

LONG ROAD TO REBELLION:  
MIAMI'S LIBERTY CITY RIOT OF 1968

ERIC G. TSCHESCHLOK

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by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. Raymond A. Mohl, Department of History, and has been approved by the members of his supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Schmidt College of Arts and Humanities and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the circumstances leading to the 1968 ghetto riot in the Liberty City community of Miami, Florida. After placing the Liberty City uprising in national and local contexts, the thesis chronicles race relations and African American living conditions in Miami from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s. The thesis focuses upon major grievances of Miami's black community in the 1960s. These included deplorable housing conditions, economic exploitation, bleak employment prospects, racial discrimination, poor police-community relations, and economic competition with Cuban refugees who settled in the Miami area during the 1960s. The thesis argues that the riot in Liberty City constituted a form of African American protest against these factors. In brief, Miami's 1968 ghetto revolt marked an attempt by local black residents to improve their life chances and living standards by demanding empowerment within their own communities and control over the processes that affected their lives.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE LIBERTY CITY RIOT IN NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

In 1898, social reformer Josiah Strong predicted that "the problem of the twentieth century will be the city." Five years later, Negro-rights advocate W. E. B. Du Bois declared that "the problem of the twentieth century" would be "the problem of the color-line." Both forecasts proved accurate, for in conjunction they prefigured the centrality of urban race relations in the formation of modern America. Moreover, these turn-of-the-century prophecies still hold relevance today. As historian Richard C. Wade noted in 1990, the relationship between blacks and whites in the nation's cities remains "both a central theme of American history and also the central test of American democracy."<sup>1</sup>

Few people would dispute Wade's assertion, which by his own admission "seems almost self-evident." Yet, as Civil War scholar David M. Potter repeatedly observed, self-evidence is often a by-product of omniscient hindsight. That is, everything seems self-evident after the fact. Hence, because urban race relations emerged as the nation's foremost domestic crisis in the 1960s, the significance of that issue seems obvious to Americans in the 1990s. They, after all, confront urban and race-related dilemmas

regularly and have never known otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

To Americans in the 1950s, however, who lacked the *ex post facto* perspective of the succedent generation, the problematic implications of urban race relations did not appear especially self-evident. In fact, to most Americans at midcentury, Du Bois's and Strong's utterances of racial and urban difficulties would have seemed well-nigh ludicrous. Despite the pervasiveness of Jim Crowism--customary and codified discrimination against blacks--the old racial caste system was showing some signs of decline. The United States Armed Forces, for example, began a slow process of desegregation in this period. At the same time, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a number of judgments banning state-sponsored segregation in housing, interstate transit, and education. These decisions, of course, culminated in the landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which declared the racial segregation of schoolchildren to be an unconstitutional and "inherently unequal" practice with "no place" in the "field of public education."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, around the time of the *Brown* decision, Southern blacks began organizing dozens of community-level movements to secure full citizenship rights for African Americans. Under the weight of these civil rights struggles, the barriers of racial impurity began to fall in

rapid succession. To be sure, the readjustment of race relations in the South did not go uncontested. Using all possible means, including violence and intimidation, white Southerners resisted the civil rights onslaught and slowed school desegregation to a halt. Yet, this resistance ultimately failed to buttress the crumbling framework of state-sanctioned segregation and discrimination. African Americans continued to make sweeping legal and political gains, as virtually all forms of Jim Crow lost their official footing.<sup>4</sup>

Not surprisingly, to many Americans the civil rights revolution held the promise of a "Second Reconstruction." Unlike its nineteenth-century predecessor, this latter-day Reconstruction, they believed, would succeed in establishing a truly colorblind democracy.<sup>5</sup> The momentous civil rights legislation of the mid-1960s reinforced this belief. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, for instance, aimed to eliminate color-based discrimination in employment, housing, and public facilities. That same year, the ratification of the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution exempted federal elections from all poll-tax requirements--devices long used by the South to immobilize the Negro electorate. Meanwhile, the 1965 Voting Rights Act banned other suffrage-restrictive artifices such as literacy tests, while empowering federal authorities to file suits challenging

the legality of state poll-tax laws. Accordingly, in 1966, the Supreme Court outlawed state poll taxes as "an invidious discrimination" that "[ran] afoul" of the concept of equal protection for all citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Seemingly, these edicts marked the fruition of the long struggle for racial equality; they restored to African Americans the constitutional rights and personal freedoms that they had lost to the cause of white supremacy nearly a century before. Thus, to hopeful Americans of all races, such human rights breakthroughs seemed to portend the emergence of a "New Frontier" and of a "Great Society" in which an integrated and open commonwealth was at hand. And, as most Americans envisioned, this New Frontier would take shape in the cities. This seemed only logical, as urbanization thrust whites and blacks into an interracial setting in which they inevitably came into contact, if only grudgingly and intermittently.<sup>7</sup> By the mid-1960s, then, the optimistic visions of many Americans--at least many white Americans--bore little semblance to the prognoses offered by Strong and Du Bois six decades earlier.

America's millennial aspirations proved illusory, however. Just days after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Law--the crowning achievement of the civil rights movement--the all-black Watts district of Los Angeles erupted into a week-long riot. Tragically, Watts was merely

a foretoken of things to come. For the next three summers, racial unrest rent urban America asunder. From 1965 through 1968, city after city went up in flames, as the nation's black ghettos exploded into violent protest against long-endured deprivations and injustices. These developments bore out the dire prophecies Strong and Du Bois: the city and the color line had, indeed, proved troublesome--a combustible mixture with deadly potential.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout most of this riot-torn period, though, Miami, Florida escaped the nationwide pattern of violence. And, white Miamians anticipated no disruption of the status quo. After all, Miami's racial history stood in marked contrast with the strife-ridden past of cities like Detroit, which had endured three terrible race riots since the end of World War I. Miami had experienced no racial turmoil of this magnitude As a result, whites in Miami and in the rest of metropolitan Dade County perceived no threat from the racial turmoil that engulfed the rest of the nation. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported just weeks after the Watts rebellion, Miami was taking pride in the fact that "there has never been a major race clash here."<sup>9</sup> Owing to this "perfect" race-relations record, most white Dade Countians pictured the local black community as complacent and content. A major disorder, they thought, could not happen in their backyards.

In 1968, however, the unthinkable occurred. In August of that year, as the Republican national convention assembled in Miami Beach, the Miami ghetto community of Liberty City erupted into several days of rioting. Though a minor affair in comparison with most other urban disorders, the Liberty City riot nonetheless wrought great damage--less so in terms of property or human life than in regard to the psychological trauma it inflicted. Indeed, the disturbance left white Dade County residents stunned and confused. In view of the recent equal-rights revolution, Miami whites, like white Americans in general, could fathom no cause for racial upheaval in their city. Typically, then, white responses to the Liberty City commotion ranged from questions like "why are [blacks] rioting--everything's fine in Miami?" to more bigoted ones like "what the hell do Niggers want?"<sup>10</sup> At any rate, irrespective of their degree of prejudice, white reactions all reflected the same overriding theme: profound misunderstanding.

Such miscomprehension stemmed largely from the errant assumption, held by many whites and preached by civil rights advocates of both races, that the black acquisition of full citizenship rights would likely cure all ailments plaguing black America. In 1959, for instance, Alabama's Tuskegee Institute promoted full citizenship for Negroes

as a surefire means "to build a superior quality of race relations in the South." More explicit was civil rights leader Martin Luther King, who in 1965 proclaimed that "if Negroes could vote . . . there would be no more oppressive poverty."<sup>11</sup>

By 1968, however, four summers of urban unrest disabused even the most optimistic reformists of such notions. Indeed, the 1960s' riots made painfully clear the limited impact of civil rights advancements upon most urban black communities. The desegregation of public accommodations, for example, offered little advantage to the impoverished ghetto dweller who lacked the resources to indulge in those accommodations. Civil liberties, likewise, did not mend broken homes or secure stable employment. Political enfranchisement did not alleviate deplorable ghetto housing conditions or make crime- and disease-racked neighborhoods safe or healthy. In sum, neither legal equality nor the ballot proved able to eliminate black poverty and deprivation. Thus, by early 1968, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference could safely upend the 1965 voting rights proclamation of its recently assassinated captain, Martin Luther King, and enounce that "the right to vote or to eat in any restaurant, while important, does not . . . actually effect conditions of living."<sup>12</sup>

This observation spoke to the root of the ghetto riots

of the late 1960s: the inability of the civil rights campaign to demonstrably affect the pathologies endemic in the nation's inner cities. Certainly, conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and economic exploitation had existed for generations without producing a decade of disorder. But by the late 1960s the situation had changed entirely. For far too many African Americans at that time, the future appeared irretrievably dim.

Yet, such was not always the case. Prior to the mid-1960s, black Americans at least had hope, however faint, in the possibility of positive social and economic change. The civil rights movement, with its rapid and impressive legal successes, seemed to vindicate this belief. Thus, by 1960, the *New York Times* could draw sharp distinction between the "angry history" of Negro Americans and the promising outlook of their "hopeful future." Such optimism intensified during the next few years, as the downfall of legalized apartheid created unparalleled opportunities for the emerging black middle class. Moreover, civil rights reformism released all African Americans, regardless of economic status, from the humiliating stigma associated with symbolic subordination to white supremacy.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time, though, the attainment of civil equality liberated scarcely more black urbanites from ghetto squalor than the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves

on New Year's Day, 1863. The disestablishment of Jim Crow notwithstanding, life in the ghetto remained, in the words of Richard Wade, "nasty, brutish, and often short." To many blacks, this suggested that ghetto-induced suffering had become an inescapable fixture of their existence. Thus, more than ever before, the fate of black America seemed irrevocably sealed within the confines of the ghetto--that citadel of spiked ambitions and spoiled life chances, whose walls all the marches and demonstrations in the world appeared unable to breach.<sup>14</sup>

By the late 1960s, then, disillusionment and despair had overtaken the optimism of earlier generations of black Americans. Young blacks now looked to the future with expectations of little but poverty and isolation; and they viewed these prospects with utter contempt. Their situation no longer seemed wretched, yet bearable, but permanent and intolerable. Justice and genuine equality, it seemed, were not forthcoming under any circumstances. For this reason, and with the young in the lead, African American communities across the nation took to the streets in violent exposition against the abjection and despondency of ghetto existence and against the white power structure deemed responsible for the ghetto imprisonment of black America. Indeed, white property and symbols of white authority, such as police officers and firefighters, proved to be the

targets of choice for rampaging ghetto insurrectionists.<sup>15</sup>

Though viewed as exhibitions of criminality by most white Americans, the 1960s' ghetto uprisings actually constituted an African American strategy for social protest. Unlike voter registration drives or civil rights sit-ins, however, urban riots were spontaneous eruptions rather than planned demonstrations. Nevertheless, inner-city revolts embraced a definite program for social advancement. This agenda placed little emphasis upon equal rights, demanding instead upgraded status via immediate improvement of day-to-day living conditions. Specifically, ghetto occupants called for decent housing, improved employment opportunities, better schools, and full participation in the economic and social life of the nation, especially within their own black communities. More broadly, African Americans sought to gain a sense of dignity and security.<sup>16</sup>

Before the mid-1960s, most urban blacks hoped to realize these aspirations through nonviolent full citizenship agitation. By the late 1960s, though, the stasis of ghetto conditions convinced many African Americans that such tactics were ill-designed to redress the problems of the central city. As militant black nationalist Malcolm X prophetically observed in 1963, passive civil rights activism failed to "take the Negro out of his sordid surroundings." Five years later, the National Advisory

Commission on Civil Disorders reached a similar conclusion. Despite de jure racial equality, wrote the commission in its 1968 Kerner Report, the nation was moving toward "two societies, one black, one white--separate and unequal." In large measure, the 1960s' uprisings represented an African American attempt to reverse this trend, a desperate last-ditch effort to achieve through violence the objectives that civil disobedience had failed to carry into the ghetto.<sup>17</sup>

So it was with Miami's Liberty City riot. Like African Americans who rioted elsewhere, a desperate and mostly young group of ghetto insurgents in Liberty City took to the streets hoping to secure those qualities of life historically lacking in black urban areas: full employment, empowerment within their own community, adequate housing, and a wholesome environment in which to rear and educate their children. For a brief moment, the civil rights movement appeared to make these goals accessible to Miami blacks. But by the late 1960s the reformist tide began to ebb, leaving that group's inner-city plight noticeably unaffected.<sup>18</sup>

Despite fair employment regulations, for example, Miami blacks remained economically static, locked into a low-wage, service-type occupational structure. Identifying such "limited job opportunities" as a source of "higher levels

of frustration" among Florida Negroes in 1960, Governor LeRoy Collins's Advisory Commission on Race Relations urged "constructive treatment" in "the whole area of economic opportunity" for blacks. Little such treatment, however, was in the offing. To a degree, federal equal protection measures improved economic chances for blacks by reducing, somewhat, overt racial discrimination in the job market. Yet, as one Miami resident informed Governor Farris Bryant in 1963, equal rights guarantees did not furnish Negroes with the education or skills needed to obtain remunerative positions. Even without Jim Crow, therefore, much of Miami's black workforce remained unqualified for gainful employment and, thus, unable to overcome the economic disadvantages of the ghetto.<sup>19</sup>

Unmitigated poverty, in turn, reënforced old patterns of residential segregation by severely restricting housing options for African Americans. In many instances, poor blacks could simply find no affordable accommodations outside all-black areas. The real estate industry contributed to this arrangement through discriminatory marketing practices and by limiting home building for blacks to already segregated and usually slum-ridden neighborhoods. These segregative tendencies ensured overcrowding in black areas, thereby hastening the physical decay of Negro communities. Fair-housing laws aside, as Dade County Manager

R. Ray Goode indicated in 1970, "economic limitations and not-so-subtle factors such as color of skin" left Miami's ghetto population ill-housed to an extreme degree.<sup>20</sup>

Spatial separation of the races extended into Dade County classrooms as well. Ten years after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision, in fact, the Florida State Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People could justifiably complain that "racial segregation and discrimination still plague our educational system." In Miami, this statement rang equally true in 1968. Though Dade County claimed to have desegregated over half its public schools, an in-depth examination by the *Miami Herald* revealed the token nature of these efforts. In truth, hardly more than ten percent of local schools contained appreciably integrated student bodies. Thus, *Miami Herald* urban affairs writer Juanita Greene rendered an accurate synopsis of the city's total integration picture in 1968 when she noted that Miami had "barely made any progress at all in housing, and not as much as might appear on the surface in education or employment."<sup>21</sup>

Naturally, exclusion from meaningful employment and segregation in housing and schooling did little to provide the wholesome environment in which Miami blacks hoped to raise their children. More detrimental to this endeavor, however, was the institution of the ghetto itself, with

its devastating corollary afflictions. Ghetto housing, for instance, was not merely segregated, but overcrowded and dilapidated as well, with one out of ten Miami blacks living in substandard accommodations as of 1968. Additionally, much of the "sound" housing in black Miami lacked basic amenities like plumbing and bathing fixtures. But the term "low-rent" applied only to the quality of African American dwellings and not to the actual cost of housing, which was often exceedingly high. Furthermore, black neighborhoods received little municipal upkeep, as evidenced by irregular garbage collection, by inadequate drainage and sewerage, and by poorly paved, dimly lit streets.<sup>22</sup>

Cold statistics, moreover, revealed the human toll exacted by Miami's ghettos: crime rates twice the municipal average; homicide rates ten times higher than those in the white community; abominable health standards, with infant mortality rates double the norm; a 30-to-60 percent dropout rate among ghetto high schools; half the population living below the poverty line; thousands of broken, single-parent families; unemployment figures that eclipsed the county average more than twofold throughout much of the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, these scourges afforded black Miamians little sense of security or control over their own destinies. Rather, they combined to despoil most ghetto

occupants of the slightest shred of opportunity and hope.

Adding to this feeling of powerlessness was the near universal extent of white property ownership in Negro districts. Due to poverty, for instance, few Miami blacks owned homes; most rented living space from white slumlords. Further, according to one community activist, in 1970 white merchants owned 97 percent of Miami's ghetto-area businesses. And, not only did white outsiders control inner-city commerce, but most carried their profits out of the ghetto and back to suburbia. Thus, in conjunction with staggering unemployment and pervasive underemployment, the absence of intramural enterprises in black Miami squelched all hope of economic self-determination within ghetto communities. Fulminating against this situation in the wake of the 1968 disorder, one Liberty City resident tersely, but aptly, remarked, "the white man runs it all."<sup>24</sup>

The most visible manifestation of white authority in black areas was the Miami police, who unlike absentee landlords and businessmen stood as an ever-present reminder of white dominion over the ghetto. Owing to a long history of strained police-community relations in black Miami, many African Americans perceived a double standard of justice and protection--one prejudiced against blacks. Consequently, like blacks in other cities, much of Miami's African American community viewed police as

enforcement agents of white power, white racism, and white repression--and not without good reason. Ghetto youths, in particular, found themselves frequently harried and harassed and occasionally brutalized at the hands of local patrolmen. Accordingly, in its official report of the Liberty City disturbance, the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence described the city's law enforcement ethic as a belief that "staying tough and displaying force was the best way to handle minority groups." The commission also cited strong-arm police practices as a major source of hostility within the black community.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to their police- and ghetto-related trials, Miami blacks encountered a unique problem not known to most other urban black communities: interethnic competition on a colossal scale. Between the time of Fidel Castro's communist takeover of Cuba in 1959 and the early 1970s, Dade County became the home of more than 300,000 communist-fleeing Cuban refugees. As early as 1963, this emigré enclave outnumbered blacks in Miami and did so by a nearly two-to-one margin a decade later. Understandably, this immigrant influx put a tight squeeze on local markets for employment and residential space, often retarding progress for Negroes in these areas. Indeed, concluded a 1968 *Miami Herald* study, with respect to black-Cuban

struggles for "good housing and jobs," the newcomers proved to be remarkably "successful competitors." And, as urban historian and Miami specialist Raymond A. Mohl recently noted, this competition occasioned a "considerable degree of ethnic and racial tension," as African Americans felt the crunch of massive Cuban in-migration.<sup>26</sup>

By 1968, then, Miami blacks had generally realized few of their aspirations regarding economic opportunity, educational improvement, or higher standards of living. Doubtless, many began to despair of these goals, whose attainment now seemed dubious. Moreover, Miami blacks had no soundingboard or effective channels through which to vent their frustrations. As one resident said simply, "you ain't got nobody to tell it to, brother." By this time, a large number of young blacks had lost faith in traditional civil rights organizations, whose efforts, they perceived, brought little relief to the ghetto. In 1966, therefore, a Tampa biracial civic affairs committee might have easily been describing circumstances in Miami when it concluded that civil rights "gains . . . are middle class advantages" and that "the average Negro remains untrained, unemployed, and unthought of."<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, like their counterparts in Tampa, black Miamians viewed themselves as a long-forgotten second-class citizenry. The local political establishment, for example,

consistently ignored the needs of the black community. "The only time you see [politicians]," one ghetto resident exclaimed, "is when they're running for office." Other residents, including 58 percent of those polled in a 1968 *Miami Herald* survey, complained about the frequency with which white officials, once elected, reneged on campaign promises to the black community. Understandably, these occurrences left Miami blacks feeling as if they had no adequate representation and no involvement in the affairs of their own communities.<sup>28</sup>

Ironically, the many community assistance and relief programs designed to help Miami's underprivileged areas also contributed to the sense of alienation and powerlessness among local blacks. Though certainly well-intentioned, most welfare improvement agencies were staffed by white and black middle-class social workers who often had little genuine attachment to and, in some cases, little understanding of the ghetto communities they served. In an almost paternalistic vein, these organizations purported to identify and emend problems in black precincts without ever soliciting the input of rank-and-file neighborhood residents. For this reason, in 1970 one militant activist described the efforts of local community service groups as "an innocuous attempt to placate a very serious and growing situation." Likewise, in 1969 a black member

of the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence intimated that white-engineered social programs offered local blacks little more than "crumbs from the table."<sup>29</sup>

The inefficacy of interracial communication channels had grave consequences for Miami and for the rest of Florida. Indeed, the failure of grievance relief mechanisms convinced many blacks throughout the state that white society was disinclined to treat African American concerns seriously. Yet, the white community seemed all too content to tolerate the permanence of racial ghettos, with their attendant tribulations and dismal life chances for blacks. Consequently, black Floridians began to wonder whether or not violent action, which was consuming Northern cities at a swift rate, remained the only alternative form of expression and protest. Negotiation, after all, was worthless without a white audience willing to listen. Finally, in June 1967, one year after Tampa's biracial commission made its "Negroes-remain-unthought-of" observation, that city experienced Florida's first ghetto uprising. One month later, in Palm Beach County, the Negro quarter of Riviera Beach followed suit. And, of course, this violent twist in Florida race relations would eventually sweep Miami into its vortex.<sup>30</sup>

Writing in 1982, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights

located the source of Miami's second major disturbance--the Liberty City riots of 1980--in "a sense of the black community's inability to produce change or affect fate."<sup>31</sup> The case was no different 12 years earlier. By the late 1960s, like African Americans throughout the state and nation, Miami blacks had grown desperately anxious about the unaltered state of their ghetto existence. More disheartening was the willingness of the white community to abide this hopeless plight and to leave local blacks immersed in a simmering cauldron of angry emotions, unresolved grievances, and bitter discontent. Ultimately, in August 1968, this cauldron boiled over into the streets of Liberty City, where residents posed the most furious arraignment against unjust living conditions theretofore known to the South. "A riot," Martin Luther King once commented, "is the language of the unheard."<sup>32</sup> Hence, when cordial parlance fell on deaf ears, Miami blacks looked to communicate long-ignored demands for social betterment through the more audible dialect of street-corner havoc.

#### NOTES

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2. Wade, "Enduring Ghetto," 5. David M. Potter discusses the limitations inherent in the "biased" perspective of hindsight in virtually all his major works. See especially, *Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942); *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); and the myriad of insightful essays in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).
3. Wade, "Enduring Ghetto," 5; Richard M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969); Alfred H. Kelly, Winfred A. Harbison, and Herman Belz, *The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 1991), 583-591; *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).
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"Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement," *American Historical Review* 96 (April 1991), 456-471.

5. C. Vann Woodward coined the phrase "Second Reconstruction" in his 1955 study of legalized segregation, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*. However, Woodward has revised and augmented this study several times, so for the most updated account of the course and consequences of the Second Reconstruction, see *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 8-10, 122-147, 209-210. For other works emphasizing the theme of a Second Reconstruction, see Carl M. Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1982* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984); Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Steven F. Lawson, "Preserving the Second Reconstruction: Enforcement of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1975," *Southern Studies* 22 (1983), 55-75.

6. Steven, F. Lawson, "Civil Rights," in Robert A. Divine, ed., *Exploring the Johnson Years* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 93-125; Steven F. Lawson, *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 145, 167-198; Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 166, 197; Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 180-188; Grace R. Maxwell, "The Civil Rights Movement and Black Political Participation," in Charles U. Smith, ed., *The Civil Rights Movement in Florida and the United States* (Tallahassee, Fla.: Father and Son Publishing, 1989), 263-264; *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, 383 U.S. 667 (1966).

7. Wade, "Enduring Ghetto," 5.

8. For the Watts riot specifically, see David O. Sears and John B. McConahay, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Paul Bullock, ed., *Watts: The Aftermath* (New York: Grove Press, 1969); Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy, *Burn, Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles Race Riot, August, 1965* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1966); Nathan Cohen, ed., *The*

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9. Neil Maxwell, "New Influx of Cubans Faces Cool Reception from Many Miamians," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1965.

10. *Miami Times*, August 16, 1968. For rioting in Detroit, see Robert Shogan and Tom Craig, *The Detroit Race Riot: A Study in Violence* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1964); Benjamin Singer, Richard W. Osborn, and James A. Geschwendt, *Black Rioters: A Study of Social Factors and Communication in the Detroit Riot* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1970); Kerner Report, 84-108.

11. James W. Button, *Blacks and Social Change: Impact of the Civil Rights Movement in Southern Communities* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3, 5; Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 188; Tuskegee Institute, *Race Relations in the South--1959* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1960), unpaginated; Martin Luther King, Jr., quoted in Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 193. It should be noted that King and most other civil rights leaders were well aware of the limitations of equal citizenship alone. Most black leaders viewed the acquisition of legal and political rights as a preliminary step toward attacking the broader problem of social and economic inequality. In other words, the latter obstacle could not be overcome without first hurdling the former obstacle. Moreover, King and his associates understood that the very success of their movement--not

to mention white toleration of the movement--rested upon its limited goals of legal equality. Hence, civil rights leaders uttered little that smacked of disrupting the current socioeconomic order. To do so would have been to invite white backlash. However, by confining their speeches and actions only to issues concerning full citizenship, King and other movement participants seemed to confirm the white notion that all African American grievances could be redressed solely by the conferment of equality under the law.

12. Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Program Office, "Statement of Purpose: Poor People's Campaign, Washington, D.C.," May 21, 1968, cited in Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 289.

13. New York Times, January 17, 1960; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1974), 497; Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 187; Morris, *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 286-287.

14. Wade, "Enduring Ghetto," 10-12, quotation on 10; Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*, 22-24, 79-103; Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 186-192.

15. Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*, 22-24, 79-103; Feagin and Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts*, 268-282; Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement*, 186-213; James Geschwender, "Civil Rights Protests and Riots: A Disappearing Distinction," *Social Science Quarterly* 49 (December 1968), 474-484; Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, "Racial Disturbances as Collective Protest," in Louis H. Masotti and Don R. Bowen, *Riots and Rebellion: Civil Violence in the Urban Community* (Beverley Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1968), 121-130; Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 497-498; Wade, "Enduring Ghetto," 9-10.

16. Feagin and Hahn, *Ghetto Revolts*, 268-282; Sears and McConahay, *Politics of Violence*, 99-101, 105; Angus Campbell and Howard Schuman, "Racial Attitudes in Fifteen American Cities," in *Supplemental Studies for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 47-48; Geschwender, "Civil Rights Protests and Riots," 474-484; Fogelson, *Violence as Protest*, 22-24; Lang and Lang, "Racial Disturbances as Collective

Protest," 121-130.

17. Malcolm X, quoted in *Tuskegee Institute, Race Relations in the South--1963* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Institute Press, 1964), 36; Kerner Report, 1.

18. See especially the testimony of riot participants cited in *Miami Herald*, August 9, 1968.

19. Governor's Advisory Commission on Race Relations, "Memorandum of Discussion....," October 1, 1960, typescript, Records of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Race Relations, Record Group 100, Series 226, Box 6, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee; Gilbert M. May to Farris Bryant, July 27, 1963, Farris Bryant Papers, Record Group 102, Series 756, Box 113, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter cited as Bryant Papers).

20. Kerner Report, 473; Raymond A. Mohl, "Making the Second Ghetto in Metropolitan Miami, 1940-1960," *Journal of Urban History* 21 (March 1995), 416, 418; Elizabeth L. Virrnick, "New Housing for Negroes in Dade County, Florida," in Nathan Glazer and Davis McEntire, eds., *Studies in Housing & Minority Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 135-143; Dade County Community Relations Board, Housing Committee, "Proposed Public Policy Guide," n.d., circa 1966, typescript, Elizabeth L. Virrnick Papers, Box 2, Historical Association of Southern Florida, Miami (hereafter cited as Virrnick Papers); R. Ray Goode, "Who Will Blow the Trumpet for the Ill-Housed?" November 16, 1970, speech prepared by Metro-Dade County Manager for Seventh Annual Meeting of Dade County Community Relations Board, Virrnick Papers, Box 2. For a thorough analysis of residential segregation nationally, both before and after the civil rights era, see Arnold R. Hirsch, "With or Without Jim Crow: Black Residential Segregation in the United States," in Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 65-99.

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L. Hall and James E. Ely, Jr., eds., *An Uncertain Tradition: Constitutionalism and the History of the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 326-355.

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Tampa biracial commission, quoted in Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 210.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### PROLOGUE TO UNREST: THE PATTERN OF RACE RELATIONS IN THE SOUTH AND IN FLORIDA, 1865-1900

The 1968 riot in Liberty City was one of many chaotic occurrences arising from the turbulent milieu of the 1960s. The origins of the disturbance, however, began to take shape far earlier than that row-ridden decade. Indeed, Miami's African American community traveled a rather lengthy road to rebellion--one stretching back far beyond the emergence of Liberty City in the 1930s and even beyond the incorporation of Miami in 1896. In 1968, in fact, one member of the city's black press traced the genesis of the uproar back to the introduction of African slavery in America, imputing the insurrection to the fact that blacks' "position in society [had] not really changed since 1619."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the exaggeration in this statement, its allusion to Negro slavery was not without merit. As C. Vann Woodward has pointed out, "the long experience of slavery in America left its mark on the posterity of both slave and master and influenced relations between them more than a century after the end of the old regime."<sup>2</sup> In a broad

sense, the Liberty City disorder grew out of the relations to which Woodward adverted. That is, in the largest sense, the seeds of unrest in Miami took root in the pattern of race relations established in Florida and throughout the South following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery.

The Civil War demolished the slave-plantation society of the Old South and worked the disenthralment of four million erstwhile slaves. Yet, neither the war nor emancipation established in definite terms the new social position of the Southern blacks whom they delivered from bondage. For some time after emancipation, in fact, the legal status of the freedmen remained governed by the Supreme Court's pernicious 1857 ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. The proslavery judgments of that suit, of course, became inoperative with the annulment of slavery by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Untouched by that measure, however, was Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's decree that Negroes, whether bondsmen or freemen, were not citizens under the Constitution and, thus, "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." Hence, Southern blacks now possessed freedom, but as per the law of the land they still held no certain rights.<sup>3</sup>

The status of Southern Negroes remained insecure during the first two years of postwar Reconstruction, when the states-in-defeat retained wide latitude regarding the

readjustment of their internal affairs.<sup>4</sup> Led by Confederate veterans and former secessionists during the immediate post-Appomattox era, Southern state governments sought to rebuild their society in close approximation to the antebellum order. Hence, in 1865-1866, Florida's postwar leadership set out to revise the state's laws with a view to the retention of numerous aspects of that "benign, but much abused and greatly misunderstood institution of slavery."<sup>5</sup> To this end, Florida joined the rest of the South in enacting a series of "black codes." Essentially, these proscriptive statutes relegated blacks to second-class citizenship by depriving them of civil privileges enjoyed by whites. And, in some states, the labor provisions of the black codes reduced freedmen to a condition tantamount to re-enslavement.<sup>6</sup>

This process of Southern self-reconstruction--or, as historian John Hope Franklin termed it, "Reconstruction: Confederate style"--distressed Northern Republicans, especially those of the Radical persuasion who aspired to bring racial justice to the South.<sup>7</sup> Yet, that region's white-supremacist regimes remained intransigent, committed to a reunion-without-compromise position on the "Negro question." In 1867, therefore, Congress passed a series of Reconstruction Acts voiding the legality of existing Southern governments, placing the seceded states under

armed occupation, and granting Congress ultimate authority over Reconstruction. Congress then supervised the erection of governments in the South based upon impartial manhood suffrage and upon the exclusion of ex-Confederates from the political and electoral processes. Hence, most Southern whites, who were generally Democrats, lost their stake in government, while the Republican-inclined freedmen won full voting rights. Such developments, obviously, paved the way for the Republican domination of Dixie.<sup>8</sup>

Radical Republicans also passed a myriad of legislation conferring upon blacks equality under the law. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment, for example, affirmed Negro citizenship and guaranteed blacks equal protection of the laws. The latter measure, ratified in 1868, also protected freedmen from state action depriving them of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The Reconstruction Acts, meanwhile, provided for black suffrage, while the Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, seemingly made black voting rights irrevocable by prohibiting racial discrimination in the electoral process. Finally, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 forbade racial discrimination in public conveyances and in hotels, inns, theaters, and most other general accommodations and public places of amusement. In addition, the most egalitarian-minded Radicals recommended land redistribution

in the South to give freedmen an economic base to support their political rights; but such a program never materialized.

