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## COLORED TOWN: MIAMI'S BLACK COMMUNITY, 1896-1930

by PAUL S. GEORGE\*

AT THE TIME of Miami's incorporation in 1896, the fortunes of black Americans had declined to their lowest level since the Civil War. The heady illusions and notable accomplishments of the freedmen during Reconstruction had succumbed to the harsh realities of economic dependency and the restoration of white Democratic rule in the South. Increasingly, blacks found themselves scapegoats for political and economic tensions and targets of virulent new doctrines of racial inferiority, resulting in widespread disfranchisement, segregation (Jim Crow) legislation, and increasing white intimidation and violence in Florida and elsewhere in the South. The problems worsened in the early decades of the twentieth century, a period that one historian has aptly described as the "nadir of race relations in Florida and the nation."<sup>1</sup>

The racial situation in Miami was typical. After incorporation, the city upheld state segregation statutes, passed its own Jim Crow ordinances, and consigned blacks to cramped quarters with inadequate municipal services. Miami's white citizens vigilantly resisted black movement into their neighborhoods, administered a dual system of justice, and countenanced white terrorism of blacks.

Fifty years before the incorporation of Miami, slaves from the Carolinas began immigrating to south Florida to work on the few plantations in the sparsely settled region. Later, Bahamian blacks, attracted by employment opportunities in the rich agricultural fields of Coconut Grove, south of Miami, settled in the area. They

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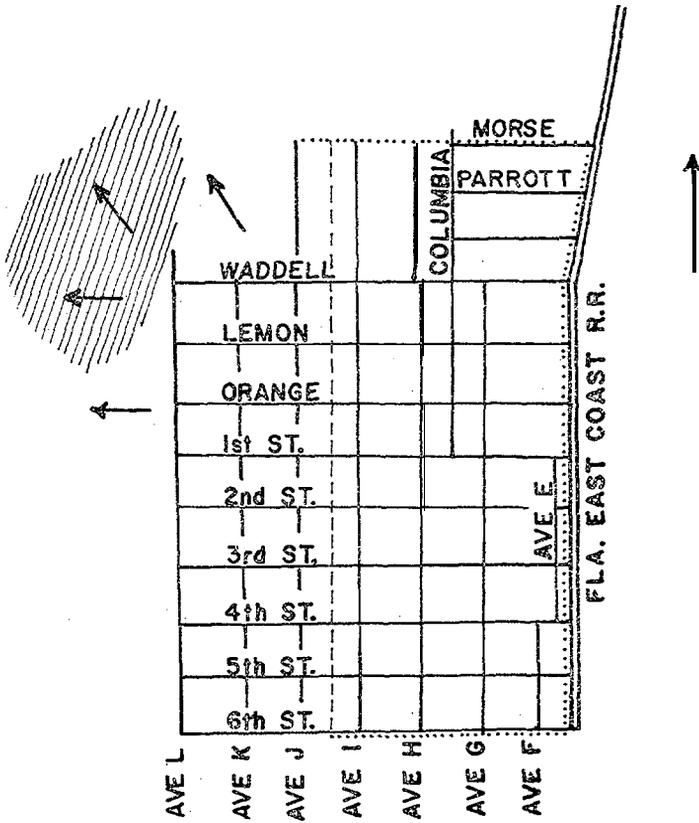
1. Jerrell H. Shofner, "Custom, Law, and History: The Enduring Influence of Florida's 'Black Code,'" *Florida Historical Quarterly*, LV (January 1977), 290. For a treatment of white attitudes toward blacks nationally, see George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971).

were followed still later by small numbers of blacks from north Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Tiny black communities soon dotted the landscape north and south of Miami. Substantial migration of blacks did not occur, however, until Henry M. Flagler began constructing his Florida East Coast Railroad into Miami, and brought in hundreds of black laborers.<sup>2</sup>

The railroad launched an era of frenetic urban growth in south Dade County. From a settlement numbering only a few families in 1895, Miami mushroomed to a town of 3,000 by the summer of 1896. Blacks worked with white laborers in clearing land and on various construction projects and lived among them in a temporary "tent city."<sup>3</sup> Blacks and whites also labored together in community affairs. According to one pioneer Miamian, several blacks spoke at the incorporation meeting in July 1896. Of 368 persons who voted in the incorporation election, 162 were blacks. Most black voters were registered to vote immediately before the elections by the Flagler organization, which wanted their support for incorporation and for its slate of candidates in the first municipal elections.<sup>4</sup>

Incorporation marked the beginning and end of meaningful black involvement in municipal affairs for more than six decades. Within a few years of incorporation, blacks were virtually disfranchised. State statutes in 1897 and 1901 enabled the Democratic party of Florida to exclude blacks from membership, preventing them from participating in Democratic primaries, the only meaningful contests in the solid Democratic South.<sup>5</sup> Black

