

EXPLOSION: MIAMI TRIES TO FATHOM THE VIOLENCE NEW OUTBREAK IS 4TH EPISODE IN; OVERTOWN AREA SINCE 1980

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)

January 19, 1989, THURSDAY, FIVE STAR Edition

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Section: WAR PAGE; Pg. 1A

Length: 987 words

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Body

MIAMI OVERTOWN IS a predominantly black neighborhood in downtown **Miami** with a population of nearly 14,000. Most of the buildings are two-storied, boarded up and uninhabitable. Drugs are sold openly on every other corner. The streets, strewn with debris, are usually populated with nondescript men on the corners, sitting on beat-up sofas or overturned shopping carts. Stray dogs almost outnumber the people. But on Tuesday, **Overtown** was anything but noisy. Fear was evident. Schools were closed, and so were some stores. Few people talked, although some children standing near a police roadblock were singing, "We Shall Overcome." Then Tuesday night, for the second straight night, **Overtown's** streets lit up the **Miami** sky. The latest round of **violence** is the fourth similar incident **in Overtown since 1980**. It is a community beset by problems, from prostitution to drugs. Its biggest concern, though, is dealing with the job competition from the steady flow of immigrants into the **Miami area**. According to city officials, **Overtown's** average income is less than \$7,000, and 55 percent of the population is unemployed. **Overtown's** community leaders say their earning power has gone down with the rising number of Cubans and other refugees who come into the **Miami area**. The latest wave of immigration is from Nicaragua. The newcomers have been greeted with an outpouring of charity and have been sheltered at Bobby Maduro **Miami** Stadium, an action that has upset **Miami's** black community. "All of the refugees that come over here . . . Why are we (the government) so concerned about them instead of us?" asked the Rev. Thomas Ferguson, pastor of the South Florida Under God Church.

"They have not dropped one blood for American soil. It's not fair. We are taxpayers. We are American citizens. We are part of the American dream. Where is this justice? Why do we have to wait until a situation like this before we **try** to solve the problem?" Residents of **Overtown** feel that Cubans, and eventually the Nicaraguans, will take jobs away from blacks. Tyrone Jones, 29, a butcher in an **Overtown** grocery, said that's why only white stores were hit by vandals during the first night. "The white store owners want to pay the refugees less money or they want to work us 60 to 70 hours a week," said Jones, who was shot in the leg by police in 1980. "I wouldn't be surprised if more white stores are burned. I've heard that we will take this rioting to the Super Bowl so the nation will understand our problems, not just local government. We are tired of being talked down to. "This is no place to live, no place to raise a family. If they can give the Cubans and Nicaraguans money, I want mine first. Or move them here, and let me have the advantages and benefits they do." A series of incidents involving police also has contributed to tensions in the black community. PULSE, a group of black ministers organized to improve conditions for black **Miami** after the **1980** riots, has repeatedly alleged brutality on the part of police officers. "The police are worthless," said Tawanda Johnson, 16. "It's the way they talk to people; it's very condescending. They don't shoot to halt in this neighborhood. They shoot to kill." Mayor Xavier Suarez of **Miami** said he found nothing to substantiate claims by some blacks that the unrest was caused by resentment over the waves of Nicaraguan immigrants coming to **Miami**. "The people know we are working toward finding out the truth," said Suarez. "We're looking to normalize everything and keep police presence as unobtrusive as possible. As far as the Super Bowl, the city braces. We hold our breath." The National Football League's office issued a short statement Tuesday saying only that officials were keeping an eye on the situation. When **Overtown** resident Jones heard about it, he replied:

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"If I was the NFL, I would keep my eyes, ears, feet and the rest of my body out of the stadium on Super Bowl Sunday."

Classification

Language: English

Subject:

Company: MIAMI OVERTOWN (97%); MIAMI OVERTOWN (97%)

Person: TYRONE JONES (57%)

Geographic: MIAMI, FL, USA (94%); FLORIDA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (94%)

Load-Date: October 23, 1993

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