Despite the failure of land-reform proposals, Radical Reconstruction represented a period of great progress for Southern blacks. Under Republican rule, for instance, state governments established the South's first systems of public schooling, which served children of both races. By 1868, moreover, most reconstructionist regimes had rescinded the noxious black codes and drafted new state constitutions safeguarding Negro suffrage and incorporating the Fourteenth Amendment. And, of course, for the first time ever, Southern blacks had a voice in public affairs; and the elections of numerous black officeholders amply evidenced the strength of that voice. In Florida, for example, more than 30 blacks entered the state legislature during Reconstruction, while Josiah T. Walls and Jonathan C. Gibbs compiled creditable records as U.S. congressman and Florida secretary of state respectively.<sup>9</sup>

Social advancement for blacks, however, did not come without certain restrictions. For example, in replacing the South's bygone peculiar institution with a protocol of race relations based upon equality under the law, Republican state governments implemented a "separate but equal" policy long before the Supreme Court enshrined that

doctrine in 1896. Thus, while Republican leadership granted freedmen equal access to common carriers, public schools, militia companies, and all types of social services and public forums, it did so on a segregated basis. Hence, Florida's 1873 civil rights statute conformed to the general trend when it provided for equal, though exclusive, public accommodations, while permitting, though not enjoining, integrated schools.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, as Howard N. Rabinowitz has illustrated, segregation actually upgraded the status of Southern Negroes. After all, under slavery and the subsequent black codes, Southern blacks had no access whatsoever to militia service, education, welfare privileges, or most public facilities. Segregation, therefore, replaced out-and-out exclusion and was, thus, an alteration of normal Southern race relations that most blacks heartily welcomed.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, while not challenging this segregation-as-improvement argument in the limited context of Radical Reconstruction, David R. Goldfield has correctly indicated that the long-term "result of racial separation was exclusion--exclusion from jobs, from a decent education, from numerous public facilities, from public services, from politics, and from the courts."<sup>12</sup> Over time, then, segregation lost whatever positive attributes it had during the First Reconstruction and evolved into a wholly detrimental institution--one

precipitating a Second Reconstruction one hundred years later, and one that played a conspicuous role in the origination of the urban calamities of the 1960s.

This transformation in the nature of segregation began during the 1870s, when Radical Reconstruction entered a period of steady decline. In fact, the erosion of Radical influence in the South began by 1869. By that year, a series of presidential amnesties and pardons had made most former Confederates re-eligible for political participation. As a result, by 1875 the Conservative party--as the Southern Democracy was known at that time--had recaptured the reins of government in all Southern states except Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. Southern propagandists labeled this recovery of self-governance "Redemption," implying that Conservative leaders, also known as Bourbons, "redeemed" the region from "Black Republican" tyranny.<sup>13</sup>

In a few states, the strength of white Democratic ballots alone allowed for Redemption through legitimate electoral channels. In most states, however, Conservative ringleaders--with the aid of white-supremacist brotherhoods like the Ku Klux Klan and paramilitary organizations like the white Rifle Clubs--gained power by using intimidation, fraud, violence, and even murder to deter poll-bound freedmen from voting or to punish white Republican rivals. In one Florida county alone, for example, white terrorists

lynched or assassinated more than 150 people between 1868 and 1871.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, Bourbon Redemption spelled doom for the Republican-inspired era of social advancement for Southern blacks. Not all at once, but gradually--first through custom and, later, through codification--the Redeemer regimes created social and legal systems based upon white superiority and black inequality. Generally, the Solid South, as the firmly Conservative-Democratic section came to be known, did not revert to the exclusionary policies of the old black codes. Rather, white Democratic leaders retained the segregationist policies of their Republican predecessors. Whereas Republican separate-but-equal laws emphasized equality, however, Conservative practices ignored this aspect and stressed only separation as a form of public etiquette for the behavior of the races. Such practices, of course, became a blueprint for Negro subordination and for the foundation of the Jim Crow South.<sup>15</sup>

Generally, the federal government did little to prevent the Democratic takeover of the South. By the early 1870s, most Northerners, including Republican politicians as well as the public-at-large, were willing to concede the collapse of Reconstruction. As George M. Fredrickson has made clear, few Republicans ever embraced the idea of "a long period of special care and guardianship" for the freedmen. Rather,

guided by the dominant laissez-faire ideology of the age, most Northerners held that freedmen merely required legal equality to enable them to compete freely and fairly in the marketplace and to make their own unaided way in society. And, they argued, reconstructionist equal rights legislation had served this purpose, thereby precluding the need for further federal intervention in Southern affairs; freedmen could be left to their own devices, and the "Negro question" could be left to the purview of the states.<sup>16</sup>

The disputed presidential election of 1876 provided the backdrop for the final abandonment of Reconstruction. In that contest, Southern Democrats pledged support for Republican claims to the presidency, even though the Democratic candidate won more popular votes. In return, Republican leaders agreed to withdraw the U.S. Army from the last three "unredeemed" states and to assume a noninterventionist stance on racial matters in the South. Known as the Compromise of 1877, this bargain gave the South complete "home rule," for when federal troops left the region, Bourbon Redeemers toppled the only remaining Republican administrations.<sup>17</sup>

Shortly, thereafter, the Conservative-Democratic states undertook to make the South a "white man's country." Most of the rebel states quickly altered or abolished the state

constitutions drafted under Republican auspices, replacing them with new ones in which equal rights and equal suffrage planks were conspicuously absent. Concurrently, Southern officials employed suffrage-inhibitive devices like grandfather clauses and poll taxes in a discriminatory manner toward blacks, so as to effectively initiate a white-only franchise.<sup>18</sup>

Often, these proscriptive gestures received official sanction. The federal judiciary, for example, played a mammoth role in implementing the Compromise of 1877 and in returning the race problem to the states. As early as 1873, in fact, the Supreme Court revived the concept of dual citizenship as expounded in the *Dred Scott* decision. Citizenship, according to the tribunal, fell into two categories: national citizenship, which guaranteed certain basic rights; and state citizenship, which encompassed the vast majority of personal liberties. Hence, this decision made the states, and not the federal government, the primary guarantor of civilian rights--a power that Southern states used to the detriment of their dark-skinned inhabitants.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, the Supreme Court limited the protective scope of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. In 1876, the High Court ruled that the latter amendment exempted voting qualifications solely from explicit race-based

discrimination, implying that literacy tests, poll taxes, and other ostensibly nonracial suffrage restrictions were constitutionally acceptable state regulations. And, in 1898, the Court affirmed this implication in express terms. Also in 1876, the Court found that the Fourteenth Amendment applied only to the abridgment of civil rights by state action. The federal government, therefore, was powerless to protect freedmen from individual and unofficial civil rights violations--as when night-riding mobs of hooded Klansmen used terrorism and brutality to "keep the Niggers in their place."<sup>20</sup>

In 1883, the Court used this state-action principle in the infamous *Civil Rights Cases* to nullify the Civil Rights Act of 1875. According to the justices, that law unconstitutionally forbade individuals, rather than states, from discriminating against blacks in public places. Essentially, this ruling conceded the right of private owners of public establishments to deny access or refuse service to whomever they wished.<sup>21</sup>

Emboldened and largely vindicated by these judicial pronouncements, Southern state governments intensified their apartheid-building efforts. Indeed, noted one scholar in 1954, the *Civil Rights Cases* decision, in particular, "virtually assured the subsequent development of Jim Crow laws." By 1885, in fact, most of the former Confederacy had

enacted some form of Jim Crow apparatus institutionalizing segregation as a means of social control. Reminiscent of the black codes of 1865-1866, the new Jim Crow codes made racial distinctions far more rigid than they had been during Reconstruction and the first years of Redemption. And, of course, in 1896 the Supreme Court sustained Southern segregationist legislation by affixing its stamp of approval to the doctrine of "separate but equal." As the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision explained, the equal rights guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment "[were] not intended to abolish distinctions based upon color."<sup>22</sup>

Florida entered the arena of codified white domination in 1885, when a Bourbon-controlled convention drafted a new constitution to replace the Republican constitution of 1868. This new charter paved the way for stringent racial separation and for the wholesale disfranchisement of blacks. Aside from mandating segregated public education, the state compact authorized the use of a poll tax as a preconditional voting requirement. The constitution also directed state office-bearers to post bonds before assuming their elective positions. This measure all but barred blacks from public service, since few of them could afford the forfeiture of bond money even if elected to office.<sup>23</sup>

Beginning in 1889, and in keeping with the spirit of the new constitution, Florida's legislature enacted

a series of Jim Crow laws that ultimately governed race relations in the state until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. The first of these ordinances sought to establish a legal framework for black disfranchisement. An 1889 poll-tax law, for example, was artfully devised to discourage punctual payment of the tax, thereby enabling state election inspectors to more easily disqualify "unsuitable" would-be voters. A companion statute, likewise, purposefully complicated ballot-casting procedures so as to make the ability to read a veritable prerequisite for voting. And, a few years later, state officials enacted another ballot-reform law, which the Florida secretary of state billed as "equivalent to an educational qualification" that "virtually trumps the ignorant darky." Directed almost exclusively against blacks, who were generally poor and illiterate, these measures excluded a majority of black Floridians from the democratic process.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, between 1889 and 1915 the legislature passed a plethora of acts giving legal force to the segregative practices theretofore observed as a matter of custom. Statutes in 1905 and 1909, for instance, enjoined racial separation on street cars and on railroad passenger cars. Similarly, the legislature ordered the separate incarceration of black and white criminal offenders. Some

years earlier, state assemblymen outlawed interracial marriage. Often, Florida lawmakers carried the segregationist impulse to absurd lengths. Such was the case with the law requiring the separation of public school textbooks used by pupils of the different races; and the law specified separation even while the books were in storage.<sup>25</sup>

By the turn of the century, then, African American inequality was fact, both officially and informally, in Florida and throughout the South. Verily, in 1886 one former black congressman from South Carolina aptly summarized circumstances in late-nineteenth-century Dixie when he stated simply, "the Anglo-Saxon is master of the situation."<sup>26</sup> As mentioned earlier, federal magistrates provided a solid legal foundation for the racial order emerging in the New South. By the 1890s, though, Southern white supremacists received their greatest support from academicians and social theorists in the North.

Indeed, at that time, Social Darwinism and various other forms of race-thinking gained wide currency in Northern intellectual circles. As a result, the nation's elite centers of culture and learning soon promulgated a racist creed that held blacks as members of an innately inferior caste, as unintelligent beings in need of white guidance to survive in the civilized world. At best,

according to these racial postulates, black Americans were ignorant creatures with no capacity for matters of state or politics. At worst, they were indolent, shiftless, barbarous savages who threatened to "Africanize" a superior Anglo-Saxon culture unless subjected to rigorous social controls.<sup>27</sup> In sum, as Carl N. Degler noted in 1959, "by the end of the nineteenth century, molders of public opinion in the North had begun to look at the Negro through Southern eyes." Thus, Northern-born historian James Ford Rhodes was merely echoing national sentiment when in the 1890s he posited the "scientific truth" that Negroes comprised "one of the most inferior races of mankind."<sup>28</sup>

Owing to such theories, American racialists found it easy to justify the separation of blacks from white society and their exclusion from the body politic. In addition, America's imperialist thrust during the Spanish-American War of 1898-1899 and its subsequent mission to uplift its "little brown brothers" in the Phillipine Islands further legitimized white efforts to subordinate "darker peoples." Ultimately, the pervasiveness of American anti-black thought caused an escalation in racial friction, especially in the South. Despite the success of their Jim Crow measures and their disfranchising maneuvers, Southern whites refused to let the race issue dissipate. Finding appeals to white prejudice an effective vote-getter, for

instance, Southern politicians made Negro-baiting their primary electioneering technique. Likewise, from the 1890s to the 1920s and beyond, the Southern press spoke of blacks in none but terms of odium and disparagement.<sup>29</sup>

The dissemination of ultra-Negrophobic propaganda helped give rise to an ugly climate of race hatred that all too often culminated in ruthless white aggression against blacks. Bereft of substantive political and legal rights, black Americans had little defense against these abusive and often fatal acts. Case in point: between 1889 and 1922, the number of lynchings in America surpassed 3,400, with more than 1,100 occurring in the first fourteen years of the twentieth century. These years also witnessed a flurry of big-city and small-town race riots. In truth, these riots were no more than pogroms, in which hostile white mobs marched into black communities, burning homes and property and indiscriminately beating and killing blacks--occasionally, by publicly burning them alive. And, almost invariably, white pogromists and lynch mobs went thoroughly unpunished.<sup>30</sup>

Like blacks elsewhere, those in Florida remained highly vulnerable to this type of persecution. As Jerrell H. Shofner has commented, early-twentieth-century Florida provided a setting in which "white ruffians . . . assaulted blacks without fear of reprisal." In one instance in 1913,

for example, Jefferson County sheriff's deputies shot down three blacks, apparently, just for being out and about on a Saturday night. By the 1920s, moreover, Florida experienced a significant resurgence of Ku Kluxery. This renascent Klan worked hard to preserve the color line, instigating and participating numerous acts of violent terrorism designed "to keep the Niggers in their place."<sup>31</sup>

Florida Klansmen, for instance, helped set the stage for the 1920 election riots in the Orange County hamlet of Ocoee. For weeks before the state's 1920 elections, local Ku Klucks and other Ocoee whites warned black townspeople to refrain from voting. When one black citizen attempted to cast his ballot anyway, he became the object of a vicious mob beating. Apparently, this incident whetted the blood-lust of the entire white community, which ran riot for the next three days. White mobs surrounded Ocoee's black settlement and burned it to the ground. Several black residents, included one mother and her two-week old infant, perished in the blaze, while white sentries mowed down a number of others who attempted to flee from the burning village. Authorities reported about 35 fatalities during the Ocoee riot, but unofficial estimates ranged much higher. In the riot's aftermath, moreover, most whites treated the event as if it had been kindred to a carnival or circus. When asked what had occurred, one young white

girl happily told of how "we had some fun burning up some niggers."<sup>32</sup>

Race riots and white terrorism were by no means confined to the former slaveholding states, however. Indeed, according to John Hope Franklin, "rioting in the North was as vicious and almost as prevalent as it was in the South." The 1908 riot in Springfield, Illinois, for example, rivaled any of the World War I-era pogroms in the Southland. During this orgy of bloodletting, one black octogenarian was lynched within a block of the statehouse, while several other blacks met the same fate within half a mile of Abraham Lincoln's old Illinois residence.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, when Miami, Florida sprang into corporate existence in 1896, the town came to life in an era of extremely poor race relations. Not surprisingly, the early decades of the twentieth century brought cruelty, alienation, and frustration to Miami's first-generation black community. Miami managed to avoid the race riots that plagued other cities, but other manifestations of white-supremacist violence were pervasive. Between 1896 and the 1930s, for instance, Miami was the scene of at least half a dozen lynchings. Moreover, Miami police killed African American "suspects" with frightful regularity. The Ku Klux Klan, predictably, became visibly active in Miami during the 1920s and 1930s, arranging numerous kidnapings and beatings.

Bands of hostile white citizens also terrorized the local black community from time to time. More than once in 1920, for example, Miami whites went on shooting sprees in the area's black district.<sup>34</sup>

Given the racial climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is not difficult to understand why in the 1950s scholar Rayford W. Logan dubbed the turn-of-the-century era "the nadir" of the Negro in American life and thought.<sup>35</sup> Recent scholarship, however, suggests that Logan made too much of this issue. African Americans in Logan's nadir period unquestionably encountered a high degree of oppression, but they were not often the passive victims of oppression that conventional wisdom has taught. If white repression had kept African Americans so utterly cowed and intimidated, after all, there would have been little need for the constancy of terroristic acts designed to keep blacks "in their place." To some degree, therefore, African Americans resisted white domination, even in this low point of American race relations.

Robin D. G. Kelley has articulated this point in his studies of the South's Jim Crow-era black working class. According to Kelley, African American working people left a record of "hidden transcripts"--low work production, on-the-job theft, the sabotaging of equipment--documenting their daily protests against the injustices inflicted upon

them by white society.<sup>36</sup> More recently, in their studies of Jim Crow-era Memphis, Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith have argued that blacks also left "unhidden transcripts" of their resistance to white oppression. As Goings and Smith have illustrated, black Memphians often made their contempt for Jim Crow plainly visible, as when some blacks boarded segregated street cars and then assaulted offensive conductors who ordered them to disembark. Other black citizens, meanwhile, expressed their discontent by ignoring white police officials who addressed them with racial slurs, knowing full well that such insolence might incur physical punishment.<sup>37</sup>

African Americans in Florida demonstrated this same type of agency. In Ocoee, for instance, the man who attempted to vote in defiance of Klan warnings knew that he would receive a flogging for his efforts. Yet, he remained undaunted. Similarly, at a 1920 Ku Klux Klan parade in Jacksonville, one black woman called out disparagingly to the marching Klansmen: "White folks, you ain't done nothin'. Them German guns didn't scare us and I know them white faces ain't goin' to do it now." Also in 1920, one Gadsden County black was assaulted and instructed to leave the county for the "crime" of inciting African Americans to vote. The man remained, however--"determined to die rather than submit." Clearly, these

actions were not those of intimidated people. Despite the enormity of the oppression they faced, black Floridians were determined to retain a sense of dignity and control over their own lives.<sup>38</sup>

Blacks in Miami left voluminous of "unhidden transcripts" of their own. For instance, despite threats from the city's white chauffeur cartel, which monopolized the city's commercial carriage trade, black chauffeurs continued to ply their trade in competition white drivers. In 1917, a group of white drivers attacked Fred Andrews, an African American who had opened a chauffeur service. Andrews later evened the score by stabbing one of his assailants. Likewise, despite Klan warnings and a few home bombings, some black families made repeated attempts between 1910 and 1920 to move out of the crowded "colored" section of the city and into areas reserved for whites.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, because Florida's Jim Crow system governed racial etiquette in the state until the civil rights thrust of the 1950s, Miami's second-generation black citizens encountered the same kind of discrimination and proscription that their elders had faced. Consequently, black Miamians of this generation evidenced the same type of protestant resistance to white-imposed social restraints. In 1940, for example, the magazine *Miami Life* reported upon "a young Negress" who had caused an uproar on a local bus when she

"cursed the white passengers because another Negro had been told to take a seat in the rear of the bus."<sup>40</sup>

Thus, the themes of agency and protest formed a central part of black life in Miami since the city's founding; and these themes carried over to each succeeding generation of black Miamians. In the 1960s, Miami's young third-generation black community took these themes to new heights during the 1968 ghetto revolt in Liberty City. The 1968 riot sprang largely from a set of complex and destructive urban-related problems that was unique to the African American generation of that decade. Yet, the disorder arose, too, because young blacks in the 1960s still confronted the legacy of Jim Crow. Hence, not only did this group face its own urban difficulties, but it had to shoulder the long-borne burdens of its forefathers. In this sense, Miami's road to rebellion began with the pattern of race relations established in Florida in the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

NOTES

1. *Miami Times*, August 16, 1968.
2. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 11.
3. Dred Scott v. Sandford, 19 Howard 393 (1857); Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 576, 580-581.
4. For the initial stages of Reconstruction, known as Presidential Reconstruction, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 24-82; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 1-52; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 1-227. For the experiences and efforts of the freedmen during this period, see Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1979). For the Reconstruction experience in Florida, see Jerrell H. Shofner, *Nor Is It Over Yet: Florida in the Era of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974); Joe M. Richardson, *The Negro in the Reconstruction of Florida, 1865-1877* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1965).
5. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History: The Enduring Influence of Florida's 'Black Code,'" *Florida Historical Quarterly* 55 (January 1977), 279.
6. For the "black codes" generally, see Theodore Brantner Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1965). For Florida's black code, see Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," cited above.
7. "Reconstruction: Confederate Style" is the title of chapter 3 in Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*.
8. For Radical Reconstruction, see Stampp, *Era of Reconstruction*, 83-154; Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 53-83; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 228-280.

9. For Republican rule in the South, see Stampp, *Era of Reconstruction*, 155-185; Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 84-149; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 281-411. For a history of the freedmen in the Republican South, see Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*. For Josiah T. Walls, see Peter D. Klingman, *Josiah Walls: Florida's Black Congressman in Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976). For Jonathan C. Gibbs, see Joe M. Richardson, "Jonathan C. Gibbs: Florida's Only Black Cabinet Member," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 42 (April 1964), 363-368.

10. Howard N. Rabinowitz, "From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890," in Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race, Ethnicity, and Urbanization: Selected Essays* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 137-146; Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," 286.

11. Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Rabinowitz, "From Exclusion to Segregation," 137-146.

12. David R. Goldfield, "Black Political Power and Public Policy in the Urban South," in Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 162.

13. For Bourbon Redemption, see Michael R. Perman, *The Road to Redemption: Southern Politics, 1869-1879* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Stampp, *Era of Reconstruction*, 186-215; Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War*, 189-219; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 564-601.

14. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," 285. For violence in the Reconstruction-era South generally, see George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

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16. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny*,

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18. Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 228-233; Franklin, Reconstruction after the Civil War, 211-212.

19. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case*, 580-583; Slaughterhouse Cases, 16 Wallace 36 (1873); Alfred H. Kelly, Winfred A. Harbison, and Herman Belz, *The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 1991), 355-356.

20. United States v. Reese, 92 U.S. 214 (1876); Williams v. Mississippi, 170 U.S. 213 (1898); United States v. Cruikshank, 92 U.S. 542 (1876). For a concise analysis of "The Supreme Court and the Negro" during the Reconstruction era, including the aforecited cases, see Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), chapter 6. See also, Kelly, Harbison, and Belz, *American Constitution*, 356-359.

21. Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3 (1883).

22. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*, 109; Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

23. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," 287.

24. Ibid., 287, 289; Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*, 296.

25. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," 289-290; Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 102.

26. R. H. Cain, "The Negro Problem of the South," *African Methodist Episcopal Review* 2 (January 1886), 145.

27. For excellent overviews of white attitudes toward blacks during the late nineteenth century, see Fredrickson, *Black Image in the White Mind*, 198-319; Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*.

28. Degler, *Out of Our Past*, 235-237, quotation on 235; James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule at the South in 1877*, 7 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1892-1906), Vol. 1, 370; Vol. 5, 556.

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30. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1974), 322-327, 356-361, 363; Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 86-87.

31. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History," 291-293, quotation on 291; David Chalmers, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Sunshine State: The 1920s," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 42 (January 1964), 209-215.

32. Walter F. White, "Election Day in Florida," *The Crisis* 21 (January 1921), 106-109; House of Representatives, *The Ku Klux Klan: Hearings before the Committee on Rules, Sixty-Seventh Congress, First Session* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 63-66.

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35. See Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought*.

36. Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black-Working Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80 (June 1993), 75-112.

37. Kenneth W. Goings and Gerald L. Smith, "'Unhidden' Transcripts: Memphis and African American Agency, 1862-1920," *Journal of Urban History* 21 (March 1995), 372-394.

38. White, "Election Day in Florida," 106-108.

39. George, "Colored Town," 441-442; George, "Policing Miami's Black Community," 436, 440.

40. *Miami Life*, March 16, 1940, cited in Ralph J. Bunche, *The Political Status of the Negro in the Age of FDR*, ed. Dewey W. Grantham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 199.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### SHADOWS OF CONFLICT: RACE RELATIONS AND MIAMI'S BLACK COMMUNITY, 1896-1940

In view of Miami's race-related troubles during the latter portion of the twentieth century--four major ghetto conflagrations and more than a dozen minor disturbances between 1968 and 1989--it seems almost appropriate that the city's incorporation in 1896 coincided with the Supreme Court's verdict in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. After all, the tribunal's "separate but equal" judgment in that case gave legal solidification to the pattern of race relations from which those riots ultimately emerged. And, of course, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, race relations in Miami were severely strained. At the same time, nonetheless, Miami offered blacks economic opportunities that were far superior to those of African Americans in other Southern communities.<sup>1</sup>

In extending his Florida East Coast Railway from Palm Beach to Miami and down through the Florida Keys, for example, "robber baron" Henry M. Flagler employed hundreds of blacks in numerous manual-laboring capacities. Likewise, Flagler's resort hotels in these areas employed throngs

of black domestic workers, as South Florida's booming tourist industry attracted opportunity-minded blacks from all parts of the American South and from various Caribbean islands, particularly the Bahamas. Generally, black employment was limited to menial trades and service industries. Hence, wages were low and underemployment was high. Yet, Miami's job market remained steady and, thus, continued to serve as a magnet for nonnative islanders and for rural blacks from all corners of Dixie.<sup>2</sup>

Miami's economic prosperity continued unabated well into the 1920s. Local race relations, however, worsened in the first decades of the twentieth century. Shortly after incorporation, city fathers undertook to exclude blacks from municipal affairs. A battery of Jim Crow ordinances brought local social relations into line with general region-wide trends. Meantime, the city's white leadership grew increasingly vigorous in its enforcement of state capitation laws and other provisions circumscribing black suffrage rights. In short, for black Miamians living in this period, discrimination, proscription, and segregation became integral components of daily existence.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, from the first day of its corporate life, Miami was a residentially segregated city. Pursuant to the 1896 plan of incorporation, all property abutting Biscayne Bay and the Miami River was reserved for white

ownership, while black settlement was restricted to a few inland areas. Maintained through race-restrictive provisions in local land deeds, the residential color line effectively consigned the majority of black Miamians to a crowded and unhealthy shantytown, called "Colored Town," in the northwest section of the city. Known later as the Central Negro District and today as Overtown, this tract of land originally belonged to the FEC railroad, which used the space to house its black laborers, whom restrictive land covenants would have otherwise barred from residence within the city.<sup>4</sup>

From its inception, Colored Town was Miami's first ghetto, though contemporaries did not use that designation. Nevertheless, as Richard Wade has illustrated, "by the turn of the century the black ghetto, as we now know it, was everywhere a part of the urban South." And, before long, the Great Migration of Southern blacks to cities in the North would make the ghetto a national institution, firmly embedded in all American provinces.<sup>5</sup>

Like other ghettos, Colored Town suffered from a severe lack of municipal services. Basically, this shortage of amenities persisted because city officials simply ignored the needs of the black community. Thus, Colored Town was the last city district to receive services like water and sewers, while its streets remained unpaved and unlit.

Additionally, Colored Town lacked adequate facilities to support its burgeoning population. Slum housing and run-down shotgun cottages comprised the area's universal accommodations. As late as 1949, moreover, half the housing in the area remained substandard. Commonly, black dwellings had no electricity or on-premises bathing facilities. And, of the few homes with indoor plumbing, most went without hot water.<sup>6</sup>

Poor housing, cramped conditions, and an absence of sanitary facilities created an extremely unhealthy environment in Colored Town. Correspondingly, throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, Miami's black quarter endured bouts of smallpox as well as epidemics of yellow fever, influenza, and numerous other plagues. The infant death rate doubled that of the white community, while a variety of venereal diseases tormented black neighborhoods. Yet, this pestilence-cursed region contained no professionalized medical facilities until the construction of the Christian Hospital in 1918. Supported through church collections, local fund-raising activities, and community-chest donations, the hospital provided black Miamians with health-care services that they could not have received from the rest of the city's segregated medical clinics.<sup>7</sup>

Colored Town also lacked sufficient recreational and

educational facilities. Until the 1920s, the area contained no parks; and black Miamians had no access to the city's other white-only parks. Similarly, there was no black high school until the 1920s. Black elementary schools, meantime, remained perpetually understaffed, underequipped, and underfunded. And, not until 1936 did civic activists erect Colored Town's lone library. Naturally, the absence of learning centers delayed educational progress for blacks. As late as 1930, in fact, the illiteracy rate among Miami blacks was 11.3 percent--thirty-seven times higher than the white rate of 0.3 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Like most ghetto communities, Colored Town had a full share of crime and vice. Yet, vice-related problems worsened in the area after 1910, when the local constabulary actually foisted an additional red-light district upon the city's black quarter. Prior to 1910, the nearby town of North Miami served as Dade County's principal haven for prostitution, gambling, and drunkenness. John Sewell, one of Miami's first citizens, recalled that North Miami "had all the vices that there ever were in the worst frontier towns." Likewise, pioneer Miamian Isidor Cohen called the area a "notorious locality" that "harbored a number of saloons, gambling houses and kindred evils."<sup>9</sup> Beginning in 1910, however, Dade County Sheriff Dan Hardie initiated a campaign to purge North Miami of its dens of

iniuity. Unfortunately for Miami's black community, Hardie accomplished his aim by driving North Miami's brothels, grog shops, and gambling houses into the northwest segment of Colored Town. "Hardieville," as the new vice district came to be known, operated as a thriving center of impurity until the late 1910s.<sup>10</sup>

Though Colored Town served as the home for most Dade County blacks--who numbered about 13,000 in 1920 and 30,000 ten years later--other black settlements existed in the Miami area. At the far western edge of Lemon City, a well-to-do white bayfront community three miles northeast of Colored Town, a tiny black hamlet sat alongside the FEC railroad tracks. Further south, the bayside town of Coconut Grove accommodated a more sizable black population. Settled largely by Bahamian immigrants in the late nineteenth century, Coconut Grove emerged as the first black community in the Miami vicinity. By 1900, Bahamian blacks comprised a major source of labor in the Miami area, working as fishermen, longshoremen, and farm laborers in the rich agricultural groves south of the city.<sup>11</sup>

Though outnumbered by American blacks in Colored Town and Lemon City, the Bahamian element exercised a tremendous impact upon black folkways in Miami. In her research for the Florida Writers' Project in the 1930s, black author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston recounted the "unusually

strong influence" that Bahamians exerted within the general black community. Through "their dress, customs, and religious practices," she added, Caribbean immigrants pushed "West Indian customs" to the forefront of black culture in Miami.<sup>12</sup>

Before coming to Florida, most Bahamians, as British subjects, encountered nothing akin to the rigid Jim Crowism of the American South. Thus, upon arrival in Dade County, many island immigrants brought with them a firm belief in racial equality. Consequently, Bahamian residents became frequent targets of abuse and persecution by the Miami police, who sought to teach the recalcitrant islanders respect for the color line by using brute force. The local court system, predictably, supported such coercion. In 1908, for instance, one Miami magistrate applauded police usage of extralegal tactics to alter the opinions of "Nassau Negroes who upon their arrival here consider themselves the social equal of white people."<sup>13</sup>

Police-Bahamian altercations occurred often during the first decades of Miami's corporate life, usually resulting in physical brutality against the foreigners. In addition, and not altogether infrequently, Miami police were known to murder Caribbean blacks for the most trivial offenses. As a British consular official noted after police slayings of Bahamians in Miami and Key West in 1908, "the

killing of a man for practically no reason whatever is a common occurrence" in South Florida. Moreover, such abusive practices continued for decades, as actor Sidney Poitier illustrated in his autobiography, *This Life*. Poitier, who came to Miami from the Bahamas in 1943 as a teenager, recalled several frightful run-ins with local police. These encounters ultimately convinced Poitier to leave Miami--a city whose "not so subtle pattern of racism" he simply could not abide.<sup>14</sup>

American blacks fared no better than Bahamians in matters concerning Miami's racist police forces. Especially irksome to most blacks was the willingness of constabulary officials to tolerate acts of white mob violence against the black community. In 1898, for example, local police did nothing to stop U.S. servicemen stationed at Camp Miami from harassing residents in nearby Colored Town. Finally, recalled Isidor Cohen in 1925, a group of white rowdies "invaded the colored settlement and terrorized the negroes," evidently "to keep up the excitement" of the martial experience. Though this foray left one black Miamian dead and many others critically injured, police arrested no soldiers for the crime; and U.S. troops continued to harass black citizens until Camp Miami disbanded following the end of the Spanish-American War.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, between 1900 and 1920, white mobs lynched

several black townsmen and burned, bombed, or otherwise destroyed a vast amount of black property. Yet, police made only a handful of arrests in these cases, and municipal courts failed to make a single conviction in mob-violence incidents. Clearly, in this era of horrid race relations, Miami mirrored the rest of the South in enforcing a dual system of justice--one that deprived blacks of equality under the law. Local judges, for example, routinely meted out harsher punishments to black offenders than to whites guilty of similar crimes. Likewise, police patrols made it habit to invade Negro homes without search warrants. And, these officers were not above the practice of extortion: threatening black citizens with arrest unless they paid a special "tax."<sup>16</sup>

Miami police were especially prone to "look the other way" in instances where whites directed violence against blacks seeking to integrate white neighborhoods. Between 1910 and 1920, as gross overcrowding continued to degrade physical and sanitary conditions in Colored Town, several black families abandoned their tumble-down hovels in the Negro quarter and attempted to find better housing in adjoining white communities. The *Miami Herald* expressed the consensual white mood regarding these attempts when it wrote that the "advance of the negro population is like a plague and carries devastation with it to all surrounding

property." Predictably, then, in 1915 and 1920, black movement into white regions resulted in terroristic raids and bombings against those who dared to breach the color line; and local police lent tacit approval to these attacks.<sup>17</sup>

The severity of racial boundary disputes prompted Miami's civil leadership to draft a segregation ordinance in 1915 to more clearly delineate geographic zones open to the respective races. In this respect, Miami looked to join a number of other Southern metropolises that had enacted racial-zoning laws during the Jim Crow frenzy at the turn of the century. Yet, by 1915, these laws were not faring well in the courts. And, rather prophetically, the local Colored Board of Trade denounced Miami's segregationist proposal as legally indefensible. Apparently, some local politicians agreed, for the city council tabled the segregation bill shortly thereafter. Many whites voiced displeasure at this move, but the U.S. Supreme Court soon vindicated the councilmen's decision. In 1917, in an unwonted judgment in favor of African American rights, the High Court found race-specific zoning ordinances to be repugnant to the Fourteenth Amendment, declaring that such statutes obstructed black property rights without due process of law.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, the Court's decision in this case scarcely

affected the racially bifurcated nature of residence in Miami or in the rest of the urban South. In a vein of defiance, in fact, several Deep South cities sought to revive racial zoning in the 1920s. A few municipalities, including Dade County, made similar attempts as late as the 1940s. State courts, however, nullified all these measures. Nevertheless, residential segregation remained the rule in Southern communities, which required no laws to make racial separation fact. Even without racial-zoning codes, for instance, extreme poverty left most black Southern city dwellers with no chance of escaping their ghetto-ordained fates. In addition, white social pressure, including informal sanctions as well as heinous violence, dissuaded untold numbers of blacks from challenging the residential color bar.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, the most effective segregation-maintaining method, employed in both Northern and Southern cities, was the use of race-restrictive covenants. These private agreements enjoined real estate brokers and individual property owners to preserve the racial, ethnic, and religious homogeneity of residential developments. In short, these contracts prohibited property holders from selling or renting living space to "undesirables." In later years, amid runaway suburban expansion, whole subdivisions came under the governance of such covenants. This situation, of course,

excluded most blacks from suburban areas, confining them to deteriorating core cities.<sup>20</sup>

After the illegalization of racial zoning in 1917, white Miamians grew increasingly reliant upon restrictive land covenants to secure the color line in central-city districts. Undeterred, however, African American residents continued to seek decent accommodations beyond the borders of Colored Town. At times, therefore, renewed residential conflict appeared imminent.