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2. Transcript of an interview with Kate Dean and Louise Davis, members of pioneer black families in south Florida, conducted by the Miami Dade County Library and Dade Heritage Trust, Miami, Florida, May 29, 1973, pp. 1-6, 11-12, 14-17, 19; Historical Association of Southern Florida; *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1976; *Miami Times*, July 1, 1976; Jean C. Taylor, "South Dade's Black Pioneers," Historical Association of Southern Florida *Update*, III (June 1976) 10.
  3. Transcript of interview with Kate Dean and Louise Davis, May 29, 1973, 1-6, 11-12, 14-17, 19; *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1976; Nixon Smiley, *Yesterday's Miami* (Miami, 1973), 24.
  4. Transcript of the proceedings of the meeting held July 28, 1896 for the incorporation of the City of Miami, Florida, Office of the Clerk of the City of Miami; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, July 28, 1917; *Miami Herald*, July 22, 1976; *Miami Metropolis*, May 15, 1896; *Miami Times*, July 1, 1976.
  5. "An Act to Provide for the Payment of a Capitation or Poll Tax as a Prerequisite for Voting and Prescribing the Duties of Tax Collector and Supervisor of Registration in Relation Thereto," *Laws of Florida*, 1889, 13-14; "An Act to Regulate the Holding of Political Primary Elections



### COLORED TOWN c. 1920

--- "color line" c. 1911  
(western boundary)

..... other boundaries

← black expansion pressure

////// Highland Park

Redrawn by Malinda Stafford. Florida State Museum.



A home in Colored Town, circa 1900. Courtesy of the Historical Association of Southern Florida.

A black laundress in Colored Town, circa 1930.



George: Colored Town: Miami's Black Community, 1896-1930

# Colored Town Bargain Store



Dealer in

**GENERAL MERCHANDISE,**

Shoes,

Hats,

Caps,

Dry-Goods,

Tinware,

Copperware.

and Groceries.

***CHEAPEST BARGAIN HOUSE IN CITY.***

**Mr. S. W. BROWN, Prop.**

**Mrs. S. W. Brown, Lady Clerk.**

**Miss Lilla V. Brown, Ass't Clerk.**

**303 Ave. G.**

**MIAMI, FLA.**

**236**

An advertisement for the Colored Town Bargain Store, a flourishing local business, as it appeared in the *Miami City Directory* of 1904. Courtesy of the Historical Association of Southern Florida.

Miamians could join the weak Republican party and vote in general elections upon payment, once every two years, of a poll tax of one dollar. Few bothered. In 1920, registered white voters in Dade County outnumbered blacks fourteen to one. That margin increased significantly at election time, since a high percentage of blacks failed to pay their poll tax on time, and thus were barred from voting.<sup>6</sup>

Segregation also became a way of life. Residential segregation, the cornerstone of racial separation, was from the beginning the rule in Miami. Restrictive clauses in land deeds prohibited the sale of land to blacks except in the section called Colored Town, in Miami's northwest sector.<sup>7</sup> Colored Town quickly became an impoverished, congested quarter, abounding with disease and crime. Most white Miamians heard or read of it only in a criminal context or during periods of unrest, and many were ignorant of a subculture there which contained enterprises, institutions, and activities characteristic of many black settlements. It included a bustling black business community, vice district, a variety of entertainment, and numerous churches. Colored Town also contained an interesting population mix, since a sizable percentage of its inhabitants were Bahamian blacks, and a lesser number were Jamaican and Haitian Negroes. Despite substantial popula-

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in the State of Florida for the Nomination of Delegates to Political Conventions, or of Candidates for Any Elective Office Under the Laws of This State," *Laws of Florida*, 1897, 62-64; "An Act to Regulate the Holding of Political Primaries in the State of Florida for Nominating Candidates for Any Office Under the Laws of This State, and for Nominating Delegates to Political Conventions," *Laws of Florida*, 1901, 160-65; *Constitution of Florida*, 1885, "Declaration of Rights," section 2.

6. *Daily Miami Metropolis*, May 27, 1909; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, October 18, 1920; *Miami Herald*, September 21, October 15, 1920; Jesse Jefferson Jackson, "The Negro and the Law in Florida, 1821-1921: Legal Patterns of Segregation and Control in Florida, 1821-1921" (M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1960), 96, 98-101.
7. Ruby Leach Carson, "Miami: 1896 to 1900," *Tequesta*, XVI (1956), 8; J. K. Dorn, "Recollections of Early Miami," *Tequesta*, IX (1949), 55; *Miami Metropolis*, May 15, 1896. Miami's original boundaries extended from Fourteenth Street on the banks of the Miami River north to First Street, and from Avenue A along Biscayne Bay west to Avenue H beyond the Florida East Coast Railroad tracks. Encompassing an area extending from Sixth Street to First Street and from the railroad tracks near Avenue F to Avenue H, Colored Town comprised about fifteen per cent of Miami's original area. During its first thirty-five years, this black community expanded slowly in a northwesterly direction. Colored Town is sometimes called "Overtown" in modern accounts of Miami's original black settlement, but the author has not seen this term used in the primary sources he has examined.

tion increases, whites prevented Colored Town from expanding much beyond its original boundaries. This resistance produced explosive racial situations, and is a pervasive theme in the early history of Miami.

