FHA in

1979. HUD sold these houses for one dollar, with the stipulation that prospective buyers stay in the house five years and bring it up to code standards.<sup>25</sup>

The white population of Opa-locka decreased from 70.1 percent in 1970 to 31.7 percent in 1980. The black population during that decade increased to 63.5 percent. White apartment dwellers and homeowners left the city in droves. By 1978 Opa-locka became the victim of redlining. Developed by the HOLC in the 1930s, redlining is the practice through the appraisal and lending process, of circling a black or decaying area with red lines on a map. This in turn prevents residents from obtaining mortgage and home improvement loans because they appear to be poor credit risks. In January and February of 1978, some seventeen mortgages were issued in Opa-locka compared to 380 mortgages granted in northwest Dade County generally. Out of the seventeen loans, only two were conventional mortgage loans; the rest were either FHA or VA loans. The lack of investment in the area only added to the city's spiralling deterioration. Opa-locka was in its period of decline and death.<sup>26</sup>

A 1987 urban study ranked Opa-locka the seventh poorest suburb in the nation. Overcome by physical decay and apathetic residents, Opa-locka's future appeared gloomy. T.D. Allman in, Miami: City of the Future, refers to Opa-locka as "the refuse bin for everything Miami wanted to brush under the carpet." Yet, a glimmer of hope shines through. Several



Community Development Corporations (CDC's) have been working in Dade County's poorest neighborhoods and slums. CDC's obtain grants and low-income loans from foundations and the government with the hope of luring other investors into poor neighborhoods. Established in 1980, the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation (OLCDC) has as its goals the fostering of economic development by attracting and creating business opportunities; the reduction of the excessive unemployment rate among residents; and the construction and renovation of housing for low to median income individuals. Recently, the OLCDC restored City Hall and is in the process of restoring the Hurt Building and eight other historic properties in Opa-locka's central business district. Its aim is to create a tourist attraction based on the legacy of Curtiss' Arabian dream. In addition, the OLCDC has assumed FHA foreclosed homes and implemented a renovation program. Eleven families have moved into twelve of the three bedroom single family homes that the corporation constructed. Though the efforts of the OLCDC and its effects on the community have yet to be determined its work signals the beginning of the process of renewal.<sup>27</sup>

The process of residential change that characterize Opa-locka was replicated in Carol City, another nearby community in the northwest section. The white subdivision of Carol City was developed by Carl Byoir, Ralph Solkin, Julius Gaines (Bunche Park developer), and John MacArthur (owner of Banker's

Life and Realty). When the community opened in 1955, it was touted as the first completely planned community of the post war building boom and "the most stupendous thing happening in the south." On opening day thousands of people rushed to purchase homes in the "Blue Collar Gables." The planned community was a cooperative effort of Harland, Bartholomew & Associates and the Dade County Planning Board. The initial plans called for a comprehensive system of curvelinear roads, canals, shopping centers, schools, a hospital, and public recreational areas.<sup>28</sup>

Carol City's original homeowners were called "pioneers" by the local press because of the community's desolate location -- in the farthest reaches of northwest Dade County. The new residents were proud of their community and began to "civilize" the boondocks by forming various clubs and associations. By 1957, eight hundred houses had been completed and occupied. However, disagreements among the developers signalled trouble for Carol City. The project shut down, and after an array of lawsuits John MacArthur landed on top because his company had financed the project. MacArthur sold a 3,200 acre tract of land to California developers Desser and Garfield, and Carol City's future once again seemed bright. By 1958, Carol City had become a bustling community with 1,500 houses completed and occupied. The community was reported to be Florida's fastest growing suburb in 1960 with a population of 17,000.<sup>29</sup>