Yet, racial boundary strife diminished after 1920 and did not resurface as a serious race-relations issue for another two decades. In part, this residential armistice resulted from the emergence of smaller black communities south of downtown Miami. These south-county settlements provided an outlet for a portion of Colored Town's excess population without engendering color-line disputes. Additionally, during the 1920s, a number of black families left the mid-city Negro district and purchased homes in Brown's Sub (Brownsville) a few miles northwest of Colored Town. Though an all-white area at the time, Brown's Sub was sparsely populated and could accommodate black settlers without necessitating frequent contact between the races. Moreover, Brown's Sub lay outside Miami's city limits in a segment of Dade County where color-line restrictions were less inflexible than

in metropolitan precincts.<sup>21</sup>

The abatement of racial residential controversy, however, was by no means a sign of improved race relations. With respect to white terrorism and persecution, in fact, the 1920s and 1930s marked the absolute lowest point in the history of race relations in Miami. These years witnessed additional lynchings, rampant police brutality, and a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, the Invisible Empire became a powerful force in Dade County during these decades.<sup>22</sup>

Boasting a membership of about 1,500 in 1925, Miami's John B. Gordon Klan No. 24, named after a Confederate general, qualified as the second-largest KKK klavern in Florida. Before long, Miami's Invisible Empire also included a John B. Gordon Klan No. 5 and a separate Dade County chapter. Generally, white Miamians accepted the Klan as an ordinary municipal-service organization. Thus, few whites thought anything amiss when the Klan entered a float in the civic and fraternal division of Miami's Fruit and Flower Parade in 1924. Doubtless, many whites felt joy when this float took first prize.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, the bulk of the Klan's activities were not so community-spirited. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, white-sheeted practitioners of hate terrorized Miami blacks with impunity, often with the tacit approval, if not the

active participation, of local law-enforcement agents. On several occasions, in fact, the Klan orchestrated the kidnappings and beatings of Miami citizens, white and black, who advocated social justice for African Americans. In 1921, for example, Klansmen abducted and flogged the West Indian rector of a black church, tarring and feathering the cleric for "preaching Negro equality." Designed to drive "Nigger lovers" out of town, these tactics often produced the desired result.<sup>24</sup> In addition, Miami's Klan did an outstanding job in frustrating the intentions of vote-minded blacks who paid their poll taxes and dared to assert their constitutional rights.<sup>25</sup>

As large and intimidating as Miami's Klan was, though, it remained unable to match the oppression perpetrated by the local police force. Following a disastrous hurricane in 1926, for example, the county sheriff vowed "to put [idle Negroes] to work." To this end, local police forcibly conscripted hundreds of black laborers to assist in repairing damage to the city. According to one observer, these workmen received numerous beatings during their term indenture but nary a day's wages for their toils.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, city lawmen committed black homicides at an alarming rate during the 1920s. Without exception, though, coroner's inquests exonerated the guilty officers from any wrongdoing. Predictably, then, and in the face

of incriminating evidence, Miami's police chief, H. Leslie Quigg, won acquittal from a 1928 indictment charging him with complicity in the lynch-style police shooting of a black hotel worker. As W. E. B. Du Bois noted in an editorial for *The Crisis*, the news medium of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, there had never been much "chance that Quigg . . . would suffer any severe punishment." Nevertheless, because Quigg's trial revealed the gross extent to which he sanctioned abusive police conduct, the chief's superiors dismissed him in spite of his acquittal.<sup>27</sup>

The local black community had little pause to celebrate Quigg's removal, however, as Miami's mood grew increasingly Negrophobic during the Great Depression era. Against the backdrop of a shrinking labor market, working-class whites adopted a "no-work-for-Negroes-until-every-white-man-has-a-job" attitude. During a tour of Florida cities in 1931, a field agent for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation took note of Miami's "acute" racial situation, describing the city as one of two places where black residents encountered the poorest opportunity and treatment in the entire state. Miami blacks, this man observed, were not even "allowed to come into white . . . business section[s] unless in some servile capacity." By the mid-1930s, furthermore, anti-black sentiment reached such a fever pitch as to spawn

a white movement to reinstate Quigg as commandant of the local police force. According to pro-Quigg backers, only "a man so notably master of the racial situation as [Quigg]" possessed the expertise needed to handle the "acute Negro problem." Apparently, many white Miamians agreed with this contention, for Quigg regained his chiefship in the late 1930s.<sup>28</sup>

The return of Chief Quigg heralded a further deterioration of police-Negro relations. Indeed, police batterings and killings of blacks persisted well into the 1940s. One black man characterized Miami patrolmen during these years as "full of intolerance, bigotry, and sadism." Another resident proclaimed that local policemen "had no respect for Negro life at all."<sup>29</sup> Not until the mid-1950s did police cease their totalitarian reign of terror over Miami's black community. Even then, police continued to employ less violent, though equally intimidating, means of dealing with the city's black population. Harassment, browbeating, and general courtesy characterized police treatment of blacks well into the 1960s. Ultimately, such mistreatment proved pivotal in the instigation of Miami's first racial disorder in 1968.<sup>30</sup>

Because Miami's all-white police force consistently balked at its duty to protect and serve the African American community, Miami blacks repeatedly asked local authorities

to hire black policemen who understood the needs and concerns of the black citizenry. Since the first such request in 1901, though, city administrators refused to do so. As a result, Miami blacks began arming themselves in an attempt to secure much-needed protection against white terrorism and general ghetto crime. In response, white policemen grew increasingly hesitant to patrol black sections of town, viewing these areas as armed and hostile territories. Finally, the reluctance of white officers to enter black neighborhoods, coupled with renewed community agitation for black policemen, resulted in the creation of a separate black police squad in 1944. This unit had no jurisdiction over white areas, and until the 1960s black officers could not arrest white suspects. Nonetheless, the arrival of black police had a positive impact upon the social well-being of the black community.<sup>31</sup>

Still, though, the small contingent of black police did not end white atrocities and mob violence against the black community. And, of course, Miami blacks possessed no political means to combat these outrages. Since poll taxes and literacy tests disfranchised most black Floridians, African American concerns seldom figured into the public decision-making process of Florida's municipal governments.

The case was no different on the state level, where

Florida lawmakers paid little heed to matters of interest for Florida Negroes. Furthermore, even those blacks who paid their poll taxes on time and learned to read in order to properly cast their ballots found themselves without a voice in state politics. Pursuant to statutes in 1897 and 1901, Florida mimicked the rest of Dixie in establishing white-only Democratic primary elections. As Democracy reigned supreme in the Solid South, Democratic primaries invariably determined the outcome of regular elections. Therefore, white-primary elections excluded even the small number of legally registered black voters from participation in political contests.<sup>32</sup>

In 1926, the Supreme Court appeared to strike a huge blow in favor of black political rights when it invalidated race-exclusive party primaries as violations of the Fifteenth Amendment. Nonetheless, Southern states soon found a legally defensible way to keep blacks politically impotent. Most states converted their parties into "private clubs," which could regulate membership according to race without violating the state-action clause of the Fifteenth Amendment. This tactic, too, became illegal in 1944, but until then "private" primaries continued to disfranchise the black population of the South.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1930s and early 1940s, therefore, black voters in Miami had little involvement in state elections.

For a fleeting instance in the early 1930s, however, this situation appeared to change. In April 1932, Florida's attorney general, Cary D. Landis, announced that duly registered black voters would be allowed to take part in the upcoming state primaries in June. In response, a small number of black Miamians registered themselves in anticipation of the elections. Almost immediately, the local Ku Klux Klan mobilized to keep blacks from the polls. Shortly before the elections, Miami Klansmen staged a motorcade through Colored Town, during which several members went door to door distributing leaflets that read: "Don't Forget. June 7 is a White Man's Primary."<sup>34</sup>

Such intimidation ultimately proved unnecessary, however, for Landis had erred in his earlier pronouncement. On account of the "private" nature of Florida parties, neither Landis's office nor any other state body held sway over the business of Florida's Democratic club. Hence, that party's executive committee retained sole authority to regulate party membership and, thus, to determine qualifications for primary electors. And, as always, the Democratic executive committee chose to deny party membership to Negroes, leaving Miami blacks, once again, without a stake in state government. Not until the abolition of the white primary in 1944 did blacks in Miami and in the rest of the South have recourse to state

elections.<sup>35</sup>

With respect to municipal politics, Miami had a city-commission form of government whose members were elected at large on a nonpartisan basis. Thus, the white primary did not apply. Nevertheless, at-large elections virtually disfranchised Miami's black populace anyway. Had Miami used a conventional district- or ward-type electoral system, densely packed black communities in the central city and in Coconut Grove would have had a powerful bloc vote. As things stood, though, in Miami and in numerous other cities, the at-large system greatly diluted black political power and reduced the number of representatives coming out of black communities. In fact, Miami had no black city commissioner until the late 1960s.<sup>36</sup>

In 1939, a handful of city officials moved to replace at-large elections with a ward-based system. Though these politicians gerrymandered district boundaries to preclude the potential election of black commissioners, the plan encountered considerable opposition on account of the large black population of one of the wards. Under this district arrangement, warned one *Miami Herald* writer, "you are sure to have at least one negro councilman and you might have two. Do the people of Miami want that?" Media opposition to the new plan was not surprising given that, until the early 1930s, local newspapers referred to blacks in little

other than a criminal context and in terms of derision such as "coons," "fiends," and "hamfats." At any rate, when the matter was put to referendum, Miami's race-conscious electorate killed the voting-district proposal by more than a four-to-one margin. Clearly, white Miamians at this time were paralyzed by what one local black leader described in the early 1960s as a "mortal fear" of "the Negro bloc vote."<sup>37</sup>

Owing to the generally hostile white mood regarding Negro suffrage, Miami blacks rarely bothered to vote in city elections during the first third of the twentieth century. In 1931, for instance, one prominent black citizen informed the NAACP that not more than a dozen blacks attempted to vote in city elections that year, adding that he voted only in years "when conditions [were] favorable." Still, a small number of blacks paid their poll taxes and sought to exercise the franchise. Often, though, these voters found themselves "ku kluxed" or intimidated by white mobs and hostile poll officials. Thus, during the 1931 municipal elections, the few blacks who attempted to cast ballots complained of harassment from the KKK, from disrespectful voting registrars, and from other "white ruffians" and "idle lowbrows of the white race." Several of these frustrated voters reported their experiences to Miami police officials, who told one group that the election was for

whites only and another to stay away from the polls in order to avoid trouble with white "crackers."<sup>38</sup>

Plainly, discrimination, persecution, and disfranchisement played a major role in the development of black Miami during the first third of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, for Miami's first-generation black community, life consisted of much more than the consequences of white racism, urban squalor, and ghetto insecurity. As urban historian Arnold R. Hirsch has recently made clear, aside from its many negative components, the American ghetto "was also a self-sustaining institutional and cultural entity that nourished the social and intellectual networks that made the flowering of a Harlem Renaissance possible." In Miami, black communities in Colored Town and Coconut Grove fit Hirsch's description perfectly. In fact, by the 1940s, Miami's core-city black district had gained such national repute as a cultural and artistic mecca as to warrant the epithet "Harlem of the South."<sup>39</sup>

Colored Town reached its cultural apogee during the 1930s and 1940s, when the area achieved great renown for its thriving entertainment district and bustling night life. Located along Northwest 2nd Avenue, Colored Town's entertainment strip contained numerous dance halls, hotel lounges, and an array of jazz and blues clubs. Often, these establishments played host to nationally known

entertainers like Nat King Cole, Cab Calloway, and Harry Belafonte. Moreover, the injection of Bahamian music and dance styles gave night life in Miami a unique island flavor. Zora Neale Hurston, herself a product of the Harlem Renaissance, and her Florida Writers' Project associates took note of this Caribbean influence in the 1930s, commenting that nightly in Miami and other towns along Florida's eastern seaboard "the hot drum heads throb, and African-Bahamian folk arts seep into the soil of America."<sup>40</sup>

Colored Town's 2nd Avenue strip also contained a performing-arts theater, several motion-picture theaters, restaurants and kiosks. Accordingly, by the 1930s this section was known as "Little Broadway." In addition, black Miamians engaged in sundry other amusements and leisure activities. The Colored American Legion, for example, organized festivities and parades on military holidays, while most black residents celebrated religious occasions with a variety of festive ceremonies. And, owing to the large Bahamian population, black Miami observed several British holidays as well. Miami blacks also took part in frequent athletic meets, including the Florida Tennis Association's annual tournament for black players from Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and the Bahama Islands.<sup>41</sup>

Additionally, Miami's black community sponsored a plethora of civic leagues, social clubs, and mutual-aid

associations. During the 1910s, for example, the Colored Board of Trade and the Negro Uplift Association of Dade County consistently protested against Jim Crow legislation and police brutality. The Colored Town Civic League, meanwhile, promoted the social reformism characteristic of the Progressive Era. The Negro district contained Red Cross and YMCA affiliations prior to 1920 and a YWCA chapter after 1925. During the 1930s and 1940s, prominent black leaders such as Reverend John E. Culmer took an active role in the local branch of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation--a biracial, Atlanta-based human-relations group that eventually merged into the Southern Regional Council. Among the many other charitable organizations operating in the black community was the Friendship Garden and Civic Club, whose lobbying efforts helped bring about the creation of Miami's black police unit in 1944. In 1936, similarly, this ladies' group built Colored Town's first library, whose Saturday "story hours" for children won city-wide acclaim for "helping to curb juvenile delinquency."<sup>42</sup>

The local black community also contained a number of intellectual and fraternal societies, including a large chapter of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). During the 1920s, the Jamaican-born Garvey attracted a huge national following with his black

nationalist "Back to Africa" ideology and with his strong appeal to race pride at a time when white society consistently denigrated the human worth of African Americans. In brief, Garveyism emphasized the doctrines of self-help and racial solidarity, urging black people to forsake the Anglo-defined culture of America and to channel their energies toward the internal development of their own communities and institutions.<sup>43</sup>

By the early 1920s, the UNIA, Miami Division claimed about 1,000 adherents, while mass rallies in later years added hundreds, if not thousands, of new disciples. As a correspondent for Garvey's *Negro World* reported in 1927, "Garveyism is spreading like wild fire down here in Miami." According to one federal investigator assigned to monitor the local UNIA, most Miami Garveyites were Bahamians who "bitterly resent[ed] the color line as drawn in Florida." Correspondingly, Bahamians in Coconut Grove became popular targets of persecution for the Ku Klux Klan and Miami police, who looked to punish the race-proud immigrants for their defiance of white supremacy. Nonetheless, the Miami UNIA stayed strong until the late 1920s, when bitter infighting, punctuated by intragroup violence and the assassination of one factional leader, weakened the organization. Moreover, Garvey's conviction on federal fraud charges and his subsequent deportation in 1927 seemed

to enervate the whole Garvey movement.<sup>44</sup>

Even during the heyday of Garveyism, however, religion remained the most integral component of African American culture in Miami; at its peak of success, the UNIA never rivaled the institutional pre-eminence of the church. As early as 1904, one Miamian underscored the centrality of religion in the black community by describing Colored Town as "a city of churches." By the 1940s, in fact, black Miami boasted 70 churches--or, roughly one house of worship per every 500 residents--including the largest Protestant Episcopal church in the Southern United States. And, as in most other African American communities, the local ministry provided much of black Miami's community leadership.<sup>45</sup>

Additional civic leadership came from a small, but prosperous, professional class. By the 1920s, this middle class had created in Colored Town a thriving business district that served as the economic hub for the entire metropolitan black community. As researchers for the Florida Writers' Project noted in the 1930s, Miami was one of only a few Florida towns that had "entire city blocks where Negro businesses [were] the only ones to be found." Indeed, Colored Town contained black-owned stores of all sorts, as well as numerous restaurants, boarding houses, hotels, nightclubs, legal offices, insurance and real estate

brokerages, newspapers, service industries, and most other imaginable commercial enterprises. And, because most African American residents made a conscious effort to patronize these black-held establishments, Colored Town's commercial district flourished, making Miami's midtown black section a stable and self-supporting community.<sup>46</sup>

Prior to World War II, the success and self-sufficiency of Miami's black business community held out the promise of social mobility for the city's African American residents. For most Miami blacks, of course, this promise never materialized. Nonetheless, the few rags-to-riches sagas instilled a slight sense of hope in an impoverished and oppressed community that, at the very least, needed something positive upon which to reflect. In like manner, Colored Town's noteworthy cultural achievements and various social diversions doubtless enabled black Miamians to better cope with their otherwise isolated and squalid existence.

Between the late 1940s and the 1960s, though, this situation changed dramatically. During these years, in Miami and many other metropolitan areas, the era of the self-sustaining ghetto community came to an abrupt halt. In cities throughout postwar America, a nonstop barrage of urban-renewal schemes, expressway-construction projects, and racially oriented land-disposal programs transformed the country's urban landscape, frequently undermining the

stability of long-established and historic core-city black communities.<sup>47</sup>

In Miami, the dislocating effects of these public policies brought an end to the social, artistic, and economic prosperity of old Colored Town, which by 1950 was redesignated the Central Negro District, though the area increasingly came to be known as Overtown. During the 1950s and 1960s, especially, highway building and slum-razing efforts in downtown Miami exacted a heavy toll from the mid-city black community. Businesses folded, churches closed, and thousands of Overtown inhabitants lost their homes.<sup>48</sup>

Economic decline and demographic upheaval, in turn, stultified the Harlemesque renaissance that made Depression-era Colored Town a lively, well-known cultural center. "Overtown today," observed the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1982, "sits grimly beneath elevated highways," where "a few small businesses struggle among abandoned and boarded up buildings . . . , vacant lots, regiments of unemployed workers, and overcrowded, rundown housing." Gone were the days of bustling nightclubs and jazz, blues, and arts festivals; no longer did the Nat King Coles of the entertainment world visit Miami's Central Negro District. In sum, wrote one scholar of urban Miami recently, by the late 1960s, "little remained of Overtown

to recall its days as a thriving center of community life, when it was widely known as the 'Harlem of the South.'"<sup>49</sup>

Eventually, the black families chased out of Overtown by urban renewal relocated in new communities. Invariably, though, these new settlements became ghettoized slums, or "second ghettos." Ultimately, the Liberty City area emerged as Miami's largest second ghetto, though there were smaller ones as well. These new black communities, however, lacked the strong professional class and the self-sufficient commercial community of old Colored Town. Moreover, Miami's second ghettos offered residents none of the cultural attractions and recreational amusements characteristic of the black community during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> In brief, Miami's second ghettos suffered from all typical inner-city ills but, unlike the city's original ghetto community, provided most black Miamians with little hope for economic self-betterment or for social diversion from their segregated and degraded surroundings. In this respect, second-ghetto formation in Miami represented the elemental precondition for the Liberty City riot of 1968.

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49. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Confronting Racial Isolation in Miami* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1982), 8; Mohl, "Race and Space in the Modern City," 102.

50. "Statement of Neal Adams, President, Brownsville Improvement Association, Miami, Fla.," *Oversight of Federal Housing and Community Development Programs in the State of Florida*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on Housing of the Committee on Banking and Currency, House of Representatives, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session, Miami, Florida, October, 8, 1971 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 211 (hereafter cited as Hearing on Housing Oversight); "Statement of Athalie Range,

Secretary, Florida State Department of Community Affairs," Hearing on Housing Oversights, 195; Dade County Planning Board, *Survey of Negro Areas* (Miami: Dade County Planning Division, 1951), 22, 29, 34, 75-76; Banner, *Appraisal of Progress*, ix, 68-80.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOWING THE SEEDS OF DISCONTENT: SECOND-GHETTO FORMATION IN MIAMI, 1940-1968

During the mid-1930s, as the Great Depression dragged on with no end in sight, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration initiated a myriad of reforms designed to ease the housing worries of America's hard-pressed citizenry. The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, for example, established the Public Works Administration (PWA) to oversee federal slum-clearance efforts and to develop government-assisted low-income housing programs. In later years, these duties devolved upon the Public Housing Administration (PHA). Meanwhile, other New Deal agencies, such as the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), and the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) initiated federal mortgage reforms and conducted local real estate appraisals in order to provide municipal governments with federal funds to construct affordable housing in their cities.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1930s and 1940s, these federal agencies played a prominent role in shaping Miami's housing market, and their activities laid the foundation for the future

racial and spatial reconfiguration of metropolitan Dade County. In fact, the remodeling of the area's racial demography began as early as 1937 with the completion of Liberty Square, a PWA-funded public housing project for blacks. Built on undeveloped land five miles northwest of downtown Miami, Liberty Square provided a much-needed outlet for blacks living in the city's overcongested Central Negro District. Moreover, the project provided low-cost housing to a poverty-stricken segment of the population in dire need of adequate shelter.<sup>2</sup>

Without question, the need for new and decent black living arrangements in Miami was desperate. Block upon block of row housing, crammed tightly onto small lots and with no more than six feet of space between structures, epitomized residential conditions in the Central Negro District. Such extreme land crowding, in turn, bred high levels of disease and insanitation. Hence, in 1934, the *Miami Herald* decried Colored Town as Miami's "plague spot," as did the *Miami Post* five years later. According to the *Post*, Colored Town's "roadways [were] littered with filth of every description, and flanked by fly-blackened garbage piles, that rotting in the sun, waft their unspeakable odors and disease germs throughout the neighborhood and adjoining white sections." In addition, noted one observer in the early 1930s, Miami's Negro zones contained "little

or no recreational facilities." And, many of Overtown's decrepit shotgun shacks lacked electricity, flush toilets, and hot running water as late as midcentury.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, Liberty Square homes provided black residents with a clean and wholesome environment. Aside from the many storm-proof apartment houses fronting on palm-planted courtyards, the project included a central administration building with a recreation hall, nursery school, kitchen, doctor's office, and federal credit union. Such amiable surroundings doubtless made for a more home-conscious and civic-minded tenantry. In fact, Liberty Square tenants maintained their homes so beautifully that the project soon acquired a reputation as the most attractive public housing development in the country.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, for all Liberty Square's positive attributes, the construction of the project set in motion a decades-long process of private development schemes and public land-usage decisions that had altogether negative consequences for Miami's African American community. In retrospect, it is clear that the completion of Liberty Square constituted but the initial phase in the wholesale transformation of black settlement patterns in Dade County that occurred between 1940 and 1968. Amid this process, Overtown endured a series of community-splintering events that ultimately drove out half of the 36,000 residents who called Overtown

home at midcentury. At the same time, this demographic upheaval resulted in the creation of a number of volatile second ghettos in the metropolitan area.

By the mid-1950s, in fact, the Liberty Square project had itself emerged as the center of a new and rapidly growing black ghetto known as Liberty City. By 1960, Liberty City served as the nucleus for a fifteen-square-mile, nearly contiguous second-ghetto expanse encompassing most of the northwest metropolitan area. Stretching from Brownsville (formerly Brown's Subdivision, or Brown's Sub) a few miles south of the original Liberty Square project to Opa-locka in the northwest corner of the city-county border, Liberty City not only surpassed Overtown as Miami's largest ghetto, but it became the largest single community in metropolitan Dade County as well. Not surprisingly, such rapid demographic transition brought dislocation, chaos, and a host of inner-city ills to Miami's northwest black quarter--problems that ultimately spawned Miami's first ghetto uprising, the Liberty City riot of 1968.<sup>5</sup>

Though few people could have foreseen the ultimate consequences of second-ghetto growth in Miami, the settlement of large numbers of Miami blacks along the city's undeveloped northwestern periphery was largely a pre-planned occurrence. In fact, the achievement of this end, rather than some altruistic desire to better house the city's

low-income minority populace, guided the thinking of proponents of the original Liberty Square project from the start. The motivations of developer Floyd W. Davis and his business partner John Gramling, two of the most active advocates of public housing in Miami, amply evidenced this point.

In the early 1930s, Davis and Gramling formed the Southern Housing Corporation, which was the first company to apply for PWA funds to build a black housing site in northwest Miami. Though the efforts of the company failed, Davis and Gramling remained at the forefront of the public housing crusade. Repeatedly, the two men impressed upon New Deal housing officials the need for black accommodations outside the dilapidated, disease-ridden Central Negro District. In its original PWA application, for example, the Southern Housing Corporation denounced Overtown's sanitary conditions as a "menace to the whole city." Gramling, in particular, sent scores of letters to PWA authorities describing the mid-city slum area as a "cess-pool of disease" and as a health hazard and breeding ground for numerous contagious infirmities.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, the well-being of the local African American community weighed less heavily upon the minds of Davis and Gramling than the pair intimated. As a race-baiting magistrate during the early 1900s, for example, Gramling

had shown little but contempt for Miami blacks. Davis's interest in federal housing measures, meanwhile, stemmed largely from his ownership of the land on which Liberty Square was finally built. Davis also owned many of the unoccupied plats surrounding Liberty Square and, thus, stood to profit tremendously from future black settlement in the area.<sup>7</sup>

Miami's civic leadership also had ulterior motives for promoting the Liberty Square settlement. From the project's inception, Miami city planners and downtown businessmen envisioned Liberty Square as the nucleus of a large African American community that would take in a substantial portion of the mid-city black population. In essence, local policymakers hoped to eliminate the Central Negro District wholesale in order to facilitate the expansion of the city's central business district.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly, in 1936, the Dade County Planning Council unveiled its "Negro Resettlement Plan," which proposed "removing [the] entire Central Negro town" to three "model negro towns" that would be constructed on undeveloped land along Miami's distant northwestern perimeter. The next year, in an address before the Miami Realty Board, local developer and county planning advisor George E. Merrick recommended "a complete slum clearance . . . effectively removing every negro family from the present city limits."