Black Miami grew quickly. Depending on the year, it comprised twenty-five to forty per cent of Miami's total population during its first generation. Heavy migration and a high birth rate accounted for its rapid growth. Lured by prospects of better economic opportunities and Colored Town's growing reputation as an entertainment center, blacks from the Bahamas and other parts of the Caribbean, as well as native Americans, poured into the area.<sup>8</sup>

Colored Town lacked proper facilities for even a small population. Municipal penuriousness resulted in unpaved and pock-marked streets and footpaths, insufficient lighting, uncleared areas of wilderness, and a dearth of sanitary facilities. The black community had no park until the 1920s; a library came even later. Although generally insensitive to black needs, the *Miami Herald* admitted in 1920 that "in the distribution of improvements, Colored Town has not fared equally with other portions of the city," and averred that its people "are entitled to at least a fair proportion of city improvements."<sup>9</sup>

The most glaring deficiency in the private sector was the severe shortage and low quality of housing. Most dwellings were cramped and rickety, vulnerable to heavy rains, winds, and fire. Few homes possessed electricity or indoor plumbing. As Colored Town's population grew, the housing problem became even more acute. In 1920, social workers discovered 100 families re-siding on one block, while a single lot on another block contained nine cottages.<sup>10</sup>

In such an environment disease was rampant. Colored Town residents suffered epidemics of yellow fever and influenza and

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8. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Population*, II (Washington, 1913), 66; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Population*, II (Washington, 1922), 759-60, 795; *Miami Herald*, September 26, 1912, February 10, April 20, 1915, February 1, 1916. According to the United States census report for 1920 Miami contained more West Indian-born inhabitants than any other American city except New York.
  9. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, May 10, 27, 1920; *Miami Herald*, April 28, 1920; *City Manager's Report* (Miami, 1926), 95, 97.
  10. *Daily Miami Metropolis*, October 21, November 7, 1904; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, May 10, 27, 1920; *Miami Herald*, February 1, 1916.

sporadic outbreaks of smallpox. Venereal disease was widespread. The area's infant mortality rate was twice that of white Miami. Yet the settlement had few physicians and no hospitals until the Christian Hospital, a wooden structure containing twelve bedrooms, opened in 1918.<sup>11</sup>

A public school did exist in Colored Town as early as 1896, but "School Number Two," as it was styled, was cramped for space and hampered by poor lighting and an absence of blackboards and heating. Additional public schools arrived slowly; there was no black high school until the 1920s. The shortage of public schools led to the creation of many private, industrial, and home-study institutions. Most were of dubious quality. Predictably, truancy was high and learning slow. As late as 1930, the illiteracy rate for black Miamians ten years of age and older was 11.3 per cent, as opposed to an illiteracy rate of 0.3 per cent among white Miamians of the same age.<sup>12</sup>

If schools were few, churches were abundant; one resident characterized Colored Town as "a city of churches."<sup>13</sup> Baptist churches were the most numerous, but Colored Town also contained many Methodist and Episcopal churches, and a fewer number of Seventh Day Adventist, Pentecostal, and Church of God congregations. Churches varied sharply in size and style. Many were large structures, others were homes, stores, and even tents. The prevalence of churches underlined the significance of religion in black communities. Spiritual, social, and even political activities took place frequently in the churches. Ministers were

11. Florida State Board of Health Report for 1899-1903 (Jacksonville, 1904), 14-34; Board of Health Report, 1909, 59; Board of Health Report, 1912, 132; Board of Health Report, 1913, 137; Board of Health Report, 1921-1922, 274-77. Transcript of an oral history interview with Annie M. Coleman, Colored Town civic leader, conducted by Harvey and Mary Napier for the Miami Dade County Public Library and Dade Heritage Trust, May 10, 1976, 6, Historical Association of Southern Florida; *Miami Herald*, April 21, 1975; William M. Straight, "James M. Jackson, Jr., Miami's First Physician," *Tequesta*, XXXIII (1973), 81-82.
12. Florida Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1897-1898 (Tallahassee, 1899), 100, 106, 111, 185; Report of Superintendent, 1903-1904, 84, 137; Report of Superintendent, 1904-1905, 319; Report of Superintendent, 1911-1912, 234, 412-13; Report of Superintendent, 1921-1922, 523; Report of Superintendent, 1927-1928, 230-31; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Population*, III (Washington, 1932), pt. 1, 412; *Daily Miami Metropolis*, November 7, 15, 1904, January 27, 1905; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, July 19, 1920; *Miami Herald*, July 10, 1911, February 9, 1976; Thelma Peters, "Miami's First School," *Update*, I (February 1974), 7.
13. *Daily Miami Metropolis*, September 24, 1904.