Serious trouble began in Carol City when a recession hit the building market in the late 1950s. By the early 1960s, it was stated that economic conditions no longer warranted the building of additional homes in Carol City. Many of its residents were employed in the building trades and were hit hard by the recession. A third of the houses were in foreclosure. In 1963 Carol City was described as a "ghost town of abandoned homes, failing businesses and unkept trash piles." That year, a Channel 7 news broadcast described Carol City as a slum area, and the FHA reported that it was the second most depressed areas in Dade County. The many promises made by previous developers had never materialized. A lack of street lighting accounted for the highest rate of vandalism in the county. Block after block of low to median income housing became available as black residents displaced by I-95 began to search for new homes.<sup>30</sup>

Again, a federal agency intervened and helped to expand the "second ghetto" in northwest Dade county. This time the agency was the FHA. The most important feature of the FHA loan is the low downpayment required by the borrower. As an incentive to buy homes in foreclosure, the FHA waived the downpayment entirely on homes in Carol City. Black families and the new Cuban immigrants took advantage of this policy and moved into the area in large numbers in the early 1960s. The Homeowner's Association banded together and resisted blockbusting attempts and by working together were able to



mold an integrated community. A Dade County Planning report in 1964 indicated that neighborhood integration in Carol City had been successful and that whites, blacks, and Cubans were living peacefully side by side. However, urban sociologist and Carol City resident Nicholas Sileo complained that government planning and greedy realtors were turning Carol City into a slum.<sup>31</sup>

Sileo had reason to feel this way about his community. After years of repossessions, a new boom had arrived in Carol City by 1969. John MacArthur had sold off tracts of land to builders who specialized in subsidized FHA houses. The county allowed the over-building of subsidized houses in the area. During the year 1971, some 1,000 subsidized low-income apartment buildings were constructed in Carol City. Since 1969, 34 percent of all subsidized housing built in the county was located there. A 1971 Miami News article reported that it was "the Metro Commission that allows neighborhoods like Carol City to turn into ghettos by haphazard zoning, large scale construction when schools were already crowded, and when trash pick-ups are made only once every two or three months." However, the fact that the FHA eliminated qualification rules and overlooked poor risks had a pervasive effect on the area. Eventually, this policy led to the flight of the white residents, the community's deterioration, and slum conditions. By 1972 the tipping point had been reached, and Carol City's population shifted to predominantly black.<sup>32</sup>

The placement of Liberty Square in Dade County's northwest low-income corridor began the process of natural ghetto expansion. After World War II, the continuation of unofficial segregation policies allowed for the development of all-black communities such as Bunche Park, Biscayne River Gardens, and Magnolia Gardens in the northwest section. City and county officials, developers, and realtors worked together to expand the second ghetto into Opa-locka and Carol City. An excessive supply of housing, the blockbusting techniques of the real estate industry, and help from the FHA facilitated ghetto expansion. The FHA indirectly halted the successful integration of both communities by its failure to properly screen the economic status of its loan applicants. The mortgage lenders and banks that redlined the area added to the deterioration and ghetto maintenance in both communities. Whites fled the area and left behind blacks isolated in deteriorating neighborhoods such as Opa-locka and Carol City.

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## CONCLUSION

A Profile of the Black Population, published in 1980 by the Dade County Planning Department, reported that the northern half of Dade county, which contained 50 percent of the county's total population, housed 80 percent of the county's black population. As early as 1965, the Metro-Dade Planning Department projected that the area of future growth for black residents in the county was west of I-95 from N.W. 36th Street to County Line Road and that by 1990 the area would contain 85 percent or more of the black population. The historic black communities of Overtown, Opa-locka, Liberty City, and Brownsville "had overflowed and merged to form a single area, sprawling from downtown Miami all the way to the County line." The black residential patterns in the southern portion of the county were altogether different. The older black communities in South Dade that had been established along the Florida East Coast railroad lines remained small separate communities with little movement into adjoining neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> The second ghetto in northwest Dade county neither happened by accident; nor was it a natural process. Miami's second ghetto was designed initially by local politicians and businessmen who wanted to rid the downtown area of slums to make way for business development. The



placement of the Liberty Square public housing project in northwest Dade, between two small historic black communities, rather than in a more suitable area closer to downtown, set the stage for the creation of a new ghetto. The building industry, realtors, federal and local legislation, and neighborhood associations created, reinforced, and maintained the second ghetto in Miami during the post war era.