Such black-removal objectives persisted throughout the next decade as well. In 1945, for instance, municipal planners advocated the initiation of a "resettlement program" involving the creation of a "new village" that would siphon off 25,000 central-city blacks. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, a black-run newspaper whose Florida edition enjoyed wide circulation in Miami, reported upon similar plans the next year. Even as late as 1949, City Commissioner R. C. Gardner insisted that the "downtown colored section [would] crumble" under the great "expansion pressure" of the central business zone, giving way to "modern and beautiful commercial development."<sup>9</sup>

Ultimately, these relocation schemes never evolved beyond the planning stages. Nevertheless, during the late 1930s and 1940s, a number of private real estate firms formulated their own plans for guiding the process of black resettlement in northwest Miami. In 1942, for instance, the New Myami Development Corporation, headed by the familiar team of Floyd Davis and John Gramling, petitioned municipal authorities for permission to erect a "model negro settlement" in western Dade County. Recognizing the tremendous profit potential in such a venture, several other development companies made similar requests.<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, these development projects received the backing of local officials who looked to remove the downtown

African American community in order to make room for commercial expansion. These proposals also won approval from many local black leaders. The Miami Colored Chamber of Commerce and the Negro Civic League, which had supported the Liberty Square project in the 1930s, enthusiastically endorsed the construction of new housing for blacks. No doubt, rank-and-file Overtown residents, too, viewed the proposed northwestern developments as an opportunity to escape the central-city pesthole in which they currently resided.<sup>11</sup> Even the local Ku Klux Klan lent support to the idea of black settlement along the distant fringes of the city. In a letter to county commissioners in 1942, both the Dade County Klan No. 26 and the John B. Gordon Klan No. 24 billed the removal of the midtown black presence as "the greatest good to the greatest number."<sup>12</sup>

Yet, the northwesterly expansion of Miami's African American community encountered stiff opposition as well. At the head of this resistance stood white slumlords who saw slum clearance as a threat to their Overtown investments. Indeed, these landlords profited immensely by exploiting the ill-quartered black rack-renters downtown. Overtown slumlords, therefore, opposed the original Liberty Square project and all subsequent efforts to build black housing outside the Central Negro District. Seizing upon the McCarthyite hysteria of the early cold war years, Overtown

slumlords raised the specter of communism and socialized housing during the 1950s to defeat a series of public housing proposals that would have provided mid-city ghetto residents with decent accommodations elsewhere in Miami. Hence, charged local housing reformer Elizabeth L. Virrick in 1958, "the opposition to any change in the status quo here is unbelievable and is carried on by the . . . people who own the extensive and profitable Negro slums."<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, northwestern development projects met with a flurry of protest from white Miamians living in close proximity to Liberty City. As early as 1935, in fact, white residents in this region formed a Nor'west League to protest the construction of the Liberty Square project in the vicinity of their community. As the secretary of this organization told PWA authorities, "everybody thinks this model negro settlement idea is lovely--for somebody else's neighborhood." Likewise, Louise Pencke, a northwest Miami homeowner and secretary of the Miami Realty Board, conveyed the same type of racism in several letters to the county commission in 1941 and 1942. According to Pencke, black movement into Liberty City put adjacent white communities at the mercy of "negroes on the loose." She also made clear her patriotic willingness to surrender her home, if necessary, for the cause of American freedom. "But," she added, "being compelled to give up one's home to make

possible the building of places for negroes to live is a different thing entirely."<sup>14</sup> As these statements suggest, the waning of the nadir of Miami race relations did not come with great celerity.

In response to public outcries against black settlement around Liberty City, municipal officials rejected all northwestern development schemes during the mid-1940s and imposed a moratorium of sorts upon the opening up of new areas for Negro occupancy. To remedy black housing shortages, then, the Dade County Commission recommended in 1945 that metropolitan Negro districts "be replanned to the limit of their present area capacity thus providing additional housing for 26,000 persons." This course, so went the logic, would minimize racial conflict by allowing the northwest black section to expand "within its present bounds" rather than extending into outlying white regions.<sup>15</sup> Between 1945 and the early 1950s, county planners did permit some gradual expansion of black residential space, but on a strictly "'controlled' basis" so as not to disrupt Miami's segregated living patterns. Furthermore, despite the U.S. Supreme Court's 1917 ban on racial zoning, the Dade County Commission brazenly enacted a Jim Crow zoning ordinance in 1945 specifying certain boundaries as "the dividing line between the White and Colored people in Dade County."<sup>16</sup>

Though these measures ensured the eventual overcrowding

and ghettoization of Miami's northwest black regions, the "controlled" expansion of black residence allowed those developments to grow slowly and relatively orderly into the 1950s. Despite noticeable levels of slum conditions, for example, in 1950 the three major northwestern black areas--Liberty City, Brownsville, and Opa-locka--had almost normal population densities that were 70 to 80 percent lower than those in the Central Negro District. And, despite the absence of recreational space, these communities offered residents a quasi-suburban environment. As of 1950, in fact, Liberty City's owner-occupancy rate of 22 percent ranked highest among Miami's black sections. Many Brownsville families owned their own homes as well. And, between 1946 and 1951, about 2,000 modern apartment houses and single-family dwellings were built in Opa-locka and the adjoining Bunche Park subdivision.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, this suburban atmosphere did not long survive in northwest Miami. In the long run, the decisions of metropolitan planners guaranteed the ghettoization and overpopulation of the Liberty City area. Other public agencies contributed to this outcome as well. As early as 1936, for example, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) redlined much of northwest Miami, including huge tracts of undeveloped land.<sup>18</sup>

A mainstay in housing markets nationwide, redlining was a discriminatory appraisal method whereby property assessors designated low-income, high-minority tracts as hazardous, poor-investment locations. Consequently, bankers and mortgage lenders routinely denied "high-risk" residents in redlined districts loan money to move into better neighborhoods or even to improve their existing accommodations. Thus, redlining ensured the continued segregation and physical decay of inner-city areas. The fact that northwest Miami was largely undeveloped at the time of its redlining indicates that the FHA and HOLC slated that section of Dade County as the primary area for future African American settlement.<sup>19</sup>

Even during the nationwide housing boom following the end of World War II, redlining and racial zoning deprived most Miami blacks of the increased residential opportunities enjoyed by white Americans at that time. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, observers from such disparate groups as the city's Negro Service Council, the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA), and the University of Miami's Bureau of Business and Economic Research documented the near total exclusion of African Americans from local mortgage and home-financing markets. As late as 1960, in fact, housing reformer Elizabeth L. Virrick reported that "until recently" Dade County blacks were

routinely denied FHA-insured mortgage loans.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, African Americans in Miami proved to be aggressive home seekers despite their inability to obtain home-related financing. Correspondingly, by the mid-1940s, enterprising real estate brokers came to see Miami's black community as an untapped reservoir of housing consumers. As one HHFA agent wrote in a 1948 Miami field report, local blacks were "able, willing, and anxious" to secure wholesome living space, "thus providing a substantial market for both rental units and privately owned homes." A few years later, the Greater Miami Urban League reiterated this point, commenting that "enlightened sources view the non-white population as a potential housing market that has not been fully explored." For private builders, though, exploiting the black housing market proved difficult, since Dade County's plans for the "controlled" expansion of African American residence often disallowed the construction of whole new black subdivisions. Hence, to increase the supply of black housing around Liberty City, developers resorted to blockbusting--that is, to managing the racial turnover of existing white neighborhoods in northwest Miami.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, blockbusting accelerated the pace of second-ghetto growth in the area surrounding Liberty City. This process also engendered decades of racial tension in Miami--not only among white residents who opposed black

movement into their neighborhoods, but also among most local real estate interests. Indeed, the mainstream real estate industry viewed second-ghetto promoters as renegade developers. After all, the willful disruption of the racial or ethnic integrity of established communities was a serious breach of ethics according to both local and national real estate standards. Nevertheless, the potential dividends to be reaped from exploiting the black housing market loomed too large for many Miami developers to ignore.<sup>22</sup>

Wesley E. Garrison emerged as Miami's first genuine blockbuster during the 1940s. A prominent speculator and home builder, Garrison owned much of the property around Brownsville. By 1945, Garrison began moving black residents into working-class white neighborhoods on the fringes of Brownsville's black section. This alteration in African-American residential patterns hardly conformed to the "controlled" process envisioned by civic leaders who, according to the *Miami Herald*, furiously fought Garrison's efforts to extend the "negro settlement boundaries of Brownsville." Finally, the Dade County Commission passed its 1945 racial-zoning ordinance to prevent Garrison from further subverting the residential color line.<sup>23</sup>

Undeterred, Garrison challenged the legality of racial zoning before the Dade County Circuit Court, where Judge Stanley Milledge ruled in favor of Garrison's African

American clients. Appealing this decision to the Florida Supreme Court in 1946, county officials defended their racial-zoning policy as pursuant to a 1937 state statute investing county governments with broad police power to regulate matters of building and zoning. As the Florida justices noted, however, the 1937 act empowered counties to regulate only such typical urban planning matters as building height, lot sizes, and population densities; the law made no authorization for zoning on the basis of race or color. Moreover, as Judge Milledge had done, the justices explained that if the state law had made such racial provisions, it would have done so unconstitutionally by violating the U.S. Supreme Court's 1917 directive in *Buchanan v. Warley*, which voided racial-zoning laws as repugnant to the due-process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus, the Florida court declared Dade County's racial-zoning code null and without force in law.<sup>24</sup>

The annulment of race-specific zoning procedures paved the way for Garrison to effect complete racial transition in Brownsville. This process met with considerable contention, though, as segregation-minded whites endeavored to preserve the lily-white complexion of their communities. Between 1945 and 1948, for instance, the Ku Klux Klan went on a cross-burning spree in black Brownsville, while other white mobs staged armed parades through black areas. As

the *Pittsburgh Courier* reported, these efforts were meant "to prevent Negroes from expanding their residential section" into previously all-white neighborhoods. In one case, the Klan escalated its fiery-cross campaign to include torching the homes of two African American families who dared to cross Brownsville's color line. Thus, as Garrison complained to Governor Millard Fillmore Caldwell in 1946, the Klan emerged as an aggressive enforcer of residential segregation in postwar Miami.<sup>25</sup>

Miami blacks remained unintimidated, however. Through their own indomitable human agency, local blacks continued to seize the opportunities created by blockbusting realtors like Garrison and to risk their lives in order to find better housing on the hostile edges of white Brownsville. Certainly, then, one local black newspaper encapsulated the mood of large numbers of African American home seekers in a 1949 headline that read: "KKK Burns Three Crosses--So What?" As this piece noted, "the day has passed when the mere burning of a cross . . . or the parading of hooded cowards can wreak fear" among Miami's African American citizens.<sup>26</sup>

When white terrorism failed halt black infiltration into Brownsville's neighborhoods-in-transition, white resistance finally gave way to massive "white flight" from the area during the 1950s. Thus, while roughly half of

Brownsville's population was white in 1950, a decade later Brownsville had become an all-black community that formed the southern flank of Miami's mammoth northwest ghetto. By that time, Brownsville began to show the signs of two decades of feverish second-ghetto growth. In contrast with the community's semi-suburban environment at midcentury, Brownsville had by 1960 degenerated into a blighted and impoverished inner-city borough with living standards only marginally better to those in the city's Central Negro District.<sup>27</sup>

This suburb-to-ghetto transformation occurred in Opa-locka as well during the 1950s. In the early part of that decade, developers Milton H. Davis and Julius Gaines began building black housing in the region of Opa-locka east of Northwest 27th Avenue--the city's unofficial color line, which held until the late 1960s. Much of this housing, including the 1,400-unit Bunche Park subdivision, was of the single-family variety. Yet, these dwellings suffered from faulty construction, as evidenced in 1950 when a minor hurricane wrenched off the roofs of hundreds of Bunche Park homes. Moreover, unlike white communities west of 27th Avenue, black Opa-locka grew increasingly run-down and congested during the 1950s. Hence, by the early 1960s, Opa-locka formed the extreme northern segment of Miami's northwest ghetto colossus.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time that Garrison, Davis, and Gaines were engineering the racial transition of Brownsville and Opa-locka, Malcolm B. Wisehart and John A. Bouvier began pushing out the Negro boundaries of Liberty City. Well-known Miami slumlords, Wisehart and Bouvier had holdings in virtually every black district in the city. They also owned the Knight Manor apartment complex in Edison Center, a white neighborhood on the eastern fringes of Liberty City. When a substantial portion of Knight Manor remained vacant in 1951, Bouvier and Wisehart renamed the complex Carver Village and began renting units to blacks, thereby touching off a tension-filled period of second-ghetto conflict.<sup>29</sup>

Immediately, Edison Center whites organized to prevent the further expansion of black settlements. In August 1951, neighborhood residents formed a citizens' action committee "to protect [their] Southern way of life" from the possibility of residential integration. The chairman of this group, Ira D. Hawthorne, also helped organize the Dade County Property Owners Association, which arraigned Wisehart and Bouvier for "forsaking the welfare of their community and neighbors" by moving "colored tenants in[to] a long established white neighborhood." At the same time, this consortium appealed to Florida Governor Fuller Warren for assistance in maintaining the system whereby "white

people . . . [lived] with white people, and colored with the colored." In conjunction with the Edison Center Civic Association, Hawthorne's group also petitioned the Miami City Commission to invoke "emergency police powers" to evict all Negroes from Carver Village, but to no avail.<sup>30</sup>

No matter, the Ku Klux Klan had already stepped in to oversee the eviction process itself. Throughout the summer of 1951, Miami Klansmen disseminated hate literature in Edison Center, kindled bonfires in black-occupied sections of the neighborhood, and organized armed white parades through Carver Village. Fearing that such demonstrations might lead to bloodshed, city commissioners took action to settle the Carver Village controversy in September. Essentially, the commission resolved to condemn Carver Village and to acquire it through eminent domain for purposes of converting the site into a police sub-station and a sewage-treatment plant, which would provide a buffer zone between white and black communities in the Liberty City locality.<sup>31</sup>

Long before these proceedings began, though, three dynamite bombings of unoccupied Carver Village buildings brought second-ghetto tensions in Miami to life-threatening heights. Miraculously, nobody was hurt by the blasts, which occurred between September and December. During the same period, terrorists also bombed several Jewish synagogues

and one Catholic church in Miami.<sup>32</sup> Concurrently, a similar pattern of violence seemed to overtake the entire state. In late 1951, for example, Central Florida Klansmen orchestrated the bombing-murder of state NAACP president Harry T. Moore and his wife. Likewise, 1951-1952 witnessed an outburst of police-related killings and maimings of African Americans in various Florida communities, including Homestead in south Dade County.<sup>33</sup>

This statewide rash of violence earned Florida and Miami a considerable amount of unwanted national attention. The *New York Times* and *The Nation* magazine, for example, carried extensive coverage of the Carver Village bombings and the Moore assassination.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in a March 1952 letter to Governor Fuller Warren, the Stockton, California branch of the NAACP excoriated Florida's justice system for failing to apprehend those responsible for the "murders of Mr. and Mrs. Harry T. Moore and [for] the violent outbreak of other terroristic acts against Negroes, Jews, and Catholics." Several months later, Florida NAACP leader Robert W. Saunders demanded that Warren take steps to end "the reign of unjustified killings of Negroes by so-called law enforcement officers." Such atrocities, asserted Saunders, were "making . . . Florida the 'laughing example of Democracy' to the world."<sup>35</sup>

Yet, many whites thought differently. In late 1951,

for instance, a New York resident identifying himself as "A lover of the South" told Governor Warren that the Carver Village episode was "a fine happening," regrettable only in that "there [were] no casualties." According to this man, such bombings were beneficial means for "keep[ing] unruly niggers . . . in place." The Dade County Property Owners Association, meanwhile, went so far as to accuse Miami blacks of dynamiting local synagogues in order to win sympathy from the city's Jewish community. Apparently, Miami police believed likewise; they arrested two black suspects in relation to the bombing of a Hebrew school and jailed the pair for two days until verifying the men's alibis.<sup>36</sup>

The whole Carver Village investigation, in fact, substantiated the unflattering analysis of Florida law enforcement put forth by Florida and California NAACP officials in 1952. Although the concurrent bombings of black residences and Jewish and Catholic centers clearly smacked of the patented efforts of white-supremacist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, Miami Police Chief Walter Headley refused to view the various incidents as even remotely linked. Furthermore, despite the Klan's activities in Edison Center prior to the bombings, not to mention its earlier terroristic maneuvers in nearby Brownsville, local police did not question a single Klansman

in connection with the explosions. Instead, Chief Headley insisted that the Carver Village bombings were "part of a Communist plot to incite racial hatred."<sup>37</sup>

Headley's halfhearted investigation of the Carver Village bombings came as no surprise to most Miamians. As Headley admitted several years later, these were the "old days" when Miami police commonly dismissed complaints from Liberty City as "just another nigger cutting." Moreover, Headley defended the KKK as "an American law-abiding organization." While covering the Carver Village affair for *The Nation*, however, free-lance journalist and former Florida Writers' Project director Stetson Kennedy offered a more accurate depiction of the Klan: "The local Klaverns have long used terror to keep Negroes inside the ghettos assigned to them, and their program for exploiting any minority has included anti-Semitism." In conformity with this description, federal inquiries in 1952 linked Miami's John B. Gordon Klan with the Carver Village bombings. By that time, though, the evidence was too fragmented to issue indictments. Headley, meanwhile, continued his racist policies for decades and, by doing so, played a key role in the fomentation of Liberty City's riot of 1968.<sup>38</sup>

At any rate, as was the case earlier in Brownsville, white scare tactics and violence failed to stop black Miamians from moving into white communities on the outskirts

of Liberty City. Following the Carver Village incidents, in fact, the pace of racial turnover accelerated in Miami's northwest neighborhoods. Between 1957 and 1958, for example, African American families began buying homes in Orchard Villa, a white subdivision separating Liberty City from Brownsville. Despite white protest marches, sporadic cross burnings, and numerous death threats, blacks continued to surge into the vicinity and to seek enrollment of their children in the all-white neighborhood school. Such developments triggered rapid white flight from the area, so that by 1959 Orchard Villa had become an all-black locale. Within the next two years, this process of racial transition repeated itself throughout the remaining white residential zones in northwest Miami, thereby allowing Liberty City and Brownsville to merge into a single second-ghetto colossus.<sup>39</sup>

About the same time, black Miamians encountered the initial shock waves produced by Florida's involvement in the federal interstate highway program. Inaugurated in the late 1950s for purposes of national defense, commercial stimulation, and transportational advancement, the federal highway program provided America's urban centers with a multitude of practical benefits. Nonetheless, the erection of a far-flung national highway network also had negative consequences, especially for low-income householders in the oldest and poorest urban communities and in racial

or ethnic inner-city enclaves. Commonly, federal and state road engineers plotted highway routes directly through these neighborhoods, destroying the social underpinnings of formerly stable, if aged and physically worn, cultural centers.<sup>40</sup>

In Miami, the historic black district in Overtown became one of many such communities to fall before the juggernaut of "progress." During the 1950s and 1960s, Interstate-95 tore through the mid-city Negro area, uprooting thousands of residents and forcing them into ghetto pockets elsewhere in Dade County. In this respect, highway construction and kindred urban-renewal activities became potent second-ghetto shapers in Miami; and they proved to be far more disruptive than the efforts of blockbusting real estate agents or of Jim Crow-resistant individual black home seekers.<sup>41</sup>

Generally, freeway proponents in Florida gave little forethought to the broad social implications of the highway program. Instead, politicians and entrepreneurs entertained visions solely of expressway-engendered economic gain and infrastructural improvement.<sup>42</sup> As one Miami realtor posited in a 1959 letter to U.S. Senator and former Florida governor Spessard L. Holland, nothing was "more important to the prosperity and well-being of the citizens of Florida than the interstate highway program." Likewise, other members

of the business community billed the highway project as "a priceless boon to Florida tourists and Florida's tourist industry." For reasons such as these, Florida officials became early and avid participants in the interstate-making process.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, state highway planners and local businessmen envisioned roadway construction as an expedient for the eradication of urban blight and for the reclamation and redevelopment of inner-city space. Hence, in 1957, one Miami developer encouraged Florida road officials to use expressway construction to remove the "slum type buildings housing negroes" in the city's urban core. Other city boosters urged a similar course, reviving decades-old plans for the extirpation of the Central Negro District and for the corresponding growth of the midtown business district. In 1956, therefore, with these aims in mind, the Florida State Road Department routed the downtown-Miami leg of Interstate-95 through a blighted, but densely settled, section of Overtown. Though this stretch of freeway ultimately eliminated many of the ramshackle neighborhoods adjacent to the city's commercial core, time would show that, as a maneuver in slum clearance, highway building in Miami failed dismally.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the authors of Miami's expressway program were remarkably short-sighted. As Monsignor Bryan Walsh,

a local community activist and director of the Catholic Services Bureau for the Archdiocese of Miami, stated in a 1981 interview: "What is clear is that the planners had little understanding or concern for the human problems involved."<sup>45</sup> This fact became apparent during the intense freeway building of the 1960s, when the I-95 right-of-way tore through the heart of Overtown, razing thousands of black housing units and the entire black business district. In 1966 alone, the construction of one massive interchange network obliterated the housing of approximately 10,000 people.<sup>46</sup>

Hence, by the end of the decade, the Dade County Community Relations Board could report to the *Miami News* that expressway construction and concomitant urban-renewal endeavors had displaced about half of Overtown's inhabitants. Testifying before a House of Representatives' subcommittee in 1971, one Community Relations Board officer delivered a poignant elegy on the fate of Miami's once-thriving mid-city black precinct: "What was once a viable community of 36,000 is now an eroding, disjointed living area for 16,000; 60 percent of whom are under 21 and of these 50 percent with only one parent at home." Clearly, black Miamians realized little "progress" by way of the interstate highway system. For them, expressway building was a community-sundering experience that transformed the

"Harlem of the South" into a desolate urban wasteland.<sup>47</sup>

Understandably, highway building had a profound impact upon the racial demography of Dade County, scattering thousands of Overtown blacks pell-mell throughout the region. Yet, the social ramifications of interstate construction were not unforeseen. As housing reformer and antihighway activist Elizabeth Virrick informed Florida's road bureau in May 1957, "the pathway of the new expressway will cause great hardship to the Negroes in the Central Negro area, . . . who will be displaced." Two months earlier, the *Miami Herald* addressed the central issue in an article entitled "What about the Negroes Uprooted by Expressway?" A few days later, the city's black newsweekly, the *Miami Times*, did likewise, asking "where will these people go?" J. E. Preston, president of the Greater Miami Urban League, voiced similar concerns in April, urging Governor LeRoy Collins and state road bureau chief Wilbur E. Jones to plan for the social repercussions of Miami's freeway project. Like Virrick and the *Miami Times*, the Urban League recommended an official program of relocation assistance for residents dislodged by the I-95 right-of-way.<sup>48</sup>

These importunings notwithstanding, local officeholders and state road authorities made little provision for the resettlement of Overtown's displanted populace. In 1959, the Dade County Manager's Office did suggest the creation

of an official agency to administer any forthcoming relocation program, but neither the agency nor the program ever materialized. Thus, complained the Citizens' Housing and Planning Council of Dade County in 1960, municipal authorities "have done very little to meet the problem" of relocation housing, despite their "solemn promise" in 1958 "to assist families displaced by . . . governmental action." A decade later, the *Miami Herald* made the same point in a sarcastic critique of local highway-building achievements: "A splendid expressway system laced the community in concrete at the expense of thousands of people whose dwellings were leveled before anyone thought to ask where they would find shelter."<sup>49</sup>

Without relocation assistance, Overtown's unseated residents found resettlement options limited. Because discriminatory covenants and redlining practices of the real estate industry precluded any significant deconcentration of the dislocated population, Overtown's uprooted occupants had little alternative but to crowd into existing pockets of African American residence--mainly Liberty City. In the mid-1960s, the Miami Housing Authority and the newly chartered Dade County Department of Housing and Urban Development (known as "Little HUD") finally began building relocation housing sites. As the National Urban League and state and local NAACP organizations discovered, though,

these agencies, too, perpetuated patterns of residential segregation by locating new housing projects in existing all-black districts. Moreover, the amount of public housing built was minuscule. Hence, the majority of displaced blacks found new quarters with the help of profit-hungry slumlords, who looked to realize tremendous gain from managing the resettlement process themselves.<sup>50</sup>

Foremost among this cadre was Luther L. Brooks, whose Bonded Collection Agency had been collecting rents for and representing the interests of Overtown slumlords since the 1930s. As public spokesmen for the slumlords, Brooks had for decades fought every plan for downtown slum razing, commercial expansion, and urban renovation, all of which required the removal of central-city blacks and, thus, jeopardized slumlord investments in Overtown rental housing. Hence, Brooks initially opposed the Overtown route of I-95, which he realized would destroy wide swaths of white-owned rental property in the Central Negro District.<sup>51</sup>

Unable to change the expressway pattern, though, Brooks and his associates became aggressive second-ghetto boosters by the early 1960s. At that time, Overtown landlords began purchasing properties in Brownsville, Liberty City, and adjoining white communities so that when I-95 finally tore through Miami's mid-city black quarter they would be well-positioned to transfer their operations to Miami's northwest

sector. In fact, while state and local governments declined to provided highway and urban-renewal victims with relocation aid, the Bonded Collection Agency began an unofficial resettlement program of its own, supplying blacks with moving vans and relocation housing in Liberty City and nearby transitional neighborhoods. Thus, as the *Miami Herald* reported in 1963, Brooks "helped break the boundaries of the old Negro ghettos," moving African American families "into border areas, then pushing the borders." In this respect, Brooks became a literal prime mover in the development of Miami's northwest ghetto region.<sup>52</sup>

Naturally, the accommodation of most of Overtown's 18,000-20,000 homeless refugees had a dramatic impact upon the demographic and spatial composition of Liberty City. As population densities soared, blacks began moving into neighboring white communities at an accelerated pace. The resultant white flight from these areas hastened the process of racial turnover that blockbusters like Malcolm Wisehart and Wesley Garrison initiated in the Liberty City vicinity years earlier. Amid such rapid growth, Liberty City expanded beyond Miami's city limits into unincorporated Dade County, absorbing the smaller Brownsville Negro district in the process. By the early 1960s, then, Liberty City emerged as the hub of a sprawling black corridor stretching from Brownsville to Opa-locka in the northwestern

quadrant of the metropolitan area. And, as late as 1968, this sector continued to spread at the rate of a block and a half per week.<sup>53</sup>

Under these circumstances, Liberty City's once-suburban character quickly succumbed to the encroachments of urban decay. By 1960, the area's widely-spaced buildings and single-family dwellings had vanished into historic memory. In their places now stood "concrete monsters"--multi-storied apartment complexes whose lack of amenities neatly complimented their poor design. According to Dewey Knight, who in the late 1960s became the first black to serve on the Dade County Manager's staff, the supply of these dwellings increased rapidly to accommodate the rising tide of refugees driven out of Overtown by "something called urban renewal, which ended up being urban removal." As Knight observed, this chain of events reduced Liberty City from an erstwhile "area for upward mobility" to a spiritless inner-city zone consisting of little more than tattered tenement housing and asphalt pavement. Another South Floridian made the same point in a 1963 letter to Governor Farris Bryant: "Five years ago [northwest Miami] was one of the newest and nicest sections of Miami, now look at it. It is dieing block by block."<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the sustained inrush of Overtown blacks all but ensured the rampancy of overcrowding and slum conditions

in Liberty City. Under the weight of unmitigated demographic irruption, living standards quickly degenerated. Crime rates mounted, while the area's once-impressive owner-occupancy rate plummeted to near nothingness. County welfare rolls swelled with new cases from Liberty City, as employment opportunities dwindled with the ingress of each new group of highway-displaced residents. Housing conditions, meantime, spiraled downward amid excessive and shoddy construction of "concrete monsters." Reflecting upon these developments in 1969, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded that unrestrained population growth, ineffective planning, and the quick-for-profit construction and rental of high-density, low-maintenance apartment units had "destroyed the original concept of a more civilized and liveable low-cost housing area." Truly, by the 1960s, Liberty City had evolved from a "model" public housing project into a depressed and blight-ravaged urban sprawl, whose population of 45,000 made it far and away Miami's largest ghetto.<sup>55</sup>

On the whole, then, Miami's interstate-spawned program of slum razing and urban beautification fell far short of its intended objectives. Rather than revitalizing blight-plagued sections of town, the erection of Miami's expressway system hastened the formation of a vast second ghetto on the outskirts of northwest Miami. As Neal Adams,

president of the Brownsville Improvement Association, noted in testimony before a congressional housing committee in 1971, highway building and urban renewal "perpetuated racial and economic ghettos" in Miami through a process of "slum displacement rather than replacement." State community-affairs secretary Athalie Range, who served as Miami's first black city commissioner in the late 1960s, made the same observation. According to Range, the demolition of black housing in Overtown did little to relieve urban slum conditions, since uprooted families merely "found refuge housing in the substandard units outside of the city of Miami."<sup>56</sup>

During the early and mid-1960s, when highway building first shifted into high gear, only a handful of Miamians thought to consider the long-range implications of the coming of I-95. Hence, few people listened when antifreeway crusader Elizabeth Virrick warned against "the helter-skelter spewing out of expressways without proper forethought and planning." And, scarcely a soul took heed when she impugned expressways as "Great Frankensteinian monsters" that menaced to bring devastation, disfigurement, and other "grim results" to the city. Yet, Virrick's dark visions ultimately came to pass.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, through its racial and spatial reordering of Miami's urban landscape, interstate construction brought

the grimmest of results to Dade County--the Liberty City riot of 1968. Without question, unrestrained second-ghetto growth in Liberty City played a huge role in the origination of Miami's first racial disorder. And, of course, highway construction unleashed that growth via the destruction and dislocation of Miami's central-city black community. Admittedly, Overtown was the most wretched place to live in the whole metropolitan area. Nevertheless, as African American attorney and one-time Florida cabinet member Jesse McCrary recently asserted, "Overtown had a history."<sup>58</sup> In other words, Overtown was a bona fide, self-contained community with deep roots and a sense of identity and heritage.

Miami's second ghettos, however, boasted none of these qualities. Liberty City, for example, lacked the established professional class and self-sufficient business community of Overtown. When I-95 leveled black commercial facilities and community centers downtown, these establishments did not resurface in the second ghettos. Thus, while I-95 left Overtown a gutted no-man's-land of boarded-up shops, condemned buildings, and rubble-cluttered empty lots, it also left the Liberty City area far more unstable and volatile than were previous ghettos in Miami. At the end of the expressway-building era, noted the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1982, Liberty City emerged

as "a severely depressed area with inadequate housing, a high unemployment rate and a pervasive sense of hopelessness and anger."<sup>59</sup> From this milieu did the 1968 rebellion rather easily take shape.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### BLACK ACTIVISM AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN MIAMI, 1940-1968

During the 1950s and 1960s, as urban-renewal measures, interstate highway construction, and intense second-ghetto development rent the social fabric of black Miami, the city's African American community also entered the modern civil rights era. This period marked an age of unparalleled social progress for Miami blacks, which in some ways counterbalanced the many negative events that befell the black community during these years. In Miami and throughout the South, the civil rights movement brought an end to the near century-long reign of Jim Crow. Yet, this Second Reconstruction proved to be a force of considerable social disruption as well. Despite its many positive achievements, the civil rights movement contributed to the sense of uneasiness and volatility that pervaded Miami's ghettos during the 1960s--the very atmosphere from which the 1968 riot in Liberty City sprang forth.