important figures, and were recognized as community leaders and spokesmen to the white population.<sup>14</sup>

Colored Town's business and professional community formed another influential element. A business district, predominantly black-owned, took shape along a half mile strip on Avenue G. By 1905, it contained grocery and general merchandise stores, ice cream parlor, pharmacy, funeral parlor, clubhouses, rooming houses, and an office of *The Industrial Reporter*, a black newspaper. These enterprises were later joined by a soft drink plant, professional offices, real estate brokers, insurance agencies, and numerous food and entertainment establishments.<sup>15</sup>

Dana A. Dorsey was Colored Town's most prominent businessman and its lone millionaire. After coming to Miami in 1896 from Quitman, Georgia, it is said that he parlayed a \$25 parcel of land into a business empire which included properties in Dade and Broward counties, Cuba, and the Bahamas. By 1920, Dorsey's holdings also included Colored Town's first hotel, which became a gathering spot for visiting dignitaries. On Sundays, Dorsey rode about in a chauffeured limousine collecting rents from his properties. He was Colored Town's main benefactor, and he financed the community's first park, a library, and a school.<sup>16</sup>

Other black luminaries included the Reverend Mr. S. W. Brown, a South Carolinian who owned the bustling Colored Town Bargain Store and other properties; Henry Reeves, a Bahamian, who published the *Miami Times*, Colored Town's most influential newspaper; Kelsey Pharr, a funeral director and developer of the community's first cemetery; and Richard Toomey, the first black lawyer in south Florida, vice president of the Negro National Bar Association, and for many years a principal spokesman for black Miamians.<sup>17</sup>

14. Federal Works Agency, Works Projects Administration, *Guide to Supplementary Vital Statistics From Church Records. The Florida Historical Records Survey*, I (Jacksonville, 1942), 154-75; interview with Annie Germaine, a black Bahamian who migrated to Miami. in 1921, Miami, Florida, January 29, 1977; *Miami City Directory*, 1907 (Jacksonville, 1907), 241; *City Directory*, 1926, 36.

15. *City Directory*, 1904, 31-32; *City Directory*, 1914, 297-98; *City Directory*, 1927, 1179-1320; *Daily Miami Metropolis*, January 27, 1905; Dorothy Fields, "Reflections on Black History: Miami's First Newspaper," *Update*, III (February 1976), 10; Dorothy Fields, "The Industrial Reporter: Miami's Early Black Newspaper," *Update*, III (August 1976), 4.

16. Transcript of interview with Annie M. Coleman, May 10, 1976, 15; *Miami Herald*, January 29, 1950, April 20, 1975, February 1, 1976.

17. *City Directory*, 1915, 344; Historical Association of Southern Florida,

Black labor was the backbone of the city's physical plant and many businesses. From Flagler's clearance and construction projects in 1896 to the building boom of the 1920s, blacks played a vital role in the growth and prosperity of Miami. White Miami's dependency on black labor was evident during racial crises, when the specter of a mass exodus impelled business and community leaders to assure blacks that they would receive better treatment and protection.<sup>18</sup>

Employment figures are not available, but other information indicates that for much of the period the area's expanding economy provided ample job opportunities for a large labor force. In addition to construction projects, blacks toiled as draymen and hackmen at the railroad station, and as stevedores, hotel porters, mechanics, leather tanners, blacksmiths, domestics, tailors, gardeners, and farmers. Black women were prized as laundresses, nursemaids, cooks, and cleaners.<sup>19</sup>

Black Miamians enjoyed various leisure activities. They participated in colorful minstrel shows, bazaars, festivals, parades, athletic contests, and excursions to the beach and to other black communities, especially Coconut Grove, South Miami, Buena Vista, Lemon City, and Little River. There were numerous secret and fraternal orders, civic and business organizations, Red Cross and YMCA establishments, black nationalist groups, and local chapters of Bahamian clubs.<sup>20</sup> Avenue G was the center for activities and organizations. Clubs met nightly in commodious, dimly-lighted buildings. The street also hosted parades celebrating the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, religious holidays, and, in deference to the large Bahamian element, even British holidays. Impressive parades occurred when contingents

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"Reflections on Black History"; scrapbook of Agnew Welsh, book 40A, 61, Florida Room, Miami Dade County Public Library; *Miami Herald*, May 31, 1976.

18. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, July 17, 1917; *Miami Herald*, July 17, 1917; Dorn, "Recollections of Early Miami," 55.
19. *City Directory*, 1904, 32-33; *City Directory*, 1927, 1179-1320; *Miami Herald*, April 20, 1975, February 1, 1976; Smiley, *Yesterday's Miami*, 12-14, 33.
20. *City Directory*, 1907, 241-42; *Daily Miami Metropolis*, September 19, 1904, January 10, 1905; *Miami Herald*, December 26, 1912, February 21, 1975; Dorothy Fields, "Black Entertainment, 1908-1919," *Update*, II (December 1974), 11; Dr. S. H. Johnson as told to Dorothy Fields, "Reflections on Black History: Fun and Games Overtown," *Update*, IV (August 1977), 8, 9, 11.

of black Miamians left for military service during World War I. Parades sponsored by the Colored American Legion on Armistice Day were equally festive after 1918.<sup>21</sup>

Renamed Northwest Second Avenue in the 1920s, Avenue G acquired fame for other kinds of entertainment. The syncopated sounds of jazz and the blues issued nightly from its nightclubs and dance halls. Northwest Second Avenue also contained the Lyric, a legitimate theater, and several movie houses, as well as its own trolley car line. The strip's rich entertainment accounted for a new sobriquet, "Little Broadway," and a growing national reputation. In the 1930s and 1940s, its clubs presented such stars as Marion Anderson, Bessie Smith, Hazel Scott, and Nat "King" Cole.<sup>22</sup> More prurient entertainment was found in nearby North Miami, a thriving center for prostitution, gambling, and saloons. Pioneer Miamian John Sewell insisted that North Miami, established in 1896, "had all the vices that there ever were in the worst frontier towns." The night after payday was particularly chaotic.<sup>23</sup>

By 1910, however, the "better class" of North Miamians, preparing to incorporate their community, persuaded Sheriff Dan Hardie to eradicate the vice district. Hardie proceeded to drive the prostitutes into Colored Town, creating a red-light district in its northwest corner. Named "Hardieville," the area quickly surpassed North Miami as a center of vice. Hardieville's brothels were elaborate dwellings which featured colorful madams, elaborately attired ladies, live music, alcohol, and drugs. Hardieville also offered bars, restaurants, and fortune tellers. Vehicle traffic, particularly on the weekends, congested the streets. During World War I, federal authorities, fearful of the district's effects on servicemen, forced its closing, but black prostitutes remained in Colored Town.<sup>24</sup>

Reform groups periodically attempted to purge Colored Town

21. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, October 30, 1920; *Miami Herald*, November 7, 1920, April 20, 1975, February 1, 1976; Thelma Peters, "Jubilation-The War's Over!" *Update*, III (October 1975), 7.

22. *City Directory*, 1922, 902-1039; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, September 1, 1920; *Miami Herald*, April 20, 1975, February 1, 1976; Edward Ridolph, "Street Railways of Miami, Part II," *Update*, I (August 1974), 8; *City Manager's Report*, 84.

23. John Sewell, *Memoirs and History of Miami, Florida* (Miami, 1923), 140.

24. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, December 13, 1911, September 9, 1920; *Miami Herald*, November 11, 1911, June 21, 1917, August 16, 1912.

of vice. In 1913, the Civic League of Colored Town and a white counterpart, the Civic League of Miami, urged the city council and the police department to crack down on bootlegging and gambling, impose a curfew of 8:00 p.m. for children, and remove "immoral women" from the streets.<sup>25</sup> Other organizations, such as the Negro Uplift Association of Dade County, battled police brutality and discrimination, while the Colored Board of Trade fought segregation legislation and white terrorism, which sometimes erupted over boundary disputes. The earliest major disturbance of this nature occurred in 1911, after several black families moved north and west of Colored Town into a white area. The *Miami Herald* blamed this incursion on slick white speculators renting shoddy homes to blacks, and maintained that the "advance of the negro population is like a plague and carries devastation with it to all surrounding property."<sup>26</sup> In November 1911, white residents of North Miami agreed to restrict blacks from moving beyond a line along the northern and western borders of Colored Town.<sup>27</sup> Supported by the municipal leaders of Miami and North Miami, their "color line" held until 1915, when several black families moved beyond the boundary. White discomfiture over this migration exploded in August 1915, as six masked whites raided several black dwellings west of the line. Their occupants received warnings to abandon their homes, and most left immediately.<sup>28</sup>

The renewal of boundary strife caused Mayor John Watson and several officials to seek council approval for an alley separating the races along the disputed western boundary and for a segregation ordinance. A committee of the Colored Board of Trade retorted that "the enactment of a segregation ordinance by the council would be ill advised" because "segregation by legal enactment is indefensible both in laws and morals."<sup>29</sup> After a lengthy discussion, the council appointed a committee to consider a segregation ordinance and establish a geographical barrier between the races. On October 18, 1915, the committee unveiled

25. *Minutes of the City Council*, VI, October 2, 1913, p. 304; VII, June 8, 1914, 26. Hereafter cited as *MCC*. These demands met with modest success.