After World War II, the federal government became more involved with the urban housing problems of American cities and initiated legislation for urban renewal and public housing. Since 1948 extensive legislation has been enacted and policies established and directed towards the elimination of the inner-city ghetto. Federal, state, and local decisions in housing policy tried to eradicate the ghetto, but ultimately facilitated the second ghetto in city after city across the United States. In order to rid the cities of their slums, new housing had to be built for displaced slum dwellers, usually public housing. Miami took advantage of the new slum clearance and urban renewal programs and slowly began to work towards providing better housing for its African American population. Though Miami voted twice in the early 1950s to institute a public housing program, it never materialized. The fact that a public housing site required approval by county or city commissions made the issue in Miami a political nightmare. No one wanted a public housing project in their neighborhood. So, rather than dispersal of public

projects throughout the county, the few that were built were placed in already segregated areas or changing neighborhoods in the northwest section. Unlike other American cities, where the ghetto was comprised of large public housing complexes, Miami's new ghetto was built mostly by private interests.

The improved economic position of African Americans during the post-war era provided the means to move out of the ghetto. The building industry responded in Miami with several large-scale private developments, most of which were located in the northwest section. The black population of Miami, historically crowded into the segregated communities of Overtown, Coconut Grove, and Liberty City, had other choices, though still limited, in where they could purchase a home. The location of these new developments was determined by the fact that there large tracts of affordable land in this section. More importantly, the area was relatively unpopulated by the white majority, so there was much less opposition to the large segregated communities. Though the new housing for blacks in the northwest section was a marked improvement over the dilapidated shacks of "Colored Town," the building practices of the developers and the lack of services provided by the city and county condemned the new communities to a future of blight.

Once the northwest section of the county had been unofficially established for black expansion, developers, realtors, and slumlords helped to push out the boundaries into

the surrounding white neighborhoods. In 1951, Bouvier and Wiseheart broke down the barrier that divided black Liberty City and white Edison Center by renting to blacks in an all-white apartment complex. During the early 1950s, white residents responded with violence, and Klan activities increased as blacks began to move into traditional white neighborhoods. The completion of I-95 in the early 1960s accomplished what urban renewal had not -- it destroyed the historic black community of Overtown and sent thousands of blacks searching for new homes. The higher economic position of the black community during this period and new civil rights legislation weakened Jim Crow laws, but Miami was determined to keep its community segregated. Realtors busted one white neighborhood after another north of Overtown all the way to the Broward County line. There were opportunities for successful integration in communities like Opa-locka and Carol City. Unfortunately, government agencies such as the FHA, lending institutions, and the poor zoning practices and services provided by the local government halted the possibility of integration and reinforced segregation by contributing to the decay of the northwest section of Dade county.

African Americans in Dade county still live in highly segregated neighborhoods, even though the quantity of housing available to them has improved within the last fifty years. Statistics show that blacks are more segregated than Hispanics



in Dade county, despite their significantly longer residence. Unlike other ethnic groups, the majority of African Americans in the United States have been forced by a variety of pressures to live in ghettos. Other minority groups have been able to escape the ghetto once their economic and educational status improved. Not so for the African Americans. Historically, they have never enjoyed the freedom of choice given to other ethnic groups. Today, the black community is not only segregated by race, but also by economics. Because of conditions in predominantly black areas, the growing African American middle class is leaving the poorer blacks behind, even more isolated than they were fifty years ago. Worse, it is highly unlikely that the ghetto will disappear in the near future.<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

1. Dade County Planning Department, Profile of the Black Population (Miami: Research Division of the Metro-Dade Planning Department, 1984) 23, 24.
2. Ibid., 28; Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow," in Hirsch and Mohl, Urban Policy, 70.

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