According to conventional wisdom, the civil rights movement began in earnest following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 school-desegregation ruling and, with guidance from

strong national leaders and national organizations, came to fruition in the 1960s when the federal government enacted a multiplicity of laws mandating racial equality. Recent scholarship posits otherwise. As sociologist Aldon Morris has convincingly argued, most civil rights struggles were community-level affairs emerging from local circumstances and guided by community leadership that was often far removed from national decision-making processes. Thus, the Second Reconstruction consisted of many separate civil rights movements springing from numerous distinct movement centers. This was certainly the case in Miami, where the crusade for racial equality took shape from community institutions and indigenous leadership rather than from some elite cadre of figures presiding over a centralized and nationwide undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, traditional interpretations of the civil rights movement often overlook the fact that in many communities, including Miami, liberty-conscious citizens of both races had organized movements for civil equality long before the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. As historians Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein have recently written, by the mid-1940s "civil rights issues had reached a level of national political salience that they would not regain for another fifteen years."<sup>2</sup> In Miami, in fact, African Americans

began establishing a tradition of concerted resistance to Jim Crow by the late 1930s. Initially, much of this activism focused upon the goal of political empowerment. On the national level, civil rights tacticians like Martin Luther King followed a similar course of action in the 1960s, insisting that black Americans could not appreciably enhance their social and economic status without first acquiring and exercising political power. But Miami's African American leadership began operating under this premise far sooner than King and his contemporaries made voting rights the cornerstone of their race-advancement strategies.<sup>3</sup>

Miami blacks made their first major demonstration of political power in 1939, when black community leaders sought to capitalize upon the 1937 rescission of Florida's state poll tax by launching a voter registration campaign among local blacks. Prior to that time, Miami blacks had remained more or less politically dormant. As several black citizens informed the NAACP in the early 1930s, the Ku Klux Klan, hostile election inspectors, and delinquent capitation payments prevented most blacks from voting. Following the 1937 poll-tax repeal, however, growing numbers of African Americans became willing to take their chances against white ruffians at the polls, suggesting that Florida's capitation law acted as a greater deterrent to

black suffrage than any form of white intimidation. In any event, while stressing the need for better municipal services in black districts, activists like Sam B. Solomon of Miami's Negro Citizens Service League registered about 1,500 people for the May 1939 city commission elections.<sup>4</sup>

Not unexpectedly, the Ku Klux Klan endeavored to keep blacks from the polls. On the eve of the May elections, white-robed Klansmen conducted a motorcade through black residential areas, burning dozens of wooden crosses and hanging black effigies from lampposts with signs attached to them stating "This Nigger Voted." In addition, the Klan distributed leaflets warning "Niggers" to "stay away from the polls." Nevertheless, local African Americans exhibited the same type of agency that they later showed in the 1940s and 1950s, when blacks refused to heed white-supremacist threats and continued to seek better housing beyond the Klan-guarded frontiers of Miami's ghettos. Hence, Miami's black electorate responded to Klan-intimidation campaigns with an unprecedented voter turnout.<sup>5</sup>

Following this demonstration of political activism, Miami's white leadership launched a drive to amend the city charter so as to effectively exclude blacks from municipal primary elections. The Negro Citizens' Service League fought this effort vigorously. As Sam B. Solomon wrote in a letter to Governor Fred P. Cone, "we protest" the

"bill to amend [the] city charter." According to Solomon, this measure "would be an open and direct violation" of African American civil rights. Nonetheless, Florida's legislature approved Miami's charter-reform proposal, and Governor Cone signed the bill into law. Yet, city officials had little success in enforcing this measure. For one thing, the *Miami Herald* denounced the local white-primary idea as wholly unjust and as a "gesture in futility." A large number of ordinary white citizens, meantime, cared little whether or not local blacks voted. And, most important, black Miamians continued to assert their right to vote. As a result, even amid the city's brief flirtation with white-only primaries, black political participation in Miami rose slowly but surely during the early 1940s.<sup>6</sup>

In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court furnished blacks in Miami and the rest of the South with even greater political clout. In *Smith v. Allwright* the nation's highest tribunal found white-only primary elections to be unconstitutional infractions of the Fifteenth Amendment. Previously, the Court had considered white primaries valid if the party in question was a private, rather than a state, organization. Hence, Southern states converted their parties into private clubs that could legally exclude Negroes from their operations. This tactic barred Southern blacks from participating in state elections for decades. In *Smith v. Allwright*,

however, the Supreme Court ruled that political parties could no longer claim to be private groups, as their very nature made them agents of the state. Accordingly, the justices voided the legality of white primaries, which they construed as offensive to the anti-discrimination provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>7</sup>

The white-primary ban gave Southern blacks large-scale access to state political processes for the first time. And, coupled with Florida's earlier poll-tax repeal, the measure paved the way for steady increases in black voter registration in Dade County over the next two decades.<sup>8</sup> Yet, Florida's white leadership hardly welcomed the white-primary decision with open arms. Tom Conely, chairman of the executive committee of state's Democratic party, expressed the sentiments of most Florida officials when he reacted to the ruling in *Smith v. Allwright* by vowing: "We'll certainly resist if possible any attempt to have Negroes vote in our primaries." Correspondingly, the Florida assembly deliberated a number of measures seeking to disfranchise Florida blacks and to "preserve the purity of the ballot."<sup>9</sup>

Despite their incessant bellyaching, though, Florida's leaders opened state primaries to African American electors in 1946.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, though, state law provided for segregation in the electoral process by mandating

separate polling locations for the two races. Generally, election supervisors made the voting process more convenient for white registrants than for blacks. According to a 1958 human-rights audit sponsored by more than a dozen Dade County civic associations, such racial bias at the polls "tend[ed] to discourage Negro voters seeking to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens by voting." Nonetheless, the number of registered African American voters in Florida and Dade County rose steadily throughout the 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

During the early 1960s, the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) stirred local blacks to even higher levels of political activism with its Voter Education Project, a massive voter registration and civic-awareness campaign conducted between 1962 and 1964. One of the many results of this campaign was the formation of the Junior Democrats of Liberty City--an organization consisting of high school seniors from Miami's northwest ghetto region, who came together "to help the future citizens familiarize themselves with civic and community work." With assistance from the NAACP, the Greater Miami Urban League, and several smaller social and religious groups, Greater Miami CORE concluded its Voter Education Project having registered more than 12,000 new voters, whose numbers brought the aggregate total of black voters in Dade County to an all-time high.<sup>12</sup>

The power of African American ballots became manifest in the late 1960s, when Dade County blacks sent one of their own, Joe Long Kershaw, to the state legislature and another, Earl Carroll, to the county commission. Likewise, in 1967, Athalie Range became the first African American to win election to Miami's city commission. When Range accepted a position in the Florida State Department in the 1970s, she was succeeded by black activist ministers Edward T. Graham and Theodore R. Gibson. These leaders, like black public figures throughout the urban South, labored indefatigably to improve the quality of life for blacks in their community. Moreover, black political empowerment forced white authorities to be more responsive to the service needs of their African American constituents.<sup>13</sup>

African Americans in Miami also sought to better their social situation outside the realm of politics; and, again, they did so prior to the *Brown* decision of 1954. In the 1940s, for instance, black Miamians worked to improve local race relations by cooperating with white liberal and leftist groups like the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), and the Civil Rights Congress (CRC). These groups, however, effected little genuine change prior to the civil rights thrust of the 1950s. The Atlanta-based

CIC, for example, sputtered through cycles of decline and renaissance until finally merging into the Southern Regional Council (SRC) in 1944. The SRC, though, never gained a strong foothold in Miami.<sup>14</sup>

The most active of Miami's early civil liberties groups was the Civil Rights Congress. Organized in the late 1940s, Miami's CRC branch consisted mainly of militant blacks, labor rights advocates, and leftist Jews, many of whom were women. The cornerstone of CRC's strategy was interracial "mass action," which it used to call public attention to matters of human rights and racial injustice. Through public rallies and picketing, through protests in print and over the air waves, and through incessant lobbying and political agitation, the CRC sought to expose the ignominy of Jim Crowism in Miami. The association also involved itself in civil liberties litigation, especially in cases concerning police brutality against blacks.<sup>15</sup>

But the CRC had too little time, and too little public support, to significantly redress inequities in Miami's social order. On account of the group's pronounced interracialism, commitment to civil equality, and persistent anti-Klan agitation, the CRC became a target of constant harassment and repression by the KKK and the Miami police. Further, owing to its radical slant and to the communist tendencies of many its pro-labor elements, the CRC fell

victim to the right-wing political demagoguery and anti-communist hysteria of the early cold war years. Conservative officeholders, federal agents, reactionary civic clubs, and a hyperpatriotic press all attacked the CRC as a communist-front organization, putting the group on the defensive and undermining its effectiveness. By May 1950, Miami CRC leader Matilda "Bobby" Graff could report that her group was "practically non-existent," driven to the brink of oblivion by its reactionary adversaries. By the next year, conservative forces had red-baited the Miami CRC out of existence.<sup>16</sup>

Such attacks from the political right did not cease with the dismemberment of the CRC, however. During the age of McCarthyism, anti-communist partisans nationwide assailed the patriotism of just about any human-relations, labor, or liberal-progressive association that voiced dissatisfaction with the status quo. This was especially true in the South, where segregationist conservatives cloaked themselves behind a thick veneer of "Americanism," while denouncing civil rights coalitions as subversive torchbearers of Stalinism.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Reverend Jerry Falwell expressed a fairly typical brand of Southern conservatism when, shortly after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision in 1954, he informed his Virginia parishioners that "the hand of Moscow" was behind the integration movement. In 1956,

likewise, Florida gubernatorial hopeful Sumter Lowry blasted the integration movement as part of an "international Communist conspiracy" to destroy white Christian civilization. Clearly, for Southern votaries of McCarthyism, the line between social activism and socialism was not fine, but invisible.<sup>18</sup>

In Florida, counterprogressive forces sustained their McCarthyite attacks upon left-wing and civil rights groups throughout the entire decade of the 1950s. In 1954, for instance, a Dade County grand jury launched a crusade against radical labor organizers and old CRC leftists within Miami's Jewish community.<sup>19</sup> Two years later, the state assembly created the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee (FLIC) to look into subversive activities of progressive agencies in the state. The chairmanship of the FLIC went to Charley Johns, a right-wing hard-liner and former Klansman who harbored little sympathy for the civil rights movement.<sup>20</sup>

Until the early 1960s, the Johns Committee worked hard to stifle civil rights activism in Florida by attempting to expose the state NAACP as a communist-front organization; and the committee made Miami's NAACP branch its primary target. Between 1957 and 1963, the FLIC conducted a relentless fact-finding mission in Miami to prove that the "Communist Party and the NAACP are tied up together

in Florida."<sup>21</sup> In reality, noted Shirley Zoloth, chairman of Miami's chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, FLIC proceedings were little more than "witch-hunts" designed "to smoke out reds in the NAACP," as well as "a heavy smear job" intended to discredit civil rights activism in general. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, similarly, insisted that the matter had little to do with communism, but was instead an attempt by the "Cracker dictatorship" to destroy the NAACP and to thwart social progress for African Americans.<sup>22</sup>

The conduct of FLIC investigations largely confirmed these suspicions. Year after year, the Johns Committee subjected Miami NAACP members to batteries of hearings and high-pressure interrogations, hoping to bully the activists into confessing their communist connections. In 1958, for example, one FLIC inquisitor exclaimed that "anyone refusing to answer questions of this committee . . . is not fit to be to be a citizen of Florida." By 1959, the FLIC concentrated its attack upon Father Theodore R. Gibson and Reverend Edward T. Graham, the two most prominent preachers in black Miami. Gibson was local NAACP president while Graham was a former officer in the organization, a member of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and a frequent participant in CORE and Urban League activities.<sup>23</sup>

Neither Gibson nor Graham, nor any other NAACP member, cooperated with the Johns Committee. In fact, after

repeatedly refusing to divulge membership information about their group, Graham and Gibson ended up in court in an effort to halt FLIC harassment. In 1960, Graham won his suit easily before the Florida Supreme Court, but Gibson had to take his plea to the U.S. Supreme Court. Finally, in 1963, the High Court found in favor Gibson, ruling that FLIC attempts to compel the rendition of NAACP membership rolls violated the associational right to privacy guaranteed under the First Amendment to the Constitution.<sup>24</sup>

Gibson's legal victory ended the FLIC's red-baiting campaign against the NAACP. Yet, the anti-communist witch-hunts, in Miami and elsewhere, took a heavy toll, impeding the progress of the civil rights movement. In Miami and many other areas, the "boogey of communism"--as scholar Jack M. Bloom had called it--temporarily forced the African American struggle for equality off the streets and, as a matter of self-defense, into the courts. Moreover, the national offices of groups like the Urban League and the NAACP expended great time and energy proving their national loyalty by adopting strong anti-communist platforms. The preoccupation with flag-waving, however, distracted these organizations from the business of racial advancement. Many mainstream civil rights groups, for example, distanced themselves from left-wing associations like the Civil Rights Congress, thereby spurning what might have otherwise been

productive cross-organizational cooperation.<sup>25</sup> As a case in point, in the late 1950s Florida's state NAACP took care to avoid collaboration with the Southern Conference Education Fund, a biracial, militant integrationist group that federal authorities branded a front for communism.<sup>26</sup>

On the whole, however, Miami's NAACP branch weathered the McCartyite onslaught successfully. By the early 1960s, the anti-communist paranoia had largely dissipated, so that many sensible white Miamians had come to see the NAACP as unjustly victimized in its struggles with the FLIC. No longer public enemy number one, then, the NAACP began to slowly reclaim the membership it lost during its first years of conflict with the Johns Committee. More important, Miami's NAACP branch never ceased functioning completely, as did embattled NAACP groups in several other Southern states. Even during the most repressive periods of FLIC harassment, the Miami NAACP continued to sponsor voter registration drives and to litigate for integrated schools and open public accommodations.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, even while conservative elements hounded Miami's NAACP division, other civil rights groups continued to fight for racial equality. And, this reformist activism often produced some tangible gains. In 1945, for example, local blacks led by clergyman-activist Edward T. Graham effected positive results by conducting a "wade-in" on

Miami Beach. In response to this demonstration, municipal officials reserved Virginia Key Beach for black sea-bathers, who previously had no access to the area's world-famous shoreline.<sup>28</sup> In later years, the pressure of renewed wade-ins compelled Miami's white leadership to open all city beaches to African Americans. Similarly, by the mid-1950s, local Urban League and NAACP affiliates had integrated public libraries and a few other public facilities, as well as the medical staff at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital.<sup>29</sup>

African Americans in Miami won additional gains as the local civil rights movement gathered momentum during the mid-to-late 1950s. In 1956, for instance, on the heels of successful bus boycotts in Montgomery in 1955 and Tallahassee a year later, the local NAACP threatened the Miami Transit Company with similar action, eventually integrating local mass transit operations through litigation in 1957.<sup>30</sup> Following this victory, persistent lobby pressure and legal action on the part of the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Greater Miami Urban League resulted in the integration of Dade County parks, golf courses, and public swimming pools by 1960. Also, in the late 1950s a number of Miami Beach hotels and restaurants--generally those owned by Jews--began to voluntarily desegregate.<sup>31</sup>

Even so, by the late 1950s, black Miamians still had much to accomplish in the way of social advancement and equality. Black housing remained largely substandard, with an inordinate number of residences lacking private baths and other modern conveniences. Public accommodations, such as hotels, restaurants, and theaters, regularly denied service to blacks as late as 1960. Most places of public amusement did likewise, save for municipal golf courses, whose "Monday Only" rule for blacks allowed African American golfers to play once per week. Similarly, many Miami hospitals refused to admit African American patients. As late as 1963, in fact, the only "integrated" facility in most local hospitals was the isolation ward! And, pursuant to the state sanitary code, Dade County maintained separate washroom facilities and drinking fountains for the two races well into the early 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

The degree of racial inequity was especially pronounced in the sphere of employment. According to a 1958 audit conducted by fifteen Dade County human-rights and community-affairs organizations, there were "almost no opportunities for employment for Negroes in private positions other than manual or laboring capacities." A 1953 study by the National Urban League drew similar conclusions. As the Urban League discovered, virtually all of the 1,300 blacks employed by city and county governments worked in laboring,

clerical, or custodial positions. Moreover, not a single Negro firm held contracts or did regular business with municipal governments. The situation was no better in the private sector. In surveying 37 Miami firms employing over 12,000 workers, the Urban League found that only one plant retained an African American in a supervisory post, while only one black workman, a chef, "possibly" performed a skilled job.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, many companies refused to hire African Americans altogether, especially in cases where employees had to meet the public. Until 1965, similarly, Miami blacks suffered the degradation of a city ordinance requiring them to possess identification passes in order to work in white suburbia.<sup>34</sup>

The extent of racial discrimination was particularly gross in Miami's labor unions. Most trade unions excluded blacks outright or maintained separate auxiliary unions for Negroes. These Jim Crow locals, however, offered black craftsmen only second-class membership status. Hence, while workmen in all-black auxiliaries paid union dues to the main local, they seldom received voting rights or privileges equal to those of their white counterparts. During the entire decade of the 1950s, for example, not one of Miami's segregated unions allowed its black members to receive apprenticeship training. Furthermore, most segregated unions operated under "gentlemen's agreements" whereby white

workers plied their trades in white areas while "colored" operatives worked only in black districts. Whenever activity in white areas slowed, though, union bosses commonly "furloughed" black artisans working on black projects and replaced them with white laborers. Under this arrangement, noted local NAACP counsel Howard W. Dixon in 1954, Negro tradesmen received only "a modicum of work."<sup>35</sup>

Such racial employment disparities were most prevalent in local building trades which, as Dade County's largest industry, employed a considerable segment of Miami's black workforce. Unfortunately for black building tradesmen, though, not a single construction-related union accepted Negro applicants, no matter how highly qualified. Hence, black craftsmen had to form their own unions in order to work in Miami as skilled mechanics. By the mid-1950s, therefore, black electricians, plumbers, carpenters, painters, stonemasons, roofers, and hod carriers had all organized their own unions. Yet, these Jim Crow outfits had difficulty conducting business, as white union officials continued to enforce covenants restricting black craftsmen to work sites in black areas. Further, white union managers violated their own gentlemen's agreements whenever it suited them. On more than one occasion in the mid-1950s, union bosses laid off black artisans working on construction projects in black sections of town and replaced them with

out-of-work white laborers, even though these projects had been assigned to the unions' Jim Crow auxiliaries.<sup>36</sup>

Around 1950, the Miami chapter of the Civil Rights Congress organized a Greater Miami Right to Work Committee to combat such inequalities in local building-trades unions.<sup>37</sup> But CRC activists were unable to alter Jim Crow labor practices before right-wing, pro-segregation interests drove their organization underground. Between 1954 and 1955, however, the Miami branch of the NAACP initiated its own workmen's rights campaign in an attempt to "bust" the gentlemen's agreements and to integrate the city's lily-white craft unions. In a short period, these efforts produced positive results. By autumn 1954, after months of intense negotiations between white union representatives and a team of NAACP officers and black business agents, Miami's all-Negro trowel-trades union successfully integrated into the established Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers Local of Dade County.<sup>38</sup>

Yet, integrationist efforts failed in most other areas. In fact, carpenters, tilesetters, painters, and sheetmetal workers unions held firmly to the color bar, refusing to admit qualified black mechanics. In 1955, therefore, the NAACP could report that the carpenters union had not "lifted any color ban" but instead had "provoked more economic discrimination." By the same token, most building-trades

unions continued to prevent black artisans from working outside "colored" sections of the city. In perpetuating this practice long into the 1960s, white union officials often used their groups' bargaining power, as well as more coercive types of suasion, to influence the hiring practices of private developers. In 1955, for instance, when one contractor attempted to employ African American carpenters on a "white" project, he was informed by the white union's business agent that "he'd better lay off if he didn't want something to happen to his building." Even the newly integrated bricklayers local adopted a policy prohibiting the use of interracial work details.<sup>39</sup>

By the 1960s, then, black craftsmen in Miami had made little headway in the area of organized labor. Nonetheless, Miami blacks continued to change their destinies for the better in a number of ways during the 1960s, owing largely to the mass-based protest strategies of the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. In 1960, for instance, a CORE-led economic boycott of Miami supermarkets ended triumphantly when these stores abandoned their discriminatory hiring policies and began adding blacks to their payrolls. And, in early 1962, Greater Miami CORE successfully concluded a year-long campaign of theater stand-ins, giving blacks complete access to that medium of entertainment for the first time.<sup>40</sup>

The most electrifying mass-based demonstrations, though, involved a series of CORE-sponsored sit-ins in 1959-1960 protesting segregation at lunch counters in downtown five-and-dime stores. The practices of these establishments had long been a source of irritation for Miami blacks. While local department stores encouraged black patronage, company policies nonetheless prohibited African American customers from trying on clothes in-house and from receiving service in store cafeterias or lunchrooms.<sup>41</sup> In 1959, Miami's CORE group decided to end this discrimination. No one could have known at the time, however, that the lunch-counter sit-ins would prove to be the crucible of the civil rights movement in Dade County.

Even before the sit-ins began--as early as 1958, in fact--CORE's national office targeted Miami for its nonviolent, direct-action protest strategy. As national CORE director James R. Robinson informed one local activist, "I have been interested in Miami because it is strategic and yet basically not so intolerant as most cities of the Deep South; it is South of the South and could play an important role from that side." Hence, between 1958 and 1960, CORE dispatched several field operatives to Miami and supervised a series of South-wide "interracial action institutes" there. In a very real sense, these training sessions in direct-action tactics produced the shock troops

of the civil rights movement in Dade County.<sup>42</sup>

Miami's CORE division conducted its first wave of lunch-counter sit-ins, known as "testings," between April and June 1959. Initially, the sit-ins involved only two- and four-person interracial teams, and they lasted only a short while. By June, though, many sit-ins consisted of several dozen black and white participants, and some lasted for several hours. Nevertheless, these demonstrations yielded little reward. No blacks received service. There was no violence, however. In fact, as one company spokesman later noted, lunchroom management practiced its own brand of "passive resistance"--peacefully ignoring CORE's interracial testing squads until they left the premises, or closing up shop completely until black demonstrators departed. These tactics left CORE representatives, who were expecting aggressive opposition, a bit stunned. Somewhat shaken by these events, CORE discontinued its sit-in campaign in June and entered a brief period of relative inactivity.<sup>43</sup>

CORE sprang back to life in September, though, when national field agents conducted the first "interracial action institute" in Miami. During this session Miami's CORE group resolved to renew its sit-in campaign, targeting luncheonettes at Jackson-Byron's, McCrory's, and Grant's variety stores. After six consecutive days of picketing

and demonstrations, Jackson-Byron's agreed to integrate its dining facilities, only to renege on this pledge within days. McCrory's and Grant's, too, clung tenaciously to discriminatory service policies.<sup>44</sup> At this point, the scene became ugly. For an entire week in mid-September, CORE mustered 40 to 80 people for daily sit-ins and protest demonstrations at downtown department stores. This escalated degree of militancy provoked company officials to call in the police, who made numerous arrests. Likewise, hostile whites began to mob and harass CORE activists daily. In one case, two sitters-in were beaten by segregationist thugs, while national CORE representative Gordon Carey was "roughed up" by local police and warned to "get out of Miami."<sup>45</sup>

The violence and unsatisfactory results of the September sit-ins caused great discouragement and dissension within CORE's ranks. Many members thought the group should tone down its direct-action approach. Others worried about the state's red-baiting witch-hunts against the NAACP, which by November 1959 were at high tide. A number of CORE members also belonged to the NAACP, and CORE officer Dr. John O. Brown was local NAACP vice-president. Hence, some CORE activists feared that their organization would also "be worked over a bit" by Florida McCarthyites and, thus, advocated maintaining a low profile. More militant

members, meanwhile, proposed stepping up the fight against Jim Crow. Because CORE's leadership could agree on almost nothing, the group remained only moderately active throughout the fall of 1959.<sup>46</sup>

This period, proved critical to the success of the civil rights movement in Miami, as it tested the endurance and mettle of the city's most militant activists. Disheartened and divided, Miami CORE could have easily faded from the scene, as did the Civil Rights Congress a decade earlier. This, then, would have discredited the efficacy of CORE's interracial, direct-action protest strategy and severely reduced the potential for civil rights advancements in Miami. Yet, Miami CORE proved itself worthy of the challenges it faced. By March 1960, inspired partly by student sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina in February, Miami's CORE group was back in action. In cooperation with local ministerial leadership, CORE initiated its most vigorous sit-in campaign, while conducting similar demonstrations and boycotts against discriminatory retail stores.<sup>47</sup>

While these procedures were occurring, the city's leading black activists, businessmen, and preachers--Edward T. Graham, Theodore Gibson, John O. Brown, and CORE chairman Albert D. Moore to name a few--engaged in weeks of heated negotiations with food vendors and shop owners. State and

local officials, such as Governor LeRoy Collins, Miami Mayor Robert King High, and Miamian John B. Turner of Collins's Advisory Commission on Race Relations, also involved themselves in bringing about an end to the lunch-counter struggle. In late March, Collins made a televised address urging Floridians to support the desegregation of dime-store lunch counters. Mayor High, similarly, appointed a special biracial committee to aid African American spokesmen and store managers in their negotiations. Yet, these politicians were mainly concerned with Miami's national image and possible negative affects of racial discord upon the area's tourist industry. Hence, they often urged black leaders to accept a compromise solution to the matter or pressed for additional time to negotiate with downtown merchants.<sup>48</sup>

Miami's black activists rejected these alternatives, though, even while angry food vendors vowed to maintain the color line in their establishments. Such heightened white resistance, in fact, seemed to galvanize the entire civil rights community. By April, the Miami NAACP entered the lunch-counter conflict, threatening to litigate on behalf of CORE demonstrators unless recalcitrant vendors complied with black demands for integration. In addition, NAACP president Theodore Gibson and CORE director Albert D. Moore vowed to lead Dade County Negroes in a South-wide

economic boycott against stores whose dining areas refused to serve African Americans. This demonstration never took place, but additional sit-ins and picketing continued for months. Finally, in August 1960, CORE's direct-action strategy, as well as the resolve that black leaders showed in behind-the-scenes negotiations, proved triumphant, as 28 food-serving chains and independent merchants agreed to serve all patrons without regard to race.<sup>49</sup>

The success of the lunch-counter sit-ins had a dramatic impact upon the civil rights movement in Miami. Once department store lunchrooms integrated, the entire downtown retail trade soon followed. Victory at the lunch counters also made it easier for Miami blacks to integrate other restaurants and public facilities.

Some observers attributed the social and political advancements of African Americans to an improved climate of race relations in South Florida. A common perception, at least outside Miami, was that large numbers of transplanted Northerners and Yankee tourists, coupled with Dade County's increasingly cosmopolitan make-up, made Miami more tolerant and progressive than other Deep South metropolises. Like national CORE executive James R. Robinson, many Americans thought of Miami as "South of the South." And, indeed, some civil rights gains did point to an improved atmosphere of race relations in Miami. During the 1960 sit-ins, for

example, Mayor High's special biracial study committee found that the idea of integrated lunch counters was "no source of irritation" to most ordinary white Miamians. Rather, the committee cited uncompromising store managers who clung stubbornly to offensive company policies as the central problem of the lunch-counter episodes.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, during CORE's Voter Education Project of 1962-1964, voter registration workers reported virtually no incidents of harassment or intimidation. "There has been no overt indication of resistance on the part of the white community," one field operative noted, while applauding the cooperative spirit of most white voting registrars. The Dade County Classroom Teachers' Association demonstrated this same spirit in 1963, when it invited all African American school teachers in Dade County to join the formerly all-white organization. This step made the local teachers' group the only such integrated association in the entire state. Further, by the early 1960s, many white Miamians had come to support Theodore Gibson in his legal struggle to end anti-communist harassment of Miami's NAACP branch. In fact, when Gibson finally won his suit before the Supreme Court in 1963, the *Miami Herald* called the decision "just," while the *Miami News* billed it as "strongly in the American tradition."<sup>51</sup>

Despite these positive examples, however, racial and

ethnic attitudes in Miami were actually little different than those in the rest of the South. As Jewish social activist Bella Fisher informed the Civil Rights Congress in 1948, Miami's progressive image was largely myth. Ruth Perry, secretary of Miami's NAACP chapter, made the same point a decade later when she wrote that Miami had "an appearance of more liberality and freedom than actually exists."<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, as late as the early 1960s, racism, anti-Semitism, religious bigotry, and even nativism exerted a tremendous influence upon human relations in Dade County. In this period, white Miamians deluged Florida's statehouse with complaints about civil rights activities and about the desegregation of public accommodations in Miami. In 1963, for example, one man angrily asked Governor Farris Bryant why a Dade County government building had removed the "colored" and "white" signs from its formerly segregated water fountains and restrooms. A year earlier, a white Miami woman fumed over lunch-counter "sit downs," informing Bryant that the NAACP and CORE were "only trouble makers" that "[were] certainly against all our country stands for." One South Floridian managed to incorporate all major categories of prejudice in his complaint to Bryant. "The negroes," this citizen wrote, "with the help of the Jews and the Cubans have about ruined Dade Co[unty].". And, he

blamed the policies of Catholic President John F. Kennedy for allowing this situation to occur.<sup>53</sup>

Nor did transplanted Northerners uniformly temper such intolerant views. In 1960, one Miami retiree who claimed to have spent "thirty years [among Negroes] in New York's Harlem" expressed a most base form of racism in a letter to John B. Turner, Miami's delegate to Florida's Advisory Commission on Race Relations. According to this man, black civil rights protests were "tribe tactics" of a people who "only a little over a hundred years ago" were "primitive human[s] of the jungle." This citizen evinced particular antipathy toward desegregationist court rulings, which he believed would force "honest, loving white people" to hand over their "lovely daughters" to "natural sex-minded male Negroes." Finally, this man concluded his missive by apprising Turner that he had never known a Negro who did not "have in the back of his mind a 'white woman,' [or] a pair of dice, a dope needle, a razor, or [a] hunting knife in his pocket."<sup>54</sup>

Anti-Semitism was also a powerful social current in civil rights-era Miami. The local Anti-Defamation League, for example, complained about "5 o'clock shadow," meaning that contacts between Jews and Gentiles ceased with the close of the business day. Furthermore, anti-Semitism and white supremacy often went arm in arm. One Miami woman

conveyed a rather typical sentiment in a 1960 letter to Governor LeRoy Collins, when she insisted that "the Communists, [the] NAACP, and the Jews" were promoting "the mongrelization of the white race." Collins also received a mass of correspondence from other Floridians complaining about "race mixing" Jews and about the many Jewish organizations that were "behind the integration of the races." One of these correspondents, in fact, was George Deatherage, a notorious former Klansman and Nazi sympathizer who founded Florida's ultra-racist Knights of the White Camelia.<sup>55</sup>

Yet, the most shocking illustrations of the strong links between racism and anti-Semitism, as well as their ties to general religious bigotry, occurred in the 1950s. During the Carver Village controversy of 1951, for example, the Ku Klux Klan dynamited several African American homes, a few Jewish synagogues, and one Catholic church within a three-month period. As late as 1958, moreover, a race-hate group self-dubbed the "Confederate Underground" bombed a Jewish temple in Miami shortly after some local rabbis came out in support of integration and full citizenship rights for blacks. This group detonated explosives in at least two other cities as well, and its flyers promised "Regular bombings . . . Negroes and Jews our Specialty."<sup>56</sup>

South Florida segregationists fought to preserve the

old racial and social order in other ways, too. As the Southern Regional Council noted in a 1957 report, Florida experienced the strongest upsurge in White Citizens' Council (WCC) activity in the entire region at that time. Generally, WCC groups worked to forestall school desegregation and to keep blacks hemmed in the ghettos assigned to them. In the mid-to-late 1950s, therefore, the citizens' council movement flourished in Miami, as the black demand for integrated schools became louder and as African Americans continued to surge into second-ghetto districts that were rapidly encroaching upon all-white communities. At one point, the citizens' council movement in Miami claimed in excess of 15,000 adherents.<sup>57</sup>

The Dade County Property Owners Association served as the city's principal WCC affiliate, as well as one of several Klan-front groups in the Miami area. Formed during the Carver Village troubles of 1951, this association sought to have all African Americans expelled from Carver Village in order to maintain the residential color line around Liberty City. FBI investigations later linked the property owners consortium, at least peripherally, to the Klan bombings in Carver Village. Nonetheless, by the late 1950s, this citizens' council affiliate was still in business, opposing desegregation measures and seeking legal means to remove black families from white neighborhoods wherein

they had recently settled.<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, then, Miami was not the liberal or egalitarian hotbed that many Americans envisioned. On the contrary, much of Miami's white citizenry confronted progressive social change with massive resistance. Most local and state political leaders embraced this spirit of aggressive conservatism as well. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, Florida's legislature remained under the control of conservative representatives from rural North Florida counties. Typically, this bloc advocated extreme measures for the defense of white supremacy. And, with the exception of LeRoy Collins, all Florida's civil rights-era governors were militant segregationists. Yet, even Collins was no integrationist. As governor from 1954 to 1960, Collins often spoke out in favor of open public accommodations and promoted interracial cooperation. At the same time, though, Collins supported segregation in education, and he won both his terms in office campaigning as a "moderate" segregationist.<sup>59</sup>