26. *Miami Herald*, October 5, 1911, October 24, 1915, June 2, 1919.

27. *Ibid.*, November 20, 24, 1911.

28. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, August 14, 1915; *Miami Herald*, August 17, 1915; *Crisis-A Record of the Darker Races*, XI (December 1915), 74.

29. *MCC*, VII, August 19, 1915, 605.

a segregation bill providing for construction of an alley fifty feet wide along the western border.<sup>30</sup> The Colored Board of Trade denounced the segregation ordinance as "a joke and a ruse." It predicted that the bill would include a color line that was too narrowly confining, and charged that the councilmen had "side-stepped the matter of white movement in the segregated district."<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the board's opposition, there were legal obstacles to the passage of a segregation ordinance. First, there was the prospect that it would suffer the fate of similar laws in Baltimore, Winston-Salem, and Atlanta, which had been overturned by the courts. Another legal snarl arose from the presence of a small black community with its vested rights on the southside. Since the provisions of a segregation law would require that all blacks live in a single district, those living on the southside would have to move to Colored Town. Unable to resolve these problems, the council accordingly tabled the bill. The previous color line remained, fortified by increased police surveillance. An uneasy truce prevailed in the disputed area.<sup>32</sup>

Despite Colored Town's increasing population density, the color line held in most places except along a portion of the northern perimeter adjacent to the subdivision of Highland Park. Black migration into this white area led to bombings and shootings in 1920. No further boundary problems of consequence occurred for the next decade, since the appearance of new black communities within Miami's expanding borders relieved pressure from Colored Town.<sup>33</sup>

Trouble was nevertheless endemic in the criminal justice system, where a dual system, bolstered by white terrorism, prevailed. Examples of this enduring pattern are plentiful throughout the period. For instance, in 1898, members of the United States Army billeted at Camp Miami, a hastily constructed military base adjacent to Colored Town, terrorized the black community with impunity.<sup>34</sup>

30. *Ibid.*, 605-731; *Miami Herald*, August 20, October 19, 1915.

31. *Miami Herald*, October 24, 1915.

32. *Crisis*, XI (January 1916), 117, XV (April 1918), 284; *MCC*, III, February 3, 1916, 167; *Miami Herald*, November 29, 1915.

33. *MCC*, X, July 1, 1920, 333; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, May 20, 26, 27, June 30, 1920; *Miami Herald*, May 21, 1920.

34. *Miami Metropolis*, July 29, 1898; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903* (Urbana, 1975), 114;

Meanwhile, Dade County Sheriff R. J. Chillingworth's flagrant attempts to prevent blacks from voting angered even many whites. In 1899, several whites protested Chillingworth's intimidation of black voters to city and county authorities and even hanged the sheriff in effigy.<sup>35</sup> Chillingworth's successor, John Frohock, was not as blatantly hostile to blacks, but, on occasion, he spoke of them disparagingly.<sup>36</sup> Several years later, Dan Hardie campaigned for sheriff on a platform that advocated "arresting suspicious characters first, and letting them explain afterwards."<sup>37</sup> After Hardie's election, it was announced that he would employ "nigger" hounds (bloodhounds) in his detective work.<sup>38</sup> Hardie was especially vigilant in apprehending black miscreants. One observer noted that Hardie was able to "catch the lightfoots about as well as any officer."<sup>39</sup> For Hardie and other lawmen, the black community was the primary source for inflating departmental statistics. Of thirty-five inmates in the county jail in September 1904, thirty-four were black.<sup>40</sup>

Vagrancy, disorderly conduct, and vice were the most common black offenses in early Miami. After pressure from municipal leaders for a community-wide cleanup, the police generally arrested numerous black vagrants, but no whites, despite a recent grand jury report criticizing the police for this practice. In addition to their raids on brothels, the police sometimes pursued black fornicators. In one roundup, the city marshal and the sheriff's department arrested thirty-seven persons, almost all of whom were black, and charged them with fornication.<sup>41</sup>

No black criminal activity raised the ire of whites more than an alleged sexual assault on a white woman. On such occasions, enraged whites threatened lynchings or mass assaults on Colored Town. In January 1903, the white community reacted in this

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Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "Negro Troops in Florida, 1898," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLIX (July 1970), 12; William J. Schellings, "Soldiers in Miami, 1898," *Tequesta*, XVII (1957), 73.

35. *Miami Metropolis*, May 12, 1899.

36. *Ibid.*, June 28, 1901.

37. *Ibid.*, May 13, 1908.

38. *Ibid.*, December 28, 1908.

39. *Ibid.*, November 1, 1909; *Miami Herald*, August 10, 1920; *Miami Daily Metropolis*, June 23, 1911.