The large extent to which white-supremacist doctrine guided Florida politics became painfully obvious as issues of integrated schooling rose to the political fore between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s. Like public officials throughout the South, most Florida politicians viewed the Supreme Court's 1954 school-desegregation decision in *Brown*

v. *Board of Education of Topeka* as an affront to Southern society and as a threat to their state's time-honored way of life. State Senator John Rawls, for example, expressed the views of most Florida conservatives when he insisted that school integration would "encourage the . . . unnatural, . . . abhorrent, execrable, and revolting practice of miscegenation."<sup>60</sup>

Moderate leaders like LeRoy Collins refrained from such open race-baiting, but moderates, too, vowed to preserve the racial integrity of Florida's lily-white schoolhouses. As Collins assured Florida voters in March 1956, "if there is any lawful way, . . . I will maintain segregation."<sup>61</sup> To this end, Collins appointed a special committee to devise methods whereby Florida might "comply" with the *Brown* ruling without actually integrating its schools. Among the committee's suggestions was a Pupil Assignment Act, which the legislature passed in 1956. As the Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported in 1963, the pupil-placement law functioned to maintain illicit patterns of segregation by leaving the matter of student assignment to the discretion of race-conscious school officials. The act charged these officials to assign students to schools on the basis of intellectual, sociological, psychological, and socioeconomic likenesses. Under the guise of these "nonracial" factors,

school authorities continued to separate black and white schoolchildren, all the while proclaiming adherence to the law of the land.<sup>62</sup>

The pupil-assignment law forestalled school desegregation in Florida for years, bearing out the prediction of one of Governor Collins's advisors that the act would reduce "the overlapping of white and negro children . . . to a comparatively small percent."<sup>63</sup> By the time Collins's last term in office expired in 1959, in fact, only one of Florida's 67 school districts--Dade County--had begun to integrate its schools. By 1960, two Dade County schools contained mixed student bodies, but this integration was in token fashion only. The Homestead Air Force Base School, for instance, contained 745 white pupils and only 22 blacks. The case was worse in Miami's Orchard Villa Elementary School, where 490 African American students enjoyed an "integrated" educational atmosphere by virtue of the eight white children also in attendance.<sup>64</sup>

Such limited desegregation, moreover, did not stem from any good will or justice consciousness on the part of the local school board. Only as recently as 1955, the Dade County Board of Public Instruction had firmly stated that the school district 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." According to board-sponsored studies, the disruptive effects of integration would diminish educational and extracurricular opportunities and services for all students.<sup>65</sup> Thus, county school officials required considerable prodding before they allowed children of the two races to associate as classmates. The school at Homestead AFB, for example, integrated only under federal ultimatums enjoining the integration of all schools serving Air Force installations. Likewise, the Orchard Villa school began accepting black students only after years of pressure from the NAACP and from scores of African American parents who endured severe social, financial, and legal burdens to enroll their children in the neighborhood school.<sup>66</sup>

By the late 1950s, school desegregation was at the forefront of the civil rights movement in Miami. The Dade County Council on Community Relations, for example, worked vigorously in the hope that "some day our schools might be desegregated." This biracial, quasi-official group initiated an extensive program to prepare local residents for the realities of integration, disseminating literature on the experiences of other communities and sponsoring conferences among parents, teachers, business firms, and youth agencies. The council also spoke out against the discriminatory nature of Florida's pupil-placement law, and it expressed alarm at reports that public schools might

close in order to evade court-ordered desegregation. This concern over school closure ultimately prompted some council members--a small group of Jewish women--to begin organizing the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality in 1958-1959.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, the Miami branch of the NAACP also demanded progress in the way of school integration, while seeking to overturn the state's pupil-placement act. In 1958, NAACP leaders Theodore Gibson and Dr. John O. Brown requested that the local school board assign their children to white schools near their homes. When the board refused to do so, Gibson, Brown, and a number of other African American parents sued the board on grounds of racial discrimination.<sup>68</sup> Florida's courts found the school board's conduct satisfactory, but the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals disagreed. In November 1959 that tribunal ruled in *Gibson v. Board of Public Instruction of Dade County, Florida* that the pupil-assignment law did not constitute good faith compliance with the *Brown* decision. Indeed, the judges found that Florida's school-assignment system smacked of "a continuing policy of compulsory racial segregation." In sum, the Court ordered Dade County to step up its integration efforts, lest it incur federal penalties to bring about that end.<sup>69</sup>

Organizations like the NAACP were not alone in pushing

for integrated schooling in Miami, however. Ordinary African American citizens provided a formidable integrationist thrust of their own, incessantly badgering local enrolling authorities to admit their children into white schools nearest to their homes. Dade County had long practiced a form of segregationist busing, transporting black children past nearby white schools to black ones across town.<sup>70</sup> Seeking to end this arrangement, black Orchard Villa residents consistently pressed to gain access to the school located, literally, just up the block. Such persistent activism ultimately compelled county school administrators to open the Orchard Villa school to black students even before the NAACP's victory in Gibson's school-desegregation suit.

Of crucial importance, also, was the fact that school desegregation occurred in Orchard Villa while that neighborhood was in the process of racial transition. Once an all-white subdivision separating Brownsville from Liberty City, Orchard Villa became increasingly black by the late 1950s, as African American residents continued to push out the borders of their communities by advancing into white zones on the ghetto frontiers. Consequently, many whites left the vicinity, creating additional vacancies for African American home seekers.<sup>71</sup> By 1958, blacks comprised a substantial portion of the Orchard Villa community. This

large black presence made it increasingly difficult for local school officials to justify the continued exclusion of African American children from the community school, especially since black parents were loudly demanding their children's admission into the institution. After conducting preliminary surveys, therefore, the Dade County school board decided to admit four African American children to the Orchard Villa school upon commencement of classes in the fall of 1959.<sup>72</sup>

Through their unrelenting agitation, then, Orchard Villa blacks forced Dade County school officials to provide the first integrated school in Miami. Yet, the Orchard Villa school did not stay integrated for long. By the end of 1959, extensive white flight from the area left Orchard Villa an essentially all-black locale. Consequently, the school, too, became virtually all-black, with only eight white pupils remaining among the school's 500-member student body in 1960. This situation was not unforeseen by the county school board, however. From the start, local school officials recognized that Orchard Villa was in the midst of racial transition, that the community would likely become exclusively black, and that the integration of the neighborhood school would therefore be impermanent. Hence, the Orchard Villa integration project was something of a hoax from the beginning.<sup>73</sup>

In subsequent years, school desegregation in Miami proved to be a protracted process. By the end of 1961, only 513 of Miami's 40,000 black schoolchildren attended school with whites. With each year, county officials expanded their integration program, but only slightly. Between 1962 and 1963, the local school board transferred several hundred African American students to white schools closest to their homes, but many of these new school assignments were in areas like Allapattah--a neighborhood east of Brownsville and south of Orchard Villa that was in the process of racial transformation. And, as happened earlier in Orchard Villa, "integrated" schools in Allapattah and in other transitional neighborhoods eventually resegregated. Not surprisingly, then, by the start of the school year 1964, only 5,000 black students in Miami--or, approximately one-eighth of the total black student body--attended integrated schools.<sup>74</sup>

Governor Farris Bryant, who served from 1960 to 1964, did little to improve the school situation in Florida during his tenure in office. A militant segregationist, Bryant made clear his position on integration while campaigning for governor in 1956: "In the homes of Negroes we find different intellectual levels and moral and sanitary standards. I feel that it would not be good for the two groups with such different standards to be thrown into direct contact." Once in office, Bryant continued to express

his "vigorous opposition to forced integration." In response to one Miamian who complained about the *Brown* decision and about desegregationist measures in Dade County, Bryant wrote: "I completely disagree with the Supreme Court, but I do not have the military power to rebel successfully, even if inclined to do so. We lost the Civil War, and that defeat cannot be erased."<sup>75</sup>

Bryant also opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, whose Title VI included significant school-desegregation clauses. When Congress finally passed the act after an 81-day filibuster--in which Florida's two U.S. senators participated--Bryant vowed not to use the powers of his office to enforce its provisions. Bryant's successor, Haydon Burns, was also a staunch segregationist who once denounced the Civil Rights Law as a "monstrous" proposition. Yet, Burns faced the threat of reduced federal education funding if he defied the law, as well increasingly militant integrationist agitation from Florida's African American community.<sup>76</sup> In early 1965, for instance, during federal briefings on implementing the Civil Rights Act, deputies from the NAACP and other civil rights groups informed Burns's assistants that they would be monitoring the state's compliance, and that legal action would follow attempts to avert integration.<sup>77</sup> In sum, federal ultimatums and black lobby pressure forced Burns to implement, at least minimally, the school-

desegregation provisions of the Civil Rights Act.

Even so, school integration proceeded slowly in Miami during the mid-1960s, despite fervent activism on the part of parent-teacher groups, church organizations, and various race-advancement agencies. NAACP president Theodore Gibson and Greater Miami Urban League director James W. Whitehead, for instance, consistently decried the city's integrationist efforts as "tokenism." Local school officials denied these charges, reporting in 1967 that more than half of Dade County's schools had been integrated. An extensive *Miami Herald* survey in 1968, however, revealed that only about 12 percent of local public schools contained significantly integrated student bodies.<sup>78</sup>

On the whole, then, the civil rights movement in Miami produced mixed results. To be sure, persistent black activism--as manifested in sit-ins, stand-ins, wade-ins, boycotts, picketing, voter registration drives, political participation, litigation, and other forms of protest--achieved impressive ends, helping tear down the walls of Jim Crowism in South Florida. Public education in Miami remained mostly segregated, however. Moreover, some civil rights gains were only symbolic, at least for the masses of poor ghetto residents in Miami. The desegregation of Florida's universities and law schools, for instance, benefited only those African Americans with the resources

to attend those institutions.

Indeed, the downfall of legalized apartheid created unprecedented opportunities for the African American middle class, but this development often had little affect upon the lives of the inner-city masses. In some cases, integration even hurt ghetto communities, providing middle-class blacks with enough mobility to escape the confines of the ghetto but leaving the more underprivileged elements unable "to get out." Recently, for example, one veteran of Miami's civil rights struggles noted that by the mid-1960s "the upward mobility types had gone" from Overtown, leaving that ghetto community without a professional class or firm economic base.<sup>79</sup>

In sum, while the civil rights movement demolished the Southern system of codified segregation, it left intact an additional system of racial separation and control--the urban ghetto, which was every bit an institutional means to ensure the social inferiority of African Americans as was Jim Crow, and which transcended regional boundaries. For the people living in urban ghettos, social concerns typically involved basic needs and matters of economic security, which often lay beyond the scope of civil rights advancements. "Looka here, man," one Liberty City resident enjoined a Miami news reporter in 1968, "we got kids sleepin' five and six in a bed and no shoes on their feet."

Clearly, the desegregation of posh hotels on Miami Beach offered little redress for such inner-city problems.<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, the inequities associated with ghetto life stemmed from a complex and entrenched cycle of inferiority that operated independently from the de jure system of discrimination brought down by the civil rights movement. Ghettos, by definition, involved a high degree of spatial isolation, which often translated into a segregated pattern of neighborhood schooling. Generally, segregated inner-city schools also remained ill-equipped and underfinanced. As a result, ghetto youngsters often received an inferior education--one leaving them unable to compete for skilled, or even decent blue-collar, jobs. This situation, in turn, resulted in high levels of economic instability in America's ghetto communities. And, of course, inescapable poverty bred all sorts of corollary problems.<sup>81</sup>

This cycle of inferiority pervaded Miami's inner-city black communities as well. Indeed, by the mid-to-late 1960s, social problem levels had reached dangerously high levels in Miami's ghettos. Black housing remained largely substandard, dilapidated, and overcrowded. About one-third of the city's ghetto residents lived in poverty, with perhaps an equal number hovering just above the poverty line. As a result, many African American families were dependent on welfare. Rampant unemployment contributed

such impoverished conditions, as did the fact that a large proportion of Miami's black jobholders lacked the skills and education needed to attain remunerative employment. Moreover, many black districts suffered from horrific health and sanitation conditions, as reflected in high incidence of contagious diseases like syphilis and tuberculosis, and in infant mortality and neonatal deaths rates that doubled the county average. Crime and juvenile delinquency also scourged Miami's ghetto precincts. School drop-out rates, meanwhile, soared as high as 56 percent in some ghetto schools, and in none was this figure lower than 30 percent.<sup>82</sup>

By the mid-1960s, community-development groups like the Greater Miami Urban League, the Liberty City Community Council, and the Brownsville Improvement Association began to demand the correction of these urban afflictions. In many ways, this agitation represented a logical progression of civil rights activism. To black Miamians, the struggle against Jim Crow was not unrelated to the struggle against ghetto-related inequalities. The latter was merely an extension of the former. In other words, with the old system of codified segregation dead, or at least moribund, black community leaders proceeded to attack the other major source of African American inequality and subordination--the urban ghetto and its attendant socioeconomic ills.<sup>83</sup>

As sociologist Jack M. Bloom has argued, however, white society viewed equal citizenship rights for blacks and socioeconomic advancement for blacks as two markedly dissimilar issues. For whites, the black call for formal equality, while perhaps undesirable, was generally not threatening. African American demands for increased social mobility and urban reform, on the other hand, seemed to many whites to be a call for social leveling and for sweeping redistributions of wealth and power. Sociologist Gary Orfield has raised similar points, noting that many whites viewed the African American urban reform agenda as a "serious threat to the accepted prerogatives of communities on the white side of the color line." Consequently, most white Americans found black demands for greater mobility and urban improvement to be unacceptable.<sup>84</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, then, white political structures and social institutions provided black Americans with little support, morally or materially, in their efforts to reverse the destructive process of ghettoization. All the while, the quality of black urban life continued to deteriorate. In consequence, large numbers of inner-city blacks became increasingly despondent and angry, feeling powerless to overcome their squalid and apparently permanent ghetto surroundings. Many African Americans thus began to lose faith in conventional mechanisms for handling their

grievances. Between 1964 and 1968, in dozens of inner-city communities nationwide, African Americans gave these grievances violent expression in a series of 150 ghetto revolts.<sup>85</sup>

To most white Americans, the 1960s' riots represented little more than blatant acts of criminality or illegitimate forms of protest. As early as 1968, urban political analyst Edward C. Banfield popularized such views in his now-famous article, "Rioting Mainly for Fun and Profit."<sup>86</sup> This argument, however, overlooks the fact that African Americans believed themselves to be out of "legitimate" protest options. After all, white society had rejected the black urban reform agenda, in effect advising African Americans to become passive victims of the dehumanizing aspects of ghetto existence. To win relief from their ghetto-related suffering, then, many blacks saw no alternative but to take their protest outside traditional channels.

Thus, the 1960s' ghetto rebellions represented not only the collective venting of frustrations by urban black communities across the country; they also marked an effort by black Americans to take charge of their own destinies, to free themselves from the white structures that kept the ghetto cycle of inferiority intact. As one rioter put it: "Too long now we Negroes have had things done to us and *for* us, but seldom *by* us. This was our initial

try." Such thinking guided the actions of African Americans in Miami as well. One local black activist, in fact, ascribed the 1968 riot in Liberty City to the fact that "white racism will not allow blacks to be the master in their own land." Hence, the ghetto revolts constituted a form of African American agency just as sit-ins and boycotts did. They were an attempt by blacks to gain a measure of control over their own lives and, thus, to improve their material, day-to-day living conditions.<sup>87</sup>

## NOTES

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## CHAPTER SIX

### OF RIOTS AND GHETTOS: ORIGINS, COURSE, AND AFTERMATH OF THE LIBERTY CITY UPRISING

Between the late 1940s and the late 1960s, rapid second-ghetto development, civil rights struggles, urban renewal, and interstate highway construction combined to create an atmosphere of tension and restlessness in metropolitan Dade County's black communities. And, by 1968, the climate in the Liberty City area had grown particularly unstable. Yet, amid such social dislocation, the ghetto itself remained firmly entrenched. Despite civil rights gains, the ghetto continued to expand and living conditions for ghetto inhabitants continued to deteriorate. And, of course, the conservative backlash of the late 1960s confirmed that white political establishments--and white society in general--intended to ignore the African American appeal for fundamental alteration of the ghetto system.<sup>1</sup>

This realization was not lost on African Americans in Miami; even the black underclass showed political astuteness in this respect. In 1968, for instance, several local ghetto residents complained about the vast sums of money that white government officials were spending to

prosecute the war in Vietnam and to enhance the space program, while simultaneously slashing budgets for domestic social programs. "They won't help people who need help," one Liberty City man asserted bluntly.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, day-to-day living conditions for most Miami ghetto residents did not improve during the 1960s, despite the civil rights legislation of the decade. For many, in fact, conditions worsened, creating heightened levels of frustration, anger, hopelessness, and distress for many black Miamians. As a result, the ghetto temper in Miami grew increasingly volatile during the late 1960s.

In early 1968, after a horrific year of rioting in Northern ghettos, the *Miami Herald* conducted an in-depth survey of local African American concerns and attitudes in an attempt to gauge the likelihood of an urban disorder in Miami. While finding the mood of Miami's ghettos to be less violence-prone than that of other urban areas, the *Herald's* study nonetheless concluded that "this city has all the potentially combustible elements that led to trouble in the North."<sup>3</sup> Yet, most white Dade Countians refused to recognize the volatility that loomed omnipresent in Miami's ghetto communities. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported in 1965, Miami was taking "pride" in the fact that "there has never been a major race clash here."<sup>4</sup> Deceived by the absence of racial rioting in Miami's past,

then, many whites pictured the black community as complacent and content.

The sad irony of this miscalculation became manifest in 1968, when local officials sought to bring the Democratic national convention to Dade County. Though Miami Beach was already slated to host the Republican convention, Miami's ruling elite hoped to lure the Democracy to South Florida as well. Miami, after all, was a firmly Democratic metropolis. In the early 1960s, registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans in Dade County six to one; this ratio dropped but slightly to five to one by 1970.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, civic authorities hoped to make amends for their abortive attempt to attract the 1960 Democratic convention, which party executives held elsewhere due to racial tensions in Miami.<sup>6</sup> In 1968, therefore, municipal leaders assured Democratic chieftains that civil turmoil of the type anticipated in places like Chicago would not occur in Miami; and they pointed to the city's "perfect" race-relations record as proof of the area's domestic tranquillity. Doubtless, then, the summer of 1968 caused the local administration great discomfiture. Not only did the Democrats convene in Chicago, where they found demonstrations of a different kind, but the August upheaval in Liberty City shattered the myth of harmonious race relations in Miami.<sup>7</sup>

In an immediate sense, political activity in Miami

served as a catalyst for the Liberty City uprising. Weeks before the GOP convention commenced on August 5, for instance, presidential aspirant George Wallace, running as an independent, stirred up racial tensions when he visited Miami to promote his segregationist and blatantly racist campaign. To the dismay of African American residents, the Alabama governor attracted throngs of enthusiastic white supporters.<sup>8</sup> And, though overwhelmingly Democratic in political outlook, Miami's black citizenry also took umbrage at the dearth of black representation in the delegations to the Republican convention. Several community organizations, in fact, attempted to hold demonstrations on Monday, August 5 and Tuesday, August 6 to protest the lily-white policies of the Grand Old Party.<sup>9</sup>

These hastily planned affairs ended in embarrassment, though, mustering only a handful of supporters. On Sunday, August 4, however, representatives of the Dade County chapters of the Vote Power League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and numerous smaller associations met in Liberty City to plan a "mass rally of concerned Black people" for Wednesday, August 7. Aside from protesting the all-white composition of the Republican convention, this gathering served two additional purposes. First, it afforded black

Miamians the opportunity to demonstrate that they were not as content with their social and economic circumstances as white leaders had intimated in their discussions with the Democratic party. Second, it allowed the African American community to express black demands and grievances at a time when Miami was the focus of nationwide attention.<sup>10</sup>

For the next three days, protest organizers circulated handbills publicizing the August 7 rally, which was to take place from 1:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. at the Vote Power headquarters on Liberty City's main thoroughfare, Northwest 62nd Street. These flyers advertised an impressive array of scheduled speakers, including basketball superstar Wilt Chamberlain and Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy, who succeeded Martin Luther King as head of the SCLC following King's assassination earlier in 1968. As community leaders had hoped, the notoriety of these figures attracted a large audience for the Wednesday gathering. By mid-afternoon, some 200 people had descended upon the Vote Power building, eager to see Abernathy and Wilt "the Stilt." When these keynote speakers failed to arrive, however, the crowd became agitated and unruly, and the situation grew volatile.<sup>11</sup>

The first overture of unrest occurred around 1:00 p.m., when white news reporters attempted to gain entry to the "Blacks Only" rally. Most of these newsmen left the area upon request, but one journalist refused to do so and was

forcibly ejected from the Vote Power premises. This incident elicited no violent reaction from the crowd of demonstrators, but it did attract the attention of the police, who were braced for trouble during the Republican convention. In response to reports that "the white media were rejected, violently, from the meeting," Miami police sent five squad cars and a carbine unit to reinforce the small surveillance detail that had been observing the rally since noon.<sup>12</sup>

The materialization of a massive police presence only exacerbated tensions. The crowd became increasingly militant; disgruntled youths began throwing stones at passing motorists and taunting police officers. Such actions remained sporadic throughout the early afternoon, but by 4:00 p.m. the crowd, now approximately 300 strong, escalated its stone-throwing campaign against passing traffic; and demonstrators began hurling bottles, rocks, and other missiles at the police. By 6:00 p.m., the police were experiencing major "crowd control problems" and, therefore, decided to establish road blocks restricting the flow of traffic on Northwest 62nd Street. Initially, this tactic seemed to defuse the situation, for when traffic thinned out, the disturbance area became relatively calm.<sup>13</sup>

In less than an hour, however, police removed all road blocks, apparently assuming conditions had returned to

normal. As traffic reappeared on 62nd Street, demonstrators resumed their rock-and-bottle assault upon passing motorists. The situation exploded shortly after 7:00 p.m., when a white man in a car brandishing a "Wallace for President" bumper sticker attempted to drive through the vicinity. As the man passed the Vote Power building, his automobile met with a barrage of projectiles, causing him to crash into another vehicle. Amid cries of "Get Whitey," the driver fled the scene on foot. Within minutes, a group of young blacks overturned the car and set it afire. The riot had begun.<sup>14</sup>

For the next few hours, some 300 rioters looted and ransacked the shops along 62nd Street. The vandals spared all black-owned property, however, targeting principally the many white-owned businesses in Liberty City's commercial district. Around 8:15 p.m., Miami police restored some semblance of order, but the quiet was short-lived. Mayhem erupted once again, and looting and pillaging continued unabated until about 9:00 p.m. At that time police finally quelled the outburst with tear gas, though sporadic incidents of fire-setting and vandalism occurred until well near midnight.<sup>15</sup>

Shortly before 10:00 p.m., local officials began to arrive at the scene, hoping to calm the masses, presumably through their charismatic presence. Yet, their arrival

only renewed the ruckus, as residents flocked to the streets, eager to voice complaints about the unbearable conditions of ghetto life. Unfortunately, the politicians did more talking than listening, and message of their speeches was to "go home and be quiet." Metro-Dade County Mayor Chuck Hall even used the opportunity to canvass for Negro support for his plan to consolidate city and county municipal services. Clearly, civil authorities underestimated the gravity of the situation, and their indifference toward community grievances enraged the crowds. Once again, angry mobs began heckling police and vandalizing white property until local lawmen used tear gas to restore calm.<sup>16</sup>

Around 10:00 p.m., Florida Governor Claude Kirk and SCLC president Ralph Abernathy arrived in Liberty City from the Republican convention in Miami Beach. After briefly talking with people in the street, the two men joined Miami City Manager Melvin Reese and Metro-Dade County Mayor Hall in a conference with neighborhood spokesmen at the Liberty City Community Council offices. From the start, black leaders sensed that the conference would end up being what ghetto residents called a "NATO" meeting, meaning "No Action, Talk Only." For one thing, blacks had no confidence whatever in Governor Kirk, who was known for his conservatism on social and racial issues. Thus,

they were not surprised when, after three hours of unproductive discourse about problems in ghetto, Kirk adjourned the meeting. The governor did suggest, however, that both parties reconvene at 11:00 a.m. the next morning to discuss possible solutions to the difficulties facing the African American community.<sup>17</sup>

In the morning hours prior to the Thursday meeting, Liberty City remained tense, but peaceful, as approximately 300 people congregated outside the Community Council building to await the arrival of the white politicos. Yet, 11:00 o'clock came and went without the appearance of a single official. Governor Kirk and the local authorities did send emissaries to the meeting, but Community Council leaders refused to receive these second-level messengers. As news of the canceled conference hit the streets, pandemonium ensued. Violence escalated throughout the afternoon on a scale far exceeding that of the previous day's commotion. Injuries and property damage rose sharply, as rioters stoned police, fire-bombed area markets, and looted white-owned shops, completely exhausting the inventories of several stores. Some prominent black citizens, including Father Theodore Gibson, tried to stem the chaos by appealing for calm and order; but their cries were drowned out by scores of voices chanting "we can't wait."<sup>18</sup>

Helpless against the mob, which was at times 1,000 strong, Miami officials requested assistance from the Florida Highway Patrol. By 3:00 p.m., 75 state troopers arrived at the scene equipped with a specially designed riot van. Essentially a modified version of an insect-control machine, the riot truck spread a thick fog of tear gas throughout the riot zone in the same manner in which farm tractors spread pesticide. Initially, this maneuver cleared the streets, causing hundreds of choking demonstrators to flee in panic. The gas, however, soon permeated the flimsy walls of the surrounding housing projects, forcing residents to return to the streets to escape the stifling torture inside their apartments.<sup>19</sup>

As the crowds re-formed, confusion prevailed, and the riot claimed its first fatalities. Around 4:45 p.m., Miami police responded with rifle volleys to what they thought was sniper fire coming from an alleyway near one of the tenement complexes on 62nd Street. When the gunfire ceased, two residents lay dead and a fourteen-year-old boy lay shot through the chest. Police found no weapons in the vicinity. But the bloodshed did not end here. Police shot and killed a third unarmed "sniper" later that night in Overtown. Though Overtown was miles away from the riot area, Miami police apparently expected trouble to spread to that district and to Coconut Grove as well.

No rioting occurred in these areas, but some vandalism did take place. It was during one of these incidents that police killed the third "sniper," who was actually a bystander who had gone out onto the balcony of his apartment house in order to cool off in the night air.<sup>20</sup>

By this time, Miami police realized they could no longer contain the situation. Consequently, at Governor Kirk's behest, municipal officials yielded command of all anti-riot operations to Sheriff E. Wilson Purdy of the Dade County Department of Public Safety. In addition, Kirk mobilized 950 National Guardsmen and placed them at Purdy's disposal. At the same time, City Manager Reese imposed a dusk-to-dawn curfew over Liberty City.<sup>21</sup>

By 6:00 p.m., Sheriff Purdy had organized his force of 800 state militiamen and 200 Dade County sheriff deputies into two brigades, positioning them at opposite ends of the disturbance zone. On Purdy's order, the detachments, equipped with everything from flame-throwers to sawed-off shotguns, marched toward each other along 62nd Street. After two hours of crowd-dispersal operations, the two phalanges converged in downtown Liberty City, having restored order with clubs, rifle butts, and tear gas. Quiet prevailed for the remainder of the evening. Moreover, the area remained peaceful on Friday, August 9, as heavy rains, renewed curfew restrictions, and a large National

Guard presence combined to keep people off the boulevard. Save for some minor curfew infractions, Miami's first racial disorder had run its course.<sup>22</sup>

The price of calm, however, was not cheap. Three Miamians lost their lives, while dozens more were seriously hurt. On Thursday night alone, the emergency room at Jackson Memorial Hospital treated 32 persons for injuries, including six for gun-shot wounds. In addition, police made nearly 200 arrests, while Liberty City remained under martial law for the next four days. Yet, even after the soldiers departed, the scars of the experience remained in the ghetto.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, Miami officialdom did little in the riot's aftermath to heal these scars. Despite vague commitments to "a reordering of priorities," city policymakers failed to address the true sources of Negro disaffection--the chronic and destructive social ills plaguing Miami's ghetto communities. Thus, WTVJ Channel 4 anchorman Ralph Renick expressed righteous indignation when, in a 1969 newscast, he upbraided municipal officeholders for their lackluster and insincere efforts to "improve and correct" the "causative factors leading to the riot."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, about the only reform that civic leaders implemented at this time concerned a police directive requiring the integration of patrol teams in black neighbor-

hoods. Even this measure, though, faced a mixed reception from Miami's African American community. To be sure, many blacks, including the editor of the *Miami Times*, applauded this gesture. After all, black leaders had long pleaded with local administrators to increase the number of black patrolmen in ghetto districts; and "Black Policemen for Black Communities" was one of the demands made during Liberty City's August 7 Vote Power rally.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, this demand was hardly universal among African American residents. As a 1968 *Miami Herald* survey revealed, almost 40 percent of metropolitan blacks preferred the treatment of white police to that of black police. According to this segment of the black population, Negro lawmen tended to be self-consciously and unnecessarily tough in dealing with members of their own race, presumably in order to win acceptance from their white supervisors and workmates. As one Liberty City resident put it, black officers were "worse than the whites" because "they been brainwashed in their jobs." Thus, black activist Neal Adams expressed a rather typical sentiment when he noted that Miami's police force needed not only more African Americans, but more black patrolmen who understood and cared about the problems and concerns of their inner-city brethren.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, one not-so-widely-supported police policy

adjustment was no panacea for the critical human-relations problems undergirding racial tensions in Miami. Yet, local policymakers took few additional strides to ameliorate the conditions from which Miami's ghetto conflagration stemmed. Instead, the city's white leadership made feeble rationalizations for the street-fighting in Liberty City. Clinging to ivory-towered notions of passivity within the Negro community, municipal authorities convinced themselves that local blacks did not "really want to get in the street and cause trouble." Hence, almost uniformly, public officials ascribed the breach of peace to the rabble-rousing of "outside agitators." Similarly, in its post-riot investigation, the Dade County Grand Jury concluded that race relations in Miami had been "relatively good" prior to the Liberty City incident and that there had been "no prior warning of trouble."<sup>27</sup>

In reality, of course, Miami's black community needed no outside agitation to give it cause for rebellion; and civil officials had simply overlooked a plethora of early warning signs. "All the reasons and conditions that cause the violence are there," affirmed Robert H. Simms, director of the local Community Relations Board. And, as most blacks understood, the preconditions for unrest took root far earlier than 1968. The ghetto uproar "just didn't start last night," observed one Liberty City youth, "it started

50 years ago." Other citizens, likewise, expressed amazement that civil strife had not occurred sooner. Hence, unlike the city's white officiary, Miami's African American community evinced little shock at the violent outbreak in Liberty City. As the Miami Times explained: "The riot last week came as no surprise to us. It should not have surprised any of you either, if you had only looked around you and seen the results of social injustice and inequality, surely you would have seen the disturbance coming too."<sup>28</sup>

This editorial spoke volumes, for the aggrievements to which it alluded were the fundamental causes of the Liberty City uprising and, indeed, of all urban insurgency during the 1960s. Like other inner-city revolts, Miami's ghetto rebellion was a manifestation of black rage against the social inequities occasioned by institutionalized forms of white racism. For decades, political and economic exclusion, housing and employment discrimination, and school and residential segregation combined to destroy meaningful life chances for most African Americans. And, in Deep South areas like Miami, the pervasiveness of white-supremacist customs made the barriers of racial imparity all the more formidable. Understandably, such repressive social controls engendered feelings of bitterness and alienation among black Americans, creating a hostile atmosphere conducive to insurrection in black communities throughout the

country.<sup>29</sup>

The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders explained the source of African American frustration in no uncertain terms in its 1968 Kerner Report: "As Americans, most Negro citizens carry within themselves two basic aspirations of our society. They seek to share in both the material resources of our system and its intangible benefits--dignity, respect and acceptance. Within the ghetto, however, it is rare that either aspiration is achieved." In sum, the Kerner Commission laid bare the ghetto as a white-over-black institution, whose privative and impoverished conditions spiked black ambitions to the "American Dream" by undermining both opportunity and hope for social betterment in the nation's inner cities.<sup>30</sup>

Small wonder, then, many African Americans considered the ghetto a tool of racial oppression, condoned and perpetuated by an exploitative white power structure. "Exploiters come into the ghetto from outside," wrote Black Power advocates Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton in 1967, "bleed it dry, and leave it economically dependent upon the larger society." Speaking to a ghetto audience a few years earlier, Malcolm X delivered a similar message: "The white man controls his own school, his own bank, his own economy, his own politics, his own everything, his own community--but he also controls yours."<sup>31</sup> Such

grievances were foundational to the African American urban reform agenda of the late 1960s. In fact, the 1960s' ghetto revolts represented an attempt by African Americans to end the white exploitation of ghetto resources by demanding increased power within their own communities. Ghetto residents wished simply to have greater control over the institutions and processes that affected their lives.<sup>32</sup>

Liberty City blacks expressed this desire for community control as well. For instance, the first of several demands listed on flyers advertising the August 7 Vote Power rally was: "Black Control of Black Ghetto--Politically, Economically, and Educationally." Likewise, as militant activist Al Featherstone told the Florida Commission on Human Relations after a civil disturbance in Brownsville in 1970, "black people must have more say-so as to what goes on in the black community." In a similar vein, David Fincher, a local black attorney and member of the federal team that investigated the 1968 riot in Liberty City, recommended the creation of a community-relations agency "involv[ing] the general people of the ghetto instead of getting white-collar people all the time." Additionally, Miami blacks demanded poverty-relief programs headed by poor people, rather than by middle-class whites. And, they called for black policemen to replace white "racist" patrolmen in the ghetto. Thus, as both the *Miami Times* and the *Miami*

*Herald* surmised, the Liberty City riot was in large measure a call for "the white man to get out of the ghetto neighborhoods."<sup>33</sup>

Nowhere was this demand more vehement, however, than in the economic sphere. Because white businessmen and slumlords practically monopolized commercial activities in Miami's ghettos, black Miamians had little sense of economic empowerment. Due to financial limitations, for example, most black families in Miami rented, rather than owned, their living quarters; and they usually rented from white slumlords. Speaking before a congressional housing committee in 1971, Bernard Dyer, who ran the Liberty City Community Council in the late 1960s, reported that more than 90 percent of the rent receipts collected in Liberty City went to white property holders. Most of this rent money was sent to downtown Miami or Miami Beach, but some of it went as far away as New York and Philadelphia. Hence, millions of dollars in rent left Miami's ghettos annually never to return to the black community, except in the form of additional white slum housing investments. The black demand for community control, then, was in part an attempt to bring some economic stability to African American neighborhoods by keeping these monies within the ghetto economy.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, relations between Miami blacks and white

ghetto entrepreneurs were tense on account of the malpractices of many white business people. Poverty, for instance, forced many black families to pay an inordinate proportion of their income--35 percent or more--for housing. As the Dade County Community Relations Board noted in 1967, "Negroes pay proportionately more for rent than any other group in the city."<sup>35</sup> Yet, white slumlords exacerbated this situation by charging rents far in excess of the worth of the slum-like hovels they provided. Thus, Bernard Dyer spoke for many ghetto residents when he lambasted white slumlords as "profiteers" who "operate housing at a rip-off rate that staggers the imagination." Neal Adams, president of the Brownsville Improvement Association, seconded this critique, asserting that "often tenants find themselves in the clutches of unscrupulous and money-hungry landlords who give little in the way of accommodations and facilities, but exact much in the way of rent."<sup>36</sup>

Further, white slumlords often collected rents on a weekly basis, and rarely did they offer tenants formal leases. Moreover, Miami landlords frequently cut off water and power services to apartments whose tenants became delinquent in rent payments; or they evicted these tenants with only the slightest notice. Resident complaints about these practices generally received little serious attention from local authorities. In addition, absentee landlords

often neglected the physical condition of their properties. This, in turn, contributed to the atmosphere of powerlessness in Miami's ghettos, as residents found themselves constantly unable to have even basic maintenance needs addressed. Not surprisingly, then, 65 percent of black Miamians interviewed for a *Miami Herald* survey in early 1968 complained of excessive rents, while 55 percent protested landlords' reluctance to make necessary repairs. Without question, through their exploitative practices, Miami slumlords helped cast the mold for the 1968 uprising in Liberty City.<sup>37</sup>

The situation was practically identical with respect to other commercial enterprises in black Miami. In 1970, for instance, Al Featherstone estimated that white people owned 97 percent of Miami's ghetto-area businesses.<sup>38</sup> And, like the slumlords, these businessmen carried their profits out of the ghettos and back to suburbia, reinforcing the pattern of economic inviability in Miami's African American communities. Not surprisingly, complaints about the extent of white business ownership in Liberty City ranked high among those aired by participants in the 1968 disorder. "You got 30 liquor stores in this Negro section," one youth told a *Miami Herald* reporter, "and not a single black man owns one." "You tell Whitey to stop taking money out of the neighborhood," yelled another youngster, while several

others sounded off about the paucity of black-owned establishments in their community. As if summarizing all these complaints, another resident affirmed simply, "the white man runs it all." Clearly, black hostility toward white retailers ran deep; and the journalist who interviewed these juveniles was not sensationalizing when he titled his piece "Whitey Leaves Legacy of Hate."<sup>39</sup>

Ghetto inhabitants had good reason to dislike local white merchants, who frequently charged exorbitant prices for inferior goods. Presumably, vendors engaged in such practices to guard against the credit risks of trading with a low-income and less-than-steadily-employed clientele. The net result, however, was that poor blacks paid higher prices than whites and often received substandard merchandise in exchange.<sup>40</sup> To Miami's African American consumers, this was merely another instance of economic exploitation by the white establishment. Hence, wrote one *Miami Times* columnist after the 1968 disturbance, white merchants made revolt all but inevitable "when [they] charged 23 cents for a 15 cent item; when [they] charged unrealistic interest rates; when [they] demanded quality prices for inferior products." Plainly, it was no coincidence that white-owned businesses bore the brunt of the damage inflicted during the upheaval in Liberty City.<sup>41</sup>

Consumer exploitation, therefore, on the part of both

white retail merchants and white slumlords, contributed immensely to the African American discontentment from which the Liberty City riot leaped forth. These were by no means the only grievances of the African American community; Miami blacks had a long laundry list of additional injustices against their race that whites either committed overtly or permitted passively: dilapidated and overcrowded housing, rampant unemployment, employment discrimination, lack of economic opportunity, crime, and brutal, racist treatment from local police--just to name the most prevalent ghetto grievances.

Yet, economic exploitation remained at the center of African American disaffection, because this injustice kept Miami's black community dependent upon white institutions, many of which had a vested interest in preserving the status quo within ghetto society. With this realization in mind, many black Miamians, and particularly a growing number of young African Americans, became increasingly vocal in their demands for power and control over their own communities. Economic independence, it seemed, was the key to complete self-determination for ghetto communities. Once ghetto areas became self-sustaining, black citizens could more easily eliminate, or at least reduce significantly, specific social problems in areas such as housing and employment. First, however, blacks had to

overcome the exploitative white power in Miami's ghettos.

By the mid-1960s, community-development groups like the Greater Miami Urban League, the Liberty City Community Council, and the Brownsville Improvement Association attempted to do just that by expanding the scope of their power over urban matters in the black community. Through persistent political pressure, lobbying, and negotiation, these agencies scraped and fought to force concessions from the city's white political establishment. Even when successful, however, the efforts of these agencies proved to be something of a one-step-forward-two-steps-back process; the quality of black urban life deteriorated faster than the achievements of community-improvement groups could upgrade it.

Moreover, municipal officials often ignored black appeals for community control and improvement. Such was the case in the late 1960s, when community associations organized rent strikes in Liberty City to protest slumlord abuses. These demonstrations failed utterly. As Bernard Dyer explained: "This didn't work, because we found when we went against the slumlords we went against the whole Dade County sociopolitical and economical committee. We found there was involvement of people who sat in high places in making sure that the ghetto continued to be the ghetto because there was a profit to be made out of it."<sup>42</sup> Other

African American attempts to gain greater community control encountered the same official apathy, if not hostility.

Doubtless, many Miami blacks recalled how, less than ten years before the rent strikes, Miami's political leadership aided local blacks, if only slightly, during the city's lunch-counter sit-in struggles. The official response to the rent strikes, therefore, sent a clear message: civil rights protests were fine, but ghetto reform was not. From the African American vantage, this message indicated that white society would never voluntarily accept the black urban reform agenda, that whites would not peaceably forgo their established prerogatives in Miami's ghettos. By the late 1960s, then, growing numbers of young blacks--constituting as much as 23 percent of the total black population according to a 1968 *Miami Herald* investigation--had come to see violence as a feasible means by which to impress upon white society the gravity of their demands for community control.<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that the riot in Liberty City was a planned event; it was not. The ghetto rebellion did, however, easily take shape from the circumstances surrounding the August 7 Vote Power rally. By that time, black frustrations had accumulated to the point where any collective, mass-based black demonstration required only a spark to explode.

## NOTES

1. For the white conservative backlash of the late 1960s and the resultant impact upon public social policy, see Gary Orfield, "Race and the Liberal Agenda: The Loss of the Integrationist Dream, 1965-1974," in Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 313-355; Bernard J. Frieden and Marshall Kaplan, *The Politics of Neglect: Urban Aid from Model Cities to Revenue Sharing* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1975); Vincent J. Burke and Vee Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed: Welfare Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1984), 313-340; Raymond A. Mohl, "Shifting Patterns of American Urban Policy since 1900," in Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 17-24.
2. *Miami Herald*, August 9, 1968.
3. Philip Meyer et al., *Miami Negroes: A Study in Depth* (Miami: Miami Herald, 1968), 51.
4. Neil Maxwell, "New Influx of Cubans Faces Cool Reception from Many Miamians," *Wall Street Journal*, October 12, 1965.
5. Miami Herald news clipping, n.d., circa 1963, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality: Addendum, 1944-1968, microfilm edition, Subgroup F, Series 3, Reel 22; Metropolitan Dade County Planning Department, *Housing in the Metropolitan Plan* (Miami: Metropolitan Dade County Planning Department, 1970), II-64.
6. Dade County Council on Human Relations, "Suggested Presentation for Discussion Leaders," January 29, 1959, typescript, Papers of the Congress of Racial Equality, microfilm edition, Series 5, Reel 19.
7. National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, *Miami Report: The Report of the Miami Study Team on Civil Disturbances in Miami, Florida during the Week of August 5, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing

Office, 1969), 6 (hereafter cited as *Miami Report*). For the 1968 Democratic national convention and civil turmoil in Chicago, see David R. Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

8. *Miami Times*, August 2, 1968.

9. *Miami Report*, 6, 8; *Miami Herald*, August 11, 1968; "Mass Rally Tonite," August 5, 1968, flyer, Dade County/Miami Riot Files, Robert Graham Papers, Record Group 104, Series 889, Box 3, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter cited as Miami Riot Files, Graham Papers).

10. *Miami Report*, 6-7; *Miami Herald*, August 11, 1968.

11. *Miami Report*, 7-9; John Boone and William Farmar, "Violence in Miami: One More Warning," *New South* 23 (Fall 1968), 28. It should be noted that Ralph Abernathy and Wilt Chamberlain were not scheduled to speak in Liberty City until the close of the Vote Power rally. As this fact was not mentioned in any circulars or handbills, however, many blacks arrived at the meeting early, expecting to see Chamberlain and Abernathy already there. When both failed to appear, the crowd became restless and rowdy.

12. Captain Leo R. Joffre, "Operational Report of Civil Disturbances," August 13, 1968, police report, Miami Riot Files, Graham Papers, Box 3; *Miami Report*, 9.

13. *Miami News*, August 8, 1968; Joffre, "Operational Report of Civil Disturbances," Miami Riot Files, Graham Papers, Box 3; *Miami Report*, 10.

14. Joffre, "Operational Report of Civil Disturbances," Miami Riot Files, Graham Papers, Box 3; *Miami Report*, 10-11; Boone and Farmar, "Violence in Miami," 29.

15. *Miami Report*, 13; Joffre, "Operational Report of Civil Disturbances," Miami Riot Files, Graham Papers, Box 3; Boone and Farmar, "Violence in Miami," 30.

16. Boone and Farmer, "Violence in Miami," 29; *Miami Report*, 13.

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20. *Miami Herald*, August 9, 1968; *Miami Times*, August 16, 1968; *Miami Report*, 19-20.
21. *Miami Report*, 17-18; *Miami Herald*, August 9, 1968.
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34. "Statement of Bernard J. Dyer," Hearing on Housing Oversight, 218-219.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### PAVING THE ROAD TO REBELLION: GHETTO GRIEVANCES

Aside from economic exploitation and the lack of a self-sufficient economic infrastructure, Miami's ghetto communities suffered from a number of other socioeconomic disadvantages. These included a variety of housing deficiencies, an equal number of employment difficulties, poor police-community relations, and an array of typical inner-city social problems, such as high crime, poverty, broken families, and low health and sanitary conditions. By the late 1960s, Miami's black and white leadership seemed to agree that adequate housing and employment were the most critical of these problems facing the city's ghetto communities. A few months before the 1968 riot in Liberty City, in fact, a Miami Herald investigation found housing problems to be the "top irritant" among African American residents in Miami.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, black housing had never been good in Miami. The Central Negro District, after all, had been intentionally built as a shack-covered slum in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Abhorrent living conditions continued

unabated in Miami's central-city neighborhoods well into the late 1940s, when the city planning board found that 46 of 71 residential blocks in Overtown lay within extremely unsavory environments. Industrial hazards and nuisances, such as railroads, blighted the area severely. Tiny row houses were compacted so tightly onto small plots as to obscure daylight in many homes. Almost one-fourth of all residences stood in alleyways or rear yards of commercial establishments. Few blocks were served by city sewers, many homes lacked hot water and electricity, and the whole area wanted for green space and recreational facilities.<sup>3</sup> Conditions in the city's oldest black community, Coconut Grove, were equally poor; but municipal planners did provide Grove residents with larger lots, "since many of these residents [were] Bahama negroes and receive[d] some remuneration from the growing of trees, fruits and vegetables."<sup>4</sup>

The quality of housing in black Miami improved after World War II, but not much. In 1951, for instance, the Dade County Planning Board found that half of the local African American population lived in substandard dwellings. Likewise, in a separate 1951 survey, two University of Miami economists found that, despite some postwar housing gains, one quarter of the city's black population remained "as ill-housed as it was ten and twenty years ago." Moreover, these researchers envisaged a rapid deterioration

of postwar housing settlements, as well as a general decline in the housing situation for local blacks.<sup>5</sup>

Regrettably, this prophecy held true. In the mid-1950s national and local Urban League reports and a Miami Herald series on local slums all confirmed that slum housing conditions were pervasive and also worsening in the city's black regions.<sup>6</sup> Further, sorry living standards continued to scourge Miami's disadvantaged urban households throughout the subsequent decade. According to a 1962 study by the Greater Miami Urban League, black housing in Miami was twice as overcrowded and ten times more dilapidated than that of whites in 1960. In 1965, the Welfare Planning Council of Dade County reported little change in these conditions. Not surprisingly, by 1968, local African Americans continually cited inadequate and crowded housing as their primary social concern. Conditions were particularly horrific in the city's Central Negro District, where thousands of residents still lived in cold-water flats or in disintegrating shotgun shacks, which the *Miami Times* labeled "unfit for human habitation."<sup>7</sup>

For most Dade County blacks, however, residential quarters took the form of concrete block apartment houses. In the Liberty City-Brownsville-Opa-locka corridor, especially, these "concrete monsters" sprang up at a swift rate during the 1950s and 1960s, when urban-redevelopment

measures laid waste to black housing in the central city. As these measures sent thousands of uprooted black urbanites packing into the second-ghetto region of northwest Miami, apartment house construction served a genuine and urgent need. Yet, while superior to Overtown's wooden shacks, these new dwelling units scarcely upgraded the social environment in Miami's ghetto communities.<sup>8</sup>

Erected hastily for profit, Liberty City apartment projects revealed defective construction and, consequently, fell rapidly into disrepair. Most apartment complexes, moreover, rented only one- and two-bedroom units to families with children. In addition, Negro subdivisions contained no playgrounds or recreational facilities, little greenery, and few open spaces. Furthermore, black neighborhoods suffered from want of sufficient municipal services. Infrequent garbage collection, for example, allowed trash and refuse to accumulate, adding to the unsightliness of the blight-ridden tenements. Poor drainage and sewerage, meanwhile, left black housing developments subject to recurrent flooding. And, as late as 1967, residents in sections of Liberty City and Brownsville were still fighting to obtain city water and adequate street lighting. Thus, it was with much understatement that local fair-housing crusader Elizabeth L. Virrick reported to the federal Commission on Race and Housing in 1960 that apartment build-

ing in black Miami had "intensified rather than relieved slum conditions."<sup>9</sup>

Miami's governing elite played a conspicuous role in allowing black housing conditions to deteriorate. As the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded in its investigation of the city's 1968 riot, the degeneration of living conditions in Liberty City resulted in part from "a lack of effective planning and zoning controls" and from "lax enforcement" of building and maintenance codes.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, metropolitan officials had a long tradition of allowing, even condoning, the construction of substandard housing in black Miami. In 1945, for instance, Dade County planners recommended that large dwelling sections of Liberty City be zoned for "minimum standards." Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, likewise, municipal leaders continually overlooked builders' shoddy workmanship and use of low-grade materials in black housing sites. As late as 1971, in fact, black citizens asserted that building inspectors continued to "look the other way" while contractors erected black housing that did not meet city specifications.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, local authorities failed to enforce maintenance codes in black neighborhoods, allowing Miami slumlords to neglect the upkeep of their properties.<sup>12</sup> In 1967, Dade County's Economic Opportunity Legal Services

Program began organizing tenants in slum housing to petition for stricter building code enforcement, but these efforts made little impact. Hence, in the early 1970s, former city commissioner Athalie Range could still lament that "in the great Northwest section of Miami . . . there are so many substandard, so many slum houses, so many apartments with code being violated every day."<sup>13</sup>

Surely, official indifference in these matters raised the ire of many Miami blacks; and it doubtless convinced many African Americans that white Miami cared little about the plight of the city's ghetto residents. As the local black representative to the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence noted in his summary of the 1968 riot, Miami blacks "[felt] as though the white society ha[d] become lackadaisical in reference to problems concerning the black community."<sup>14</sup> In view of such sentiments, it is not difficult to comprehend why some Miami blacks felt better served by venting their frustrations in the streets rather than by taking their grievances to city hall.

Miami's black subdivisions suffered from more than just physical degradation, however; they were also severely overcrowded. In 1954, for example, the Greater Miami Urban League published an analysis of Dade County's African American housing market, which found that population densi-

ties in black areas averaged 150 persons per residential acre as compared with the overall metropolitan ratio of 12 persons per acre. At the end of the decade, furthermore, a county-wide human rights audit sponsored by more than a dozen local civic groups reported no change in these statistics. With good reason, therefore, the Coconut Grove Citizens' Committee for Slum Clearance expressed grave concern in 1960 over the Miami Planning Board's deliberation of zoning proposals that might increase densities in slum districts.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, as certified by the Greater Miami Urban League, the Welfare Planning Council of Dade County, the Brownsville Improvement Association, the *Miami Herald*, and scores of private individuals, overcrowded living conditions persisted, even worsened, in black Miami during the 1960s and early 1970s. Crowding was so acute in some households that families slept in shifts, with the "day sleepers" on the streets at night and the "night sleepers" outside during the day.<sup>16</sup> Broadly speaking, such extreme racial residential concentration resulted from a combination of black poverty, discrimination in the housing market, and public policy.

In the first place, poverty compelled three-fourths of Miami's black population to rent their living quarters. Unfortunately, low-income rental accommodations generally

came in only one form: high-density tenement complexes squeezed tightly onto small parcels. In this respect, over-crowding was a built-in feature in many black residential sites. Additionally, as documented nationally by the U.S. Kerner Commission and locally by a number of sources, poverty-level incomes forced inner-city blacks to spend a greater proportion of their incomes on housing than most other urban dwellers. Compounding this situation was the fact that housing expenses for non-white Miamians were "above prevailing cost." Thus, to defray excessive rental charges, African American households commonly took in boarders, whose numbers further swelled the ranks within Miami's teeming ghetto precincts.<sup>17</sup>

The second factor condemning most black Miamians to congested ghetto neighborhoods was discrimination in the housing market. Most financial institutions, for example, practiced redlining--an appraisal system whereby banks and mortgage brokers declined to make loans in older and depressed urban areas. As Florida's Advisory Commission on Race Relations observed in 1960, most lending associations in the state operated on the premise that "wisdom does not dictate investing monies in properties in or adjacent to slums." Essentially, then, redlining made it virtually impossible for most inner-city residents to finance improvements to their current accommodations, much less

to purchase decent housing in areas outside already burgeoning ghetto districts.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar vein, realtors often used race-restrictive covenants to preserve the racial homogeneity of white communities. Under these "gentlemen's bargains" white property holders agreed not sell or rent living space to minority groups, thereby proscribing blacks from moving into decent areas of residence, such as the suburbs. In 1948, the Supreme Court declared such covenants to be judicially unenforceable, but this ruling scarcely deterred realtors, in Miami and elsewhere, from making tacit agreements to keep blacks hemmed in designated "colored" tracts.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in 1959 the Miami chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality still found that "in reference to real estate zoning, there is also a gentlemen's agreement that the present arrangement and neighborhoods will not be changed." In the mid-1960s, similarly, the Dade County Community Relations Board found that the local real estate industry continued to administer "controls and sanctions" that left most Miami blacks with little alternative but to concentrate in segregated and densely settled urban slums.<sup>20</sup>

Public policies, particularly those of Miami's planning and housing agencies, also contributed to rampant crowding in the city's ghetto communities. During the mid-to-late 1960s, the Miami Housing Authority (MHA) and the Dade County

Department of Housing and Urban Development ("Little HUD") devised relocation programs to assist the thousands of Overtown residents displaced by interstate highway construction and coincident urban-renewal and slum-razing projects in the central city. In doing so, municipal housing bureaus built a number of public housing projects that served as relocation sites. Without exception, however, MHA and Little HUD erected these projects in existing overcrowded areas, principally Liberty City and Brownsville, or in neighborhoods like Allapattah, which was in an obvious state of ghettoization and racial transition.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the 1960s, community spokesmen, such as Theodore Gibson, state and local NAACP organizations, and even the National Urban League denounced MHA for concentrating public housing in already segregated zones. Nonetheless, housing officials persisted in this course, thereby aggravating crowded conditions in Miami's ghettos.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the clustering of metropolitan blacks into slum neighborhoods had deleterious social repercussions for those residents. As one housing reformer predicted in 1961, "lives filled with lust, filth and crime" would be the inevitable "lot of those in the crowded hell-warrens of our un-privileged areas." As if validating this observation, a 1965 study by the Welfare Planning Council of Dade County revealed strong correlations between overcrowded

rental housing in Miami and such social problems as crime, juvenile delinquency, premature school termination, welfare dependency, and a host of health and sanitation problems. Similarly, in 1971, Edwin S. Shirley of the Dade County Community Relations Board and Brownsville activist Neal Adams both identified worn-out housing and insufferable residential densities as the root cause of Miami's "new-found designation" as "crime city No. 1 in America."<sup>23</sup>

Additionally, overcongested residential conditions resulted in low health standards for Miami's ghetto residents. As the Dade County Department of Public Health reported in 1966, non-white Dade Countians suffered from higher death rates and higher incidence of many major diseases than Miami whites. Black infant mortality and neonatal death rates doubled those in the white community, while blacks were ten times more likely than whites to fall victim to homicide. In addition, Miami blacks were more apt than whites to perish from five of the ten leading causes of death cited by county health officials, including pneumonia, influenza, liver disorders, and infantile illnesses. Appropriately, then, Liberty City residents living in a cramped, tenement-covered strip along Northwest 61st Street dubbed their neighborhood "Germ City."<sup>24</sup>

As with health conditions, sanitation levels in black Miami fell substantially below those in the white community.

In 1968, for instance, sanitary conditions in one black housing project were so pitiful that Dade County HUD had to initiate a "rats and roaches" program to combat rampant pest infestation. Perhaps, then, one Liberty City rioter was not speaking figuratively when he grumbled to a local newsman that "we're livin' in rat holes." At any rate, given the squalid, crowded, and socially debilitating nature of black housing in Miami, it is not difficult to see why one U.S. riot commission identified "grievances related to housing" as a primary source of African American discontentment.<sup>25</sup>

Another major source of black frustration in Miami concerned African American employment prospects, which were no less bleak than the housing situation. As the Greater Miami Urban League documented in 1962, color-based job discrimination and insufficient educational training relegated most black Miamians to the lowest-skilled and lowest-paying occupations. An additional 1962 study by the Florida Council on Human Relations corroborated these findings. According to this report, three out of four Miami blacks worked in unskilled capacities, serving mainly as "garbage collectors, cooks, kitchen helpers, porters, maids, bellboys, elevator operators, household domestics, dry cleaning pressers, and helpers in the construction trades."<sup>26</sup> Naturally, such an unbalanced occupational

structure translated into low median income levels and high levels of economic deprivation for Miami's African American families. Under these circumstances, asserted one economist bluntly in 1964, "the Negro could hardly be expected to attain a high level of living."<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, a 1966 federal survey of employment in Miami's top 15 industries painted a clear picture in black and white. According to this study, only 2.2 percent of the workforce surveyed represented blacks in managerial or white-collar positions, while black craftsmen accounted for only an additional 4.7 percent. One reason for this skewed employment structure was the limited job skills of many black working people in Miami. All too often, employers who genuinely wished to be fair to African American job-seekers had no choice but to reject black applicants in favor of more qualified white workers.<sup>28</sup>

Even so, education and proper training were no guarantors of employment equity for African Americans. In 1966, for example, Dr. Andrew F. Brimmer of the Federal Reserve Board made a study of "The Negro in the National Economy," in which he found that black college graduates could "expect to do about as well as a white person who only completed high school."<sup>29</sup> This type of inequality was evident in Miami in that, as of 1962, 15 percent of the black laborers employed in unskilled positions were

working below their level of job preparedness. As late as 1969, moreover, some employers refused to hire African Americans altogether, especially when black employees would be visible to the public.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, overt discrimination in the job market did much to keep Miami blacks at the bottom of the economic ladder throughout the 1960s.

The case was similar in the public sector, where skin color was a major determinant of work assignments. The vast majority of blacks employed by government agencies, for example, worked in manual or custodial capacities. As a case in point: in the Miami Sanitation Department, nearly all garbage handlers were black, while garbage truck drivers were almost exclusively white.<sup>31</sup> The Miami Police Department employed similar practices. Black patrolmen, for instance, did not work outside black areas; and few ever received promotion. Of the 90 black policemen in Miami in 1968, only three were sergeants, and nine were "special investigators," meaning that these officers did the work of white investigators but did not hold a permanent rank. The "token" black lieutenant, meanwhile, functioned as a liaison officer with no real field authority.<sup>32</sup>

Miami's black working class found little solace in organized labor. As Robert W. Saunders, field secretary for the NAACP, Florida State Conference, noted in 1963: "As labor goes, so goes the Negro."<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, labor

did not "go" too well regarding African Americans. Under Florida's right-to-work rule, employees were not obliged to join trade unions; but neither were unions constrained to admit all applicants. Consequently, most Dade County locals barred blacks from membership during the 1960s, thereby excluding them from craft opportunities and apprenticeship programs that prepared white laborers for career advancement. Other unions, meanwhile, retained separate "colored" auxiliary locals, whose members generally did not receive full membership rights.<sup>34</sup>

In the 1950s, the Miami chapters of the Civil Rights Congress and the NAACP attempted to end discrimination in Miami's lily-white trade unions, but these efforts produced few tangible results.<sup>35</sup> Well into the 1960s, Miami unions evidenced strong racial prejudice. As of 1962 and 1963, for example, none of the 1,500 people engaged in apprenticeship training programs in Dade County was black. By 1968, the number of black apprentices had climbed to only four. Most building-trades unions, moreover, operated with the tacit understanding that white artisans worked in white areas, while black mechanics worked in black neighborhoods. Yet, union officials often "furloughed" black craftsmen and put whites to work on black projects whenever business in white districts tapered off.<sup>36</sup> Effectively, noted local NAACP counsel Howard W. Dixon in 1955,

under such an arrangement "Negro union members [worked] as day laborers."<sup>37</sup> And, by the end of the 1960s, highly trained black mechanics continued to work without the guarantees of a fixed wage scale or uninterrupted employment.