40. *Miami Metropolis*, September 2, 1904.

41. *Ibid.*, February 17, 1903, January 4, 1907. A municipal statute made fornication an offense. In Miami's early years, police "round-ups" of alleged black fornicators occurred periodically.

fashion after Richard Dedwiley allegedly attempted to rape Rose Gould. The *Miami Metropolis*, the community's first newspaper, announced that after capturing this "unholy fiend of hell," many Miamians planned to "treat" him to "a necktie party."<sup>42</sup> After his arrest, Dedwiley was tried and convicted of attempted rape in a fifteen minute trial. He was subsequently hanged in the county jail yard.<sup>43</sup>

The city council, municipal and county courts, and the newspapers also displayed jaundiced attitudes toward blacks. In addition to its failure to provide Colored Town with adequate municipal services, the city council refused to employ black policemen in the area. The earliest request for a black policeman came in 1901, but for two years the council refused to act. Finally, in 1903, Frank Wharton, chairman of the Committee on Police and Charities, announced that he, along with Mayor John Lummus and City Marshal Robert Flanagan, regarded employment of a black policeman as unnecessary.<sup>44</sup>

The courts and coroner's juries likewise manifested the official racial bias toward blacks. Judge John Grambling of the municipal court praised the Miami police department in 1908 for altering the views of "Nassau Negroes who upon their arrival here consider themselves the social equal of white people."<sup>45</sup> Coroner's juries perfunctorily exonerated policemen and other whites in black homicides.<sup>46</sup>

The *Miami Metropolis* and the *Miami Herald* characteristically patronized or deprecated blacks. Terms like "darker," "coon," "brute," "fiend," and "hamfat" appeared regularly in their pages, along with racially degrading stories. The papers

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42. *Ibid.*, January 23, 1903.

43. *Ibid.*, March 13, 1903.

44. *MCC*, I, May 4, 1903, 295; *Miami Herald*, July 19, 1976; David Cohen, "The Development and Efficiency of the Negro Police Precinct and Court of the City of Miami" (M.A. thesis, University of Miami, 1951), 21. In 1944, five blacks joined the Miami police department, becoming the first members of their race to serve in this capacity.

45. *MCC*, III, December 17, 1908, 313. Many Bahamians came at harvest time, finding seasonal employment as laborers in the agricultural groves in South Dade. Independent and footloose, these British subjects were less obsequious than native blacks toward whites. Because many Bahamian blacks preached racial equality, a majority of whites, including the police, regarded them as troublemakers.

46. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, August 23, 25, 1909, November 27, 1911; *Miami Herald*, June 2, 1919.

frequently referred to the social and political inferiority of blacks, and prohibited pictures of Negroes on their pages.<sup>47</sup>

At other times, however, they recognized the inequities of local justice. The *Metropolis* complained that it was almost impossible to convict a white man of murder in any court in Dade County, and called justice for blacks "an outrage," the result of "infamous discrimination."<sup>48</sup> The *Metropolis* also criticized the police for hauling "unfortunate negroes . . . to court for mere family quarrels" and compelling them to "pay a fine of \$7.50 or stay in jail ten days just to make the police department pay."<sup>49</sup> Despite such criticism, a double standard of justice continued to prevail. In the second decade of this century, it showed itself especially in official support for restricting black expansion, in white terrorism, and in a tough police campaign against black bootleggers, gamblers, and prostitutes.<sup>50</sup>

The early 1920s brought additional white terrorism, black frustration, and the specter of major racial violence. The Ku Klux Klan caused much of the trouble. Founded in Georgia in 1915 on the model of its Reconstruction era predecessor, the KKK, with its shibboleths of "white supremacy" and "one hundred per cent Americanism," won wide acceptance from millions of Americans by the early 1920s. A parade of 200 men announced the organization's presence in Miami in May 1921. Klan membership increased quickly in the friendly confines of South Florida. By 1925 the local chapter had an estimated 1,500 members and participated in numerous civic activities.<sup>51</sup>

Soon after the Klan's arrival in Miami, blacks became targets for a series of its threats, beatings, and kidnappings. In July 1921, eight Klansmen kidnapped H. H. Higgs, a black minister in Coconut Grove and president of the local branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, charging that he espoused racial

47. *Miami Metropolis*, August 29, 1902, February 27, December 11, 1903, April 15, June 5, 1909; *Miami Herald*, October 5, 1911, June 2, 1919. The *Miami Daily Metropolis*, sometimes entitled the *Daily Miami Metropolis*, was a daily counterpart of the older, weekly *Miami Metropolis*, which naturally shared the same viewpoint as the latter.

48. Cited in *Crisis*, XII (June 1916), 76.

49. *Daily Miami Metropolis*, May 27, 1909.

50. *Miami Herald*, January 29, 1911, March 1, 29, 1916, November 29, 1915; *Miami Metropolis*, January 29, March 1, 1916.

51. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, May 24, 25, 1921; *Miami Daily News*, July 26, 1925; *Miami Herald*, November 24, 1925; *Miami Sunday News*, July 24, 1949.

equality, intermarriage, and violence as a weapon against white oppression. The minister was released only after promising to return immediately to the Bahamas. His abductors were never found.<sup>52</sup>

Two weeks later another band of masked men kidnapped Phillip Irwin, white pastor of a black church, whose sermons reportedly stressed racial equality and intermarriage. Irwin was beaten, tarred and feathered, and ordered to leave Miami within forty-eight hours before being dumped from a speeding car in downtown Miami. The cleric left town quickly, while his kidnappers remained free.<sup>53</sup>

Additional kidnappings, beatings, and forced migrations followed in 1921, all unpunished. On one occasion, several prominent Bahamian blacks received letters warning them to leave Miami immediately or face punishment similar to that suffered by Higgs and Irwin. The letter, which branded its recipient a "traitor" who was "dangerous to any community," was signed by the "Committee that waited on Higgs and Irwin."<sup>54</sup> After reading a copy of the letter received by the Reverend Vincent Moss, a Baptist preacher, Police Chief Raymond Dillon denied that either the KKK or "a white person" had written it. Instead, the chief maintained that "a personal enemy of the preacher who was possibly a member of his own race" was responsible.<sup>55</sup>

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52. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, July 2, 1921; *Miami Herald*, July 2, 3, 1921, January 10, 1926, February 10, 1975; John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1967), 479-81. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.) was a black nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican Negro, in 1913. It claimed millions of members by the 1920s. The U.N.I.A. exalted everything black, while insisting that the solution to the suffering of black Americans was migration to Africa and the establishment there of a nation of their own. Since Higgs was a black nationalist, it is highly unlikely that he championed intermarriage, as his accusers insisted.
53. *Miami Herald*, July 18, 19, 20, 1921; *Miami Sunday News*, July 24, 1949. The Klan later erected an obelisk at the county courthouse, where Irwin was dumped, which bore the legend: "On this Spot a few years ago a white man was found who had been tarred and feathered because he Preached Social Equality to Negroes." Another side of the column contained a warning: "Note: If you are a Reckless Negro Chauffeur or a White man who believes in Social Equality be advised Dade County dont [*sic*] Need You."
54. *Miami Herald*, July 26, August 26, 1921. Dr. A. P. B. Holly and John Bethel were two blacks who left Miami after receiving a copy of the letter.
55. *Miami Herald*, July 26, 1921.

In ensuing years, the Klan continued to harass blacks with impunity. In this lawless climate other whites took the law into their own hands. The most notable example occurred in June 1923, when a white mob near Homestead lynched two blacks, William "Grey Eye" Simmons and Robert Gainer, for the alleged murder of Charles Bryant, a United States marshal.<sup>56</sup>

Miami's police were also involved in black homicides in the 1920s. Coroner's juries ruled in each instance that the officer had acted in self defense. But testimony at the trial of Police Chief H. Leslie Quigg and some of his aides in the death of Harry Kier, a black, suggested otherwise. During the trial, William Beechy, a former Miami police department member, testified that the police frequently terrorized black suspects. A grand jury investigation of the police department at this time found strong support for Beechy's testimony; its findings resulted in Quigg's removal as chief of police.<sup>57</sup>

Quigg's successor, Guy Reeve, and director of public safety, H. H. Arnold, treated blacks more prudently. But arrests of blacks for major and minor offenses continued to outnumber arrests of whites even though the former comprised only thirty per cent of Miami's population. In fiscal year 1928-1929, the police charged more blacks than whites with murder, manslaughter, robbery, burglary, and aggravated assault. In many of these categories the black to white arrest ratio was extremely large.<sup>58</sup>

By the close of its first generation, Colored Town's meteoric growth had led to marked changes in its appearance, while the increasing institutionalizing of discrimination created additional problems. The community's troubles worsened in later decades amid further changes and dislocations and the persistence of discrimination.

56. *Miami Daily Metropolis*, July 3, 1922; *Miami Herald*, January 26, June 23, July 2, 1922, June 17, 1923.

57. *Miami Daily News*, April 24, 29, 1928; *Miami Herald*, September 7, 1923, May 20, 1925, February 4, June 10, 15, August 27, 1926, April 24, 28, 1928; *Crisis*, XXXV (June 1928), 203-04. Quigg's dismissal came after he and his co-defendants had been acquitted.

58. *Fifteenth Census 1930, Population*, III, pt. 1, Reports by States, Table 12, 410; Department of Public Safety, City of Miami, *First Annual Report, Fiscal Year July 1, 1928-June 30, 1929* (Miami, 1929), 15; *Miami Herald*, November 11, 1928.