To some degree, the 1964 Civil Rights Act equalized employment opportunities for Miami blacks by outlawing discriminatory hiring practices. Yet, the banishment of Jim Crow from the job market hardly made the city's skill-deficient black workforce qualified for middle-income vocations. Thus, without federal mandates enjoining private firms to actively recruit and train Negro personnel, black workers continued to find avenues to economic advancement blocked. By the end of the decade, therefore, little had changed to enhance employment possibilities for Dade County blacks, which a 1968 *Miami Herald* investigation found to be "still severely limited."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, as in central-city communities nationwide, chronic unemployment plagued Miami's disadvantaged black sections. According to one federally financed study of the city's urban afflictions, 37 percent of ghetto-area heads of households were jobless as of 1967. Moreover, African American unemployment rates consistently eclipsed white unemployment figures throughout the decade. At the time of Miami's 1968 riot, a local poverty relief agency

placed the level of unemployment in Liberty City-Brownsville at 8.0 percent--more than double the county-wide average of 3.2 percent. Surely, then, Miami NAACP director Donald Wheeler Jones aptly summarized the economic ordeal of out-of-work blacks when he attested: "The only way a lot of Negroes are keeping a roof over their heads now is catching breaks--waiting on street corners for somebody to give them a day's work."<sup>39</sup>

African American employment difficulties caused enormous social problems for Miami's black communities. Most obviously, staggering unemployment and underemployment reinforced the cycle of poverty that ran amok in Miami's ghetto communities. In 1970, in fact, 29 percent of all Coconut Grove families, 34 percent of all Overtown families, and 30 percent of all Liberty City-Brownsville families lived below poverty level. And, as a 1968 Miami Herald study concluded, another 28 percent of black Miamians lived marginally above the poverty line.<sup>40</sup>

There were other indices of social problems as well. Economic deprivation, for example, prompted hundreds, if not thousands, of African American men to join the ranks of Miami's "invisible" male population--husbands and fathers who lived out-of-house, feigning abandonment of their families so that their wives and children could qualify to receive welfare. At the same time, thousands of jobless

men actually did drop out of mainstream society, resulting in an inordinate number of female-headed households. As of 1970, in fact, fatherless black families constituted 23 percent of all black families in Miami.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1960s, a number of official welfare programs attacked the problem of social breakdown in Miami's ghetto communities. By 1966, for example, Dade County's Economic Opportunity Program, Inc. (EOPI), which functioned as the local arm of the federal War on Poverty, had initiated a Community Action Program (CAP) in black Miami aimed at redressing a broad range of socioeconomic ills. Yet, bureaucratic red tape and the sheer magnitude of the social problems involved blunted EOPI's effectiveness, despite the fact that Dade County's CAP received more federal anti-poverty funds than any comparable program in the nation. EOPI's on-the-job training program, for instance, targeted hard-core "unemployable" males but had difficulty recruiting this element. These men, who mostly worked as day laborers, could not avail themselves of job training because their impoverished households needed cash each evening. Thousands of black men in Miami simply could not wait a single week before receiving a paycheck.<sup>42</sup>

Other social welfare programs suffered from the same type of ineffectiveness. In 1967, for instance, only 200 of 900 children in one Overtown elementary school partici-

pated in a federal-state "free lunch" program, when virtually the entire student body qualified for meal assistance. Similar patterns prevailed in Liberty City schools as well. In attempting to locate the source of this problem, the *Miami News* found that school officials did a poor job of informing parents about the free lunch program. Moreover, the application process for the program was highly intimidating. As the *Miami News* wrote: "We have seen the [application] questionnaire. It is prying, it strips from the parents any semblance of dignity that they might have, it challenges the integrity of the person signing."<sup>43</sup> In some ways, therefore, the free lunch program discouraged many of the people whom it intended to help. This example, then, leaves little confusion as to why Miami blacks demanded greater community control of social programs in black neighborhoods.

The economic and employment crises of Miami blacks had a direct bearing upon the outburst of violence in Liberty City. In fact, both the *Miami Times* and the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence cited as a primary cause of the 1968 riot the failure of the local business community during the summers of 1967 and 1968 to provide a sufficient number of jobs for black youths, despite widely-publicized promises to do so. Doubtless, then, Georgia Lee Jones of the

county's biracial Community Relations Board articulated the frustrations of many ghetto residents when she thundered after the riot, "lies [and] promises [are] all we get from the white people."<sup>44</sup>

Of course, with respect to economic hardship and deplorable housing, Miami's black communities differed little from other inner-city boroughs throughout the nation. Unlike most American ghetto dwellers, though, blacks in Miami encountered an additional ethnic factor, which compounded racial difficulties and added to the rage and frustration of the African American community. Indeed, for black Miamians, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the subsequent exile migration to South Florida had grave implications, as vast numbers of Latin newcomers--300,000 by 1971--entered already tight markets for employment, housing, and municipal services.<sup>45</sup>

Dr. John O. Brown, vice-chairman of the Miami affiliate of the Congress of Racial Equality, explained black apprehension toward the Cuban influx in succinct terms. "The Negroes plain don't like it," said Brown in 1965. "They are very much afraid that this is going to cost them jobs." Such fears were not misguided. Immediately upon arrival, Cuban immigrants began infiltrating the area's low-wage, service economy, displacing large numbers of black laborers in Miami's menial trades. By the mid-1960s, in fact, the

city's hotel, restaurant, and building industries--formerly bastions of African American employment--had all experienced an impressive black-to-Cuban turnover.<sup>46</sup>

Particularly illustrative of this situation was black-Hispanic competition in the local garment trade. Prior to the Cuban exile migration, garment work had emerged as one of the few employment bright spots for Miami blacks. By the late 1950s, blacks had begun to make great strides in this field; and Miami's International Ladies Garment Workers Union became one of few Dade County craft unions to admit African Americans. As union business agent Robert Gladnick noted in 1963, however, "the arrival of the Cubans definitely stopped the progress of the Negro in the industry." Within a short span, Cubans came to monopolize non-union garment work by undercutting prevailing wage scales. As a result, hundreds of blacks lost jobs in the field, victimized by the typical last-hired-first-fired policies of local employers. In the early 1960s, moreover, Cubans came to dominate even unionized garment shops. Thus, by 1963, only 70 African Americans retained membership in Miami's 2000-member garment union, while Cubans comprised 75 percent of the union's membership and over 90 percent of the total garment-industry workforce.<sup>47</sup>

As economic competition between blacks and Hispanics grew, so too did African American hostility toward the

"Cuban invasion" of South Florida. As early as 1963, for example, *Ebony* magazine enumerated an array of "grave social and economic problems" that the Hispanic interlopers brought to black Miami "in the wake of their invasion." These included not only job displacement, but also the mass eviction of unemployed black tenants, an increase in crime and vice, and the reduction in receipts of Negro-owned businesses. Similarly, in 1965, Miami's NAACP branch expressed "great concern" to Governor Haydon Burns about the acute African American burdens ensuing from Cuban-engendered "economic oppression." A year later, likewise, the *Miami Times* complained that "Cubans are slowly taking over the business of Dade County."<sup>48</sup> Little wonder, then, that in their study of the Liberty City riot, federal investigators identified economic competition between blacks and Cubans as a primary factor in the origination of the disturbance.<sup>49</sup>

Cuban settlement in Dade County also reinforced crowded residential patterns in black Miami by limiting the number of available housing units in the area and by restricting the geographic space open to black community expansion. As civic activist Elizabeth Virrick explained in 1971, the accommodation of more than 350,000 refugees by the early 1970s had strained Dade County's housing inventory to the point where "many of the blacks and the poor [were] unable to compete" for residential space. And, for those

African Americans uprooted by urban-renovation measures in the late 1960s, Cuban in-migration made the search for replacement shelter doubly difficult.<sup>50</sup>

Cubans themselves, meanwhile, generally escaped the miserable living conditions prevalent in Miami's ghettos. As the Dade County Community Relations Board noted in 1967, "Cubans have far better housing than Negroes." In addition, the exiles competed successfully with Miami blacks for recreational facilities and municipal services. In 1968, for instance, Dade County HUD made plans to use federal urban-renewal funds to build a civic center in the predominantly Cuban municipality of Hialeah. Meanwhile, just miles to the southeast, black communities in Liberty City and Brownsville remained starved for recreational public works. Furthermore, because most refugees were light-skinned, they enjoyed greater social benefits than local blacks. According to Miami Urban League director James W. Whitehead, these included special classes for Latino schoolchildren, equal treatment with whites in city hospitals, and "every privilege in Miami that whites enjoy and which are often denied to Negroes."<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, as studies from the 1960s through the 1980s have shown, Miami's Cuban community had fewer social problems than the African American community.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the 1960s, in fact, the Cuban community had emerged

as America's most prosperous and viable immigrant enclave; and the Cuban success story had become legendary. Yet, this against-all-odds saga of industrious immigrants who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps explains only part of that story. As historian Raymond A. Mohl has shown, the vibrant Cuban community that developed in the 1960s was to a considerable extent a product of the welfare state, fueled by massive government assistance.<sup>53</sup>

More recently, in a segment of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," Monsignor Bryan Walsh offered a similar analysis. As director of the Catholic Services Bureau for the Archdiocese of Miami since 1955, Walsh dealt extensively with Cuban-related issues in the 1960s. According to him, the up-by-the-bootstraps legend ignored the fact that without tremendous outside assistance, Miami's Cuban community would have become "a permanent pocket of poverty in South Florida." Thus, in Walsh's view, "the success of the Cuban situation" derived from federal aid given to the exiles during the critical "initial adjustment period."<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, as refugees fleeing a communist regime, Cuban expatriates received preferential treatment and considerable assistance from cold war-era government agencies. The Cuban Refugee Program, for example, provided them with food and clothing, housing and relocation assistance, medical

care, education programs, job training, and job placement.<sup>55</sup> Understandably, such governmental favoritism incensed local blacks, who generally had little access to any of these services. Equally disturbing for blacks was the fact that Cubans qualified for federal relief payments that were higher than the maximum benefits paid to native residents under Dade County's welfare system. And, the newcomers qualified for federal welfare immediately, whereas U.S. citizens in Miami had to establish five years of local residency before qualifying for county aid. Assessing the impact of these disparities in 1965, a team of state administrators found that "a growing resentment" to the "preferential treatment" given to Hispanic outlanders had begun "seething in the Negro community."<sup>56</sup>

Federal economic aid to Cubans extended beyond social welfare programs, however. Loan money from the Small Business Administration (SBA), for example, allowed many exiles to start their own businesses; and these became the bedrock of the Cuban community's prosperous and self-sufficient "enclave economy." The black community, by contrast, received almost no SBA funds and, thus, continued to languish on the periphery of the metropolitan economy. As a case in point: in 1968, the SBA loaned about \$80,000 to blacks in Dade County, while distributing almost \$1 million more in loans to Hispanics. Such examples leave little confusion

as to why 60 percent of black Miamians polled in a 1968 community relations survey believed that the government was doing more to help Cubans than African Americans.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Cuban entrepreneurial success sometimes came at the expense of existing black enterprises. Thus, pro-Cuban federal assistance programs did not just benignly neglect Miami's African American citizenry; they occasionally exacerbated the economic woes visiting the city's hard-pressed black community. Hence, asserted Miami NAACP chief Donald Wheeler Jones in 1965: "The Government says they are extending democracy by bringing the Cubans over-- what they are doing is extending poverty right here." At the same time, Jones also wrote to the state's governor and one of its U.S. senators reprobating federal policies whereby Miami's African American community served as "a sacrificial lamb for the extension of freedom and democracy to refugees from a foreign land."<sup>58</sup>

Clearly, by the late 1960s, the stark contrast between rising Cuban fortunes and the still-downtrodden predicament of Miami blacks had furnished the city's African American community with just cause for dissatisfaction. Touring Miami in 1966, Martin Luther King warned about the potentially explosive consequences of acute black-Cuban economic rivalry.<sup>59</sup> Yet, this warning, like so many others, went unheeded. Official policies continued to alienate Miami

blacks by bestowing upon Cuban refugees social advantages that white society proscribed for blacks since the earliest days of Jim Crow. In 1968, this alienation found vivid expression in the riot-torn streets of Liberty City.

Despite the many grievances and frustrations of Miami's black community, the riot in Liberty City might not have come to pass had the state of local police-community relations not been so horrendous. "Almost invariably," wrote the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders in 1968, "the incident that incites disorder arises from police action."<sup>60</sup> The case was no different in Miami; violence ensued when police overreacted to the August 7 Vote Power rally. Thus, in an immediate sense, the policies and practices of the City of Miami Police precipitated the city's first racial disorder.

One event during the summer of 1967 epitomized the negative tenor of police-community relations in Miami during the 1960s. In July of that year, as rumors of impending civil disorder abounded, a group of local attorneys offered to aid city police in processing the inordinate number of prisoners that a major disturbance would likely produce. To their surprise, the assistant police chief told the lawyers that riot participants possessed no rights, that most rioters would be dead or hospitalized anyway, and that, therefore, the lawyers' services were not needed.

Upon reporting the chief's remarks to the City Attorney's Office, the counselors were simply told, "let the chips fall where they may." Not surprisingly, the attorneys "left the office with the impression that if riots were to begin, the Police might very well be the initiating factor."<sup>61</sup>

In large measure, the lack of police regard for community relations issues stemmed from the rigid law-and-order ethic of Chief Walter Headley. Long-time commander of the city's police force, Headley saw no linkage between law enforcement and community relations. Moreover, the veteran chief espoused the type of minority relations policies common in Deep-South cities during the 1930s and 1940s. Consequently, Chief Headley made little attempt to establish a friendly dialogue with Miami's African American community. On the contrary, he aggravated racial tensions when, in December 1967, he "declared war" on lawbreakers in Miami's Negro districts. "Community relations and all that sort of thing has failed," exclaimed the chief at a press conference. Headley, therefore, announced a new "get tough" policy, vowing to "use shotguns and dogs" to cut crime in the city's slums. As to the prevention of civil uprisings, Headley offered a simple formula: "when the looting starts, the shooting starts."<sup>62</sup>

Chief Headley did not hide the racial overtones of

his get-tough policy. He admitted that the primary target of his campaign was Negro males, "young hoodlums," between the ages of 15 and 20. To keep this group orderly, Headley charged his officers to enforce the city's "stop and frisk" ordinance, which empowered police to invoke search and seizure authority at will.<sup>63</sup>

Predictably, Chief Headley's pronouncements drew waves of criticism from civil rights groups and black community organizations, both locally and nationally. National CORE director Floyd McKissick, for example, credited Headley with "setting up the first Fascist state of Miami." Miami NAACP president Dr. George Simpson, likewise, worried that Headley was encouraging his officers "to revert to the enforcement practices of 15 or 20 years ago when, in too many instances, to be black was to be guilty." The chief's get-tough proclamation, Simpson concluded, "was an asinine thing to say." More denunciatory was local American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) chairman Richard Yale Feder, who remarked: "I must add my voice to those horrified by Chief Headley's 'final solution' to the crime problem. It reads like Eichmann's." In retrospect, however, Headley's most prophetic critic proved to be Neal Adams of the Brownsville Improvement Association, who found Headley's statements so inflammatory as to predict that "it wouldn't take much to touch off an insurrection."<sup>64</sup>

Yet, Headley's get-tough policy won strong backing from most municipal officeholders and white civic clubs. With the exceptions of black member Athalie Range and Puerto Rican-born Maurice Ferre, for instance, the Miami City Commission endorsed Headley's program to the hilt. Likewise, Miami Mayor Steve Clark and Vice Mayor Irwin Christie both insisted that shotgun-wielding patrolmen would violate nobody's rights and would deter lawbreaking in the city's crime-plagued precincts. Similar statements accompanied the all-white Downtown Kiwanis Club's official endorsement of Headley's get-tough campaign.<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, in fairness to Chief Headley, it should be noted that a large segment of Miami's African American community also supported the get-tough program. In fact, the results of one *Miami Herald* opinion poll in black areas showed that 48 percent of the respondents approved of Headley's program, while 39 percent disapproved, with the remainder holding no opinion. Clearly, most black Miamians were worried more about rising crime rates in the city's ghettos than about overaggressive police behavior. As Baptist preacher Thedford Johnson put it: "Shotguns and dogs? They could justify machine guns and lions if that's what it took to wipe out crime in our streets."<sup>66</sup>

Yet, the *Herald's* survey found that such attitudes were prevalent only among older African Americans. Since

this group was far more apt to be victimized by ghetto crime than to be brutalized by police, the older segment of the black population tended to support Headley's crackdown. But among young blacks, Headley's get-tough proposition met with suspicion and revilement. Unlike older African Americans, black youths spent much of their time in the streets, where they frequently encountered police on a personal basis. All too often, these encounters involved some type of harassment or mistreatment. According to the *Miami Herald*, such experiences helped create "a significant reservoir of hostility against police" in Miami's black neighborhoods. Generally, therefore, young blacks interpreted Headley's show-of-force policy as a racist declaration of an "open season" on ghetto residents.<sup>67</sup>

Militant youths might have been the most vocal critics of the police, but they were not the only black Miamians to express concern over Headley's new law-and-order agenda. Most non-elderly African Americans at least questioned the intent of Headley's get-tough policy. "Nobody's for open violence," commented one middle-aged Overtown resident, "but we're not for a police state either." "You can't put the town under martial law," this man concluded. Father Theodore Gibson, long-time civil rights leader, also considered Headley's declaration "unfortunate," intimating that its harsh tone would aggravate racial tensions in

Miami. Several other residents, all over 35 years of age, expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that Headley's program was too violent, that it "pick[ed] on the Negroes only," and that it would therefore "cause hard feeling[s] between both races." In sum, as the Dade County Community Relations Board noted in January 1968, many black citizens feared Headley's statements meant "a war on people rather than a war on crime."<sup>68</sup>

In the early months of 1968, police actions did much to confirm these fears. Almost daily, confrontations between blacks and police occurred as officers broke up curbside gatherings, making arrests for vagrancy and conducting degrading bodily searches of neighborhood youths, whom they commonly addressed as "boy" or "nigger." Likewise, shotgun-and-dog patrols routinely entered black night clubs and pool halls, demanding identification and searching patrons for weapons without probable cause. Occasionally, Miami's "finest" crossed the bounds of excessive force, as when two lawmen stripped a black teenager down to his shorts and dangled him by his ankles from a highway overpass. Yet, such things seemed not to bother Chief Headley. "We don't mind being accused of police brutality," he told the news media, "my police officers . . . are used to it."<sup>69</sup>

Not surprisingly, tensions between blacks and police

mounted steadily throughout Headley's get-tough administration. In the months prior to the Liberty City commotion, citizen complaints about police harassment, civil rights violations, and verbal abuse became commonplace. And, these same complaints found ample restatement among participants in Miami's ghetto rebellion. Indeed, more than one angry rioter railed against arbitrary and demeaning stop-and-frisk procedures. "You don't see no white man getting stopped and frisked," shouted one Liberty City resident in disgust.<sup>70</sup>

Police brutality was evident during the riot in Liberty City as well. Though the Dade County Grand Jury reported finding "little evidence of the use of unreasonable or excessive force" by the police during the disturbance, local residents told a different story. Bernard Dyer of the Liberty City Community Council, in fact, received dozens of brutality complaints, mostly from residents who did not take part in the rioting. For instance, police assaulted one married couple for sitting on the front porch of the pair's Northwest 63rd Street home in violation of the curfew that was in effect. Apparently, this couple did not move indoors fast enough after police ordered them to do so.<sup>71</sup>

George Chatfield and his wife experienced a similar incident. Police entered the Chatfields' home during the

Liberty City disorder in search of a suspected sniper. When the Chatfields did not cooperate as police saw fit, one officer beat Mr. Chatfield over the head and arrested him. Mrs. Chatfield was also injured and had to receive medical attention. After the scuffle, the Chatfields' young daughter reported the incident to Metro Dade County Mayor Chuck Hall, who was in conference with neighborhood spokesmen in downtown Liberty City. Hall forwarded the complaint to the acting police chief--Chief Headley being out of town during the actual riot period--with instructions to have Chatfield released from custody. The chief's office denied receiving this complaint, however. In fact, the Miami Police Department denied receiving any official brutality complaints, even the dozens that Bernard Dyer insisted he referred to Headley's office.<sup>72</sup>

Clearly, Miami City Commissioner Maurice Ferre had not been wrong when he prophesied that Chief Headley's hard-line program would "cause all types of problems."<sup>73</sup> Ultimately, in fact, Headley's get-tough approach helped breed the very unrest it was supposed to deter. As the Miami Study Team of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded in 1969, Headley's policy "of keeping an underprivileged and restless minority orderly and cowed by a constant visual display of force" failed because this policy "create[d] grievances which

[could] accumulate until they actually cause[d] a riot." Indeed, through his reactionary tactics and discriminatory application of the law, Headley only added to the embitterment and alienation of Miami's African American community. Ghetto inhabitants felt powerless and trapped, "boxed in" by "the Man." As a result, many blacks saw nothing to lose by striking out against the system. Thus, one youth surely spoke to the desperation of thousands when he declared to a Miami Herald reporter, "they got guns, the police, but tell 'em we been dead a long time."<sup>74</sup>

Apart from such first-hand testimonials, further evidence supports the conclusion that Chief Headley's inattention to community relations contributed to the fomentation of violence in Liberty City. Though most of Liberty City lay within the City of Miami, some parts extended into unincorporated Dade County. These sections fell within the jurisdiction of the Dade County Department of Public Safety, headed by Sheriff E. Wilson Purdy. Unlike Headley's department, Sheriff Purdy's office did implement a community relations program; and the results of that program showed Headley to have been incorrect in positing the failure of community relations endeavors.

Shortly after taking office in early 1967, Sheriff Purdy began to establish a rapport between his department and the black community within his jurisdiction. To this

end, his office created a Community Service Section composed of eleven full-time community relations officers. These men met regularly with community spokesmen, visited neighborhood bars and poolrooms, and generally helped people cope with everyday problems.<sup>75</sup>

The benefits of this community relations program were many. For one thing, it enabled the Dade County Sheriff's Office to establish a high level of communication with the African American community--something the City of Miami Police never achieved. As a result, Purdy's department earned the trust and respect of many ghetto residents. As the *Miami Times* wrote in August 1968, "our hats are off to 'top cop' Purdy and his staff of trained personnel." Moreover, Purdy's community concern helped reduce criminal activity. While the crime rate in Dade County rose 20 percent in 1967, which equaled the national average, the increase was a mere 4.1 percent in the Liberty City-Brownsville area patrolled by the Sheriff's Office.<sup>76</sup>

Yet, the greatest indicator of the success of Purdy's policy was the geographic delimitation of the 1968 riot itself. During the two days of violence, the disturbance was confined almost entirely within the City of Miami, while the county segment of Liberty City remained peaceful. This is not to say that ghetto occupants within Purdy's district were content with their quality of life. However,

these spatial characteristics do lend credence to the *Miami Times*'s assertion that "last week's riot vividly pointed out the community relations policy of Chief Walter Headley has failed miserably."<sup>77</sup>

Yet, this failure was only part of the larger community relations failure of Miami's local administration as a whole. Nothing illustrated this point better than Dade County's grand jury investigation of the 1968 disturbance, which found "no prior warning of trouble" in pre-riot Liberty City.<sup>78</sup> In retrospect, this assertion seems almost comical. The Liberty City uprising had been in the making for some time, and there had been myriad early warning signs.

For a number of years, for example, black civic leaders and black community organizations had impressed upon city officials the need for better housing in black areas. Similarly, throughout the 1960s, Dade County labor leaders, the *Miami Times*, state investigators, and even Martin Luther King had warned about African American economic grievances arising from Cuban immigration to Miami. And, for decades, the black community had sought better police protection, while imploring local authorities to hire more black patrolmen to replace abusive and racist white lawmen in the city's ghettos. Finally, just months before the violent eruption in Liberty City, the *Miami Herald* published a comprehensive

community relations survey outlining all these problems.

Hence, the warning signs were plainly visible; Miami's purblind policymakers simply chose to overlook them. Truly, Miami's civil leadership took few steps to accommodate blacks' attempts to improve their lives by reforming the ghetto system. Occasionally, in fact, public policy undermined these attempts, creating greater socioeconomic difficulties for local ghetto residents. As a result, large numbers of African Americans came to feel as though white leaders, and white society in general, had forgotten them completely. David Fincher, Miami's black delegate to the federal team that investigated the Liberty City disorder, made this point clear in his summary of the riot: "The people in my community have no where to go, or no one to turn to who is very deeply concerned with their problems."<sup>79</sup>

Like most people, African Americans in Miami wished to conduct their lives with dignity and self-respect. As one ghetto insurrectionist put it, "the Negro wants to be treated like a human being."<sup>80</sup> Yet, in the face of ubiquitous racial discrimination and inequity, many black Miamians felt they were not treated as such. In the job market, for instance, color-biased employment practices deprived blacks of meaningful occupational opportunities. Likewise, poverty and discrimination in the housing market

forced blacks to crowd into blight-scourged, crime-infested slums, which sapped their health, and where the policeman and the felon were often coequal enemies. White indifference toward these problems, meanwhile, reinforced the belief that blacks could secure little alleviation of their ghetto suffering through conventional grievance-relief channels. By 1968, then, Miami's African American community was ripe for rebellion. This was especially true for younger blacks, who usually had no families to support, no steady employment to put on the line, and generally nothing to lose by rising up against the system.

In sum, the Liberty City revolt conformed to Robert M. Fogelson's interpretation of the 1960s' riots as "articulate protests against genuine grievances in the black ghettos." Miami's ghetto insurrection constituted a form of protest because it was a black attempt to call the attention of white society to African Americans' dissatisfaction with their subordinate socioeconomic position and with their squalid inner-city plight. This, in fact, had been the purpose of the Vote Power rally out of which the rebellion evolved--to demonstrate that local blacks were far less content with their social and economic situation than white leaders had suggested to Democratic party officials during their efforts to lure the 1968 Democratic national convention to Miami Beach.<sup>81</sup>

Further, the Liberty City rebellion was articulate in that ghetto revolters directed their actions against the sources of blacks' most urgent and annoying grievances. In talking with news reporters, for example, riot participants invariably explained the origins of the disorder in terms of deplorable and crowded housing conditions, police abuses, consumer exploitation, or unemployment and economic deprivation. In keeping with the spirit of these complaints, rioters inflicted the greatest amount of damage upon white retail shops and the police. This was no accident. The rioters were deliberate and selective in attacking symbols of their subordinate condition.<sup>82</sup>

Nonetheless, neither ghetto grievances nor black protests against them accounted for the timing of the 1968 riot. After all, living conditions in black Miami had been horrendous since the city's incorporation in 1896. Yet, Miami's first- and second-generation black communities did not take to the streets in violent protest against their oppression. This does not mean that African Americans in Jim Crow-era Dade County stood idle as passive victims of racial injustice. On the contrary, since the 1940s, black citizens in Miami had organized concerted, community-level protests against their inferior status. Black community leaders simply directed that protest through demonstrations, boycotts, voting, and other conventional

political and economic channels. As most of these leaders were middle class in outlook, they naturally favored an orderly approach to social change. Moreover, many black community leaders were ministers, who held both moral and professional commitments to nonviolence.

In 1968, however, a sizable minority of Liberty City's population let it be known that African Americans would find alternative ways to be heard when white society closed conventional protest channels to blacks. The paradox here was that living conditions in black Miami were better in the 1960s than at any time before. Certainly, Miami blacks had made noticeable social progress by the 1960s; but this was not enough to forestall ghetto rebellion.

Part of the answer to this apparent dilemma lay in the fact that Miami's young, third-generation blacks, who did most of the actual rioting, gauged progress differently than their elders. To young Miami blacks in the 1960s, generational progress was irrelevant in comparison to progress measured in terms of black-versus-white. One Liberty City rioter made this point evident when he told a local journalist: "The biggest mistake Whitey ever made was to let me go to the home of the white lady my grandmother works for. I learned a lot there. If I'd never gone, I wouldn't know what a garbage can I live in." Doubtless, the apartment in which this young man lived

was markedly superior to the shotgun cottage in which his grandmother grew up. This fact meant nothing to the man, however. This rioter was concerned only with the fact that "Whitey" had better housing than he did; and he, and thousands like him, wanted better housing too.<sup>83</sup>

Such youthful impatience for progress and equality stemmed partly from raised expectations created by the civil rights movement--expectations that did not often translate into reality in Miami's ghettos. The civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s gave virtually all American blacks a new sense of pride and empowerment, as it sent the system of state-sanctioned white supremacy to its grave. Thus, one of the lessons of civil rights battles appeared to be that blacks could achieve the same things as whites. This seemingly positive message carried dangerous implications, however. As Florida's Advisory Commission on Race Relations warned in 1960, "any group [that is] encouraged to follow and accept the goals of the majority while not being given the economic means to reach these goals will increase in frustration and tension."<sup>84</sup>

Such was the case with Miami's young ghetto residents. For them, the much-anticipated gains of the civil rights movement were largely symbolic. Only the black middle class realized tangible and significant material benefit from the downfall of legalized apartheid. Open housing

laws, for instance, had no real impact on the residential patterns of Miami's inner-city blacks. Likewise, fair employment mandates did not qualify Miami's untrained African American youngsters for decent employment. Moreover, massive Cuban migration to the Miami area in the 1960s further impeded social and economic progress for local blacks. As one scholar has recently asserted, Miami was so thoroughly engaged in accommodating Cuban exiles in the 1960s that it "[pushed] civil rights and social reform issues into the background."<sup>85</sup>

As ghetto youths came to recognize that civil rights reforms would not redress their plight, Miami's ghetto temper grew increasingly desperate and volatile. Many youths feared that their ghetto confinement and subordinate state were becoming permanent. From this desperate mood came the African American demand for ghetto reform through black community control. The logic of this movement was straightforward: blacks themselves, rather than white slumlords, merchants, and policemen, should hold most of the power within black communities, since only blacks cared enough about inner-city problems to correct them.<sup>86</sup> Yet, the movement for community control brought little, if any, discernible change by the late 1960s. Rent strikes failed to weaken the power of ghetto slumlords, white merchants continued to monopolize trade in blacks areas, and white

police continued to harass and abuse ghetto residents with relative impunity. At the same time, ghetto housing continued to deteriorate, black poverty and unemployment rates climbed, and soaring crime levels in black districts helped make Miami the most crime-plagued city in the country.

By 1968, then, Miami's volatile ghetto communities required only a spark to ignite into open rebellion. That spark came in Liberty City in August 1968. The outburst in Liberty City marked an African American protest measure designed to compel the larger society to confront long-ignored problems that afflicted Miami's inner-city blacks. The revolt also represented a forceful restatement of the African American demand for black control of black communities and institutions. It was a certification that black Miamians would not sheepishly accept injustice and inequality. "Instead," noted Robert M. Fogelson, blacks "intend[ed] to call attention to their grievances, to share in the benefits of affluent America, to even the score with white merchants, and ultimately to gain control over their own communities." In brief, the Liberty City uprising was, as Jack M. Bloom has observed of the 1960s' revolts generally, "a way to win black gains, under conditions where most participants felt that there was no other way to win them."<sup>87</sup>

The tragedy of the whole episode, though, was that blacks' reform-through-riot efforts in 1968 proved largely unsuccessful. Indeed, 13 "mini-riots" in black Miami during the 1970s and four major riots in Liberty City and Overtown during the 1980s amply evidenced the lack of improved life chances for the bulk of Miami's ghetto inhabitants.<sup>88</sup> As late as 1982, in fact, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights could still report that "blacks have been excluded from the economic mainstream in Miami." Even today, the black community seems hopelessly lodged at the bottom of the metropolitan economy, racked by high unemployment and poverty-level incomes. Moreover, Miami blacks continue to endure below-standard and largely segregated housing and schooling.<sup>89</sup> Plainly, many of the human relations problems that spawned revolt in 1968 still haunt the African American community today; and these problems have kept blacks in Miami on the brink of rage and despair ever since.

NOTES

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3. Miami Planning Board, *Dwelling Conditions in the Two Principal Blighted Areas: Miami, Florida* (Miami: City of Miami, 1949), 30-68; Elizabeth L. Virrck, "New Housing for Negroes in Dade County, Florida," in Nathan Glazer and Davis McEntire, eds., *Studies in Housing & Minority Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 136-137.
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8. Wolff and Gillogly, *Negro Housing in the Miami Area*, 4-6, 8-10, 21; Dewey Knight, interview printed in Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 650-651; Raymond A. Mohl, "Making the Second Ghetto in Metropolitan Miami, 1940-1960," *Journal of Urban History* 21 (March 1995), 401-402, 415-416; Raymond A. Mohl, "Race and Space in the Modern City: Interstate-95 and the Black Community in Miami," in Arnold R. Hirsch and Raymond A. Mohl, eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth-Century America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 125-134; Bruce Porter and Marvin Dunn, *The Miami Riot of 1980: Crossing the Bounds* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1984), 11.

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